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Perdue had our ear but wasted the opportunity

I'm not sure what I expected but I am pretty sure that Governor Perdue's State of the State Address had the ear of the legislature, key people in our state and the general public. These are not ordinary times and it is possible that our expectations were too great because of the severe economic circumstances in which we find ourselves. Our reaction to the speech was that Perdue wasted an ideal opportunity to become a stateswoman instead of a typical governor delivering another typical address.

Perdue has frequently likened our current situation to that of the Great Depression, citing Governor O. Max Gardner's leadership during those hard times. Whereas Gardner instilled public confidence by speaking plainly and telling people exactly what the state was facing, Perdue spoke broadly of hard times and tough decisions. Gardner used the opportunity to tell his story the way he wanted it told. Perdue essentially said she would let her budget do the talking when she submitted it next week. Gardner specifically said he would make major changes in state government and then did it. Perdue essentially said the legislature would make the necessary changes pursuant to her budget.

Perhaps the biggest missed opportunity was that Governor Perdue didn't use the occasion to call out our better selves, asking us to respond to these times by helping one another, by keeping faith in our government and its leaders when they demonstrate leadership and by doing whatever we can in whatever ways we can to help us get through this crisis together. The Governor said this was a time for ordinary citizens to become extraordinary leaders but she gave us nothing to measure this by, other than the Hudson River flight attendant who "did her job."

Perdue said it was time to stand up to special interests, pork barrel spending and backroom dealing, adding we don't have the time for talk-show political posturing or petty partisan games. Unfortunately, with no examples to back up her rhetoric we can do little else but speculate.

Instead we heard a lot of typical political platitudes, some obvious attempts to draw applause, and very few specifics. She is unquestionably the best trained chief executive our state has ever had, serving in the legislature longer, being intimately involved in building many budgets and in passing legislation, also in having heard more than her share of these addresses to the people. She should have been able to gauge the moment and the expectations.

We can all agree that our troubled state needs leadership and we want Governor Perdue and our legislature to succeed in providing solutions to our problems. Given what she has shown so far in her administration we were hoping for better. The axiom should be "When you've got peoples' attention, tell them what you need to tell them." Judging by that yardstick Governor Perdue missed the mark in her first State of the State address.

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