

# **State Water Committee Run Amok**

**By**

**Bill Falcone**

The RI Water Resources Board's Water Allocation Committee, chaired by Harold Ward, is being led in a direction contrary to the best interests of the people of our state. This is occurring with the blessing of the Board Chairman William Penn and to the chagrin of many other members of the Board who represent our State's water supply and agricultural communities.

In 2009, the RI General Assembly amended water allocation legislation that was originally passed in the late 1990's. Senator Susan Sosnowski of Washington County was the guiding force in amending the legislation, and the outcome produced a fair and balanced mechanism for managing our State's water resources. The legislation empowered the Board as the sole State agency responsible for water allocation issues. Ignoring the open and cooperative process by which the legislation was drafted, certain special interest groups, along with the RI Department of Environmental Management, continue to attempt to usurp the Board's authority by using the regulatory process and the liberal interpretation of related federal laws.

The shenanigans taking place within this committee and involve ignoring competent Board employees while using special interest group members to assist the committee in developing allocation policies and regulations. It is well known that this special interest group, ironically named the Coalition for Water Security, is hostile to the public water supply and agricultural interests and wants to force its radical approach to water conservation on the customers of our public water systems and the farmers of our State. They are working toward a slow confiscation of your right to use water and the farmers need to water his crops, and are being aided by the actions of the RIDEM under the guise of water conservation.

Senator Sosnowski, a South County farmer, worked diligently in 2009 to bring all interested parties to the table and passed the legislation which was agreed to by all. Much of the harsh and unreasonable language advocated for by the Coalition was deleted due to the confiscatory nature of its approach. Not happy with the outcome, the Coalition is trying to bypass the law and insert their confiscatory language within the rules and procedures now being developed as Chairman Ward and his minions manipulate the committee's actions. Mr. Ward, with the blessing of Board Chairman Penn, was moving at a breakneck pace to get these radical procedures passed before anyone would notice. The water supply community is questioning their actions and the farm community is up in arms at this undemocratic and socialistic approach to allocating our water.

Fortunately, Senator Sosnowski acted quickly and in a letter to the Board questioned the action that they were about to take. She wisely advised the Board to begin the process anew and include all stakeholders to insure that the paying customers of Rhode Island's

31 municipal water supply systems and the farmers are heard, and their interests considered.

Please pay attention to what is about to take place. If the Coalition has its way your water bills will rise unnecessarily and RI farm products could become unaffordable for the average Rhode Islander. All this occurring under the false claim of working to conserve our water resources.

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