

Another Depression-era governor for North Carolina?

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Gov.-elect Bev Perdue is traveling around North Carolina this month, holding summits with business leaders and trying to gauge just how much of an uphill climb she will have when she takes office in January.

And she's been reading a little, too.

In an interview with the [Triangle Business Journal](#), Perdue said she is looking back 75 years ago to O. Max Gardner, the Old North State's Depression-era governor, for inspiration on how to deal with the current economic crisis.

And with good reason, since the state is looking at a possible \$3 billion budget shortfall next year.

Is Perdue setting herself up to be the next Depression-era governor?

First, a little history:

[Oliver Max Gardner](#), a lawyer from Shelby, was a regular renaissance man and an oddity in the South. He was a truly progressive politician in a state that was backwoods and backwards economically and socially. And, as incredible as it may sound, Gardner was a strong advocate for the right of women to vote way back in 1916 and was the very first textile mill employer in the South to employ African American workers as early as 1912. These were not exactly popular positions for any politician at the time or for that matter until recent times. As Lt. Governor, Gardner actually cast the vote in the State Senate that ratified the Suffrage Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1919.

Gardner also served as governor of North Carolina during the Great Depression, served as a state senator, was Under Secretary of the United States Treasury and was named Ambassador to the Court of St. James by President Harry Truman.

As governor, he took some pretty drastic steps to modernize state government — steps that still last to this day.

He created the University of North Carolina system by consolidating [UNC-Chapel Hill, N.C. State](#) and [UNC Greensboro](#) (then known as the Women's Teaching College) under one roof. As the only person in history to have been elected as Captain of the football teams at NC State and

at UNC Chapel Hill, Gardner was probably the only person who could have pulled off this consolidation. The fact of the matter is that the State and Carolina alumni did not like each other in 1929 and still don't like each other.

He created the state Highway Patrol.

He created the state Department of Transportation and assumed responsibility for the maintenance of all primary and secondary roads in the state.

He brought all of the public schools under state control.

He passed the first North Carolina Workers' Compensation Act.

He established a minimum age for the employment of child labor.

He reorganized state government based on a study by the Brookings Institute, a study that he had ordered as Governor.

He raised the corporate income tax rate.

He created a state Department of Education and had the state assume the responsibility for the compensation for all public school teachers in North Carolina.

And he kept the banks from defaulting on the state's loans by asking textile magnate [Charles A. Cannon](#), owner of Cannon Mills in Kannapolis to back the state's debt with his own fortune.

So yeah, ok, Bev Perdue, not a bad governor to emulate. Just as President-Elect Barack Obama is looking to [Abraham Lincoln](#) on how to choose his Cabinet, Perdue is looking to keep the state afloat when she takes over in January.

Outgoing Governor Mike Easley is already pushing state construction projects forward to help stimulate the state economy, but road projects are controlled by the state Department of Transportation.

[That department is ridiculously corrupt.](#)

[Transportation Secretary Lyndo Tippett](#) has sent money to hometown of Fayetteville to the detriment of other, more important road projects in the state, namely, widening Interstate 85 through Cabarrus County and [completing I-485 around Charlotte](#).

But, really, who's complaining?

[Perdue and Easley are going to meet with Obama and Vice-Presidential-Elect Joe Biden](#) at the National Governor's Association meeting Tuesday to talk about the economy, as the state faces a \$3 billion budget shortfall next year.

This time around, Perdue doesn't have the luxury of a fantastically-wealthy textile magnate to bail out the state. So what should she do?

First and foremost, resist the Good Ole Boy Network, at all costs, that will want their share of the pie. This is Perdue's biggest challenge, since she has been a part of the network since her days in the state senate. She is a Democrat, which has run this state for more than 100 years.

And with Joe Hackney and Marc Basnight leading the General Assembly, the temptation will be too great to give in their demands and the demands of the big lobbyists — Big Ag and education — just because they are old legislature buddies.

[She already told biotechnology leaders last week](#), who asked for a public-private partnership to help struggling start-ups and mid-level companies, that she wasn't going to promise them or anybody any money right now.

This comes after the [North Carolina Biotechnology Center](#) announced the state [had invested about \\$1 billion](#) in building the biotech infrastructure through the past 10 years.

Let's be honest here, folks, we're in hard times and there is no room for hand-outs, costly subsidies and misdirection of funds to hometowns. This is triage time — where the worst come first.

Her pet projects, like health care and Medicare, will have to go on the back burner for the time being while she figures out how to keep the state running with \$3 billion less dollars.

With Erskine Bowles in charge of the UNC System, the 16 universities are cleaning their financial houses in response to Easley's order to cut back on spending.

Hopefully, with a new Council of State and Cabinet, Perdue will change the tune in Raleigh and rein in the Good Ole Boy Network, at least during the lean times.

“Are state employees, teachers, parents, and elected officials going to yell and scream at me? Yes,” she said to the Business Journal. “But I have been yelled and screamed at before. It doesn't bother me, and I am going to do what's right.”

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