

# DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR LAW AND RELIGION STUDIES  
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

## Senator Orrin G. Hatch

A Dedicated Supporter of Religious Freedom in America

October 5, 2014

In recent years there has been perhaps no other public figure as active and supportive of religious freedom in America as Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah). His support for religious liberty has been manifest in the many initiatives and legislative proposals he has championed throughout his Senate service.

Orrin Grant Hatch was born in 1934 to Jesse and Helen Hatch, whose ancestors had helped settle Vernal, Utah. He learned the value of hard work at an early age, initially following in his father's footsteps as a metal lather. He married Elaine Hansen of Newton, Utah, and together they established a family. Today they are the proud parents of six children, twenty-three grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren. Young Orrin worked to support himself and his growing family while he attended college and later law school. He graduated from Brigham Young University in 1959 with a BA in History and received a Juris Doctorate with honors from the University of Pittsburgh Law School in 1962. He practiced law first in Pennsylvania and later in Utah.

Orrin Hatch was elected to the United States Senate from the state of Utah in 1976. His electoral victory came as a surprise to many. He had entered the race as a young and relatively unknown political outsider who was considered to have little chance. He ended up beating not only other contenders within the Republic Party but also winning by a solid margin against a three-term Democratic incumbent.

Senator Hatch has had an important influence on U.S. legislation over a Senate career spanning nearly four decades. Now in his seventh term as Utah's senator, Orrin Hatch has championed a variety of legislative causes and has been the author or a principle supporter of many important bills too numerous to mention, including the landmark Hatch-Waxman generic drug use law passed in 1984. Though accurately regarded throughout his career as a quintessential conservative, he is known among his Senate colleagues for his efforts to reach across the aisle to seek bipartisan solutions to the nation's challenges.

Notable among his prestigious assignments have been his long service as chair or ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee; his membership on the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee; his current service as the ranking member on the Senate Finance Committee; and as a member the Board of Directors for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Senator Hatch has played a truly significant role – perhaps the leading role – in shaping legislation affecting religious freedom in America. In 1994, Senator Hatch led the fight to pass the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), garnering near-unanimous support in both parties. RFRA is arguably the most important religious liberty legislation of the twentieth century. It provides heightened protections to religious organizations and limits government’s ability to substantially burden an individual’s or religious group’s exercise of religion. In 1997, after the Supreme Court limited RFRA’s application to the federal government, Senator Hatch introduced the Religious Liberty Protection Act to limit the scope of the Supreme Court’s decision. This was followed by Senator Hatch’s introduction of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), which Congress unanimously passed within just two weeks in 2000. RLUIPA applies the RFRA legal standard to prison inmates and churches in zoning disputes.

Senator Hatch’s legislative initiatives have also included the 1979 introduction of the Religious Freedom in the Workplace Act, and the Religious Liberty and Charitable Donation Clarification Act, which was signed into law in 2006.

The Senator’s advocacy on behalf of religious liberty has extended to the judicial branch as well. He recently filed amicus briefs in the Hobby Lobby case in both the U. S. Court of Appeals and the U. S. Supreme Court, and he has worked for many years to confirm judges that understand and respect the importance of religious rights.

Senator Hatch has also taken opportunities throughout his Senate service to educate Americans on the importance of religious liberty. In 1984, for example, as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on the Constitution, he held a high-profile hearing on the state of religious liberty. In 2010 he publicly defended the right of Muslims to build a mosque near Ground Zero in New York City. And just recently the Senator penned an op-ed in USA Today titled “Why Religious Freedom Still Matters.”

Summing up Senator Hatch’s leadership on religious liberty, Professor Michael McConnell, one of America’s leading religious liberty scholars and the Director of the Constitutional Law Center at Stanford Law School has written, “No Senator has fought longer, or more effectively, in defense of religious liberty for all Americans,” than Senator Orrin Hatch. (“Utah Senator Orrin Hatch is a loyal advocate for religious liberty,” *Deseret News*, May 27, 2012.)

On behalf of my colleagues and as director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University, it gives me great pleasure to honor Senator Orrin G. Hatch with the 2014 Distinguished Service Award for his outstanding contributions to the defense of religious freedom during his long career of public service in the United States Senate.

W. Cole Durham, Jr., Director