



Candidate Questionnaire – Georgia’s U.S. Senate Runoff

Candidate Name: Reverend Raphael Warnock

Background Information

1. **Education:** B.A. Psychology, Morehouse College (1991); M.Div., Union Theological Seminary (1994); M. Phil., Union Theological Seminary; Ph.D. Systematic Theology, Union Theological Seminary (2006)
2. **Where is home?** Atlanta. I am a native Georgian born in Savannah and lived here most of my life. I am deeply invested in serving the citizens of Georgia.
3. **Do you currently hold a public office? If so, how long have you held your current office?** No, I have spent my life serving people as a pastor.
4. **Past public offices held:**

1. Additional background information you’d like to share:

I grew up in public housing in Savannah with 11 brothers and sisters. My father was a veteran, small businessman and a preacher. Although we were short on money, we were long on faith and love. We were taught the value of hard work and that we could do anything that we put our minds to. I know I share these values with the hard-working farmers of Georgia.

A Senator is elected to serve the people of Georgia. Service has been the focus of my entire career. As a pastor, I have learned to listen to my parishioners and help them navigate the hardships of life based on the teachings of Jesus and the love of God. I have not confined my work to my church, but walked out into the community to work for people who do not feel they are being heard.

Some of my top issues are jobs and the economy, health care, education, infrastructure, and climate. All these directly affect farmers and rural communities. My overarching policy interests around agriculture focus on rebuilding rural communities that have been decimated by lack of health care, good schools, and adequate infrastructure. I also recognize that the average age of the U.S. farmer is 57.5 years. For Georgia’s agricultural economy to remain strong and viable into the future, we need to develop and support policy that encourages young people to become farmers and generates an acceptable standard

of living. One way to do this is for farmers to receive a higher percentage of the retail value of their production than they now capture. Georgia has the potential to be the “breadbasket” of the eastern seaboard. Much of the food Georgia’s residents consume can be grown, further processed, and distributed in our state. All this provides renewed opportunities for our rural communities.

We need to develop policies that better support the diversity of agriculture we are blessed with in Georgia, and to protect our farmland. I will work with the agricultural community to focus on their needs and their visions for their communities - not directing policies from the top down. I know farmers want a hand up not a hand out and will work to support policies to encourage small businesses such as value-added agricultural products and to support the education and infrastructure that will allow these businesses to flourish.

Environmental Issues

1. In 2015, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized the Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) rule, which expanded the definition of “navigable waters” and increased federal regulatory authority of our nation’s waterways. In April 2020, EPA issued a revised, streamlined rule that established four categories of jurisdictional waters and provided exclusions for other waterways that have traditionally not been regulated by the federal government. Of the two rules, which do you believe more closely aligns with the intent of the Clean Water Act?

Farmers are the original stewards of our environment. Through their practices, we can conserve soil and water resources, improve air quality and combat climate change. What farmers need is additional incentives to adopt these practices that benefit all of society. They also need certainty. The definition of what is and is not waters of the U.S. has been interpreted by numerous court cases and executive actions since the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972. Farmers have been subjected to these various interpretations and changing rules since that time. We need to settle in on a definition and stop subjecting everyone from operating under uncertain conditions.

2. As you are aware, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals released a decision earlier this year to vacate the label for Dicamba, an important herbicide widely used by Georgia farmers. Do you agree with the EPA’s recent renewal of the label for Dicamba and the additional control measures put in place?

I understand that managing weeds is crucial for farmers to be able to make good yields, and weed resistance is an accelerating problem. Weed scientists indicate there are few prospects of new chemistries in the pipeline. Dicamba is a tool that cotton and soybean farmers are dependent on right now, and the EPA has required additional protective measures to protect other farmers from drift. Georgia has done a good job in reducing problems through their training program conducted by UGA Extension and Georgia Department of Agriculture. I think we need to support farmers with a more comprehensive approach to weed management to preserve current tools that are already effective and decrease the need for herbicides. This means re-emphasizing crop rotation as well as using conservation tillage and cover crops to suppress weeds. It may also mean using technology to target and use limited

spray weeds. These systematic approaches will reduce unintended impacts, while keeping farmers economically viable. They will also dovetail with efforts to allow agriculture to be part of the solution to climate change.

3. It appears likely that the next administration will be looking to advance legislation and regulations on the subject of climate change. What role, if any, do you see farmers and ranchers playing in those debates?

Farmers and ranchers absolutely need a seat at the table in terms of legislation and regulations involving climate change. Farmers bear the brunt of climate variability. They need to have incentives to respond to these issues so that they can continue their businesses. In recent years, the combination of stronger hurricanes and prolonged droughts have ruined crops and made it difficult for farmers to recover from unpredictable and devastating weather patterns. Georgia's extended droughts have made irrigation difficult and increased expenses by causing both farmers and rural communities to have to lower well depths.

Georgia farmers have the capacity to adapt to these changes, while also mitigating some of the long-term consequences of climate change by sequestering carbon dioxide in their crops and soils. It is important that the Farm Bill provide farmers with incentives for these carbon capture practices. The incentives will allow farmers to become more resilient to climate change and can also provide stable support for farmers. These mitigative practices have multiple benefits including increasing agricultural productivity, ensuring clean water and providing resilience when facing the continuation of weather uncertainty. I believe there are win-win solutions we can develop that we reduce the impacts of climate variability and preserve the state's agricultural way of life for future generations. Agriculture is an important part of any solutions. I want to be a voice for farmers being included in these discussions.

Labor

1. What steps would you take if elected to reform the current H-2A program to ensure there is an adequate supply of labor for U.S. farms? How would you address the issues associated with undocumented workers currently on U.S. farms?

Ag labor is a critical issue that has not been adequately addressed. Our immigration system should be reformed to provide a simple, fair, and legal guest worker program for needed agricultural workers that protects their health and well-being. This would include such things as guest worker visas that can be easily renewed. I understand that agricultural workers are not interchangeable. It takes skill and knowledge to be an efficient worker and farmers invest money in training workers. I will work to make the changes needed for an improved guest worker program.

Tax Issues

1. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 increased the exemption level for the estate tax. This change is set to expire in 2025, meaning the estate tax exemption will revert to its previous level. Where do you stand on the estate tax, and what solutions would you work to advance to bring relief to family-owned, generational farms?

Preserving family farms should be a high priority for agricultural policy. The estate tax does affect family farms, particularly those in areas where land prices are high due to development. This is happening in Georgia around urban areas and we are losing prime farmland at an alarming rate. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 increased the exemption from \$11 to \$22 million for couples. Studies indicate that about 79% of farm assets are in land but that relatively few farms have assets greater than the \$11 million level and there are other exemptions and ways to keep the estate value below that level. While we all benefit from the services and infrastructure the government provides, I do not want to see farmers bear the brunt of supporting this. Everyone should pay their fair share.

I think we should strengthen the viability of the family farm by investing in rural communities so that young people see the opportunities and want to stay in farming. We should develop policies to encourage local and regional markets and build on the existing strengths of a community. We can only do this by listening to the community and helping them develop a vision so they can thrive, then helping support that vision with the infrastructure, education and health care they need to stay viable. I do not believe in one size fits all solutions to these problems but think we need to do the hard work of listening and developing solutions for each community. This will take a big change in how USDA approaches farms and rural development, but I am committed to work for that change.

Farm Bill

1. The original purpose of the farm bill was to provide a safety net for producers during times of disaster or low commodity prices. Over the years, nutrition and food assistance programs have consumed a greater share of total farm bill spending. If elected, would you work to ensure the next farm bill prioritizes the farm safety net?

The farm bill has to prioritize the farm safety net. I do not think this has to come at the expense of supporting those in our society most in need. In fact, there should be ways for these programs to work together. One example is the Disaster Household Distribution that helped households and food banks in the COVID19 pandemic. The USDA supported American farmers and helped get food relief to many who were suffering. At its very core, the Farm Bill is focused on food, both its production and distribution.

The current safety net for farmers does not work for many. The current crop insurance programs are a good example. I have heard reports that farmers need to buy insurance but it only helps if a crop is completely lost. The program may not work well for the diversity of crops we have in Georgia. While Georgia is a proud producer of cotton, peanuts, corn and soybeans, we produce so many more crops, including vegetables, blueberries, cattle and chickens. I want the farm bill to work for all Georgia farmers, big and small. I will listen to you and work to develop streamlined programs to support all of our state's farmers.

I also want to help increase programs that will support rural development. I want to look for ways to strengthen programs like Georgia Grown to support our farmers. The depletion of grocery shelves during the beginning of the COVID19 outbreak last March showed us in stark terms that we do not want to outsource growing our food. We need to develop more robust regional markets that will provide a buffer for shocks like the pandemic or even weather-related disasters. This is a place that Georgia with its agricultural diversity can shine. If we support agricultural research on better management of pests, water, and soil, as well as technology for Georgia growers, we can be a food basket for the region and nation. I think we can do this in ways that we rebuild rural communities and preserve our natural resources.

As I mentioned above, the farm bill conservation programs should encourage practices that ensure Georgia farmers become more resilient to climate change and provide stable support for farmers facing the consequences of climate change. The farm bill should also look to help farmers adapt to the changing weather patterns through research, extension, and technology support.