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## ARC chairman says metro area must address traffic, water and education

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ARC Chairman Tad Leithead

The new chairman of the Atlanta Regional Commission says residents of the metro area must work together to address the region's traffic, water and education problems.

"We simply cannot tolerate what we have allowed this city to become in terms of traffic," ARC Chairman Tad Leithead told members of the Buckhead Business Association on April 1.

"We also cannot tolerate what we've allowed this city to become in terms of water – water resources, water quality, water availability, our right to the water that falls from the sky – and we can no longer, I believe, accept being somewhere in the 49<sup>th</sup> or 48<sup>th</sup> position with regards to the education we offer our young people."

The single biggest problem facing the metro Atlanta community, he said, is water. "In the morning what we think about is traffic. That's right in front of our minds because we're trying to get to work," he said. "But I submit to you that while you're listening to the traffic report, if you step in the shower and turn the handle and the water doesn't come out, you're going to forget about traffic. ... At the end of the day, you can survive traffic, but you cannot survive without water."

Leithead, who has worked for more than 20 years in commercial real estate in metro Atlanta, was elected head of the 10-county regional planning agency in December. He is the first citizen representative chosen to head the ARC. He was served on the ARC board since 2000 representing an area that takes in portions of Cobb, Fulton and DeKalb counties and the city of Atlanta.

During his talk to the Buckhead business group, Leithead said metro Atlantans need to work to fix legal problems threatening metro Atlanta's access to water from Lake Lanier, to capture and hold more rainfall and to conserve water.

"We are the largest metropolitan area in the country served by the smallest reservoir," he said. "The basin serving Lake Lanier is only 1,000 square miles. It's not a very big place. Only the rainfall falling in that 1,000-square-mile area lands in Lake Lanier."

So the metro area needs to capture more of the rain that falls in the area and to improve water conservation, he said.

Leithead called education "a huge challenge for us," pointing to multi-million-dollar budget gaps facing several metro school systems "at the same time we're ranked number 49 in the country as far as education."

He said ARC was working to develop stronger candidates for school boards. "We're got to elevate the way we go about educating our children," he said.

Candidates for school board should be better qualified for the job, he said.

"We can work to try to establish minimum standards for who is allowed to run for school board," he said. "You wouldn't want your attorney general to not be an attorney. You'd like people who run for the school board to have some modicum of understanding about curriculum, and about administration, about costs, and about students and about teachers and about what goes on in a school.

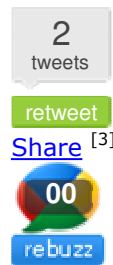
"I guess we've all *been* in school at one time or another, but back then our perception was distorted. We were kids."

Finally, he said, the metro area must address its traffic problems. "We are being choked to death by traffic," he said.

"Transportation, and transportation which is not uniquely dependent on single-occupancy vehicles, is one of the highest priorities in this region," Leithead said.

A legislative proposal to allow regions of the state to impose a special sales tax to raise money for transportation projects could generate \$8 billion over 10 years in metro Atlanta, he said. Coupled with federal funds, that could mean about \$13 billion in projects, he said. Still, he said, that would amount to only 10 to 11 percent of the money needed.

"Even if that legislation passes, we will have somewhere in the neighborhood of a \$90 billion shortfall," he said. "But we would be able to build some very high priority projects."



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