

Commentary: Utah's senators should vote no on Ron Mortensen



(Leah Hogsten | The Salt Lake Tribune) Salt Lake City business and civic leaders gathered Thursday to reaffirm the principles of The Utah Compact, initially adopted in 2010. The compact emphasizes humane treatment of immigrants, keeping families together and focusing deportation on serious criminals.

By Curt S. Bramble, David R. Irvine and Paul T. Mero | Special to The Tribune • Published: 1 day ago
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As lifelong Republicans with deep roots in Utah and with immigrant forebears, conscience compels us to speak out against President Trump's recent re-nomination of Utah's radical Ronald Mortensen to serve as the assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) — despite the objections of multiple conservative lawmakers to his prior nomination.

If confirmed to this position, Mortensen would oversee the U.S. government's efforts to assist refugees all over the world. However, his long record of maligning faith leaders, as well as his deeply disturbing close ties to the white nationalist and eugenics-founded Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), should disqualify him from this or any government job. The policies for which Mortensen and his colleagues have long advocated reflect the worst and darkest impulses of our nation, and we urge conservatives of good conscience to oppose his nomination and stand instead for our country's proud tradition — and Christ's call — of welcoming the stranger.

In his role as a fellow at CIS, Mortensen has [previously attacked The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints \(also known as the LDS or Mormon Church\)](#) for welcoming our undocumented brothers and sisters to participate in church life. He believes that undocumented members should not be able to practice their deeply held faith by having baptisms, holding church positions, receiving blessings or otherwise participating in our faith communities. This idea is completely antithetical to the welcoming environment that our church believes in — and it would also deny thousands of individuals their First Amendment rights to practice their religion freely.

Additionally, [Mortensen believes that the LDS Church should stop trying to reach out to our undocumented neighbors through missionary work](#), encouraging anyone who is living here without proper papers to return to their home countries. Our nation must be one of laws — but we must also be one of commonsense and compassion. No serious person would ask hardworking individuals with decades-long ties to our state, with U.S. citizen children, who are otherwise law-abiding and who contribute to our communities every day, to pull up the roots they've planted for countries that they haven't seen in a generation.

Mortensen has [further maligned LDS leaders — and, in fact, faith leaders of all backgrounds](#) who do not agree with his harsh, hurtful views on our immigrant brothers and sisters — falsely claiming that “religious leaders [only] love their neighbors as long as they are [undocumented immigrants].”

We do not believe that people of good conscience must choose between ministering to, caring for, and welcoming all individuals, regardless of whether they are citizens or not. This is a false choice, and one Utahns of all faiths should reject.

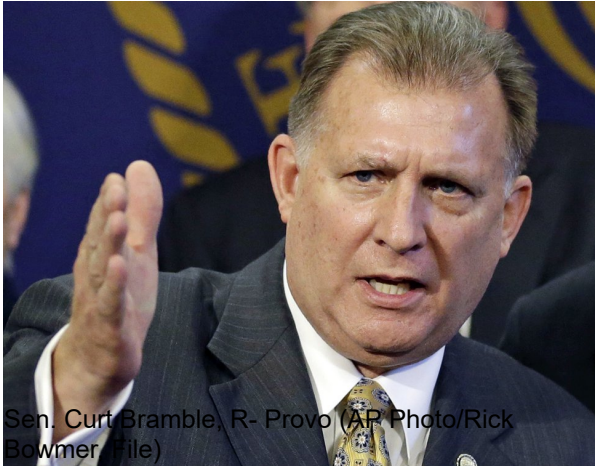
Mortensen would be in a position to wield enormous influence over U.S. refugee policy, overseeing our country's treatment of some of the most vulnerable children and families on earth. Both conservative lawmakers and individuals of faith should be particularly alarmed by this possibility.

CIS affiliates have circulated white nationalist propaganda thousands of times, including on the explicitly-racist online platform VDARE. And the founder of CIS, John Tanton, [once claimed that he had “come to the point of view that for European-American society and culture to persist \[would\] require a European-American majority](#), and a clear one at that.”

Rescuing and resettling refugees — without regard to their origin — is a defining feature of our American creed. Throughout our history, welcoming those fleeing persecution and violence has strengthened our communities and advanced our deeply-held commitment to freedom. Mortensen's nomination to head PRM threatens this tradition. This is why conservatives of conscience, like [Utah Gov. Gary Herbert](#), the [late Sen. John McCain](#), and former Sen. [Jeff Flake](#), have been so vocally opposed to his nomination.

Conservatives who revere the divinely-endowed unalienable rights singled out in the Declaration of Independence recognize the dignity of every human life and the worth of the individual. In Utah and across our great nation, we see every day the intrinsic value that immigrants and refugees bring to our neighborhoods and workplaces. We see, too, how these individuals and families, who have frequently risked everything to escape desperate poverty and violence, or a bleak future in their home countries, work tirelessly to create a better life for themselves and their families. These are the highest American ideals, and it is a great privilege to welcome the stranger to our shores.

The United States has been a beacon of freedom and liberty since our founding. Members of Congress who are truly conservative can only have one stance here, and that is to vote against Mortensen and his disturbing record.



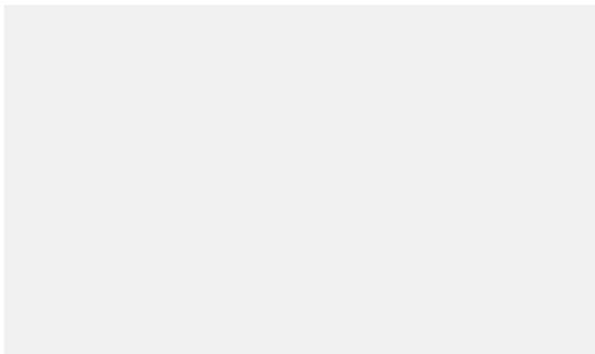
Sen. Curt Bramble, R- Provo (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer, file)

*Utah state Sen. **Curt Bramble**, was the lead sponsor of the Utah Compact, and other legislation to aid Utah refugees and immigrants.*



Trent Nelson | The Salt Lake Tribune Attorney
David Irvine speaks at a news conference in Salt Lake City Tuesday June 27, 2017.

***David Irvine** is a Salt Lake City attorney and a Better Utah board member.*





| Tribune File Photo Paul T. Mero

edom Fund and is a co-author of the Utah Compact.