

Senate fails to vote on international religious freedom ambassador nominee

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WASHINGTON—Senators recessed before Christmas without voting on Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback's nomination as ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom.

President Trump [nominated](#) Brownback in July to fill the post left vacant since David Saperstein stepped down Jan. 20.

The Senate's failure to act sends Brownback's nomination back to the president's desk, because U.S. Senate Rule 31 requires senators to agree unanimously to continue considering nominees at the end of a year.

For Brownback to be considered when the Senate reconvenes, President Trump must re-nominate him. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee may or may not hold hearings again, but the committee must vote again if he is to be considered by the Senate.

Elijah Brown, executive vice president of the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative and general secretary-elect of the Baptist World Alliance, expressed his disappointment at the Senate's inaction.

"At a time when 500,000 Rohingya Muslims have been forced to flee from Myanmar as refugees in what the State Department has declared 'ethnic cleansing, to use just one example, this position ought to be seen as a priority," Brown said.

"In fact, the office of the ambassador-at-large for international religious

freedom has never been more pressing. It is my hope that nomination and confirmation could occur quickly in early 2018. Ideally this would be finalized by the 2018 National Prayer Breakfast on Feb. 8."

Before Brownback was elected governor, he served in the U.S. Senate from 1996 to 2011, after having served in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1995-96. During his time in the Senate, he was co-sponsor of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. He also was co-chair of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus.

Brownback's nomination for the ambassadorship gained public support from Randel Everett, founding president of the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, and Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, among others.

However, the Council on American-Islamic Relations criticized Brownback for his support of a 2012 anti-Sharia law bill, which prohibits state courts and agencies from using Islamic law in rendering decisions.

He also drew the ire of gay rights groups for signing an executive order that reversed a previous order barring discrimination against LGBT state workers.