

Other views

Sanford delivers a strong message on quality of life

By Brad Wyche

I joined thousands of South Carolinians in listening to our new governor's first "State of the State" address last month. At the beginning, he gave us a preview of what he would be talking about: the budget crisis and restructuring state government were expected, but the last topic — quality of life — was an unexpected surprise.

I waited anxiously for Gov. Sanford to reach that topic. Not that the other topics aren't immensely important, but trying to protect and improve quality of life is what we do everyday at Upstate Forever. I especially wanted to hear what he had to say about this.

He spent no more than five minutes on the topic, but his message was powerful and exciting. Gov. Sanford reminded all of us of what a wonderful state we live in — few places in the world rival South Carolina's natural beauty.

Keeping it that way is important not only for ecological reasons but also because it contributes mightily to tourism, now our state's number one industry.

The governor expressed his strong support for the South Carolina Conservation Bank Act, which passed the General Assembly last year and will be funded next year. I can't help but think that the governor's intent was to put a quick end to the talk about delaying funding or even repealing the law. The implicit message was: "Don't you dare."

The governor next turned his attention to the absurd state regulation that requires all new schools to be built on large tracts of land. The rule undermines efforts to establish neighborhood schools and also causes sprawl. Yes, he used the "S-word" — the first governor in the history of South Carolina to use that word in the State of the State! We have come a long way!

GUEST COLUMN



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And there was more to come. Before his speech, Gov. Sanford appointed a "quality of life" task force to consider these important issues and make recommendations on what needs to be done. It is a broad-based group of people from around the state, with al-

most every viewpoint represented. The task force delivered its report to the governor Feb. 6. It provides an inspiring blueprint on how our state can accommodate the dramatic growth that is taking place (every day our population increases by 140 people, and every day 200 acres of land are developed), while protecting and improving the environment and quality of life for everyone. Here are some of the recommendations:

- Increase funding for the Conservation Bank Act.

- Raise the per acre cap and maximum annual credit in the Conservation Incentives Act.

- Support farmland protection initiatives.

- Include the value of conserving South Carolina's natural resources in educational curriculum.

- Eliminate the minimum acreage requirement for new schools.

- Favor the restoration and construction of community-based

small schools over the construction of new megaschools.

- Require that major projects be consistent with local land use plans.

- Designate "priority investment areas" for future growth.

- "Public agencies should plan where they build and only build where they plan."

- Give precedence to maintaining existing highways over building new ones.

- Integrate transportation planning with land use planning so public transit can make a comprehensive contribution to economic development and mobility.

- Remove legal impediments to traditional neighborhood designs and provide incentives for such developments.

- Provide incentives for infill development and redevelopment of brownfield sites.

- Provide property owners and local governments the ability to resolve land use disputes through mediation and expedited judicial

review. (Notably, the task force did not support the efforts of some "private property rights" groups to change the definition of what constitutes a "taking" under South Carolina law).

- Adopt additional measures to protect isolated freshwater wetlands based on function and size.

- Reform the state's annexation and condemnation laws.

- Exercise more control over water flow to assure the protection of the state's citizens and industry.

Wow! What a terrific action plan for South Carolina! (For those who would like to read the entire report, we have posted it on our Web site at www.upstateforever.org).

I hope that Gov. Sanford embraces the report from his task force and then provides the leadership that will be needed to make their recommendations a reality. Based on his State of the State, there is every reason to believe he will do so.