

# **Sam Brownback: Bob Dole 'Lived Out His Faith' and Championed the Oppressed**

America has lost the great patriot, former United States senator and presidential candidate Bob Dole. When I heard the news of his Dec. 5 passing, I was awash in emotion and thankful the senator and I had been able to talk and pray together just a few weeks ago.

Dole and I had planned to meet in person, but wanting to be cautious because of COVID-19, we talked on the phone instead. At 98, he was still lucid, good humored and staunchly patriotic. We shared some thoughts about current events, politics and Kansas, of course. He never left his roots.

We talked about the future. Then we prayed that God would bless, guide and protect us and this nation we both care about so much. Dole never spoke much publicly about his Christianity—his wife, Elizabeth, is more vocal. But he lived out his faith and was always ready to say amen.

After Dole's passing, accolades streamed in from both sides of the political aisle and all walks of life. I had the honor of attending his memorial service in Washington, D.C. on Friday, and the gathering for him in Topeka, Kansas, on Saturday. As the military honor guard carried him out of National Cathedral, it felt like the chapter closed on what is often called the Greatest Generation—the World War II era generation he epitomized.

For me, Dole's passing was profound and personal. Not only was I elected to fill his seat in the Senate in 1996, but we became friends. This week I have found myself reflecting on his legacy and looking deeper, pondering the character of the man who loved his nation. What about him made him a success?

What endeared him to so many? How can we now follow in his footsteps?

I had just turned 12 when Dole was first elected to the Senate in the 1960s. At the time, I lived in Parker, Kansas, a small farming community south of Kansas City. Dole lived in Russell, some 260 miles west and across the plains. We had never met, of course. I am not sure that I even knew who he was until a few years later. Our paths first crossed in the 1970s when I was an officer with Future Farmers of America. There is a funny photo of two other young men and me posing with Senator Dole—I had a trendy 3-inch Afro-style haircut. Senator Dole often met with ordinary citizens like us—a practice he carried out through his entire life.

I remember Dole speaking to farm audiences years ago when I was Kansas secretary of agriculture. He would rattle off one-liner after one-liner for an hour then spend the last five minutes of his speech promising he would work to get wheat prices higher. He knew the value of a hard day's work. Dole never disappointed. He loved his people, and the people loved him.

After Dole resigned from the Senate in 1996 to focus on his presidential campaign, I was elected to fill his seat. Years later I had the privilege of serving as governor of Kansas. We often met and talked. In many ways, he was a mentor to me and countless others.

This was a man who understood the power of relationships and nurtured them. He maintained contact with thousands of people. Good relationships. Close relationships.

I once heard a minister say, "The world moves at the speed of relationships." This is true. The stronger the relationships one has, the more that can be achieved. Dole operated this way. That's why he was so effective in the Senate. That's why he was a giant of the Senate. That's why he was the leader of

the Senate for such a long period of time. And that's why the people of Kansas loved him.

He understood relationships. Because he had genuine rapport with people, he grasped their needs. He could feel what made their hearts beat, never simply relying on something in a poll or a news article. This is a lesson we can relearn today. When Dole was senator—and when I was a senator—it was easier to cross the aisle on issues both sides could address because relationships existed that gave space for common ground to be found. Today this happens infrequently. If better relationships were established where people respected each other, more issues could be addressed for the good of the nation.

Dole lived according to the principles of his faith too. He cared for others, particularly those in the most difficult of circumstances. He would fight for the oppressed whether they were persecuted by fascism, communism or a power-hungry dictator.

A few years ago, I was in Kosovo. There is a statue of Dole there. The Kosovars erected it because he had stood up for them when they were oppressed. He had helped them get out from underneath persecution. He also stood up for oppressed Romanian Christians in the 1980s when some churches were being bulldozed there. He was always the champion of the underdog.

Dole loved freedom everywhere, and he loved America. He was the personification of the World War II generation: God-fearing, selfless, determined and ready to do whatever it took to stand up for the United States of America. He left an incredible legacy and big shoes to fill. If we dare love freedom, build relationships and live out our faith as he did, we can hope to have a measure of the same impact he had.

I miss him already. As it is said, one cannot tell the height of a tree until it is on the ground. Dole was a tall one: a

towering American, a legendary Kansan and the epitome of a son of the prairie. God rest his soul.

*A lifelong Kansan, **Sam Brownback** was the U.S. ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom from 2018 to 2021. He previously served as governor of Kansas from 2011 to 2018 and as a U.S. Senator from 1996-2011.*

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