



House Natural Resources: Water Quality - 3/29/18

Thank you for allowing me this time today to address the Committee on what I believe is an issue whose time has been a long time coming and that demands action and resolution.

Many months ago, a number of interested parties and groups – strange bedfellows indeed- came together to find common ground in determining how we could begin the process of repairing Vermont's waters – a public asset that we hold in trust for future generations. Many around that table bore the scars of decades of fighting – defining "wins" not be how much cleaner our water was but by the number of court battles won or the number of laws either passed or blocked.

Each person understood the environmental, political and financial stakes and each understood that we would have to 'give in order to get'. In the end, consensus was reached on a number of principles:

1. That a long-term sustainable funding method is needed to address the roughly 1 billion-dollars in costs that the *known* remediation work requires.
2. That 'politics' sometimes with a big partisan 'P' and other times with a small self-interest 'P' have prevented action. We delude ourselves if we think that this reality will ever change – *perhaps more now than in the past*. A new model is required.
3. That traditional structures and bureaucracies are ill-equipped to juggle competing interests and priorities and *that models do exist* that can serve as sign posts leading towards success.
4. That *all* Vermonters have an interest in clean water; that we all contribute in some ways to its degradation and that we all have an affirmative obligation to contribute financially to its remediation. Paying into a statewide fund to ensure clean water is no different than paying into a statewide fund to ensure safe roads.
5. Finally, that we didn't have all the answers except to acknowledge that a statewide Clean Water Authority formed the basis implementation- an Authority that was simultaneously insulated from, *but accountable to*, the electorate. It must be accorded the ability to reach into, and across, existing institutions to gather data in order to make well informed decisions.

While we applaud the efforts that the Senate made in moving this legislation forward, it fails to address the immediate and pressing issues that those of us representing various disciplines have identified.

On behalf of not only the Chamber, but the entire coalition, I ask you to modify the Senate bill by stripping out the ancillary provisions and studies and simply:

- Create the Clean Water Authority
- Constitute its Board
- Assign it One Task – to issue a Sunrise Report that will be delivered to the Administration and to the General Assembly which:
 - Proposes a methodology for establishing investment priorities;
 - Proposes the outline of a 5-year investment plan
 - Proposes a differentiated per-parcel fee structure; its collection methodology and disbursement process
 - Proposes both an operational methodology and operational budget
 - Proposes a transparent methodology for accountability
 - Proposes a plan for the long-term appointment of members to the Authority

To close, I will end where I began: we are at an historical inflection point in our collective attempt to address the eroding quality of the waters of our state. Together we can say that the time for contemplation is over and the time for action has arrived *OR* we can revert to form and continue to dance the same dance that we've danced for the past two plus decades.

And if we do, in the immortal words of John Perry Barlow and Bobby Weir: "Heaven Help the Fools"

Thank you.