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FLAGGERS ARE WAGING A LOSING BATTLE ON REFERENDUM

Flaggers have never been hesitant to state their displeasure with me when I wrote something they didn't like (a fairly frequent occurrence.) Now, for the past several months I have been trying to get them to tell me about their political strategy for the upcoming elections and their silence has been deafening.

In the past, they have said all they want is a public referendum on the old state flag, which resembles the Confederate battle flag. That seems fair enough. The question is: How do you get approval for a referendum when you have alienated the very people who could make it happen?

Do flaggers think they can help elect a governor who will support their call for a public referendum? If so, who will it be? It certainly won't be Gov. Sonny Perdue, their Public Enemy Number One. He didn't support the flaggers after he was elected the first time. Who thinks he is going to support them in a second term? Perdue is definitely out.

Will the flaggers put their efforts behind one of the two Democratic candidates, Lt. Gov. Mark Taylor and Secretary of State Cathy Cox? Last time I looked, both are courting black voters in order to get their party's nomination. Does anybody think either candidate is going to advocate a public referendum on a flag that carries a negative connotation with many black voters? Cross off Taylor and Cox.

How about the Legislature? The Georgia Constitution says the state flag is to be determined by the General Assembly. Do the flaggers seriously think Speaker of the House Glen Richardson, who has been the recipient of flagger protests, is going to let a bill approving a referendum on the old state flag see the light of day? Not hardly. House Minority Leader Dubose Porter, another frequent flagger target, would likely be in total agreement. Do flaggers think that any legislator who wants to get a bill passed in his or her lifetime is going to cross Richardson or Porter, and push for a referendum? You can put the Legislature in the "No" column.

How about public support? I would hazard a guess that most Georgians are satisfied with the current state flag which was adopted in 2003, and which closely resembles the first national flag of the Confederacy, the Stars and Bars. Plus, I suspect Georgians, like most Americans, are concerned today with more basic issues – taxes, energy costs, improving public education, the threat of terrorism, immigration, the state of the economy – than with dredging up the old state flag again. Forget a public groundswell.

With little or no support among the gubernatorial candidates, the leadership in the Legislature or with the general public, what do flaggers do now? Unless they know a whole lot more about politics than I think they do, I suggest they give up the fight. They have lost the battle.

A year or so ago, a third-party brokered a luncheon meeting between some of the leading flaggers and me. Having spent most of my adult life dealing with external issues, I suggested that if they wanted the public's support, they should be out in the state making a positive case for their position, instead rattling their sabers at anybody who disagreed with them. I said they needed an articulate spokesperson and some compelling talking points about preserving our Southern heritage, of which the flag is only a small part. They needed to be proactive, not reactive. Get out to civic clubs. Visit the media. Talk to business people. In short, keep their friends, but work on their enemies. I could have better spent my time talking to my water glass. As far as I can tell, nothing has changed. They are still busy chasing the governor around the state with their "Punt Perdue" signs – a monumental waste of time and effort.

Hopefully, this column will kick-start a response from the flaggers and they will tell me how they intend to get a public referendum on the old state flag. It's a very simple question. I'll be interested to see how they answer it. Or, if they do.