



In a healthy democracy, respect is shown for the religious freedom and beliefs of every person. However, in our country today, religion is often used to divide and—more disturbingly—as a means to take away the rights of other people. In our pluralistic democracy, it is critical that those running for public office model how best to integrate their faith with their responsibility to all people, if elected.

The **Faith & Democracy Caucus Project** of the Interfaith Alliance of Iowa Action Fund explores the important issues around religious freedom and how the faith and beliefs of candidates would inform their policy decisions. The answers below were provided and approved by the candidate listed and the content was not edited in any manner. We encourage voters to consider the responses of all the candidates and follow up with each candidate to foster positive conversation on these critical issues.

.....**REPRESENTATIVE BETO O’ROURKE**.....



1. Should candidates share their personal religious beliefs when running for public office?

Candidates should feel free to share their personal religious beliefs and how their faith has shaped their worldview. In our pluralistic society, we are fortunate to have a great number of faith traditions that inform our notions of justice and community. A candidate’s larger political philosophy is often shaped by their faith, and discussing one’s beliefs may provide valuable insight for voters into a candidate’s priorities.

2. How will your faith or values influence your views on public policy?

Beto was raised a Catholic by his mother, went to CCD classes during the week at St. Patrick’s in El Paso, and attended mass with her every Sunday. As an adult, Beto found a stronger connection with God outside of the church and finds his faith in the kindness and grace of the people he has met, served and been served by. Beto sees God in the love that we show one another, and sees the power of religion in the way that we come together to do good for each other, especially those most vulnerable and most desperate. These values have shaped Beto’s views on public policy and are central to his efforts to build a country that celebrates our diversity and affirms the dignity and rights of all.

3. What are the proper boundaries between religion and government?

Beto wholeheartedly believes in a strong separation of church and state. That said, Beto



recognizes that individuals within government are inherently shaped by their belief systems and carry those values into every aspect of their lives. As President, Beto will not advance any religion in government, but will govern in accordance with his values of tolerance, inclusion, and justice for all.

4. How will you protect the rights of people, especially the rights of those in the minority?

The present administration has been relentless in its efforts to threaten the rights and safety of communities of color, women, religious minorities, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community. As president, Beto will not only protect, but actively affirm, the rights of all people. In an era where hate crimes have been on the rise in each successive year of this administration, Beto will ensure that the FBI and DOJ crack down on right-wing violence and combat white supremacy and Neo-Nazism. Further, Beto will root out racism in our criminal justice system, end mass incarceration, close the pay gap, and guarantee that everyone has access to the full spectrum of maternal and reproductive health care services. He will use his executive authority to reverse the cruel policies of the Trump administration, including family separation, the Muslim Ban, and the ban on transgender individuals in the military.

5. How will you balance the principles of your faith or beliefs with your obligation to defend the Constitution, particularly if the two come into conflict?

Beto's faith and values do not conflict with the values of the Constitution. Beto sees his values reflected in constitutional principles like equal protection under the law and the affirmation of natural rights and justice for all people. As President, he will uphold his oath to defend the Constitution, and will do so without compromising his values.

6. How would you seek to balance the conflicting religious and civil rights of citizens?

Beto believes that the civil rights of citizens necessarily include the religious rights of citizens. The Constitution explicitly protects the right to the free exercise of religion and an O'Rourke administration will welcome and protect adherents of all faiths. Beto will also protect civil rights from those who use religious justifications to undermine access to reproductive care, LGBTQ+ equality, or equal pay for women.

7. How would you reduce the influence of politics from our federal courts and make them less partisan?

In an effort to limit permanent incumbency, promote progress, and reduce partisan gridlock spilling into and influencing our federal courts, Beto supports a constitutional amendment creating 18-year terms for the Supreme Court, after which the Justices would be permitted to serve on the federal courts of appeals. Counting of time served would begin only on the passage of the legislation necessary to impose the limit. Beto believes that by reducing the stakes of a Supreme Court vacancy, there is less incentive for partisan actors to politicize the nomination and confirmation process.

8. Should public funds be used for private educational choices at the K-12 level? If so, name the specific ways.

Beto's focus is on ensuring that the United States rises to its full promise and potential through a commitment to public schools and public school educators. As President, he will work to shut down efforts to siphon off resources from public to private schools—through tax credits, vouchers, or through for-profit charters.

9. How would you protect a woman's right to reproductive health care, including abortion and contraceptive choices?

Beto would use the full force of the Presidency to defend a woman's reproductive rights by protecting *Roe v. Wade* at every level of the federal judiciary, passing federal legislation affirming the constitutional right to choose under *Roe v. Wade*, and expanding women's access to health care services through executive and legislative means, to ensure the right of all American women to make decisions about their own bodies. Beto would increase Title X funding for women's health, guarantee contraceptive choice, prohibit abortion restrictions on private insurance, and end the restrictions on the use of federal health care funds for abortions by repealing the Hyde Amendment.

10. What priority actions would you take in addressing the immigration crisis at the southern border?

As president, Beto will champion a rewriting of our immigration laws in our own image, which will include an earned pathway for the 11 million undocumented people in our communities, prohibition on family separation, an end to the backlog for naturalization, and an emphasis on family unification and a new community-based visa. Beto will immediately use his executive authority to stop the inhumane treatment of children, reunite the thousands of families that have been separated, and reform our asylum system to provide an efficient processing of those seeking refuge at our border. Working with Mexico and Latin American partners, Beto will work with and support the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to expand the capacity of Mexico's refugee system, collaborate with Mexico on asylum seekers, and launch a regional resettlement initiative. Recognizing that the only path to regional security runs through a more democratic and prosperous Latin America, Beto will invest \$5 billion in the region to support economic development, democratic infrastructure, labor rights, and human rights to mitigate the forces that lead people to migrate.

11. How would you promote civility and civil dialogue in the public debate of issues that are dividing our nation?

Beto believes that in this moment of truth, moving beyond our differences, we should see one another as Americans, before we see ourselves as Republicans or Democrats, to bear witness to our common and shared humanity and understand that we all care just as much about the future of this country. Even in this highly polarized, divided and digital age, we can all work to put this country, and our passion to serve it, first in our hearts and our minds. Whatever our differences, before anything else for 243 years and counting, we are all Americans first. This is why, throughout his career, Beto has never written any person off or taken anyone's vote for granted. His campaigns have been centered on inclusivity and that will continue during his

administration. Beto believes that in this country, no matter the differences between us—what you look like or who you love, who you pray to or whether you pray at all, whether you've been here for generations or just got here yesterday, whether you're a Republican or a Democratic or an Independent—you're in the right place. We're all human beings and we must treat one another that way.

The Interfaith Alliance of Iowa & Action Fund is grateful for the opportunity to provide the candidate responses to our Faith & Democracy questionnaire. This effort is solely meant as a tool to educate voters on the candidates' positions on these important issues. In no way is the publication of any candidate response to be seen as an endorsement of their candidacy for public office.

