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New Political Realities

Conservative talk show host Dana Perino offers insight into working with the new presidential administration.

by *Shelby Mettlen*, assistant editor

As former White House press secretary under President George W. Bush, Dana Perino is no stranger to the world of politics. As it turns out, she's no stranger to ranch life, either.

Now a host on Fox News' *The Five*, Perino makes her home in New York City, where she admits she hasn't driven a vehicle in seven years. Even so, she hasn't forgotten the roots from which she came.

Perino addressed a very large and very eager crowd at the Feb. 3 opening session of the Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show in Nashville, Tenn.

“What you're doing every day to help feed the country and the world is so important,” she told listeners, “but I also really appreciate how each one of you is trying to preserve the Western way of life.”

Earning a standing ovation from attendees, Perino colorfully illustrated some of the current political realities and uncertainties, and what cattlemen can attempt to predict from the Trump administration.

Perino was born in Evanston, Wyo., where her family raised cattle. Her uncle Matt still ranches on an operation that has grown to 50,000 acres. Her family moved to Denver, Colo., when she was young, but Perino continued to spend summers on the ranch. After completing her bachelor's degree in mass communication at Colorado State University–Pueblo and earning a master's degree in public affairs reporting from the University of Illinois–Springfield, she worked in public relations, then served as press secretary for former President George W. Bush for seven years. She now serves in her current position as a host on *The Five*.

New administration

After Donald Trump defied all the odds and nabbed the presidency back in November, days have been nothing short of chaotic.

For the media, trying to keep up with Trump is “like a dog on ice chasing a marble,” Perino said. There's just so much news happening.

Thanks to social media, news moves much faster than it has in the past, she said. In 2009, Twitter was just taking off, and the press would deal with one or two big stories a day. Now, there could be upward of 10 stories to follow each day.

While Trump appears to thrive on chaos, the rest of us can only process so much information at a time, she pointed out. “The White House will eventually come to understand that message discipline is important.”

You can lose the popular vote and still become president, but it casts a shadow on the mandate, Perino said. Additionally, while conservatives are ruling Washington, D.C., now, Republicans are doing better in counties that are shrinking, while Democrats are doing better in counties that are growing.

Any time a president leaves office after two terms, there is the question of “Who will be the new leader?” The 180-degree shift in leadership is contributing to the unpredictability of the new administration, she said.

Embrace the uncertainty

Expect the unexpected, Perino offered. “Every president will have to deal with things they didn’t expect.”

Harry Truman had the atomic bomb, Jimmy Carter watched the Soviets march into Afghanistan and take hostages, and George W. Bush dealt with 9/11.

“On each of those inauguration days, no one knew what to expect,” Perino said. “Every president will face a crisis; that is the nature of the job. Every problem in the world comes to that desk, and they have to figure out how to deal with it.”

Terror continues to be an issue that Trump will have to fight. Repealing and replacing the *Affordable Care Act*, tax reform, immigration and infrastructure were all issues Trump voiced strong opinions about during his campaign. Perino said she believes tax reform will actually get done this time around, and with health care and immigration such complex and multifaceted issues, it’s important for agriculture to put itself in front of the new administration as much as possible to communicate what cattlemen and farmers need from new policies.

Perino remained open-minded on the issue of trade, but urged her audience to speak out and be heard.

She praised Trump’s Press Secretary Sean Spicer and Supreme Court nominee



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Neil Gorsuch. She pointed out that the president’s cabinet is a set of strong personalities.

“These are not shrinking violets,” Perino said. Trump respects them and will work with them. On the whole, she said, “rural America will be pleased.”

Be willing to have an open mind, reach across the aisle, and get in front of Congress

and the president, she told her audience. “You have an amazing voice.”



Editor’s Note: This article was written as part of Angus Media’s coverage of the 2017 Cattle Industry Convention. For further coverage, watch future issues of the Angus Journal and visit www.angus.media.

Anticipating the 2018 Farm Bill

“I don’t need to tell any of you it’s a really interesting time to be living and working in Washington, D.C., right now,” said Bart Fischer as he addressed attendees Feb. 3 at the 2017 Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show in Nashville, Tenn. Fischer, who is chief economist for the House Agricultural Committee, provided remarks about the early groundwork being laid for the 2018 Farm Bill.

He shared that the first field hearing to gather feedback on Farm Bill concerns was scheduled for Feb. 23 on the Kansas State University campus in Manhattan, with more field hearings providing producers opportunity to give input being planned around the country throughout the spring.

Although Farm Bill talks are beginning, Fischer noted that Congress faces several other big issues in the coming year: the repeal and replacement of the *Affordable Care Act*, confirmation hearings for incoming President Donald Trump’s nominees, and an expanding federal deficit. He explained that each of these will take up legislative time and could shadow the Farm Bill process.

Fischer noted that in total the Farm Bill is 1.7% of the federal budget. With a \$19.3 trillion debt in America, he stated, “There’s a disproportionate amount of attention paid to agriculture ... We’re (agriculture) in a minority in D.C.”

He shared that America’s annual interest on the national debt is 66% more than what is paid to producers via the Farm Bill crop

House chief economist shares remarks on 2018 Farm Bill, encourages producers to be involved.

insurance program. Thus, he suggested, cutting crop insurance programs would be an ineffective way to reduce the deficit.

However, he credited the 2014 Farm Bill for contributing \$23 billion in cuts to the deficit and, he reported, that today cuts made in the Farm Bill are saving three times more than they were projected to save.

Of the current economy — and net farm income being down 46% since 2013, Fischer said the need for a farm safety net in place via the Farm Bill is top of mind. As well, he said he anticipates the

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and conservation spending will continue to be important Farm Bill issues.

Looking ahead, he said addressing payment variability within Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC), including dairy in the Margin Protection Program, and cotton, which was left out of the 2014 Farm Bill, will be three big topics dominating early Farm Bill conversations. Additionally, he said he anticipates efforts to “simplify and streamline” pasture, rangeland and forage (PRF), livestock disaster, and noninsured crop disaster assistance (NAP) programs.

Conservation programs, such as the Conservation Reserve Program, which has seen drastic cuts in number of acres accepted, will also likely be a hot topic.

As the Farm Bill process begins, Fischer emphasized, “My bottom-line point to producers is that all of you need to be engaged in this process. D.C. needs to hear from you.”

— by Kindra Gordon, field editor