

Brookings Plan

The Brookings Plan was a collection of reforms proposed by the Brookings Institution, a Washington, D.C. think tank. Searching for economic solutions to the state's financial problems, [Governor O. Max Gardner](#) commissioned the plan shortly after the onset of the Great Depression.

The Great Depression threatened to bankrupt North Carolina. Tax revenues had collapsed, leaving the government unable to pay for basic services. To solve this problem, Governor Gardner asked the Brookings Institution in the summer of 1930 for advice on how "to promote increased efficiency and economy in the conduct of the governmental affairs of the State." In December 1930, the institution published the results of its study. The final report was distributed to legislators, journalists, and other interested parties around the state.

The Brookings Plan had two elements. The first was to centralize state government by consolidating public universities into one system and combining the smallest—and poorest—counties into larger ones. Another centralizing reform was the so-called short ballot. Under the short ballot, only the governor, lieutenant governor, and state auditor would be elected by the people. The governor would have the authority to appoint every other state officer, including the treasurer and attorney general. Thus, the short ballot would give the governor tremendous power.

The second element of the Brookings Plan was to streamline state government. Recommendations included cutting state salaries by ten percent while reducing spending and taxes. The plan also suggested the creation of regulatory agencies to trim fat from the budget.

Governor Gardner strongly supported the Brookings Plan. His agenda, first proposed in a speech to the General Assembly on January 9, 1931, borrowed heavily from the plan. First, Gardner created a state university system, consolidating the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, North Carolina State College in Raleigh, and the North Carolina College for Women in Greensboro into the Consolidated University of North Carolina. Gardner also succeeded in cutting property taxes by twenty percent while reducing the state budget by \$12 million (\$102,000,000 to \$90,000,000). Some reforms went unfulfilled. Unwilling to give more power to the governor, the General Assembly refused to consider the proposal for a short ballot.

Other state governments, including Illinois and Tennessee, heeded the Brookings Plan's recommendations. Other governors wanted more specific attention to their state: Governor Clyde L. Herring of Iowa commissioned a \$30,000 Brookings Institution study of his state. As a result of Gardner commissioning the Brookings Institution to study North Carolina, state governmental reorganization became a popular idea throughout country during the Great Depression.

Sources:

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