



THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS  
LIBERTY COMMISSION  
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

June 6, 2025

The Honorable James Risch  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
483 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Risch,

I am writing to you as the President of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). The ERLC advocates for the public policy interests of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, with over 45,000 churches and nearly 13 million members. Of top concern to our churches is international religious freedom.

Given that, I write to respectfully urge you to prioritize a confirmation hearing for Ambassador-Designate Mark Walker for the role of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. Southern Baptists have long championed religious liberty as a foundational human right—one that must be protected for all people, in every nation. As the global landscape grows increasingly hostile toward religious expression and belief, it is critical that this key diplomatic position not remain vacant. From violent extremism in Nigeria to the authoritarian persecution of the Uyghur people and other religious minorities in China, there are far too many countries where freedom of religion is under grave assault and where American diplomatic leadership is urgently needed.

Mr. Walker, a fellow Southern Baptist and former Member of Congress, is well-qualified to lead in this role. He brings a unique balance of pastoral experience and legislative leadership to this State Department post. Having served 16 years in ministry, Walker has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to faith and service. During his tenure in Congress, he was recognized for his efforts to build coalitions and earned a reputation for defending religious liberty and human rights, the kind of moral clarity and conviction the position requires.

We respectfully ask that you swiftly ensure a confirmation hearing is scheduled without further delay. Persecuted people around the world are depending on America's commitment to this cause.

Yours very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frederick Brent Leatherwood". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'F'.

F. Brent Leatherwood  
President  
Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission  
Southern Baptist Convention