

State Democratic Chairman Jane Kidd ought to be commended, not ridiculed. She hears opportunity knocking for her party, and she wants to take advantage of it.

She hopes to find a silver bullet, a different approach to winning elections. Democrats seem to be enjoying a resurgence of enthusiasm all over the country, including in Georgia.

So Chairman Kidd is seeking nontraditional ways of tapping into the new wave. The last time Georgia Democrats found a fresh formula for victory was 1990. Ignoring most advisers (except James Carville), Zell Miller proposed a state lottery to finance a universal scholarship program.

Voters forgot much of their antipathy for Miller. They treated him like a rock star and elected him governor.

Eighteen years later, Democrats are looking for a new "lottery" — another fresh idea to give them a victory boost. They don't have to look any farther than the executive suite in the Gold Dome. Gov. Sonny Perdue, a onetime Democrat turned Republican, is on the right track to political success.

He is opposed to practically everything. Innovation in the Perdue period is a bad word.

He said repeatedly he did not want to push big programs (transportation) or signature issues (better education). He just wanted to make Georgia the best-

managed state in the nation. He succeeded in part one of his agenda.

The governor has made headlines during this legislative session not for what he has supported but what he has fought:

— Senate and House versions of tax cuts. The House wanted to whack the car tax, the Senate the income tax. Perdue is against both cuts.

— A constitutional amendment to allow for regional sales taxes for transportation. The tax would require voter approval twice. A statewide referendum would be needed to provide for the tax. Then a vote would be required in the region to be taxed. Sonny hates the idea, which virtually guaranteed its passage in the House.

— Sunday liquor sales in package stores. This is not a big deal, but Sonny is dead set against it. Why is the governor suddenly so involved? Didn't he say something about not wanting a nanny state? Maybe, but that is beside the point. Fighting Sunday liquor sales secures Sonny's voters' base.

Now watch closely as Sonny demonstrates how to maintain his popularity through the end of his administration as

governor and perhaps into his bid for the Senate:

— He will campaign against any new tax or tax increase. Such a position gives Sonny cover for opposing

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tax cuts, which will soon be forgotten. Remember, politicians propose tax cuts all the time. It's just talk. Most voters know that.

— House Speaker Glenn Richardson turned out to be one of Perdue's unwilling facilitators in maintaining Perdue's popularity. Richardson, who

gives his address as Paulding County, detests traffic congestion almost as much as he detests Perdue. When Richardson took the well of the House to speak for the transportation tax, he sounded almost statesmanlike. "We've been stifled too long with doing nothing. If you have offered nothing, shame on you. It's time to do something," he said.

That's the idea, Chairman Kidd: By offering nothing, nothing happens and Perdue glides along without attracting enemies — except among legislators, both Democratic and Republican, who have come to dislike him. Legislators don't count for much; it's public perception that matters.

As for Georgia winning accolades as one of the nation's "best-managed" states, Perdue deserves to take full bows. He balanced the budget by cutting from our schools by more than \$3 billion.

When he came into office, Perdue reduced appropriations for hiring drivers license examiners, causing a public outcry as long lines of license applicants appeared. Years later, he restored the funding for examiners and then took credit for making the lines disappear.

Perdue has experienced a few bumps with his budget. He tried to move a payroll from one fiscal year into another one, and auditors turned up a \$179 million Medicaid error. So what? These budget boo-boos were mostly ignored. They were too hard to cover on TV, and a lot of reporters went into journalism because they couldn't pass arithmetic.

In any event, Chairman Kidd's Democrats could study Gov. Perdue's stewardship of Georgia and undoubtedly find new ways to achieve popularity.

Of course, they would still be saddled with:

A transportation mess. A water shortage that will get worse even if the drought ends.

An education system that lags from kindergarten through graduate school.

Prison overcrowding that is being controlled by early releases of some really bad guys.

An atmosphere of corruption and improper conduct that is pervasive in the legislative and executive branches.

Otherwise, Sonny's Sure-Fire Plan for Political Success in Georgia is good to go. **[E]**

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