

# **Brownback nominated as ambassador for international religious freedom**

July 27, 2017

WASHINGTON—President Trump announced his intention to nominate Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback as the next ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom—a decision that drew widespread but not universal praise.

In a [tweet](#) soon after the July 26 White House announcement, Brownback called religious liberty “the first freedom,” noting it centers on “the choice of what you do with your own soul.”

“I am honored to serve such an important cause,” he wrote.

Before Brownback, 60, was elected governor, he served as a U.S. Senator from 1996 to 2011 and member of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1995-96. As a senator, he was a co-sponsor of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. He also was co-chair of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus.

## **Importance of filling the post stressed**

Since David Saperstein stepped down from the role as ambassador-at-large for international religious liberty seven months ago, various religious liberty advocacy groups publicly had urged the president to fill the position.



Randel Everett, founding president of the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, expressed confidence Brownback will “build on the excellent leadership of the previous ambassador.”

Everett, former executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, called Brownback “a strong person of faith, who was a key leader in Congress as a voice for the voiceless.”

“With three-fourths of the world living under religious persecution or oppression, the need for this position to be filled is urgent. We are asking that Gov. Brownback’s confirmation be fast-tracked so that he can begin work immediately.”

Elijah Brown, executive vice president of the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, likewise emphasized the importance of the Senate “swiftly” confirming Brownback for the ambassadorship.

“This nomination comes at a crucial time to improve religious freedom worldwide and to give hope to millions persecuted for their beliefs,” said Brown, general secretary-elect of the Baptist World Alliance.



Amanda Tyler Amanda Tyler, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, emphasized the importance of the ambassador's position.

"It is critical that this important post in the State Department be filled," she said. "Promoting religious freedom for all around the world is a mission that has garnered broad bipartisan support. While the Baptist Joint Committee does not take positions on appointments, we will be watching the process closely and look forward to working with Gov. Brownback in this capacity, should he be confirmed."

### **Brownback praised as 'an outstanding choice'**

Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, called Brownback "an outstanding choice" who will make "an exceptional ambassador" for international religious freedom.



Russell Moore "This ambassadorship is a key piece in our nation's responsibility to act on behalf of the persecuted around the

world, one that requires a seasoned, respected leader who brings conviction and gravity to the work of this crucial post. Gov. Brownback is exactly this kind of leader,” Moore [said](#).

He noted Brownback’s leadership role in the Senate in dealing with genocide in Darfur and the spread of HIV-AIDS in Africa, as well as advocating for persecuted religious minorities.

“We need all the diplomatic and intellectual power we can muster in addressing these critical matters of human rights and global security. I urge the Senate to confirm Gov. Brownback without delay,” he said.

Isaac Six, advocacy director for International Christian Concern, praised Brownback as “a strong supporter of religious freedom.”

“The filling of this post sends the right message to the international community that religious freedom is a strong priority for the United States and that we will not turn a blind eye to those who suffer from persecution for their fundamental religious convictions,” Six said. “We look forward to working with Mr. Brownback to further the cause of respect and tolerance for people of faith around the world.”

Montserrat Alvarado, executive director of the Becket religious liberty law firm, commended Brownback’s nomination, saying his “legacy of promoting and defending religious liberty both in the United States and overseas is strong.”

“His robust experience defending religious freedom for people of all faiths makes him uniquely qualified to lead America’s international defense of this most sacred and fundamental of human rights, religious freedom,” Alvarado said.

### **Critics cite record as governor**

However, some groups criticized Brownback's record as Kansas governor.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations pointed to his approval of a 2012 anti-Sharia law bill, which prohibits state courts and agencies from using Islamic or other non-U.S. law when making decisions.

"Gov. Sam Brownback's history of rushing to sign anti-Islam legislation designed to vilify Muslims in Kansas state courts should under any normal circumstances disqualify him from the office of U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom," said Robert McCaw, government affairs director for CAIR.

"Only under the Trump Administration would someone so opposed to the constitutional rights of an American faith community be appointed to safeguarding international religious freedom."

Brownback also drew fire two years ago, when he signed an executive order that reversed a previous order barring discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender state workers.

Last year, he signed into law the Campus Religious Freedom Bill, which allows student groups on state university campuses to establish religious beliefs as qualifications for membership.

Jesse Ferguson, political consultant and former deputy national press secretary for Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, took to Twitter to criticize Trump's nomination of Brownback.

"I know Rabbi David Saperstein who had this post for President Obama. Sam Brownback is no Rabbi Saperstein," Ferguson [tweeted](#).