



Thoughts From . . .

CAPITOL HILL

By Congressman Rodney Alexander



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Working together to save our water, jobs

WASHINGTON, D.C.--Recently, I've had several discussions with many elected officials and businessmen concerning the current challenge that North Louisiana faces when it comes to saving its current drinking water supply for future generations to come.

The concerns of saving the Sparta Aquifer and preserving the jobs that rely on this water supply will take creative thinking and new ideas.

But one example that I will continue to point to for guidance will be the work that Smurfit-Stone Container Corporation implemented nearly a decade ago, long before the Sparta debate was in the headlines.

Mike Entz, general manager, and I have talked about the measures that Stone Container has taken toward alleviating its dependence on groundwater.

Entz listed the following measures:

1. The formation of a task force that studied the reduction of water pumpage from the Sparta in 1997.
2. Smurfit-Stone Container has reduced the water pumpage significantly over the past seven years, which has been accomplished by Stone's own human resources and funding efforts.
3. A Smurfit-Stone employee is charged with checking the 12 water wells used by the facility daily. Well use is rotated with an average of 10 wells running daily. The rates are then discussed in meetings held each morning.
4. Smurfit-Stone is currently an integral part of the Bi-State Sparta Coalition formed in 1997 between Louisiana and Arkansas to look for ways to protect the aquifer.

I will continue to work with Entz, state and local elected officials, businesses, and others to help find federal funding to help generate a plan that will ultimately lead us to lessen the dependence placed on the Sparta by both businesses and consumers.

As a life-long resident of Jackson Parish, I realize the importance of Smurfit-Stone Container. Without this business, I don't think our parish could survive.

However, I'm also aware that our businesses--and our residents in North Louisiana--can't survive without water.

I've shared these very same concerns with Mike Johanns, secretary for the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, state Sen. Bob Kostelka, state Rep. Jim Fannin, state Rep. Rick Gallot, and state Rep. Hollis Downs.

I've also met with U.S. Rep. Mike Ross, Arkansas, on this issue.

I believe that Johanns, Ross, Kostelka, Fannin, Gallot and Downs all understand that the relationship between businesses and groundwater supply is delicate.

I'm optimistic that by working together--elected officials and businesses--we can save the Sparta and preserve the jobs that mean everything to our families.

But throughout the entire debate on this issue, if asked, I plan to offer an example of how a business can find new, innovative ways to save water and preserve jobs by creative thinking and planning.

That example is Smurfit-Stone Container.

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