

USDA Secretary Relishes Role in a 'Renegade's' Cabinet

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue is an easygoing son of a farmer who's made it big in politics all while being open about his Christian faith.

His agency doesn't typically get much attention but finds itself in the limelight thanks to a trade dispute between the U.S. and its biggest customer, China.

Sonny Perdue Returns to His Roots

Despite a storied career in politics, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue feels at home standing alone in the middle of a cow pasture as he did on one of his recent "Back to Our Roots" tours of the Midwest.

He grew up on a farm in middle Georgia where he fed calves, mowed fields and baled hay.

Like a growing season, you could say the 71-year-old has come full circle.

"I can remember being in the hayfields as a 10- or 12-year-old and working until 5:00 and then going to put my Little League uniform on and going to play games," he remembers with a grin.

Trusting Christ Since Childhood

It was around that time in his life when he invited Jesus into his heart while attending Bonaire Baptist Church.

"My mother may have known I was perfect, but God knew I wasn't. He knew that I was sinful just like every other person born, and I needed a Savior. And at 11 years old, I recognized that and submitted to that need of someone to pay for my sins," Perdue tells CBN News.

In Georgia, Perdue is a political legend.

After leading the state senate as a Democrat, he became a Republican and then, against all odds, won the governor's mansion—becoming the first Republican governor of Georgia since Reconstruction.

And through it all, he's never shied away from his faith.

"If you read the Sermon on the Mount, if you read the qualities of love, peace, joy, compassion, patience—those kinds of things—what are those qualities that disqualify somebody from governing?" he asked reporters after being elected governor.

Christians in Leadership Need to Live Their Faith

"We as Christians have failed to live the Christian life; that's why people worry when we get into office because sometimes we're no different, but when we're really literally living the Christian life, that's the best form of government you can have," he continued.

Despite the many important roles it plays, like regulating the food we eat, USDA isn't typically a hot-plate topic in Washington, but the agency recently landed in the crosshairs of international news when the president decided to take on the nation's trade deficit with China, and China retaliated with U.S. farm products on the tip of its spear.

"President Trump is an interesting negotiator and sometimes leads with very much aggression but has an ability to get people's attention," he said.

"While farmers are anxious over trade disputes, over renewable fuel standard, ethanol—those kinds of things—labor—they're still President Trump's most loyal supporters," Perdue continued.

Perdue is running with Trump's all to slash federal

regulations, putting nearly 30 on the chopping block last fall with more to come.

Cutting Red Tape for Farmers

He says red tape is a common complaint among farmers.

“They have to have an HR director to comply or a CFO on staff to do that and farmers—it’s typically a farmer and his wife trying to comply with these regulations and permits and reports and all those kind of things without violating the law—and it’s a very thin line to walk sometimes,” he said.

Perdue caught grief when he recommended replacing food stamps with so-called Harvest Boxes of non-perishable goods. That idea was swiftly eliminated, but he’s in favor of tightening work requirements for food stamp recipients—focusing on a hand up over dependency.

And he’s waded into the immigration debate, using his authority to make the guest worker program more flexible for farmers.

“We need a legal workforce on farms. We don’t want people living in the shadows there. We don’t want farmers doing things illegally,” a sentiment he says the president is aware of.

Perdue finds himself in an interesting new role as elder statesman, seasoned Republican—serving in the cabinet of a renegade.

“He’s an interesting fella, and he’s all business. What I like to say about him—he is decisive, he knows where he wants to go, he is a sooner-rather-than-later business guy—I understand and I get, but he has the essence of any good successful leader —you would think he’s totally made up his mind about what he’s gonna do, but he always has a little back door left open if you go around, knock on it politely and give him the

facts, he's willing to change his mind," Perdue says with a smile.

Leading as Jesus Would

The secretary says he strives to lead as Jesus would.

Once a week, he gathers with as many as 10 of his fellow Cabinet members to pray and study the Bible, led by Capitol Ministries founder Ralph Drollinger.

"It's in depth, it's not just checking the box. We actually go through the Bible verse by verse, and we challenge ourselves. The main thing we challenge ourselves is taking the Word of God and making sure that we are living it—not just talking about it." {eoa}

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