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It can't hurt

The Arkansas-Oklahoma talks

ARKANSAS AND Oklahoma have both tossed enough inflammatory words around in their battle over water quality standards. Now it's time to get beyond the huffing and puffing, and sit down again to restart the negotiating process, unpleasant as it might be.

There have been no talks between the two edgy neighbors since the first of November. That's when Oklahoma went ahead and sent a draft of its new standards to the feds. Officials in Arkansas had warned that such a pre-emptive strike would mean the end of negotiations and, so far, that's been the result. But it's been a month, and the rivers and streams running from Arkansas into Oklahoma are still polluted. Time is, as they say, a-wasting.

We're from around here and it's easy enough for us to see Arkansas's side of the matter. This state feels that it's been stiffed by standards that are too restrictive and are being imposed too fast. But the short time that Oklahoma would allow Arkansas to straighten up its act only looks short in the, well, short term. Both states have been aware of the water problem for a long time—and nothing's been done about it.

This challenge looks suspiciously like the deadline Arkansas must also meet when it comes to raising the standards of public education.

Once again, our small and often laggard state knew all about the problem for years but didn't act till it was ordered to. We've done much the same about the pollution in our rivers: neglect it till Oklahoma started pressing us.

There's been some sensible talk about raising water standards since November 1st, most notably from John Boozman, the congressman from Northwest Arkansas whose constituents are going to have to work through this border war. Congressman Boozman said the problem is broader than the chicken industry, which has been feeling as if it's been made the scapegoat of all Oklahoma's ire. But city sewer plants and even ordinary citizens who fertilize their yards also play a role in increasing the phosphorous levels in our waterways, which wend westward into Oklahoma.

Fixing the schools will cost money, and so will fixing the **phosphorus** problem. Arkansas might as well get used to the idea.

A little grace never hurts, even under pressure.

