

Environmental Elitists are at it Again

by **Bill Falcone**

Shenanigans at the Rhode Island Water Resources Board (WRB) continue to take place to the detriment of Rhode Island's 31 municipal water suppliers, our farmers, and the States municipalities. At issue is the development of regulations governing Demand Management Plans which, if special interest groups get their way, will cost RI residents and businesses \$millions\$. Legislation pertaining to water conservation was passed by our General Assembly in 2009 after intense negotiations over the language detailing the purpose and the implementation of the plans. What has taken place at recent WRB meetings in the writing of the rules and regulations that will govern these plans borders on the immoral.

Mr. Harold Ward, chair of the committee tasked with writing these rules, represents a radical point of view on the topic of water conservation and is directing the development of the rules to serve the interests of his advocacy group. Ward is acting with the cooperation and assistance of the Director of the Department of Environmental Management (DEM), William Sullivan. Ward and Sullivan have conspired to wrest control of the public water systems from the Cities and Towns that they serve. Ward has recruited members of the Coalition for Water Security (CWS) and other environmental groups to help write the rules and has purposely avoided utilizing the input of the very capable WRB staff and other stakeholders. Much of the committee's work has taken place behind closed doors in likely violation of the Open Meetings Law.

Ward and Sullivan are attempting to re-insert overly restrictive rules and procedures, which were purposely deleted from the law by our elected officials, back into the writing of these regulations. When rational minds saw through the attempt to manipulate the committee, the very competent WRB staff presented their own draft of reasonable rules to the Board for consideration. The WRB Staff draft did not include the confiscatory language that the Ward/ Sullivan collaboration contained, and it was deemed acceptable by most all of the stakeholders. Unfortunately, Director Sullivan and Mr. Ward refused to give up on their attempt to dictate how much water we Rhode Islanders can use to brush or teeth, and continue to try to force the Board to include the language, which was specifically eliminated by the legislature. The Sullivan/Ward enforcement language would grant DEM and the Coalition for Water Security unchecked power over the Cities and Town's of Rhode Island and their residents.

While Mr. Ward is driven by idealism, Mr. Sullivan has a more far-reaching motive for his actions. DEM has long sought the vast powers and duties of the RI Water Resources Board for decades. Sullivan's goal is to give DEM full control of the municipal water supply systems in Rhode Island along with control of the zoning and planning functions of our municipalities. Our hard working farm community would also be adversely affected, with many farmers put out of business and higher prices for RI farm produce. The Water Resources Board has always been self-restrained in its power usage, balancing

its power to regulate with a common sense application of its rules and regulations. Over the years, DEM has demonstrated an inability to find that balance, and any effort to transfer the WRB powers to DEM should be stopped dead in its tracks. All Rhode Islanders know that the smaller state agencies like the Water Resources Board are much more responsive to the public and the Legislature than bloated agencies like the DEM. Let your elected officials know that you do not want the DEM water police on your back because you watered your garden.

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