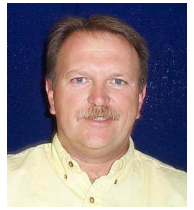


Legislative Testimony:

My first look into the Abyss known as Albany!

by Douglas R. Smorol,
Circuit Rider II



My role at the New York Rural Water Association has always been a kaleidoscope of different and ever-changing duties. As an employee of NYRWA I have been called upon, at times, to think outside the box and to attempt to perform some duties that I would not naturally aspire to. Such was the case when the NYRWA CEO, Pat Scalera, called on me to testify before the New York State Legislative sub-committee on “Water Quality in New York State”. Now as most of you already know, Pat Scalera maintains a brutal schedule that would put any corporate executive to shame. I have mentioned to her over the years that she should delegate some of her tasks to others within the organization, (me and my big mouth)! Pat took this advice to heart on October 1st, 2009, and sent me off to the state capitol to testify before New York State Senators Antoine Thompson (D) Buffalo, NY, and Elizabeth Little (R) Plattsburgh, NY, and their sub-committee on “Water Quality in New York State”.

While I am no stranger to public speaking or adversity at the local level, I was somewhat at a loss to engage two veteran statesmen (stateswomen) in a public forum. Before I actually knew what I was doing, I agreed. Now did I mention that the call-to-action came six (6) days before the actual event, on a Friday! I had all weekend to contemplate the upcoming event and my testimony. I envisioned the movie “the Godfather” with Al Pacino sitting in front of a porcupine of microphones and Robert Duval leaning over, one hand covering the microphones, advising his Don to take the 5th.

Monday morning rolls around and Pat and our lobbyist, Tom Shanahan, have created a rough draft of our testimony and e-mailed it to me to look over. It looks good to me, but they spend a couple more days tweaking the final version. Tom e-mails me that we will need ten (10) copies of the testimony for the committee, would I like him to take care of this? Well, Yeah! Then the next day Pat sends a two sentence correction to the testimony to me, I have no idea if Tom has this information as I try to absorb all this. Now to this day, I do not know if that correction made it into the testimony or not. Next thing I know I am headed for the Empire State Plaza, Meeting Room #5, where’s that? I can barely navigate Albany on a good day, much less with all this other stuff on my mind. I get there around 10:15 am for an 11:00 am Forum and find the meeting room, not a soul in site. I know I

am in the right place because there is a big professional looking poster proclaiming the forum, “Water Quality in New York State”. I sign in and I am first on the list. The testimonies start promptly at 11:00 am, and I think to myself, “Great, I’m in and I’m out”. Not so, first to sign in must mean last to testify in Albany! I listen to the various groups giving testimony and I quickly realize that I can do this thing after listening to the rants of several less than eloquent speakers. The only one that had me thinking twice about my upcoming performance was the representative from the NYSDEC who blurted out that he was a lawyer and former District Attorney. Now he was very good, but I think maybe that he does this for a living. In the end, I was the last to testify and I think I gave an acceptable rendition of our testimony. As the conversation had turned to bottled water on numerous occasions, I was quick to point out to both Senator Thompson and Senator Little the National Rural Water Association public relations campaign, “Quality on Tap” on my folder and that New York State Public Water Supply truly has, “Quality on Tap”! ●