2026 CATHOLIC VOTER GUIDE · SOUTH DAKOTA · LETTERS FROM LEO

U.S. Senate

Mike Rounds is seeking a third term. Democratic nominee Julian Beaudion withdrew, leaving independent Brian Bengs as the main challenger.



Brian Bengs

INDEPENDENT · CHALLENGER

Attorney, Navy and Air Force veteran and former professor; 2022 Democratic Senate nominee.



Mike Rounds

REPUBLICAN · INCUMBENT

U.S. senator since 2015 and former two-term governor.

Where the candidates stand on the issues Pope Leo XIV has raised, in their own words and votes. Bracketed numbers link to sources. We do not rate, score, or endorse candidates.

WAR & PEACE

POPE LEO XIV *Leo invited citizens of every country involved in the war with Iran to contact their leaders and members of Congress "to work for peace and to reject war and violence."* Remarks at Castel Gandolfo, Apr. 7, 2026 (Vatican News via The Good Newsroom)

BRIAN BENGS

Opposes the Iran war — "I wouldn't have voted to get into this quagmire" — calling it unconstitutional and lacking an end goal.

[1] Bengs campaign: Policy positions
[2] Dakota News Now: Rounds, Bengs talk priorities

MIKE ROUNDS

Backed the 2026 strikes on Iran — "I don't think the job is done yet" — and calls for an endgame strategy; says of Iran's leaders, "you cannot trust them."

[1] KOTA: Rounds skeptical of Iran ceasefire
[2] Dakota News Now: Rounds, Bengs talk priorities

VOTING RECORD

No Iran war powers resolution (H.Con.Res. 86), June 2026
No Iran war powers resolution (H.Con.Res. 89), Sept. 2026
Yes Russia sanctions bill (H.R. 5334), Aug. 2026

AI & THE DIGNITY OF WORK

POPE LEO XIV *"No one can be reduced to productivity, to cognitive performance, or to mere data."* Magnifica Humanitas presentation, May 25, 2026

BRIAN BENGS

Says communities should have "a right to say 'no'" to AI data centers; pledges not to accept data center money.

[1] Bengs campaign: Policy positions

MIKE ROUNDS

Wants the U.S. to "outpace China in AI progress"; has proposed letting Medicare pay for AI-enabled clinical devices.

[1] Dakota News Now: Rounds, Bengs talk priorities
[2] OnTheIssues: Mike Rounds

THE POOR & THE SAFETY NET

POPE LEO XIV *The preferential choice for the poor is "a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society."* Dilexi Te, Oct. 4, 2025

BRIAN BENGS

Proposes a five-stage overhaul of the health care system aimed at lowering costs and improving access.

[1] Bengs campaign: Policy positions

MIKE ROUNDS

In 2014, his campaign said he would repeal and replace the ACA with "market-based, patient-centered solutions" and opposed a single-payer system.

[1] Ballotpedia: Mike Rounds

VOTING RECORD

Yes One Big Beautiful Bill Act (H.R. 1), July 2025 — tax cuts with Medicaid and SNAP changes

ELECTIONS & CIVIC LIFE

POPE LEO XIV *Authentic democracy, "far from being a mere procedure," "recognizes the dignity of every person and calls each citizen to participate responsibly in the pursuit of the common good."* Message to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Apr. 9, 2026

BRIAN BENGS

Would work to "ensure a meaningful right to vote" for Native Americans and take redistricting out of the hands of "diehard partisans."

[1] Bengs campaign: Policy positions

MIKE ROUNDS

Has said the 2020 election "was fair" and "we simply did not win"; opposed South Dakota's 2024 top-two primary amendment.

[1] OnTheIssues: Mike Rounds
[2] Ballotpedia: Mike Rounds

VOTING RECORD

No Objection to counting Arizona's 2020 electoral votes, Jan. 6, 2021 — a Yes vote supported the objection (failed, 6–93)

No Objection to counting Pennsylvania's 2020 electoral votes, Jan. 7, 2021 — a Yes vote supported the objection (failed, 7–92)

No For the People Act (S. 2093), June 2021 — vote to begin debate (failed, 50–50; 60 needed)

Yes SAVE America Act (S. 1383), Mar. 2026 — motion to take up the bill requiring proof of citizenship to register and photo ID to vote (passed, 51–48)

Yes Photo ID amendment to the SAVE America Act, Mar. 2026 — vote to end debate on requiring photo ID to vote (failed, 53–47; 60 needed)

LIFE OF THE UNBORN

POPE LEO XIV *Abortion "cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life."* Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Jan. 9, 2026

BRIAN BENGS

Supports "abortion restrictions after the point of 'viability'" with exceptions for the mother's life or health; says he respects "a woman's right to choose."

[1] Bengs campaign: Policy positions

MIKE ROUNDS

Has said "abortion is wrong"; opposed South Dakota's 2024 abortion-rights amendment (Amendment G).

[1] OnTheIssues: Mike Rounds
[2] Ballotpedia: Mike Rounds

VOTING RECORD

Yes Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act (S. 6), Jan. 2025 — vote to advance the bill (failed, 52–47; 60 needed)

THE DEATH PENALTY

POPE LEO XIV *Someone who opposes abortion but favors the death penalty "is not really pro-life."* AP via PBS NewsHour, Sept. 30, 2025

BRIAN BENGS

No public position found.

MIKE ROUNDS

No public position found.

IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES

POPE LEO XIV *"Defending human life also includes welcoming, protecting and assisting immigrants."* Letter on the 250th Anniversary of the United States, June 25, 2026

BRIAN BENGS

Says reform "must include a strong border security component and increased legal immigration."

[1] Bengs campaign: Policy positions

MIKE ROUNDS

Has backed "border security first, then a limited path to citizenship" and says ICE "performs vital functions."

[1] OnTheIssues: Mike Rounds

VOTING RECORD

Yes Laken Riley Act (S. 5), Jan. 2025 — requires detention of undocumented immigrants charged with theft and certain crimes

Yes Secure America Act (S. 2), June 2026 — reconciliation funding for ICE and Customs and Border Protection

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY & EDUCATION

POPE LEO XIV *Religious freedom is "the right of every person to worship according to conscience."* Letter on the 250th Anniversary of the United States, June 25, 2026

BRIAN BENGS

No public position found.

MIKE ROUNDS

No campaign statement found. See voting record below.

VOTING RECORD

Yes One Big Beautiful Bill Act (H.R. 1), July 2025 — created a federal tax credit for donations to K–12 scholarship organizations

CARE FOR CREATION

POPE LEO XIV *"We cannot love God, whom we cannot see, while despising his creatures."* AP, Oct. 1, 2025

BRIAN BENGS

His 2022 platform backed tax incentives for clean vehicles and efficient buildings and more renewable energy research.

[1] Ballotpedia: Brian Bengs

MIKE ROUNDS

In 2014, backed the Keystone Pipeline and called for a return to "reasonable regulation"; has supported reining in EPA regulation.

[1] Ballotpedia: Mike Rounds
[2] OnTheIssues: Mike Rounds

VOTING RECORD

Yes Resolution overturning EPA approval of California vehicle-emission rules (H.J.Res. 87), May 2025

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