

## **STATE DEMOCRATIC HONCHO NEEDS TO PUT UP OR SHUT UP**

Bobby Kahn, the just-retired chairman of the state Democratic Party, has made a serious personal charge against Republican Speaker of the House Glenn Richardson and, of this writing, hasn't backed up his accusation. Kahn says that the Speaker had an "inappropriate relationship" with an Atlanta Gas Light Company lobbyist while cosponsoring a bill that would have financed a \$300 million pipeline for the utility. The measure failed in the 2006 General Assembly.

Before you jump to the conclusion that this is a knee-jerk defense of Republicans, go back and read my column on Gov. Sonny Perdue's sweetheart land deals, which sound too fishy to even qualify for his "Go Fish, Georgia" initiative, or whatever that silly program is called.

Then read my previous columns on the GOP's threats to take economic development negotiations behind closed doors. Like the rest of the state's media, I will use enough paper to kill a Brazilian rain forest fighting that bad idea and those who support it.

Truth in advertising also requires me to tell you that I have a reserved seat in Speaker Richardson's time-out chair. While I don't know the man personally, I have taken strong exception to some of his ill-advised remarks over the past couple of years, and damn sure don't like the idea of him building a house on accreted land on St. Simons Island.

But I also don't like unsubstantiated cheap shots, and Kahn delivered one on his way out the door of a state Democratic Party that is a helluva lot less influential than when he came in. Disagree with a man's politics all you want; that's fair game, but stay away from innuendos about his personal life unless you are willing to provide details: Names, dates and places.

Kahn may have the facts. I don't know. But I do know that nothing is served by yelling "fire" and then walking out of the theater.

So far, Kahn has refused to present any evidence of a relationship except to say it was "common knowledge." Color me naïve, but if it is common knowledge why doesn't someone else step forward and verify Kahn's charges? Speaker Richardson is not beloved on the Democratic side of the aisle. Surely, someone else will present specifics and not let this thing hang over the man and his family.

Kahn took his complaints to the joint legislative committee that investigates such matters. They threw it out because Senate President Pro Tem Eric Johnson, R-Savannah, who heads up the ethics body, said the complaint did not include any details supporting Kahn's claim.

Johnson added that hearing the charge without supporting evidence "would turn this Committee into a circus and invite kooks and partisans to file false charges." I couldn't agree more. For five years, I served as a member of the State Ethics Commission, and much of our time was wasted by political partisans trying to embarrass opponents with spurious charges.

Perhaps Kahn was trying to deflect close scrutiny of his tenure as captain of the Titanic, aka the Democratic Party of Georgia. When he took over as party chairman, the state House and Senate had Democratic majorities. There had not been a Republican governor since Reconstruction. Now, both legislative bodies' majorities are in Republican hands, as is the governor's office. For the first time in the state's history, an incumbent governor lost re-election. Democrat Roy Barnes' campaign coffers were overflowing, and yet he lost to an underfunded Republican state senator named Sonny Perdue. Who was Barnes' campaign manager? One guess. To Barnes' eternal credit and my utter amazement, he remains one of Kahn's staunchest defenders today. I should have such friends.

In dismissing Kahn's charges, Sen. Johnson said, "The fact that the chairman of a political party makes vague accusations against a leader of the other party on the weekend before the inauguration and the opening day of the session clearly indicates the motivation behind the charge. It should insult the people of Georgia and embarrass those who take the political process seriously."