



A Letter From State Senator, Jim Butterworth



What a blessing it is to be in North Georgia in October! As the fall season approaches, most people begin thinking about Thanksgiving and Christmas with families, News Year's celebrations and other Holiday season activities. As your State Senator I am pondering these things, too, but I am also beginning to think about the annual juggernaut event known as the Legislative Session.

The 2010 session was filled with many hotly debated issues, and I believe we accomplished a great deal, especially given the tools with which we had to work with. Throughout the session I engaged in many discussions about transportation, the state budget, education and, of course, water.

I am not new to the topic of planning for future growth and protecting our water resources. I fully realize that Northeast Georgia is directly in the crossbars of the ongoing battle over our state waters. Given the fact that our Senate District encompasses 3 different river basins, all of which currently supply water to major metropolitan areas, I fully realize the importance of staying in touch with ongoing discussions.

As we approach a new legislative session and a looming Lake Lanier water restriction deadline, I expect the discussions regarding water to continue to be hotly debated in the legislature. While I do fully believe that the real issue will be resolved through the judicial process, we must continue healthy discussion and consideration of how to best manage our water resources.

As you may recall, this year I introduced legislation which would have clarified how interbasin transfers are regulated in Georgia. Over the years I have learned that, in Georgia, we will never do away with interbasin transfers. SB 462 sought to remove the current encumbered bureaucratic process and put in place a process with a specified timeline, with specified notifications to anyone effected, in order to bring about a logical outcome. The bill was signed by over 25 other State Senators from across the state and it received bi-partisan support. Regardless, it did not get out of committee. Needless to say, I learned a great deal about how a bill dies a slow death, and also how to create legislation which will be successful.

There was a great deal of speculation on what SB 462 would do to existing transfers already in place in the state. There were also questions as to whether the bill would prohibit future transfers completely. Lastly, the bill was criticized because of the potential of increased litigation which might result from its passage. Indeed, if that argument was considered with every bill, then the need for a legislative session taking place at all could be debated. Regardless, as the sun set on the 2010 session, there was only limited advance in any interbasin transfer discussion at all.

Perhaps the timing was not right. Perhaps SB 462 was too much too soon. Whatever the reason for the lack of any openly obvious success, I still believe we built many bridges to future success on this critical issue. For future talks on the topic, the lines have been drawn and I know who will be on my team. That's a start.

Rest assured that I will continue to fight to protect our water. Water is truly the life blood of a growing and thriving community. Allowing any restrictions on future availability cannot be tolerated and must be aggressively defeated. I will continue to work with my legislative colleagues in the Senate and House, including my close friend Representative Stephen Allison, to craft legislation that not only protects our water, but also puts a vision in place for future generations of North Georgians.

In closing, I don't do this for any other reason but for the benefit of "Our House" here in Northeast Georgia. That having been said, I am honored to have recently received the "Environmental Leadership Award" by the Georgia Conservation Voters. I worked very closely with them in designing legislation that would not only benefit all of Georgia, but also creating a bill that had a chance of being successful through the process. I appreciate this honor, and I look forward to working with them, and for you, in the future.

May God continue to Bless you and all of Northeast Georgia.