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GAINESVILLE – "There is one entity that controls your future: that is the United States Army." Such was the prospectus offered by David Word, environmental engineer with Joe Tanner and Associates, as he addressed the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce's Board of Directors meeting Thursday afternoon.

Word knows water. Currently he is heavily involved in the planning and permitting phases of the proposed Glades Reservoir, having previously served as Assistant Director for the Georgia Environmental Protection Division for fifteen years.

Word also served on the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District and held the position of chief of the E.P.D. Water Resources Branch.

"The Department of Defense, the generals in the Pentagon, (have) direct control on the button for Hall County, Gainesville," Word added.

"If you want to get more water out of Lake Lanier, who needs to issue those contracts, who needs to issue those permits? The United States Army."

"If you want to build your own reservoir (and not use Lake Lanier), who issues the permit, who has control, who pushes the button? It's the United States Army."

"So be friends to your military partners, keep them happy," Word said with a laugh.

"Despite all the good planning, despite all the leadership that the City of Gainesville shows, that Hall County shows...the final decision comes down to the United States Army," Word said.

Word brought these words of caution, he explained, in response to the 2011 Appeals Court ruling overturning a judge's decision in 2009 that banned Lake Lanier from being used for drinking water purposes.

But the Corp of Army Engineers, Word emphasized, is now only authorized, not obligated, to consider drinking water needs as a factor in determining water releases at the Buford Dam.

"The operative word there being 'what your authority is', not 'what your obligation is'," Word explained.

As the Corp readies their Environmental Impact Study, expected by the end of 2012, Word said other means of securing drinking water need to be considered.

Word's two primary recommendations were: underground aquifers or massive storage containers in rural farming areas, and the reuse of treated waste water in more populated areas.

"Right now the City of Gainesville puts their treated waste water back into Lake Lanier, so does Gwinnett County. We all drink it. It's good," Word said. "We're doing indirect reuse of treated waste water right now, but we have to do more."

"I think the time will come, twenty or thirty years from now, when we'll see sewage treatment plants with a pipe going directly to our drinking water plants and that will change the equation all together."

As almost everyone in the room squirmed in their seats reacting to that suggestion, Word said with a smile, "Yeah, it's neat, the 'yuck' factor."

But, "without a huge, secure water source," Word concluded, "you're paralyzed; in fact, you'll decline."