

DEMOCRATIC RESPONSE TO THE
GOVERNOR'S

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY MICHAEL L. THURMOND

COMMISSIONER OF LABOR

STATE OF GEORGIA

JANUARY 13, 2010

TO SENATORS ROBERT BROWN AND TIM GOLDEN AND
REPRESENTATIVES DUBOSE PORTER AND CALVIN
SMYRE THE COURAGEOUS DEMOCRATIC PARTY
LEADERS IN THE HOUSE AND SENATE, DISTINGUISHED
MEMBERS OF THE GEORGIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY,
DEMOCRATIC PARTY CHAIR, JANE KIDD, GUESTS, AND

MOST IMPORTANTLY, TO THE PEOPLE OF THE GREAT STATE OF GEORGIA, GOOD AFTERNOON.

TRADITIONALLY THE RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNOR'S STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS HAS BEEN UTILIZED BY THE OPPOSITION PARTY LEADERS TO DEFINE AND DELINEATE POLICY DIFFERENCES AND FRANKLY, TO SCORE PARTISAN POLITICAL POINTS AGAINST THE GOVERNOR AND HIS PARTY. I WAS TEMPTED TO CONTINUE THIS HONORED TRADITION THIS AFTERNOON BECAUSE THE REPUBLICAN PARTY OF GEORGIA HAS FAILED TO RESOLVE THE MOST PRESSING PROBLEMS FACING OUR STATE.

DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE MAJORITY PARTY HAS CONTROLLED ALL THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT FOR SEVERAL YEARS, WE ARE STILL BURDENED WITH A TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM THAT IS CONGESTED, SCHOOLS THAT LACK THE RESOURCES

NEEDED TO PREPARE OUR CHILDREN FOR THE FUTURE, DWINDLING WATER SUPPLIES, AND GAPPING REVENUE SHORTFALLS THAT HAVE PLACED THE HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE OF ALL GEORGIANS AT RISK.

HOWEVER, MY FRIENDS THIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR CRASS PARTISAN POLITICAL GAMESMANSHIP. THE GREAT RECESSION HAS REAPED A BITTER HARVEST OF JOB LOSSES AND DEEP BUDGET CUTS THROUGHOUT STATE GOVERNMENT. THEREFORE, ON BEHALF OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF GEORGIA, I AM EXTENDING THE HAND OF COOPERATION TO GOVERNOR PERDUE, LT. GOVERNOR CASEY CAGLE AND SPEAKER DAVID RALSTON TO JOIN THE STATE DEMOCRATIC LEADERS STANDING WITH ME TODAY TO DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN THAT WILL HELP GET 500 THOUSAND JOBLESS GEORGIANS BACK TO WORK. AS GEORGIA LEADERS WE MUST

ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DETERMINING
GEORGIA'S ECONOMIC DESTINY.

IN ADDITION TO OUR DEEPENING ECONOMIC
CRISIS THE REPUTATION OF OUR STATE GOVERNMENT
HAS BEEN TARNISHED BY ETHICAL LAPSES AT THE
HIGHEST LEVELS OF GEORGIA'S ELECTED LEADERSHIP.
IN RECENT MONTHS, THE BRIGHT LIGHT OF PUBLIC
DISCLOSURE HAS SHINED INTO THE DARKEST CORNERS
OF THE CAPITOL. THE CITIZENS OF GEORGIA HAVE
SEEN, ALL TOO CLEARLY, HOW THEIR GOVERNMENT
HAS OPERATED UNDER SINGLE PARTY RULE. ALL
GEORGIANS, DEMOCRATS, REPUBLICANS AND
INDEPENDENTS ARE NOT JUST DISAPPOINTED, IN MANY
CASES, THEY ARE RIGHTFULLY FURIOUS.

WHEN IT COMES TO ETHICS, NEITHER THE
DEMOCRATIC OR REPUBLICAN PARTIES ARE
COMPLETELY BLAMELESS. WE ARE HUMAN AND ARE

THEREFORE SUBJECT TO HUMAN FRAILTIES. THE GOOD BOOK CHALLENGES THOSE AMONG US WHO ARE WITHOUT SIN TO CAST THE FIRST STONE. HOWEVER, IT IS ALSO TRUE, THAT TO WHOM MUCH IS GIVEN, MUCH IS REQUIRED. WE HAVE BEEN GRANTED THE PRIVILEGE OF ELECTED OFFICE BY THE PEOPLE WE SERVE AND WE MUST, AND SHOULD, BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUR DEED AND MISDEEDS.

THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF OUR GREAT NATION UNDERSTOOD THAT THE CHECKS AND BALANCES THAT TWO PARTY GOVERNANCE AFFORDS OFTEN LIMITS THE ABUSE OF POWER. WE KNOW THAT POWER CORRUPTS, BUT ABSOLUTE POWER CORRUPTS ABSOLUTELY. I BELIEVE WE NEED A NEW VISION, NEW LEADERSHIP AND A NEW DIRECTION.

OUR HISTORIC CAPITOL BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE OF GEORGIA----THIS IS THEIR HOUSE. ALTHOUGH THE TEACHER, THE NURSE, THE POLICE OFFICER, THE SENIOR CITIZEN AND THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE RESIDENTS OF OUR STATE CANNOT WALK THESE HALLOWED HALLS EVERY DAY, WE MUST MAKE SURE THAT THEIR INTERESTS ARE NOT FORGOTTEN. THIS HOUSE BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE, AND OUR JOB IS TO PROTECT THIS HOUSE. WE MUST PROTECT THIS HOUSE FROM THOSE WHO SEEK TO CIRCUMVENT AND UNDERMINE THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE.

THE PEOPLE OF GEORGIA DESERVE, AND MUST HAVE, A COMPREHENSIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN, NOT MERELY ANOTHER EMPTY PROMISE THAT SUCCUMBS TO THE PARALYSIS OF INTERNAL POLITICAL SQUABBLING. THE PEOPLE OF GEORGIA DESERVE, AND MUST HAVE, SCHOOLS THAT EDUCATE

AND NURTURE OUR CHILDREN, AND PREPARE THEM TO THRIVE IN THE 21ST CENTURY. THE PEOPLE OF GEORGIA DESERVE, AND MUST HAVE, GOOD JOBS THAT PAY DECENT WAGES, OFFER RELIABLE BENEFITS, AND PROVIDE DIGNITY TO THOSE ENGAGED IN HONEST LABOR.

THE PEOPLE OF GEORGIA DESERVE, AND WILL HAVE UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF A DEMOCRATIC GOVERNOR, AN OPEN AND HONEST GOVERNMENT THAT SERVES THE PEOPLE – A GOVERNMENT THAT APPROPRIATES TAX DOLLARS WISELY, A GOVERNMENT THAT ELIMINATES WASTE AND INEFFICIENCY, AND A COMPASSIONATE GOVERNMENT THAT PROVIDES CRITICAL SERVICES TO THOSE IN NEED.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE PEOPLE OF GEORGIA ARE IN DESPERATE NEED OF A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL

WORK WITH ENTREPRENEURS AND SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS TO CREATE MORE PRIVATE SECTOR JOBS.

AS DEMOCRATS WE STAND FOR SOUND MONEY MANAGEMENT – SPENDING TAXPAYER DOLLARS WISELY, BUT SPENDING WHEN WE MUST ON THE THINGS WE MUST. WE STAND FOR TAX REFORM, BEGINNING WITH THE TAX PLAN WE INTRODUCED LAST YEAR, WHICH, IF PASSED, WOULD PUT OVER \$1 BILLION INTO THE BUDGET WITHOUT RAISING TAXES. WE STAND FOR A FAIRER TAX SYSTEM THAT REWARDS ACHIEVEMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP. WE STAND FOR BUDGET PRIORITIES THAT REFLECT GEORGIA’S PRIORITIES: EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION; KEEPING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS, STREETS, AND HIGHWAYS SAFE; A TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM THAT KEEPS PEOPLE AND GOODS MOVING; AND PROTECTING OUR AIR AND OUR WATER.

I CAN'T TELL YOU WHAT THE MAJORITY PARTY STANDS FOR AND I CAN'T TELL YOU WHO THEY STAND FOR. OF COURSE, ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS. BUT I CAN TELL YOU WHO DEMOCRATS REPRESENT. WE REPRESENT URBAN AND RURAL AREAS AND THE SUBURBS IN BETWEEN. WE REPRESENT THE POLICE OFFICERS, SHERIFFS, AND STATE TROOPERS WHO ARE WORKING TOO MANY HOURS WITH TOO FEW RESOURCES TO FIGHT CRIME AND DRUGS IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

WE REPRESENT TEACHERS WHO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY TO HELP OUR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN SUCCEED AND THRIVE. WE REPRESENT COMMUTERS WHO SPEND HOURS STUCK IN TRAFFIC EVERY DAY WHEN THEY'D RATHER BE AT HOME WITH THEIR FAMILIES. WE REPRESENT THE TAXPAYERS WHO KEEP OUR STATE MOVING ALONG.

WE REPRESENT MILLIONS OF HARDWORKING GEORGIANS WHO DON'T WANT A HANDOUT, JUST A GOVERNMENT THAT GIVES THEM A FAIR SHAKE AT PROSPERITY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM.

BUT WE ALSO PROUDLY REPRESENT, THE LEAST AMONG US – THE IMPOVERISHED, THE ILL, THE DISABLED, AND THE DOWNTRODDEN. WE REPRESENT THE PEOPLE OF GEORGIA, AND THEY DON'T OFTEN GET THE CHANCE TO WALK THESE HALLS AND MAKE THEIR NEEDS KNOWN. BUT WE CARRY, AS WE SHOULD, THEIR AGENDA IN OUR HEARTS. THEIR HOPES, DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS ARE OUR HOPES, DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS.

OUR AGENDA FOR 2010 IS SIMPLE. WE ARE HERE TO HELP PUT JOBLESS GEORGIANS BACK TO WORK. ONE OUT OF EVERY TEN PEOPLE IN THIS STATE NEEDS A JOB. TEN PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO

WORK, WHO CAN WORK, ARE NOT WORKING, AND OUR ECONOMY SUFFERS EVERY DAY AS A RESULT. IF THE REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP WILL PUT ASIDE HYPER-PARTISAN DECISION MAKING, WE CAN BRING NEW JOBS TO GEORGIA, NOT JUST BY COMPETING FOR BUSINESSES WHO WANT TO RELOCATE, BUT BY HELPING SMALL BUSINESSES BECOME BIG BUSINESSES THAT ARE HOMEGROWN SUCCESS STORIES.

WE'RE HERE TO WORK FOR A TRANSPORTATION PLAN THAT IS FAIR TO ALL PARTS OF THIS STATE, AND THAT LOOKS BEYOND MORE LANES AND MORE ASPHALT TO PUBLIC TRANSIT AND RAIL LINES. OTHER STATES IN THE SOUTHEAST ARE USING STIMULUS MONEY TO CREATE RAIL, BUT NOT GEORGIA. IT HASN'T BEEN A PRIORITY FOR THE PAST SEVEN YEARS – IT MUST BE OUR TOP TRANSPORTATION PRIORITY NOW.

WE WILL FIGHT, AS WE ALWAYS HAVE, FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS. IN SEVEN YEARS, WE'VE SEEN \$1.6 BILLION IN CUTS TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS. AS A POLICY, IT'S FOOLISH AND SELF-DEFEATING. BY LEAVING KIDS BEHIND, WE ARE CLOSING THE BOOK ON OUR FUTURE PROSPERITY.

WE WILL WORK FOR REAL SOLUTIONS TO OUR WATER MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS. WE HAVE TO COME TO THE BARGAINING TABLE, ACKNOWLEDGE THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION, AND MOVE FORWARD BY CONSERVING WATER, PLANNING AHEAD FOR SMART GROWTH, AND KEEPING OUR EYES FIXED ON THE NEXT FIFTY, THE NEXT ONE HUNDRED YEARS IN OUR STATE'S HISTORY.

OUR BEST DAYS AS A STATE ARE AHEAD OF US, AND NOW IS THE TIME FOR CHANGE. WE CALL ON RESPONSIBLE MEMBERS OF THE OTHER PARTY TO PUT

PARTISAN DIFFERENCES ASIDE AND WORK TOGETHER TO MOVE GEORGIA AHEAD. IT'S TIME TO CHART A COURSE IN A NEW DIRECTION. LET OUR COMPASS BE – INTEGRITY.

THIS IS THE TIME TO STAND UP AND LEAD. GEORGIA NEEDS A NEW VISION, NEW LEADERSHIP AND A NEW DIRECTION.

AS A STATE, WE FACE IMMENSE CHALLENGES, BUT THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME WE'VE BEEN HERE. AND, ONE THING ABOUT GEORGIA IS THAT, WHEN WE FACE A CHALLENGE HEAD-ON, WE EMERGE STRONGER AND BETTER. WE HAVE RECOVERED AND THRIVED IN THE PAST, AFTER WAR, AFTER RACIAL STRIFE, AND, YES, ECONOMIC TIMES MORE DIFFICULT THAN THESE. EACH TIME, WE HAVE OVERCOME OUR PROBLEMS AND BECOME A STRONGER, BETTER STATE. DEMOCRATS ARE READY TO STAND WITH REPUBLICAN ALLIES FOR

THE BETTERMENT OF GEORGIA, BUT WE WILL STAND UP FOR OUR BELIEFS, AND FOR THE FORGOTTEN PEOPLE OF THIS STATE AS WELL.

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR ATTENDANCE, AND MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS YOU AND THE STATE OF GEORGIA.