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# North Carolina's challenge for these times

*Tom Campbell*

Nobody likes to cut back. It's not the American way. We are the country that has always blazed new trails, expanded our horizons, improved, invented and innovated our way to a better tomorrow. So the notion of reducing, slowing down, and eliminating is foreign to most of us, especially if we are being forced into this posture. But the impact of the economic crisis is real and will result in loss, pain, and hardship for all age groups. Few will be unaffected.

This is one of the many paradoxes in North Carolina history, well documented by Rob Christensen in his book, "The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics." Even in the throes of The Great Depression, even as North Carolinians experienced great suffering and things looked grim, there emerged a Governor, O. Max Gardner, who led this state nobly and boldly during this crisis. In this crisis our state made great gains. Gardner engaged The Brookings Institution to conduct a massive study of state government that led to sweeping reorganization. Ninety-two state agencies were reduced to fourteen. The state consolidated the three existing colleges into a university system, assumed construction and maintenance of roads, as well as financing of public schools. Scarce resources were reallocated and our state progressed.

It wasn't easy; Gardner ran into powerful opposition at every turn, but he used statewide radio addresses to exhort North Carolinians to keep the faith and support the radical changes he proposed. In one address Governor Gardner said, "If by some magic we in North Carolina could regain our faith in ourselves and each other, in our institutions and agencies of public and private service the whole face of the state would be transformed within 60 days. We should remember there has been no change in the basic character of our people. We are the same people we have always been and North Carolina possesses everything she always possessed except money. And some day we can make money again if we do not turn yellow and quit. We must carry on in North Carolina."

The lessons for today are clear. Like The Great Depression we are experiencing a crisis of confidence in this state and this nation. We must keep faith, even when all of us are paying the price for some who were greedy, incompetent or corrupt. Placing blame, while it may have some value in learning how to avoid future situations, won't make things better. As Gardner said, we are the same people as when times were good and if we keep up our heads and keep faith we will emerge from this.

The second great lesson is that now is the time for North Carolina to undertake a long overdue reorganization of state government. Most corporations will reorganize and redeploy assets every decade or so. It's been almost fifty years since government has reorganized. Current conditions mandate that instead of across-the-board cuts we need sweeping reform, examining every program, every agency, every dollar being taxed and spent to ensure we are getting the best results.

We have a remarkable model from the 1930's to use as a reminder of how we can come together and move ahead. This is the challenge for our leadership and for each of us in all sectors of our society. Let us be worthy of that challenge.

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