



Opaque government

Posted June 14th, 2012 at 4:00 PM by Bob Smith

A big problem with Big Government is that it is so obscure as to be unintelligible—it's nontransparent to most citizens. Many see it as a blurred, smeary, hazy, dirty and grimy massively deceptive blob, to use a few more common synonyms. This pathetic perception was recently shown in an example revealed by a citizen activist organization in Southport, N. C.

Many activist groups lobby for bigger government and more public spending that siphons money from the private economy. Save the Cape seems to be one that opposes unnecessary and excessive spending for a specific proposed state project: a megaport that could be located near the mouth of the Cape Fear River at Southport. ([link](#))

Frankly, a shipping port much closer to the ocean than Wilmington 20 miles upriver makes sense—if it were justified by private investment. That's not feasible. The \$6 billion project (probably much more after environmental activists get hold of it) makes it unprofitable. So, of course, government officials want us to pay for it (reminds me of a taxpayer-funded baseball stadium project pushed by the political class and supporters in Wilmington).

In their May 31, 2012 Cape Fear Firebird note authors expressed optimism that the current state budget did not include any money for the megaport in House bill H950. Last year this prohibition language in a Senate budget bill “vanished.” Local Sen. Rabon admitted some responsibility for that because he wanted money spent on a “Maritime Strategy Study.” Save the Cape people believe that this is “the vehicle for reviving the megaport.” Recently the State Port Pilot reported this story. ([link](#))

In a June 11, 2012 memo to the General Assembly Save the Cape called its attention to the “concealed change in the Senate proposed substitute” for H950. The language that prohibited public funds for the megaport or studies of it was deleted but unmarked. Official deletions in bills are commonly identified by a strikethrough. ([link](#))

Save the Cape people believe that this slight-of-hand will allow more public funds to be used for activities “never specifically approved” by the General Assembly. \$50 million has already been spent on this project; including \$44 million “funded debt of the State Ports Authority,” according to STC.

It seems unlikely that words omitted but unmarked in the Senate bill was a simple oversight. Too many “stakeholders” have their hands out for this mega-spending project. Whether more light will be shined on this questionable activity remains to be seen. But without citizens' closely monitoring our political class and constantly demanding transparency, government agents will be deceptively opaque in their schemes to access the public purse.