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Brownback pulls his family's money out of Sudan

He widens his call for divestment from funds that do business with genocidal government.

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Brownback

WASHINGTON | Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas will put hundreds of thousands of his family's dollars where his mouth is when it comes to divestment from Sudan.

Brownback, a Republican who is contemplating a 2008 presidential bid, wrote last week to 44 state governors urging them to divest from state pension funds investments in companies that do business with Sudan, whose government is sponsoring genocide in the country's Darfur region. Six other states already have done so.

Individuals, as well as institutional investors controlling billions of dollars, should also divest, Brownback said. His family has directed its brokers to divest all family holdings related to Sudan, he said.

"Each one of us can make a difference in Darfur, and it's important that we as individuals do everything we can while calling on the rest of the world to do their part, especially when so many lives are at stake," Brownback said.

An estimated 400,000 have been killed in Darfur, and 2.2 million more displaced, since 2003.

The family began divesting their holdings earlier this month, when Brownback became interested in divestment as a tool to pressure the Khartoum regime, said Brian Hart, a spokesman for Brownback.

The Brownback family has at least \$186,000 and possibly as much as \$565,000 in 10 mutual funds whose investments include companies identified by divestment activists as doing business with the Sudanese government, his most recent personal financial disclosure statement showed.

One of the investments related to Sudan, a mutual fund investment worth between \$50,000 and \$100,000, is in the name of Brownback's wife. The rest are in the names of Brownback's five children, according to the report.

Among the stocks the funds hold are companies identified by the Sudan Divestment Task Force as five of the 12 "worst offenders," mainly overseas energy companies.

For example, the Brownback family has six mutual fund investments whose holdings include Schlumberger Ltd., a French oil services company active in Sudan's rich oil fields.

The Brownbacks also have between \$30,000 and \$100,000 invested in two mutual funds that own millions of dollars worth of Petrochina Co. Ltd. stock. Petrochina is a subsidiary of the state-owned Chinese oil company, the largest foreign investor in the Sudanese oil sector.

The family's largest holding is a blind trust, worth between \$1 million and \$5 million, jointly held by Brownback and his wife. The couple is seeking legal advice on whether they can ask that any of the trust's funds invested with companies doing business in Sudan be redirected, Hart said.

Brownback's letter to the governors was co-signed by Sen. Richard Durbin, an Illinois Democrat. Durbin's form showed an investment between \$1,000 and \$15,000 in one mutual fund that held \$173 million worth of Schlumberger stock.

Durbin was not aware that the fund held that stock, and he pledged Tuesday to divest it, and to ask his brokers to focus on funds that do not include stock of companies that invest in Sudan, said spokesman Joe Shoemaker.

Advocates of "targeted divestment" say that such companies have a business relationship with a government that provides little benefit to Sudan's poor and oppressed. Furthermore, they say, direct support by foreign companies allows the Sudan regime to finance the Darfur genocide.

"The oil sector arguably contributes more direct revenue to the government's ability to continue its systematic violations in Darfur than does any other sector of the economy," according to a report this year by the Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights project and clinic at Yale Law School.

Brownback has made the Darfur genocide a cornerstone of his efforts to put an international face on compassionate conservatism. He was among the first American politicians to visit the region and passed a \$50 million emergency aid bill for Darfur refugees.

On the Web

For more information on divesting from Sudan, go to www.sudandivestment.org . The site includes a screening tool for thousands of widely available mutual funds that shows whether funds are investing in companies that do business with Sudan.

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