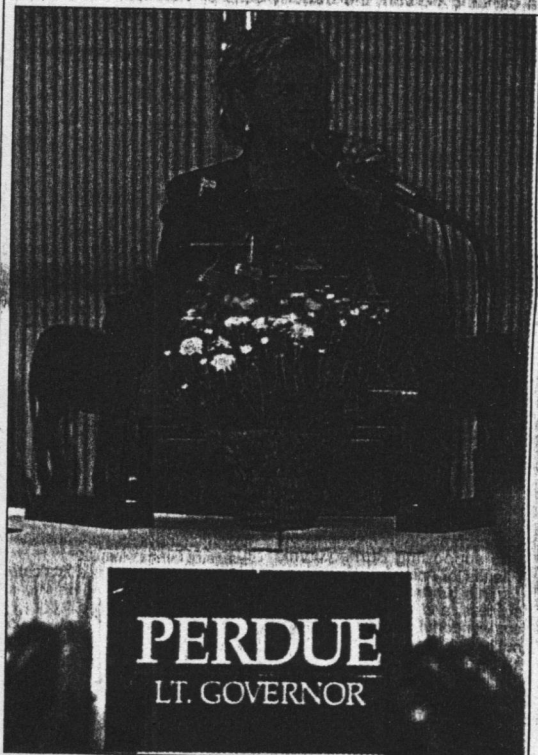


Lt. governor keynotes Sam Ervin Dinner



Staff photo by Kimmy Costner

Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue speaks to Democratic faithful during the Sam Ervin Dinner Friday at the Morganton Community House.

By FREELIN JONES
The News Herald

MORGANTON — Beverly Perdue, the state's first female lieutenant governor, was the keynote speaker at the annual Sen. Sam Ervin Dinner Friday.

The gathering of local Democrats at the Morganton Community House honored the late Sen. Ervin, a Morganton native who gained national prominence while in office.

"I feel this is something my grandfather would appreciate," said Bob Ervin, former chairman of the local Democratic Party and grandson of the late senator. "I think he would be glad to know that he is still receiving recognition for what he's done for the party."

Perdue recalled first seeing Sen. Ervin on television during the Watergate hearings.

"I remember seeing him (Ervin) on TV and thought he

was fabulous," she said. "Weren't you so proud of your hometown boy?"

However, on this night a more somber note would resonate throughout the evening.

"After Sept. 11, I think this will be less of a partisan affair," said Ervin. "There will be no division between Democrats and Republicans once matters go overseas."

Perdue echoed Ervin's sentiments in her speech, saying at this time in America it would be inappropriate to build up the Democratic Party while slighting the Republicans.

"I want to thank you for sharing with me the pain and the hope we have for this great country," Perdue told those in attendance.

She began her speech by telling the audience of her experiences this past week visiting

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several of the military bases in the eastern part of North Carolina, where troops were preparing to deploy after President Bush's declaration of war on terrorism.

"Think of those men at Ft. Bragg and Camp Lejeune," she said. "They're ready to die for freedom."

After Perdue asked for a moment of silence, she continued with her speech.

She said the first priority for the state was continuing to improve education in North Carolina from Smart Start through college.

"In the next year, North Carolina will need 85,000 new teachers," said Perdue, a former public school teacher. "We have got to have good teachers."

Along with investing in new teachers, Perdue said the state must invest in technology for students.

The lieutenant governor quoted statistics claiming school boards across the nation spend on average \$120 per student per year. The North Carolina average is \$18 per student per year, according to Perdue.

She complimented Western Piedmont Community College for "doing it right" by providing more computer classes. She said North Carolina residents and especially residents in rural counties like Burke County are finding that traditional industry is gone.

"Education must be at the front of any agenda," she said.

Another priority for Perdue is acquiring more pay and better benefits for state employees.

"We must figure out how to keep highly trained employees," she said.

Perdue went on to say the state is really divided in two between the "haves" and the "have-nots," with the haves being the urban centers and the have-nots being the rural areas.

"We have got to have a state government that helps you (Burke County) keep jobs," she said.

This, Perdue pointed out, is especially pertinent in Burke County where a large portion of the population is employed by the state.

Finally, Perdue said another priority for her is the care for

older generations.

"I have a deep commitment to old people," said Perdue, also a former health care professional. "I will promise you one thing, by the end of the year we will have a decent prescription drug plan."

Perdue ended her speech with an explanation of why she chose to be a Democrat.

"I believe with all my heart when a child is born it shouldn't matter whether that kid comes from the country club, a trailer home or government housing. Every kid should have an opportunity to be someone and that's why I'm a Democrat," Perdue said.

The dinner drew 190 local Democrats.

The dinner, however, is more than a fund-raising opportunity for the Burke County Democratic Party.

"It gives us an opportunity to see each other," said Trossie Wall, chairman of the Burke County Board of County Commissioners. "It's like a family reunion with good fellowship, good food and an outstanding speaker."