

Congresswoman Kristi Noem: Ministering My 'Biggest Job' in Washington

She has been called the "Sarah Palin of the Prairie." But South Dakota Congresswoman Kristi Noem is blazing her own trail in Washington.

She's making her mark not just within the Republican Party but in the kingdom of God, too. And she's had to overcome many challenges along the way.

Taking the Lead

For Noem, home is on the range, or more specifically, on her South Dakota farm, which is a world away from her duties on Capitol Hill. She feels total peace here and is just an ordinary mom.

"I am 100 percent convinced God created me to be a mom," Noem told CBN News at her home in Castlewood, S.D. "Every other job that I have or duty that I have is just extra things that He's put on my plate."

Those extra things have kept her busy since her election to Congress in 2010. She's clearly a GOP up-and-comer. She made big news from the beginning when she was chosen to be part of the GOP leadership team, a rare honor for an incoming freshman.

While part of Noem's role is to communicate the party's message to all Americans, her main leadership responsibility is to represent the priorities of the large incoming Tea Party freshman class, which surprised Washington with major wins in 2010.

"It wasn't my job to sit at that table and only tell them what

Kristi thought,” Noem said. “It was my job to sit there and let them know what every other member of my class thought, all 87 of them. And I was pretty vocal at that as well.”

As one of the few Republican females in Congress, she also takes the lead against the so-called GOP war on women storyline.

“We’ve got to be willing to be brave enough to get out there on the airwaves and push back on it,” she said. “I think a lot of times politicians or people who serve in public office are scared about saying something wrong. And, so, that causes us to hold back when a real controversy gets stirred up.”

Pushing Through Crisis

Noem knows a thing or two about pushing back and taking charge. Life as a simple farm girl meant hard work, attending rodeos and singing at church.

When she was young, she gave her life to the Lord during Bible school. Then, while in college, she received heartbreaking news: Her father died in a tragic farming accident.

“When he passed away, my whole life changed,” Noem recalled.

She felt lost when she was no longer able to go to her dad.

“I remember lying in bed that night not even knowing how we were going to do tomorrow because if we had a problem in our lives or if we didn’t know what to do, Dad always knew. He knew how to get through that,” Noem explained.

“I sat up for several nights. I didn’t sleep for a week and just read my Bible,” she said.

How did Noem react to this crisis? This woman of the prairie got tough, left college early and came home to run the family farm.

Ironically, her first crisis came in the form of an estate tax

bill from the IRS for thousands of dollars.

"That was one of the things that got me interested in government and policy was seeing that we had our family operation almost destroyed because of bad tax policy," she said.

Her Biggest Job

After attending to the family farm, she entered local South Dakota politics and eventually came to Washington, where she's currently working on a crucial farm bill.

"In simplest terms, if we don't get a farm bill signed into law by the end of the year, we could see \$8 a jug gallon of milk in the grocery stores, if we don't get it done."

Even though "Kristi the congresswoman" pushes for conservative policy, as a believer in Jesus Christ, she's got something even bigger on her mind.

"It was hard to get things done. I could file bills that I thought were absolutely necessary and they may never get a hearing. But then God kind of taught me a lesson through the several months that I was there right away," Noem told CBN News.

"You know He placed me there, yes, to work on policy, but maybe my biggest job was to minister to individuals," she said.

Noem said she spends her time not just trying to change minds on policy but trying to change hearts as an effective witness in a city with desperate needs.

"They will know we are Christians by our love. They will know that. And we will not attract anybody to our way of thinking if all we show them is ugliness," Noem said.

"The way that He's going to fix this country may be by changing people's hearts and getting them more geared toward

Him," she added. "And that's the quickest way we're going to get stuff done."

Praying for Obama

God did business with her, too, softening her heart toward President Barack Obama, specifically during one of his State of the Union addresses.

It's a story that Noem remembers vividly.

"When I was standing back there looking at him as he gave his speech and disagreeing with everything that he said, I felt my heart get hardened," she recalled.

"I felt God really convicted me that the way that I was praying or the way that I was feeling wasn't accurate, that what I needed to be doing more was praying for the president," she continued.

"My whole perspective changed and I felt a real conviction lay heavy on my shoulders about the way I was praying and that God couldn't possibly use me until I started to pray how He had called me to pray," she said.

There's no doubt God always had a plan for Noem's life. Even in high school when she was crowned South Dakota Snow Queen.

"Oh my goodness, you brought that up," Noem said, laughing. "In my defense, every girl in high school did the Snow Queen event. But, boy, what a good training ground for giving speeches about the wonderful things in South Dakota."

Never Quit

For Noem, the blessings don't stop there. Remember how she had to leave college early after her dad died? Well, last year as a sitting congresswoman she finally got her degree after her sister insisted.

"She just said, 'I'm surprised you never finished your college degree because you never quit anything.' That just struck me

because you know what? It does bother me to quit on something," Noem said. "I decided then that I would go back and start taking classes and if it took me 10 years, I'd at least get my college degree finished."

It's no wonder her steadfast determination and strong conservative backbone have people comparing her to Sarah Palin.

"I think Sarah and I would probably get along if we ever got the chance to meet each other," she said. "But I do think that I just want to be Kristi because if there's any other agenda there, I don't think that God will be able to use me how He wants to."