

LINDSAY THOMAS

Thank you, Carol. I always like to mention when it's pointed out that I started out in the Congress for five terms and that I did leave on my own choosing, I was not run out of town. When I look around the room today, I see a great many faces that I'm familiar with and many of you that I've worked with, and it's very heartening to see this kind of gathering of important and concerned citizens from all across our state. It's also important to see this congress of experts that we have gathered here and elected officials who are committed to this. And all of this bespeaks these tremendous concerns that all of us as Georgians have about the issue that we're here and the challenge that lies ahead for us.

I've been involved in water issues for a long time. I'm not an expert in any sense of the word and I don't propose to be, and I don't propose certainly to have the answers for all of the things that we're going to be compelled to deal with in the course of this council's efforts. But because of this extensive involvement in the water issues and the deep and abiding concern about it, I am glad to have just a few minutes to share a few heartfelt thoughts with you.

We're all aware of the effort and the energy that went into getting us to this very point here in our state's history. We're late in reaching this point, but we are not too late by any stretch of the imagination. Perhaps, as I spoke with Jim Kundell and he and I agreed, maybe it's a good thing that we had a few years to see just how serious the problems are and can be before we came here to join in this effort of a statewide and comprehensive plan.

At this very time, and you've probably read in the paper in the past few days and the news, we're recording the driest season across our nation ever going into the spring of the year since we've been collecting the data. Let us remember, and it's one of the important things we'll have to remember as we go forward and add the best of our knowledge and wisdom and experience to this process, we have a very short ability to predict long-term patterns of rainfall, and we have even less ability to control it. Our ability to do that is all but nonexistent. If we make the mistake of just concluding that this is easy, that we're going to get 45 or 50 inches of rainfall that comes in even portions throughout the season, in essence that we all indeed we have to do, we've got all the rainfall we need at our disposal, we will err dramatically in our goal as a regional commission. Certainly we have learned this. In fact, what we must rely on as we go about our planning is the unpredictability of weather and the vicissitudes of changing weather pattern perhaps even long-term.

Another thing that is very apparent and often overlooked because of its simplicity is that we've never made one gallon of water. Not one. And all we really have control over is how we use it, how we manage the natural systems of wetlands and lakes and watersheds and the man-made systems of reservoirs that deliver

LINDSAY THOMAS (continued)

our water to us. If we're not willing to reuse and conserve our water and protect our natural systems, then the hope of providing the needs that we face in the future while preserving our natural environment and our natural habitat is simply a lost cause. To put it bluntly, our resources of water have their limitations, my friends, and in a macro scheme of a state whose resources are pretty well contained within our borders, every time we pave over a watershed, put up another impervious surface, drain another wetland, we have affected the overall water budget in both a qualitative and a quantitative manner. It doesn't mean we aren't going to do these things.

My point is we've got to understand that they have an impact and they must be taken into consideration. If we unwisely use this basic natural resource of water, we're indebting our children and our grandchildren and all future generations of Georgians to come. Make no mistake about this. There's no difference in talking about indebting future generations and depleting the resources that they will inherit. It has the same effect on the balance sheet. It is really all about good stewardship. The questions are will we assume this biblical responsibility or will we fail to provide what leadership has always called on to do in difficult times? Will we bring balance and face difficult choices squarely and make wise decisions and work for a consensus that provides for growth and development while protecting the natural world that we've inherited? Or will our rivers and streams and our natural systems become simple cisterns for transporting lifeless, tasteless fluids from one point of uptake to another point of return?

We all come from various backgrounds here in this room, different parts of our state, but I truly believe that we will find as we go forward and learn and evaluate and make recommendations that our success or failure in this process is going to greatly affect the future of this great and blessed state. It is a serious charge that we have. We will find that in this matter we're all going to be joined together at the hip, from one end of our state to the other. Maybe I could be proven wrong scientifically, but I truly believe that in the scope of our state's water budget, some portion of every gallon of water that falls on the Tennessee and Carolina lines wind up somewhere at the very bottom of our state, and it affects all of us in the process.

We must all come to the table ready to do what is right for the good of our state and our future generations, and if we approach it only with the intent of serving our partial and local interests, then we will miss our mark dramatically. Having been in the public arena for a long time, I've seen a lot of good efforts fail because there were individuals who intended to outsmart everyone else for their own selfish interests. In my humble opinion, we will succeed here only if we strive to a higher and a better vision. If we're successful in doing that, we'll be able to tell our grandchildren that we were all very proud of this historic effort we're involved in. And make no mistake about it, they will know the truth

LINDSAY THOMAS (continued)

because they will inherit the state that we leave them. We're going to make decisions here that make a permanent and a lasting impact on the economy, the environment, and the society of this state. My prayer is that our decisions come from our collective wisdom under the guidance of the creator of the very resources that we must responsibly steward.

Thank you very much.