

## Jan Jones - New Speaker May Have Real Impact in South Fulton

Edited from an article by Jim Tharpe / Atlanta Journal Constitution

She has a husband, four kids and two dogs -- one named "Hotshot," the other, "Rocket." She likes to garden. She often reads herself to sleep at night. Jan Jones also just happens to be the most powerful woman ever to sit in the male-dominated Georgia Legislature. The 51-year-old Jones, a Republican lawmaker from Milton, was last week elected speaker pro tem of the state House of Representatives, becoming the first woman in Georgia history to hold the title.

Jones' rise to power could have big implications around the state Capitol, not to mention Fulton County, where she lives and which could be divided into two counties under legislation she advocates. By week's end, she was still trying to get settled in her role as well as her new Capitol office, just around the corner from House Speaker David Ralston (R-Blue Ridge). Her cell phone's voice-mail box was jammed, and she was struggling to keep up with her e-mail. She suddenly had a lot of new friends.

This is Jones' fourth term as a state lawmaker, her eighth year at the Capitol. She was majority whip before she was elected to her current job. Friends describe her as a reserved woman who doesn't mince words. Just ask about her political role models. "When I got involved in things in the community, I mostly found them to be in the way. What I did not appreciate is how complicated things are. I have come to appreciate that." Jones will probably come to appreciate those complications even more in her new role. She was immediately inundated with praise as she held the House gavel for the first time.

But critics were already circling, warning of bitter legislative fights ahead if she advances legislation to carve Milton County out of northern Fulton County. Milton was absorbed into Fulton in the 1930s. State Sen. Vincent Fort (D-Atlanta) fears Jones will use her newfound power to push a bill that could recreate the county. That House resolution has been lingering in the Legislature for four years. "It's a bad idea, and she'll use her ascension as a platform to push it," Fort said. "It's a bad idea for Atlanta, and it's a bad idea for the region. Essentially what you would have is the Balkanization of metro Atlanta."

Jones and her husband lived in the Garden Hills neighborhood of Atlanta for 12 years, and have lived in what is now the Milton area for the past decade or so. During that time, Jones has held sway in a variety of roles, marketing executive for Home Box Office, stay-at-home mom (for 10 years) and self-described "community activist." Jones got involved in community issues, both in Garden Hills and north Fulton, once trying to annex all of northwest Fulton into Alpharetta.

She said she never got interested in running for office until the 2000 census created three districts out of former Speaker Pro Tem Mark Burkhalter's (R-Johns Creek) seat. It was Burkhalter, Jones said, who encouraged her to run for one of the open seats. Burkhalter, she said, also gave her the advice that still guides her legislative career. "He said, 'Pick issues you care about. And pick something that matters to you.' "

For her, Jones said that means the creation of Milton County -- she thinks Fulton County is too big to be effectively governed -- and education. Jones, however, can quickly become the politician. Just ask her if she sees her current job as a launch pad for higher office -- governor, perhaps? "I could just as easily see

myself in four years running for something else as I could deciding I've had a great stint in public service and I'm ready to have a private life again," Jones said. "I don't see either as more likely than the other."

*Editorial note: This article sets the stage for the next one, as it points out how real the possibility of Milton Co. Splitting from Fulton Co. is.*

=====

## **The Alpharetta Republican discusses a vote on Milton County, the state budget, education and other issues.**

**On the record:** A weekly event where reporters and editors talk to leaders about key issues for Georgians. Excerpts from this conversation also can be heard on News/Talk 750 WSB. February 10, 2010

### **Q: What about the proposal for Milton County?**

A: If we were successful this year in getting a vote ... it would be a statewide referendum in November of 2010. Then come back in 2011, that session, and have a very short and simple piece of legislation that would ask the voters in North Fulton if they, too, would like to ratify the re-creation of Milton County. Then if that were successful, we would come back one year later in 2012 or '13 or even '14. I mean it will take a couple years to put together and disentangle the parts of Fulton and Milton that would need disentangling but also and, just as importantly, where the ties would remain. That would also give the city of Atlanta time to consider if they would like to consolidate Fulton and Atlanta at that time.

### **Q: What's the strongest argument against Milton?**

A: There was a concern [with creating new cities] that it would draw funds or support away from Fulton County, and that has not been the case.

### **Q: Do you see any room for privatization?**

A: Certainly. ... We actually have privatization in a number of areas of state government already with private contracts. I mean much of the DOT work is done by private contracts. ... I don't see why any reason why you wouldn't do that with driver services some day.

### **Q: How would you tackle the budget?**

A: The No. 1 priority to me is to figure out a way, however painful, to balance the budget, providing I think the first responsibility is a safety net to those who can't provide for themselves, a real safety net, and public education. ... I would not be opposed, and I don't mean this year or in years in general, in having some services pay for themselves. ... It's kind of like the gasoline tax, it ought to pay for the users.

### **Q: How about a tobacco tax?**

A: I don't have a problem with cigarette taxes. ... My preference would be if you raise the cigarette tax you roll back another tax and make it net neutral. ... We just can't always be looking for another area [to tax]. We'll run out of the sin taxes, and then we'll have to move onto something else.

**Q: What strategic spending cuts are you all looking at?**

A: There are 50 agencies in Georgia; 40 of the 50 agencies comprise 15 percent of the state's budget. The other 10 are 85 percent of the state's budget. Now 47 percent of that is public education, 10 percent is corrections, 10 percent is higher education, 6 percent is debt. When you add it up you could close down 40 agencies and that would almost approximate the downturn for this year. It means we have to think really big how we are going to change what we do.

**Q: What about education?**

A: I think it is opening up to more parental choice. I think it's changing how we pay teachers. A public education teacher today that has been there 20 years and therefore is about at the top of their pay scale, if they have a master's and a doctorate in unrelated areas, we pay them about \$20,000 more a year. I can't think of any other area in government or in the private sector where we just automatically get that. ... We made a change in that direction last year where for the first time we started paying math and science teachers almost \$5,000 more a year because those are critical need shortage areas.

**Q: Being the first female speaker pro tem, how has that been for you?**

A: The best part of winning it is the next time it won't be a big deal. The third time, no one will even notice — and that's what you hope for all girls, whether it's racial or gender, that people are selected based on what they bring to the table.

**Q: How do you deal with the sex-charged atmosphere here?**

A: I do think it has been overplayed. ... There was some element of that, but not to the degree, to the People magazine and National Enquirer level.

**Q: Karen Handel has been tough about the lobbyist culture. What needs to happen?**

A: I guess she saw more of it than I did, which is interesting since I'm in the middle of it. Or at least she thought she did. Again, I think it was overplayed by some, particularly those running for office.

*Speaker Pro Tem Jan Jones (R-Alpharetta) is the highest-ranking women in the state House.*

=====

**Is Splitting Fulton County in Half a Good Idea? Absolutely Not!**

Forwarded from State Representative Roger Bruce

A "New Milton County" would consist of the municipalities of Roswell, Alpharetta, Sandy Springs, Mountain Park, John's Creek, and Milton. The creation of a new county would likely impact several sources of tax revenue to these six municipalities as well as the remaining cities and the unincorporated portions of the county.

What Have Studies Shown? Last year Republican leaders in the Georgia General Assembly commissioned a study that addressed the fiscal viability of creating a "New Milton County". The study

was somewhat disingenuous in that it only answered the question of the viability of the new county and was silent as to the impact on the remaining area of the county. It also made an unlikely assumption that the division of sales tax revenues would remain the same.

This gives an inaccurate picture of the financial impact to the residents of the new county. The Study did not address LOST revenues in any detail. Instead, the report states, "one notable assumption employed in estimating the sales tax revenues to the county is that the Milton municipalities will receive the same amount of LOST revenues as they currently receive from Fulton County." This assumption obviously implies that the remainder of Fulton County would also continue to collect the same percentage share of LOST revenues into the future. Similarly, the Study did not address the probable reallocation of E-LOST revenues in the event that a new school district is formed to serve Milton County.

### **Concerns with HR 21**

**Voting Rights Act Issues:** The requirement for a vote, which would only be conducted by the portion of the county which would leave into Milton County, violates the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Such a violation subjects the measure to lengthy litigation, which will likely cost the State of Georgia millions of dollars.

Also, as a "Section 5" state, Georgia must obtain prior approval from the U.S. Justice Department before holding a vote to create a new city or county utilizing new voting procedures. Additionally, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 clearly requires all citizens in a political subdivision be treated equally. Failure to obtain Section 5 clearance exposes the State of Georgia to additional litigation.

Article 9, Section 1, Paragraph II (c) of the Georgia Constitution requires that all citizens in a county vote on the decision of whether or not to divide a county. HR 21 attempts to remove this Constitutional protection and, thus, disenfranchises all citizens living south of the proposed Milton County border. Such disenfranchisement would not only damage the citizens of south and middle Fulton County, but sets a dangerous precedent in the State of Georgia.

### **Additional Costs to the State of Georgia**

The creation of New Milton County would require the State of Georgia to establish certain state agencies in the new county. These agencies include, but are not limited to, the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Department of Labor, the Health Department and the Department of Children and Family Services.

These additional costs to the state would be borne by all Georgia taxpayers and, pursuant to General Assembly Rules, may require a fiscal note from the State Budget Office prior to legislative action.

### **Milton County Feasibility Study Omissions**

In 2008, the General Assembly commissioned a study (at a cost of over \$250,000) to determine the feasibility of creating a new Milton County. The study merely found that, given a best-case scenario and using 2006 revenue numbers, the operational costs of New Milton County are feasible. Because the study merely looked at a "snapshot" financial picture, rather than a sampling of times, it is unlikely that the "feasibility" finding is still viable in 2010. Further, it is unlikely that the "feasibility" finding would still

be viable if the study assumed anything other than a best case scenario for certain economic data that was missing.

Additionally, the study failed to address the following items:

**1. Remaining Fulton County**

The study does not even consider the impact on the remaining portion of Fulton County. According to David Sjoquist, lead researcher on the study, "[W]e weren't asked to do that".<sup>[1][1]</sup> The Republican Leadership authorized a study in excess of \$250,000 that did not even consider the impact on over seven percent (7%) of the state's population (i.e. the citizens living in the financial engine of the state).

**2. Capital costs**

The study only analyzes the operating costs of a new county without examining the start-up and other long-term capital costs associated with operating a county. The study assumes that all of the county and school board property located in new Milton County would be vested with the new county, and it fails to address the costs of establishing constitutionally mandated offices (sheriff, courts, etc.)

**3. Sales Tax Disbursements**

The study assumes that Fulton and New Milton would continue to split sales taxes based upon the current formula, pursuant to which the north part of the county receives far more sales tax revenue (over 32%) than is generated in the north. This assumption creates false numbers vis-à-vis property taxes, as property tax rates are dependent upon sales tax revenues.

**4. Long-Term Pension Obligations**

Under federal law (ERISA), New Milton would be considered a successor in interest to pension obligations of Fulton County. The "feasibility study" fails to address these liabilities, which would likely be substantial.

**5. Intergovernmental Agreements**

The "feasibility study" assumes that the over 100 intergovernmental agreements in place between Fulton County and/or City of Atlanta, on one hand, and the municipalities in north Fulton County, on the other hand, will remain in place. Each of these 100-plus agreements has specific provisions governing the termination of the agreements, many of which would be triggered by a split of the County and result in substantial monetary costs.

**6. The "Average Tax Payer"**

The "feasibility study" only provides gross operating budget estimates. It does not quantify the financial impact on the "average" residential or commercial taxpayer.

**7. Vagueness of Constitutional Amendment Language**

The proposed language of the constitutional amendment proposed by HR 21 is vague in two respects.

First, the language allowing the recreation of a county to cover an area which is "the same as those in effect immediately prior to the previous merger or may be generally similar but not identical as determined in the discretion of the General Assembly" is far too vague to allow a citizen of Georgia to determine what they are voting for. To illustrate, the original boundaries of Milton County prior to its merger into Fulton County in the 1930's was those lands north of the Chattahoochee River currently in Fulton County, with the exception of Roswell, which was located in an autonomous militia district. Would legislation enacted subsequent to this referendum allow those citizens in Roswell to become part of the new county? Would it allow those citizens in Sandy Springs south of the river to become part of the new county?

Second, the language "if the voters therein approve it by referendum" does not clearly identify the proposal to allow only those people in the new county to vote on the measure. This sleight of hand hides the true nature of the proposal to Georgia voters.

#### **8. Economic Development Impact**

Because of the items set forth above, and the general uncertainty caused by such a fundamental change in local governance in the metro-Atlanta region, it is self evident that HR 21 will have a deleterious effect on economic development efforts in the State of Georgia. The creation of New Milton County would leave the City of Atlanta, the economic engine of the state (and the capitol of the southeast), at an economic disadvantage making it more difficult to attract new development to the area. Further, the uncertainty that such a split will cause to vital public assistance like Grady Hospital will result in a decreased standard of living, and in Atlanta being unflavored as a destination for conventions and as a potential relocation area for large employers. This will have a ripple effect throughout the metro area and the state. For better or worse, when Atlanta gets a cold, the state gets the flu.

We are genuinely interested in hearing your feedback!!!! Please call, email or send us your comments!!

Thanks, Representative Roger Bruce