

State of the State: Doing the Hard Thing Now for a Better Tomorrow

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, President Pro Tem Williams, Speaker Pro Tem Jones ... Members of the General Assembly. Constitutional officers and members of the judiciary. The Consular Corps and other distinguished guests. And, most of all, my fellow Georgians.

Let me begin by congratulating the new Speaker of the House ... and the new Speaker Pro Tem. I have always enjoyed our past relationships and I look forward to working with you both.

As have previous Governors, I have used this address in past years to talk about the budget, policy issues, and to roll out my legislative agenda.

You're probably wondering why there isn't a budget lying on your desk. Actually, it is there, its just really thin.

This year's message will different, so let me apologize to you and the press corps in advance ... it is much bigger than a budget document.

The encouragement I want to offer goes beyond numbers on a page, beyond line items in a bill and to the very core of **why we are here** and **what we are called to do**. I hope you'll grant me that privilege as I make this last lap around the track.

First off, and before I talk about the tasks that lie ahead, I want to recognize the one Earthly person who has stood out as my inspiration and guide throughout this journey. Mary, you are the person I hope to become. Your kindness and gentleness have not only comforted me, but changed me.

Mary, you have been a constant reminder of our purpose in public office, and I thank you for all that you have done as my loving wife and as the First Lady of Georgia.

At my first State of the State Address, we decided to leave a seat in the gallery empty to represent the children of Georgia who had no one to speak for them. And for the last seven years Mary has been that voice. By launching the **Our Children Campaign**, she has united and empowered individuals, corporations and faith-based organizations as they touched the face of children in their local communities.

To my children and grandchildren in the audience today, words can not express my gratitude for your patience, love and support over the past seven years.

I often tell people this story about sharing one another's reputations...

When I was first elected to the State Senate, I sat my children down and told them there are things you can do down here in Bonaire that will make me embarrassed to come up to Atlanta. And there are things that I can do up in Atlanta that will make you embarrassed to go to school in Bonaire. Kids, you not only have never embarrassed me, but you have made me proud.

... For seven years, it has been my highest honor to work with those of you in this chamber and to represent nearly ten million Georgians. We have been through a lot together. In that time, we have sent our young men and women to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq, and we have seen the worst drought on record and an economy as difficult as any since the 1930's.

You don't need me tell you that the challenge we face is real. But we can rest in the knowledge that America has seen these times before. Just over one year ago as Governors gathered with our newly elected President, I sat in the chambers of our nation's first Capitol at Congress Hall and my mind wandered back to the earliest days of our nation and to the Founding Fathers. There, in those hallowed surroundings, I couldn't help but reflect on their courage and optimism in the face of ultimate uncertainty. Their hope was against all odds but it was the spirit their time demanded.

Think back to the early months of the Revolutionary War. Families from Savannah to Boston had given their fathers and sons to the American cause ... and, as it is with war ... many would never return to their homes. General George Washington and his army faced seemingly insurmountable odds. It was cold. His men were ill-equipped and outmatched.

It was then, on December 23, 1776, only two days before the pivotal Battle of Trenton, that Washington sought to inspire his small volunteer army by reading aloud from Thomas

Paine's powerful work, *Crisis*. Today, we can read the very words that ragged band of revolutionaries heard:

“These are the times that try men's souls ... but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman ... we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.”

Sure of their cause, they pressed on to victory. And thus began the long, rich history of our nation.

Those early days were not the darkest or most uncertain days our nation would see. Years later, the descendants of those revolutionary heroes would face each other, sometimes brother against brother – fighting over the future direction of our growing nation.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a war on a scale never before witnessed by mankind. Seventy million soldiers took up arms in a conflict of lethal artillery and machine guns, trench warfare and poison gas. And almost six million would lose their lives in the defense of freedom. In the misery and cold

... in muddy trenches along the Western Front... we held strong.

The 1930's brought a Great Depression – a global downturn so severe that one of every four able-bodied Americans was out of work. Just recently, at the Southern Governors Association's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary down in Warm Springs, I was reminded how deeply the Depression affected Southern families ... and how long it took this region to fully emerge from that time.

A decade later, America would join a world war in a fight against totalitarianism and hatred. At an unfathomable cost, America answered the call, persevered and emerged stronger still – an international defender of individual freedom and liberty.

But two world wars weren't the end of our trials in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Korea and Vietnam, America would lose more than 90,000 soldiers. And while thousands of young men fought in dark jungles across the world, there was another war at home – a war within the national conscience as

America strived ever closer to liberty and justice for all. That struggle was led by brave Georgians just blocks from here.

Our nation's story, unfolding through the centuries, gives us some much needed perspective ... about where we are ... and what we face today. It teaches us that each generation has faced their own trial and shouldered their own responsibility. They faced every enemy and bore every cost in their resolve to create a better nation for their children.

What stands out most is each generation's willingness to pick up the yoke and move our nation forward. It has not always been pretty ... but what has never happened in this nation ... is for one generation to drop the yoke and wait for the next to pick it up. And neither have they weighted them down with unbearable burdens!

This is our time to carry a heavy load ... **to do the hard thing now** for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

For our generation, the economic storm we now find ourselves in is unlike anything we've ever seen. These are hard times for Georgians ... many have lost jobs and others

are working harder and longer for less ... checkbooks are harder to balance.

Here in this chamber, this time has forced tough decisions on us.

We spent the first six years of my administration, before this recession even began, making government more responsive ... more efficient ... more value-driven. And then came the biggest state revenue drop since the Great Depression.

Together, we worked hard to find the best budget solutions and we asked our state team members for **more** in an effort to maintain services with fewer resources. But if we fail to **do the hard thing now**, our government will be spread far too thin to ensure that Georgia is educated, healthy, safe and growing.

It would be easy to sit back and point fingers at Washington, but even here in Georgia, we have to avoid the temptation to serve the needs and wants of today at the expense of tomorrow. We must reject the course forward that promises

the next generation little more than an expensive bill – crushing entitlements and unfunded mandates.

We cannot vote ourselves ease and comfort at the expense of our children and grandchildren. Alexis de Tocqueville said it well ... almost prophetically ... two hundred years ago:

“A democracy can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largesse from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury with the result that a democracy always collapses over lousy fiscal policy, always followed by a dictatorship. The average of the world’s great civilizations before they decline has been 200 years. These nations have progressed in this sequence: From bondage to spiritual faith; from faith to great courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to selfishness; from selfishness to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependency; from dependency back again to bondage.”

There has never been a cautionary tale so well-suited to a time and place as this one is to America, here and now.

I love this one story that Thomas Paine recounted from the days of the American Revolution. He told of a tavern keeper at Amboy, who happened to be a closet Tory, for whom Paine had little respect. Paine described the scene:

“He was standing at his door, with as pretty a child in his hand, about eight or nine years old, as I ever saw, and after speaking his mind as freely as he thought was prudent, finished with this unfatherly expression, ‘**Well, give me peace in my day ... Give me peace in my day.**’”

Thomas Paine goes on to say that a loving parent *should* have said, “**If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace.**” And Paine is right ... “This single reflection, well applied, is sufficient to awaken every man to duty.” We must recover the spirit of that loving, sacrificing father.

I believe I stand with most Georgians, when I say, I am for doing with a little less if it means a lighter burden and a brighter future for the next generation.

There is honor in sacrifice and we must never pervert it into the disdain of dissatisfaction!

I've talked a lot over the last few years about building a culture of conservation here in Georgia, using only what we need and being better stewards of our natural resources. At its core, that culture of conservation is a simple call to be satisfied with only what we truly need and it extends to every aspect of our lives. Going forward, we must forego the excesses of our time and reject the gluttonous instinct of this age.

These times demand that we worry less about bringing home the pork, and more about empowering our people to grow their own hogs. These times call for true leadership in our communities, calling people to create a better Georgia ... elevating them out of the easy way of dependency. We have to call every Georgian to build rather than consume ... to give rather than take.

And we must begin that transformation here!

When I was sworn in to my second term, I said that the only legacy I sought was the same one any parent or grandparent seeks: to hand off our state ... our home ... to the next generation in better shape than we found it. We now find ourselves at a moment in history, in which we must **do the hard thing now** to ensure that bright future for them.

And we can do none of this without one another. Instead of creating an environment of political posturing and blame casting, we can join hands and hearts and work together ... Republican and Democrat, rural and urban, experienced veterans and energetic newcomers.

Governing is a team sport and we are all on **Team Georgia**. You come here to the Capitol each January, from every corner of the state, elected by distinct constituencies that sometimes have little in common. And together, we form a patchwork quilt with our beliefs, ideas and personalities.

That diversity demands a true commitment to cooperation. I think of marriage and remember how the Apostle Paul exhorted husbands and wives at the Church at Ephesus. He called them to mutual respect, to put away any focus on self and to “submit to one another” for the common good.

Those truths have application beyond marriage. They count here! The people who send us here expect us to work together for the good of this state.

Georgians didn’t elect us to see a rugby match with a scrum on every decision. When we don’t work together, our jerseys get so muddy the people can’t even distinguish which team we’re on. And we all come out with mud on our face.

The folks back home have entrusted us to put principles and progress over partisanship and they have asked us to **do the hard thing now** for the future of this state.

And that means drilling down in every area of government to redefine our responsibilities and commitments going forward. We have to take this mindset and apply it to every corner of

state government, including education. For too long, the easy answer in education has been to preserve the status quo ... the prevailing winds have often forced us to accept watered-down compromises that, frankly, nibbled around the edges.

That began to change two years ago when you passed our IE squared legislation. Systems around the state are being freed from state mandates, bringing innovative thinking into their schools, while committing contractually to measurable student improvement. This radical move forward in education policy is already producing results.

Yesterday morning, I outlined a proposal that would tie teacher pay to student achievement. Some will defend the status quo, but it's hard for me to believe that tying pay to performance is anything other than commonsense. Ladies and gentleman, many young people today have the idea that the salary ceiling is simply too low in teaching. That perception effectively shuts many of our best and brightest out of our classrooms.

Teachers told us overwhelmingly in a survey that they should be evaluated based on both observation of their teaching and student growth.

Let's make the commitment now to align our compensation with the mission of our schools – let's do it for our teachers ... let's do it for our students and let's do it for the taxpayers of Georgia! I look forward to working with you on this unique opportunity to drive student achievement.

... As we rethink the appropriate role of government in these times, we cannot retreat from our duty to protect those who cannot protect themselves. I am convinced that Georgia can, Georgia must, and Georgia will adequately care for citizens in our state's mental health program, even though this has been a daunting challenge that precedes my time as Governor.

We took a major step forward last year in creating an agency whose sole focus is caring for the mentally challenged and developmentally disabled.

With a respected mental health professional leading this agency, we have developed a plan that will stabilize hospital staffing and improve care in our institutions. Yes, it will cost more money, but I am confident the additional investment will result in better outcomes for patients.

I want to be clear, my interest is not driven purely by legal mandates, but from my own personal belief that we have a moral obligation to serve those with disabilities. They are our mothers and fathers ... our sons and daughters ... our neighbors. And we are our brothers' keepers.

That obligation should carry a tangible effort. It's a **hard thing** to do in these budget times ... the budgets that I will release on Friday will include additional investment – \$20 million in 2010 and over \$50 million in 2011.

Together, we are making concerted efforts to do the right thing for this vulnerable population. I ask for your continued support as well as that of our consumers, providers, advocates, families and communities to help us develop a system of care of which we can be proud.

We have already faced tough decisions with respect to our team of state employees. We have trimmed payrolls and asked employees to do the job that two or even three of their co-workers used to perform. We have asked teachers, caseworkers, law enforcement personnel and agency heads to do more with less. And their commitment to go the extra mile deserves recognition.

So, I want to take a moment to speak directly to my fellow state employees:

Wherever you serve, I want to recognize and thank all of you for putting in the extra effort and the extra hours to meet this challenge. Responsibility and workloads have increased and you have met the call with excellence ... That doesn't go without notice. I notice your good work. Your bosses notice it. Your fellow Georgians notice it. Thank you!

Now I want to brag on our talented state team a little bit. The men and women who make up our team have refused to make excuses and they have found a way to deliver great customer service in the face of cuts. That's why, as I travel

across Georgia, citizens continue to thank me for the services you deliver.

In fact, we've asked our customers, and they have given you a customer satisfaction rate above 76 percent. That beats most private businesses and makes us one of the only states that compares favorably with the private sector. State employees will tell you their job satisfaction – which has increased 10 percent in the last two years – comes from helping Georgians.

High employee morale means a satisfied customer and a satisfied employee. I want to continue improving to make Georgia an “employer of choice” that can attract and retain top talent going forward.

And I think it is appropriate at the beginning of this legislative session to ask ourselves if we have that same mindset of service. Now is the time to ask ourselves some very foundational questions anew: “Why are we here?” and “What do the people expect of us?”

To answer those questions, I would like to recall the words of a great Georgian who passed away this year – Dr. Michael

Guido. That great sower of the seed had it right: “Greatness doesn’t exist in reducing others to your service, but in reducing yourself to their service.” Not only are those the words one great Georgian lived by, it is an ideal that is distinctly Georgian.

Seven years ago today, at my inaugural, I reminded you of the motto adopted by the Georgia Trustees – General Oglethorpe and the original colonists: “**Not for self, but for others.**” That was the charge back then. It was the charge seven years ago and it is the charge today!

We are trustees of the people’s will. We owe them our best ... That is the sacred trust of democracy. The covenant of service which you and I have with Georgians must always be foremost in our hearts and minds – to do what is right by them, not what is best for ourselves or for our party ... even to **do the hard things now for a better tomorrow.**

All of us in this room have experienced an ego boost upon winning an election. But seven years ago on inauguration day, I was humbled when my son, then just a young 25-year old preacher, gave me this charge from the great prophet

Micah: to “perform what the LORD requires. To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God.”

That charge has stuck with me for these seven years. Circumstances have changed ... many faces have come and gone ... but that call remains. It echoes in my heart and spirit, and it rings forth to you.

... You may have heard the story about the decorated general, undefeated in battle throughout his long career. When he had finally met his match after being lured into an ambush, he called for his bugler to “sound the retreat.”

When the bugler hesitated, he ordered, “Sound the retreat” even louder. Once again the bugler did not respond, and the general angrily demanded him to immediately “Sound the retreat.”

The bugler looked at the general and said, “But sir, I don’t know that call ... and our men don’t know how to retreat.”

It would be easy to sit here and dread the tough decisions that lie ahead. But now is not the time to retreat. Now is the

time to dig in even deeper and **do the hard things** so that our children and grandchildren will know a better Georgia.

It's a tall order, but ours is a high calling, **and you wouldn't be here if you** weren't men and women especially marked by optimism, ambition and an unmovable belief that we should be working to make things the way they ought to be.

I know we can achieve great things together. And I believe we will!

Thank you. May God richly bless each and every one of you. May God bless this state and our great nation!