

Later Y'all: Bev Takes Her Leave

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image via indyweek.com

On January 26, Governor Bev Perdue announced that she would not seek re-election, fearing that another campaign would only further politicize the public education fight with Republicans. Perdue, North Carolina's first female governor, narrowly won the gubernatorial race in 2008, after President Obama's surprise victory in her state. But once in office, Perdue faced a campaign finance investigation and unfavorable poll numbers that led fellow Democrats to worry about how she'd help Obama win North Carolina again in 2012. Now that it's 2012, Perdue's taking her exit and leaving her office wide open in a state that's so important to Obama that the Democratic National Convention is being held in Charlotte this September.

It seems that Perdue was ill-fated for her governorship from the beginning. When Perdue found herself in Raleigh, she faced disapproval over airline flights she'd taken during her campaign that she didn't initially record on required campaign filings. Not only did she face investigation but also the recession had ravaged North Carolina with an unemployment rate higher than the national average. So in 2009, Perdue, a

former school teacher who had run her campaign on improving North Carolina's public school systems, raised the sales tax rate by a penny and made deep cuts in education and health care. Additionally, the landmark 2010 elections gave Republicans control of North Carolina's legislature for the first time since Reconstruction in the 1870s. Last summer the GOP led legislature ousted the penny increase sales tax. In her struggle against the Republican legislature, she vetoed numerous bills last year.

Crystal Sumner, class of 2009, looked forward to having Perdue as her governor. But like many in North Carolina, her initial excitement subsided. Sumner states, "Because Perdue was a former school teacher and education has always been one of her platforms, I hoped that she would help with classroom size, teacher salaries and better technology to make North Carolina one of the best states in the nation to obtain an education." It's no surprise that during her time in office, Perdue's approval ratings have been unfavorable. This is especially crucial in regards to Pat McCrory, the Republican opponent that she barely defeated four years ago in

North Carolina's closest gubernatorial race since 1972. According to Aaron Blake in his article North Carolina Gov. Bev Perdue Won't Seek Re-Election published in the Washington Post on January 26, "a poll conducted for Perdue's campaign just before Christmas showed her trailing McCrory by six points, though her approval rating had risen to 45 percent." Former Charlotte mayor, McCrory, was gearing for a rematch with Perdue this year before her decision, which caught many by surprise. Dr. Clyde Fraizer, Meredith political science professor, states, "Nobody saw that coming. I think everybody assumed she was going to run." In Bev Perdue Retiring, published in the Huffington Post on January 26, Gary D. Robertson writes that it'll be the first time in North Carolina that a sitting governor has failed to get elected to a second term since "voters gave chief executives authority to succeed themselves in the 1970s."

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Several candidates have heard McCrory's challenge. Lt. Governor Walter Dalton has announced he's running, as well as Democratic State representative Bill Faison and former Representative Bob Etheridge. Former State Treasurer Richard Moore, who lost to Perdue in the 2008 primary, says he's also considering joining the race. Regardless of who'll vie for the Democratic nomination, there's no doubt that Perdue's decision has stirred up North Carolina's Democratic party. Anna

Beavon Gravely, class of 2011, thinks "her exit intends on strengthening the Democratic Party." Furthermore, Sumner comments, "Because there will be a new Democratic candidate, it will hopefully energize Democrats and make the race more contested."

After Perdue announced her exit, Obama offered support in a statement: "For over 25 years, she has fought for the people of the Tar Heel state – working to transform the state's public schools, improve the health care system, protect and attract jobs for members of the military and their families, and create the jobs of the future" (Robertson). With Obama's blessing, Perdue plans to focus on the state's education for the remainder of her tenure. At 65, Perdue will be taking it easy while she is going down in the history books as North Carolina's first female governor.

With this legacy it's disappointing for Perdue to leave this way. Emily Hawkins, class of 2013, explains: "Women constantly fight against stereotypes of sexuality, stupidity, and such, so they must be very smart, very modest, and very confident." Women struggle to succeed in the man's world of American politics. While other countries have had female presidents, America hasn't even had a female presidential nominee. Even though Hillary Clinton did become Secretary of State, she did so in a time when Americans met and said goodbye to other female politicians such as Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann and Christine O'Donnell. Now Clinton has expressed that she's ready to get out of politics, too. As we say goodbye to Perdue, Fraizer says it best, "In a way it's good that she can walk away from it with a modicum of dignity." Even though Perdue's time is up, at least she can bow out with some class.

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