

In Dalton, Georgia on January 12, 2006, John W. Dashler, Independent Candidate for Governor of Georgia, delivered the following speech announcing his candidacy. (The speech has been reformatted, otherwise it is unchanged.)

Taxes.

“Folks, our state budget is over \$17 billion dollars.

Have you ever wondered about the source of all that money? It’s your jobs. You pay income taxes when you earn it and sales taxes when you spend it. Your jobs fund over 90% of revenue generated within the state.

Some don’t share my opinion, but I think your tax burden is sufficient.

They think you are under-taxed and compare your tax burdens to those of other states. But, when making that comparison, shouldn’t it be what you get for what you pay?

Education.

Let’s look at education. Georgia spends nearly \$7,500 dollars per student per year to educate our children.

That is more than is spent by any other Southern state, except Virginia.

Georgia’s educators have enjoyed one of the best fringe benefit packages in the country, remain the best compensated in the South and the 18th best compensated in the country.

Levels of relative spending would lead one to assume Georgia outperforms our Southern neighbors in academic achievement. Unfortunately, we don’t.

While slight improvement on test scores is made most years, in most categories and in most grades, the sad fact is Georgia’s students remain mired at or near the bottom in every category of comparative performance.

Scores, however, aren’t the only indicator of performance. Graduating high school students advancing to our colleges and universities have one of the worst retention rates in the country.

With the exception of a few of those attending our largest institutions, most incoming freshman must take remedial classes. These students aren’t properly prepared for the rigors of college, therefore, they quickly fall behind and quit.

In other words, our public schools, enabled by our legislature and our governor, are “dumbing down” the value of a high school diploma, compromising acceptance standards in our university system and wasting tens of millions of HOPE scholarship dollars.

High school graduates aren’t just unprepared for college. Employers report that high school graduates are also unprepared for the work force.

They aren’t referring to high tech, advanced math or preparedness in science. They are referring to issues related to basic skills and work ethic. I recently read an account of a Fortune 500 company want ad that stated, “Send me a person who can read”.

Drop-outs.

Unfortunately, not all students graduate from high school.

Georgia’s K through 12 population is **one and a half million students**. The official drop-out rate is **34%**. It is understated.

Regardless, our leaders don’t appear to be overly concerned. One Senator told me he did not believe education could be made to be important to people.

One state representative said he retired from a lifetime dedicated to education. He doesn’t think the problem **can** be solved.

Other states have a different attitude.

Year after year Georgia’s drop-out rate is the worst, or near the worst of any state in the country. Other states seem to have discovered the formula for avoiding the bottom. It is **leadership** determined to solve their problems!

Our leaders don’t seem to be too bothered about our drop-out problem. Maybe it shouldn’t bother you, either.

But, maybe there are reasons that it should bother you.

Five hundred thousand of Georgia’s present student population, a population that you spend more than any other Southern state to educate, **will drop-out of school**.

Is this a new development in Georgia? Not hardly.

Some time ago, I said these words to this local Chamber of Commerce, “We solve it now, or we solve it later. Drop-outs and adult literacy cost us tens of millions of dollars every year. Failure to solve it now may **cost hundreds of millions, if not billions in the future.**” I said those words 23 years ago.

I have a document from a class I took in high school. It identifies Georgia's drop-out rate as next to worst in the country. That was over 40 years ago.

How much do drop-outs cost today?

A 2003 Georgia Southern study identified the cost of Georgia's drop-outs to be \$17 billion dollars a year.

Each and every year the existing population of drop-outs, which exceeds one million Georgians, increases by 30,000.

Each and every year, costs increase an additional \$237 million dollars!

Five hundred thousand of Georgia's school-aged population will be supported by you and your children. The next generation will be supported by your grandchildren!

Isn't this reason enough to believe that drop-outs should concern every Georgian, especially our leaders?

Summary of Education.

Georgia's public education system has grown persistently troublesome for years.

Change is needed. You know it. I know it. The governor knows it and educators know it. **Yet, teachers resist change fiercely.**

But, can you blame them?

Teachers are frustrated. For years, they have been subjected to change after change. The changes have not worked.

As a result, teachers have lost confidence in and no longer trust their leaders. Teachers are tired of change, yet they know it is needed.

What's the bottom line on relative value of your education tax dollars?

Whether we spend enough on education, whether we need to spend more, or whether we spend too much unwisely, one thing is very clear.

Spending more doing the same things are not going to improve performance.

Our failures in education have mistakenly been laid at the feet of teachers. They have been the goat long enough. It isn't their fault. Our failures in education are symptomatic of a failure in leadership at the highest level.

Educating Georgia's children is a constitutional responsibility of the governor.

Crime, Illegal Drugs and Gangs.

Crime, illegal drugs and gangs are terrorizing too many of our schools, neighborhoods and communities.

The best way to summarize the situation is, "people just don't feel safe".

How serious is crime in Georgia?

Governor Perdue said the "meth problem was growing like kudzu". Some North Georgia communities have enlisted assistance from the FBI to solve illegal drug and gang problems. One DA said "North Georgia is the epicenter of the meth problem nationwide".

Georgia has the highest combined prisoner, probationer and parolee population in the country?

Our jails and prisons are bursting at the seams. And getting all these bad people off of our streets has a price tag. It is a little over **a billion dollars a year of the state budget!** Yet, it isn't enough.

Georgia's criminal element continues to grow. It is growing so rapidly there is a present need for six more prisons. They will cost another several hundred million dollars to build and then another hundred million a year to staff and maintain!

The state budget is not the only budget being pinched by crime. Communities all across Georgia are struggling to find more revenue because of the incessant need for more jails, judges, police, DA's and public defenders.

And, what does your leader have to say? *"The meth problem is growing like kudzu???"*

Folks, effective leadership does not defer ownership of a problem. Effective leaders take ownership. They identify root sources of problems and set solutions in motion.

Incidentally, is it coincidental that 80% of Georgia's prison population are high school drop-outs possessing a 6th grade education?

Poverty/Social Assistance Programs.

Are there opportunities for early identification of high risk drop-outs or the criminal element early on? I'm afraid there is.

Imagine you are gazing upon ten babies in a newborn nursery.

All are precious and wondrous gifts from God. Unfortunately, statistics tell us-
three or four were born out of wedlock.

Most of them were born into poverty. They were born into the same circumstances from which their mothers came- a household with a single uneducated parent.

Many, if not most, will be mistreated, neglected, ill-prepared for school, socially unadjusted and live miserable existences. They will be dependent on the state for support, eventually quit school, and in all likelihood perpetuate their family legacy!

40,000 of these babies were born in Georgia last year!

This year and next year and the next, there will be another 40,000 born.

Do you feel pity for these babies or contempt for their parents?

Pity nor contempt will change their circumstances or their futures.

Their only chance to escape their fate and your only chance to stop the spiraling costs that already consume 25% of the state budget is **resolved** leadership.

The only advocate for the poor is the conscience of their leaders!

Folks, the source of many of the problems in education and most of the problems that feed the growth of the criminal element and consume much of our government assistance budget are **rooted in generational poverty!**

Generational poverty is a vicious web of despair and is the scourge of Georgia!

Costs of government assistance programs are escalating so rapidly, the governor described them as *unmanageable*. Yet, better *managing* the dollars, instead of solving the problem, appears to be his only concern!

Escalating costs are **not the problem**.

Costs are the result of being 39th in the country in child safety, health and education.

Costs are the result of Georgia's rates of infant mortality, teen births, single female heads of households and **divorce** being near the worst in the country!

Costs are the result of problems rooted in generational poverty!

The governor makes frequent use of the word *leadership*. His definition and mine vary greatly.

Effective leadership is not content with **managing** bad circumstances.

Effective leadership **changes** the circumstance!

Georgia's Economy and Jobs.

Do problems in education and quality of life issues come to roost somewhere?
Of course they do.

Employers have been sending the same message for years. **Improve your public schools. Increase the education level of your population. Solve the quality of life problems in your communities.**

Obviously, we haven't been listening?

Georgia's unemployment rate is the only one in the country that has not recovered from the events of 9/11!

2005 was Georgia's fifth consecutive year of below average economic growth.

Georgia is ranked 6th worse out of 8 technology states. One of the reasons? Failure to have a relationship with our state government. There are over 600 members of the Technology Association of Georgia. Some have already begun to consider off-shore relocation.

Most Southern states have landed a major foreign automobile manufacturer. We had our chance. We just blew it! Even though \$60 million of your tax dollars were spent and another \$250 million committed in the form of tax incentives, we still managed to blow it! Thousands of jobs were in the balance. They were lost.

Last year, Toyota announced construction of a second manufacturing plant in Canada. Why not the sunny South? Why not Georgia?

The climate was trumped by the education level of the population.

Just a few weeks ago KIA announced their intentions to build an auto assembly plant in the US. Chattanooga is a favored location. Four other states are being considered: Kentucky, Mississippi, South Carolina and Alabama.

Why isn't Georgia being considered? We may never know. Our leaders don't typically share missed opportunities or bad news.

Florida beat Georgia again last year. But, the score wasn't 14 to 10.

The score of the real game, the game of job creation, was Florida 250,000 Georgia 50,000. And, most of the 50,000 were low paying jobs without benefits. On a per capita basis, Georgia lost to Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina, too!

Thousands of Georgians who lost, or are facing loss of their good paying jobs with benefits aren't impressed with the creation of 50,000 minimum wage jobs.

Summary of Jobs in Georgia.

Georgia is losing at the game of job creation and economic development for the most unforgivable sins in business.

We are getting out-smarted and we are getting out-hustled !

Our economic development effort is no more than a high dollar advertising, marketing and promotion agency. Our only trick is the “**goodie bag**” of **giveaways, and it no longer works!**

We've **dumbed-down education, we've dumbed-down the work force** and we ignore our quality of life problems. As a result and as we were warned by employers, the only job growth we are experiencing are **dumbed-down jobs!**

Governance: Failed Leadership.

Perhaps, you don't like this picture? Neither do I.

Like you, I love Georgia. But I don't love what our leaders are **permitting** Georgia to become.

Folks, good things **don't just happen**. They are **made** to happen. Bad things **don't just happen**. They are **permitted** to happen.

In other words, I'm not saying that Georgia's leaders **made** this scenario happen. I'm saying they **permitted** it to happen.

It isn't that they tried and their efforts failed. They were too busy tending to more important matters!

Here is what the governor called “accomplishments” during last year’s legislative session.

- “Secrecy” initiatives: secrecy of names of government employees and big money donors to the University System and secrecy in negotiations
- redistricting,
- voter ID laws,
- “ethics” legislation,
- the smoking ban,
- more strikes for district attorneys,
- antihistamines behind the counter,
- tort reform,
- limiting hours paid by HOPE for our academic achievers,
- \$5 more per student as a special year end pacifier to educators,
- another billion dollars of debt,
- another billion dollars of tax relief to Georgia’s largest and most profitable corporations, and
- the largest level of debt and the largest budget in the history of the state.

Did any of these create more jobs, reduce poverty, make our communities safer, solve any problems in education, graduate any more kids from high school, reduce the adult literacy rate or reduce the growing population in need of government assistance programs?

Most, if not all, of that agenda originated by a team of legislators led by the-----
-- your governor!

At least, that’s what he boasted at the end of the legislative session.

While the governor was preoccupied with repaying political favors and establishing a new kingdom of power, **who was tending the store for 9 million Georgians?**

John’s Vision for Georgia: A New Era, A New Attitude!

Georgia has 236 legislators. Georgia doesn’t need another legislator!

9 million Georgians need one leader!

Georgians need one leader who says our present circumstance is unacceptable.

Georgians need one leader who says **“follow me, we will change the circumstance”**.

Georgians need one leader who doesn't know the words “hopeless” and “can't”.

Georgians need one leader who will tell you,

“We will solve our problems in education.”

“We will reduce the number of those living in poverty.”

“We will make our communities safe.”

“We will create more good paying jobs with benefits.”

“We will restore trust in your government.”

“We will deliver the best value for your tax dollars.”

“And, We will make Georgia the best place to live, raise a family, work and do business!”

Georgians, I am that leader!

All 9 million Georgians deserve a Governor.

All Georgians deserve a governor without having to make large campaign contributions to buy one!

All Georgians deserve a Governor who will restore **the balance of power** and give everyday, hard-working, paycheck earning, taxpaying, and entrepreneurial Georgians a voice!

All Georgians deserve a Governor that knows and has lived their circumstance.

All Georgians deserve a Governor they trust when he says,

“Georgians, I love Georgia more than I love any special interest group.

I love Georgia more than I love money or power!

I love Georgia more than I love a political party!

**And I love Georgia more than I love
government of the few, by the few and for the few!”**

Georgians, I am that Leader!!!

I may not be an experienced politician. I may not be a fine piece of China. And I may not be a perfect man with a perfect past.

But, I am a doggedly determined, independent thinking, experienced and results-driven leader. My stripes have been earned in highly competitive and challenging environments in the military, business, education and the community.

I am uncorrupted by the political process. No one owns me. I don't have my hand in anyone's pocket. My agenda is not for sale. I have one purpose. Make Georgia the best place to live, raise a family, work and do business.

Education-Socio-Economic Model.

Folks, the sad fact is, anybody can say those words.

But to restore Georgia to its former place of prominence as the economic power of the South, it is going to take more than words.

It is going to take a vision complete with ideas and actions.

I have such a vision. It is not words. It is a comprehensive set of 34 initiatives focused on solving Georgia's persistent problems. It is a product of personal research that gave me a clear understanding of what the problems were, how they were inter-related and how they could be solved.

I call it the Education-Socio-Economic Model.

Its foundation is common sense!

Here it is. 150 pages. Every bit of research, every conclusion, every initiative, every position, every thought process and every solution is published on my web site, dashlerforgov.com.

Most of my research is dated. But, none of the more current information is so greatly different that my assessment, my conclusions or my solutions needed to be changed.

Agree with it or not, it is as it should be. It is available for all to examine. I can't hide from it! I can't change the message to suit the audience.

Georgians, let my openness serve as the example that you use to hold the other candidates accountable. I urge you to not let them get away with platitudes or rhetoric. “Bullets” nor “talking points” will reveal their grasp or true level of commitment to solve any of Georgia’s serious problems.

Can An Independent Win?

Over the past several months I have discussed the political situation in Georgia and shared my vision with hundreds of people. For the past several weeks I have conducted daily focus groups and meetings with individuals.

People agree with my assessment, my conclusions and my vision. They are supportive, offer encouragement and tell me my message hits the bullseye.

Yet, the air is thick with **fear of the word “can’t”**. Can an independent win? Can an independent govern? Will supporting an independent be a waste of my vote?

I am an entrepreneurial businessman. I know the numbers game. Know the numbers. Know all of them. Know them well.

So let’s take a look at some of the numbers that cause people to doubt.

Money.

First, is the concern about money. The other candidates have it and I don’t. But I don’t want it the way they get it.

At last count, they have accumulated some \$20 million dollars.

The average contribution is \$1,000 dollars. \$20 million dollars represents **ONLY** 20,000 Georgians, which is less than one half of one percent of Georgia’s four million voters!

That means there are 3,980,000 Georgians to overcome their influence.

Additionally, if all who support me contribute ten, twenty or one hundred dollars, we can easily finance phase one of the campaign. And Georgians will prove it does not take millions of dollars to finance a statewide election.

Since the beginning, my campaign has been about winning your confidence to earn your votes- not about raising millions of dollars to buy your votes.

Getting on the Ballot.

The next number has to do with getting on the ballot.

As an independent candidate, I do not run in a primary. To get on the ballot in November, we have six months to collect 40,000 signatures of registered voters on nomination petitions.

That sounds like a lot. But, put in proper perspective, it isn't.

There are 200 people in this room tonight. If everyone collects **just one page** of 15 signatures, we will have collected 3,500 signatures. That is 7 ½ percent of our objective.

What that means is this. Only **fourteen** more groups of this size, each completing **one nomination petition**, gets us on the ballot in November!

Polls.

Of the hundreds that have heard my message, all were looking for a choice other than the party candidates. They considered themselves to be among a class of voters called *undecided*.

An independent poll conducted in late November of the heavily Republican 8th district, which is in the heart of Perdue country, revealed some surprising information. 29% said they would not vote to re-elect Governor Perdue and 32% said they were **undecided**. **If this poll is indicative of Georgia's 4 million voters, there are 1 and a third million Georgians who are undecided. Capturing the *undecided voters*, wins the election for us!**

So, can an independent win?

I don't know the words "can't" or "impossible". If I did not believe it could be done, I would not stand before you tonight and ask you to support the impossible.

I do not mean to trivialize the challenge. It is huge. But, it is not impossible. "Impossible" simply means it hasn't been done before!

Yes. An independent can win **and that is exactly what we intend to do!**

Can An Independent Govern?

That leads to the next question. Suppose we win. What then? Can an independent govern effectively?

Georgians, electing an independent to the highest office in the state sends a loud and thunderous message to political leaders of both parties. And, that message is:

“Enough is enough. We’re tired of the ‘bickering’. **You are using our money, our lives, our futures and our votes as pawns in your vicious game for power!** We reject you and your self-serving ways. We want an agenda for Georgia!”

All politicians will hear it. All political leaders will know exactly what it means.

Unfortunately, all will not heed your message. But, **I believe most will.**

I believe the overwhelming majority of legislators remember the noble purposes for which they sought office- to serve their constituents and to serve Georgians faithfully and honorably.

I believe they did not seek office to be reduced to a number and become unwillingly shackled by the chains of power partisan politics.

I believe these legislators **resent** the tactics employed by their strong-minded leaders who demand them to be compliant followers.

I believe those legislators will see my election as a breath of fresh air and will willingly join me to advance an agenda for Georgia.

I believe new leaders will emerge.

And, I believe that will set in motion the forces necessary to return Georgia to its position as the economic power of the South.

Perhaps you doubt existence of the political situation I just described?

These words spoken by Republican Representative James Mills to his fellow Republicans should remove any doubt you may have. This is a quote (January 2005 issue of the *Georgia Report's* Deep Impact).

“There will be no room for dissenters.

Know this and know it well.

I'll work to defeat you if you try to divide this caucus.

We need to be marching together lockstep.

We are the party of **free thinking**.....”

Free thinking?

Now you know the game and how it is played. Now you know that 236 legislators are not representing you. Out of fear of reprisal, they are “*lockstep free-thinkers*” doing the will of the very few- special interests and party leaders!

Georgians, our politicians need a wake-up call that only you can deliver!

Let's see, the question was, can an independent govern?

Frankly, under the broader context I don't know if **any** independent can govern. But I know **this** independent can!

Will Your Vote Be Wasted?

The last question seems to be the most worrisome to people. Is supporting an independent candidate a waste of my vote?

Ask yourself these questions.

Are you happy with where Georgia is? I'm not.

Do you want the problems I've addressed tonight solved? I do.

Do you believe it is time for **real** change? I do.

Do you think real change will be achieved with another four years of Governor Perdue? I don't.

Do you think real change will be achieved by electing one of the Democrats? I don't.

If you agree with me, then you must recognize I am **the only chance you have** to advance an agenda that focuses on solving the things that concern you.

How can voting your conviction be a waste of your vote?

Closing Remarks.

My **passion** is not to be your governor. My passion is to solve the problems that are destroying the state that we love.

The governorship is the seat of power. It is the only position from which the mission can be accomplished.

If a choice is what you wanted, you have one. By choosing me,

You choose to become an agent for **some very serious political change.**

You choose to make a shared vision for Georgia happen!

You choose to help me remove the "for sale signs" from the state's agenda and from the governor's mansion!

Or, you choose to be intimidated by fear of the word “can’t”.

As you ponder your choice, consider these words spoken by President Harry Truman,

“It’s not the hand that signs the laws that determines destiny. It is the hand that casts the ballot!”

Your vote is your voice. It is the only power you have!

Choose wisely and

“Georgians, make it about you, not the few!”

Thank you. May God Bless you and may God bless the State of Georgia.”