

Georgia Initiative Enables State Chamber To Take Lead On Water



A decision was made almost 18 months ago to begin raising funds for an ambitious new project known as **The Georgia Initiative**. The thinking then, on the part of Georgia Chamber leaders, was that future issues would require more involvement and, frankly, more hands on leadership by the business community on pressing public policy issues.

According to Charles Tarbutton, 2008 Chair of the Georgia Chamber, "The business community has a huge stake in many of these issues and deserves to be at the table when decisions are made. But, that carries with it an obligation to be ready for the discussion and debate and prepared to present our own policy ideas, support them vigorously and get them enacted." Tarbutton acknowledged that moving to this higher level, in effect, maximizing our commitment to protecting the interests of Georgia business, would require additional funding and, to secure it, the Georgia Chamber embarked on a drive to raise \$8.5 million.

The Georgia Initiative has been a success and the funds it generated came not a moment too soon. Simultaneous with pledges being received, awareness was growing that the state was facing a monumental water crisis, one that could have dire consequences on the economic health of the state if not handled in a judicious manner.

"Our goal was to work with all interested parties to find a fair and equitable solution to the problem," Tarbutton said. "We wanted to express our sincere conviction that any viable, long-term solution to our water woes must take business into consideration, because of the obvious impact business has on economic stability, growth and job creation. Once that is lost, it is very difficult to regain it," he said.

The Georgia Initiative enabled the state chamber to immediately engage the services of experienced economic water professional, Doug Miell, who joined the team headed by Suzanne Sitherwood, president of Atlanta Gas Light, and other members of her Environment & Energy Committee. With guidance from top Georgia business leaders, the committee made a substantial contribution to the final water plan that was later signed by the governor. Due to the complex nature of the issue, this would not have been possible without funds from **The Georgia Initiative**.

Though it came fast, this was just the first in what will be an increasing number of situations where the Georgia Chamber will be able to act quickly to craft and submit it's own plan regarding the challenging issues our state faces. It is, finally, a clear recognition that the Georgia business community can act forcefully, without waiting for others to set the pace.