

'Autocratic attitude'

Agency angers U.S. Rep. Swift

SKAGIT COUNTY — A federal official's visit here last week to bring news of eased floodplain development restrictions followed on the heel of pressure from local officials, The Argus has learned.

The pressure came after an engineer from the Federal Emergency Management Agency told a gathering of local officials in mid-May they would have to obey federal building regulations or be kicked out of the federal flood insurance program.

Both Mount Vernon Mayor Ruth Gudlund and local U.S. Rep. Al Swift soon afterward called FEMA official Chuck Steele and complained of what Swift termed a "dictatorial attitude" displayed by FEMA engineer Larry Basich.

"I will not tolerate that attitude on the part of federal officials," Swift said. "I had to talk to FEMA about this before and am particularly disturbed that this autocratic attitude has raised its ugly head again."

Steele last week came up to the Valley from Bothell headquarters to meet with local officials. He told Burlington officials that, contrary to what the engineer had said, Gages Slough and an area north of Burlington Hill will not be set aside as "administrative floodways."

Steele told Burlington officials they will have to regulate the amount of land-filling in the southern part of town. Supposedly, this will allow for the free flow of flood waters.

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