



# Cape Fear Firebird

*The Light of Save the Cape*

May 31, 2012

*Transparency is essential.*  
-NC House of Representatives  
guidance for budget subcommittees

***Transparency? We don't need no stinkin' transparency***

Yesterday, the State House of Representatives passed H950, the budget bill for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2013. It now goes to the Senate. The leadership has resolved to move quickly.

We are delighted to report that, at this point in the process, the \$20.3 billion budget does not include any money for the megaport at Southport. And even more pleased to say that the House has included, for the third year in a row, specific language prohibiting spending on that project. That would prevent funds tucked here and there in the budget from being used to feed the port project.

Such language was adopted for fiscal 2011, and resulted in the megaport project being put "on hold." But last year, when the House passed the budget bill and sent it to the Senate, that language vanished, removed behind a veil of secrecy. The budget was rapidly pushed through without it.

That language's disappearance in the Senate was a mystery for nearly a year. Senator Rabon told us he did not know who was responsible. The Senate leadership could not explain it, either.

But just last week Senator Rabon admitted to the *Star News* that he was "partially responsible for that" because the language might have shut down the Maritime Strategy Study.

Immediately it became apparent that the study was the vehicle for reviving the megaport. The \$2 million-dollar-study promptly morphed from focus on existing ports to a grand plan for a new deepwater port. The megaport, now with a price tag of \$6.1 billion, continued to eat State funds. The project has already consumed \$50 million, and \$44 million of that is still owed.

Shutting off funds to the megaport reflects the sentiments of legislators, Republican and Democrat, for three years. We have not found any enthusiasm for the megaport in Raleigh.

But consensus may not prevail in the Senate and preserve the restriction. It did not last year. If that happens again, we would know who is responsible. But not why. The excuse is gone: the Maritime Strategy Study is within days of completion. That and the other \$7 million in previous studies have not shown how geography can be altered and trade patterns changed to justify even a fraction of the billions the project will cost. Even Senator Rabon has said the State cannot afford it.

What will we see in the next weeks? Can we taxpayers count on the Senate and our Senator? Will we see transparency of motives, transparency of objectives, as well as transparency of process?