

# Gov. Kristi Noem to Headline Faith and Freedom Event in Early-Voting South Carolina

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, possibly mulling a 2024 White House bid, is making her debut in South Carolina next month—an introductory step in the first Southern state to cast Republican-primary votes for president.

Noem will speak Aug. 23 at the “Faith & Freedom BBQ” in Anderson, the event’s host, U.S. Rep. Jeff Duncan, told The Associated Press on Friday.

According to Duncan, who represents South Carolina’s 3rd District, the event is the state’s largest annual gathering of Republicans. In the past it has attracted speakers including then-Vice President Mike Pence, Sens. Ted Cruz and Joni Ernst, and former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who also served in the Trump administration for two years as U.N. ambassador.

“Having served with Kristi Noem in Congress, I know first-hand that she is a fighter who believes government was created for the people, and that it shouldn’t run our lives,” Duncan told AP.

After four U.S. House terms, Noem in 2018 was elected governor, an office through which she moved to the forefront of state leaders across the country railing against government restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic.

Like others possibly in the field, Noem has downplayed the prospect. When asked publicly about any White House ambitions, she has said her focus is on her 2022 gubernatorial reelection campaign.

But other actions—such as registering a federal political

action committee and hopscotching through the early-voting states—suggest otherwise as Noem tries to carve out her niche among an early crowd of possible GOP rivals for the White House.

Noem, 49, has recently visited both Iowa and New Hampshire, as have Haley, Pence and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Along with Pompeo, Florida Gov. Rick DeSantis and former President Donald Trump, she spoke at this year's Conservative Political Action Conference, where she critiqued fellow Republican governors for pandemic policies such as mask mandates.

South Carolina has also seen its share of possible contender visits. Pompeo is set to headline a state GOP fundraiser this month. Pence chose the state as the site of his first public speech since leaving office. And Haley has made several appearances on her home turf where she told AP she would not run if Trump entered the race—although her recent travel schedule has been focused on other states where she may not be as well-known.

“I am looking forward to joining Jeff and the commonsense conservatives at the Faith & Freedom BBQ,” Noem told AP. “Standing on conservative beliefs is more than rhetoric for me.”

While the event is a fundraiser, veterans, guardsmen, first responders and their families can obtain free tickets while they're still available, Duncan's office said. {eoa}

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