

### **SENATE BILL 5 IS A STINKER**

Alpharetta Republican State Senator Dan Moody is either smarter than the average bear, or he has a serious political death wish. Since I come in contact with a lot of bears around Big Canoe and have developed a keen sense of their IQ, I must assume the latter — that Moody is looking to get out of politics and into the private sector as quickly as possible. He is riding just the horse that will help him do that. It is called Senate Bill 5.

Moody is the sponsor, along with State Senate President Pro-Tem Eric Johnson of Savannah, of the grandly titled Georgia Public/Private Infrastructure Act, which they say will expand public-private partnerships to deal with water, transportation and other infrastructure issues without putting the burden on the taxpayers of Georgia. Alas, the bill has caused an uproar that can be heard from Tybee Light to Rabun Gap.

I don't believe this is what Gov. Sonny Perdue and House Speaker Glenn Richardson had in mind when they said that this session of the General Assembly — the first under Republican control since Reconstruction — was going to be a quiet affair. Conduct a little business, approve the budget, have a couple of soda pops and get out of town. I think somebody got caught trying to sneak a sunrise by a rooster.

Johnson says Senate Bill 5 “proposes a sensible way to meet the needs of the citizens of Georgia in coming years without having to implement tax increases at the state and local levels.” The bill is designed to interest private developers to get involved in public projects — like toll roads, jail houses, sewage plants, etc. The government provides the land. The developer builds and operates the project until it has made its money back and then turns it over to the government.

Maybe it is what the senators don't say that is causing such a ruckus. In order for private enterprise to develop a project, the government can use its powers of eminent domain to seize our property and then turn it over to the developers. And did I mention that the government is not required to select the lowest bidder and that negotiations with the developers do not have to be made public until a deal has already been reached? I don't know about you, but I like to know what is going on in government while it is going on, not after the fact.

Sam Griffin, publisher of the Bainbridge Post-Searchlight, can turn a phrase better than Emeril can turn a pot roast. Griffin calls the bill “the most outrageously repugnant piece of legislative claptrap since the Yazoo Land Fraud. If Gov. Perdue and responsible Republican leadership do not immediately repudiate, quash and bury forever this travesty, folks will soon be hunting down the Georgia GOP with dogs.”

The Savannah Morning News, the hometown paper of Sen. Johnson, says, “This bill is so far removed from responsible, conservative government that it makes one wonder if a project is already in the works but needs eminent domain to succeed. It's odd to see Mr. Johnson take the lead on a measure that would allow such government intrusion.”

Johnson Moody et al. are telling us to trust government to do the right thing for us. Sorry, guys. No can do. Not when you are meeting behind closed doors. That is why we have Sunshine Laws and Open Records Laws: to ensure that government does the public's business in public. How do I know that some developer won't be dropping a few coins in some official's pocket to grease a project? And what is wrong with picking the lowest bidder?

Hopefully, Sens. Moody and Johnson are up to taking some friendly advice from a bystander: From what I can tell, you either have a good bill that you have totally fumbled, or you have a bad bill that is nothing more than a sop to a bunch of developer buddies. Either way, if it looks like a skunk and smells like a skunk, it is definitely a skunk. There is no question that Senate Bill 5 is a stinker.