

December 5, 2016

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Office of the Democratic Leader
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Pelosi,

The undersigned atheist, humanist, nontheist, secularist, and religious freedom advocacy organizations respectfully request that you appoint a nontheistic commissioner to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

Since its inception in 1999, there have been 44 commissioners (including the current members) and of those, only three have been of non-Abrahamic faith (not Jewish, Christian, or Muslim). One of these, Patti Chang, a Buddhist and women's rights activist, was nominated by you to the Commission in 2003. The other two commissioners were Preeta Bansal representing Hindus from 2003-2009 and Firuz Kazemzadeh representing Baha'is from 1999-2003.

However, there has never been a nontheistic representative on USCIRF, yet according to the Public Religion Research Institute, those who are religiously unaffiliated now make up 25% of the U.S. population.¹ Worldwide, the religiously unaffiliated number over 1.1 billion, per the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life.²

Representation of those who are nontheist on USCIRF is important because around the world people who do not have religious beliefs are targeted by blasphemy laws, labeled terrorists, macheted and murdered in the streets, and seek asylum and refugee status after such persecution. However, they don't have a voice among those the U.S. has tasked with assessing international religious freedom concerns. This means those who do not have religious faith and are persecuted because of it are often afterthoughts when it comes to resources aimed at helping those suffering because of religious intolerance.

The United States and its citizens prize religious freedom, and the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects both the freedom of religion and the freedom from religion. Yet, it is freedom from religion that often is neglected and forgotten in our country's efforts to protect religious liberty.

Representation on USCIRF would send a powerful message of inclusion for nontheists both here in the United States and around the world. We respectfully request that you appoint a nontheistic commissioner to USCIRF. We have strong candidates we would be happy to suggest, and our organizations would be happy to assist you and your staff in any way.

¹*America's Largest "Religious" Group*; <http://www.ppri.org/research/ppri-rns-2016-religiously-unaffiliated-americans/>

²*The Global Religious Landscape*; <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>

Sincerely,

American Atheists
American Ethical Union
American Humanist Association
Atheist Alliance of America
Camp Quest
Catholics for Choice
Center for Inquiry
Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations
Ex-Muslims of North America
Freedom from Religion Foundation
Freethought Society
Hispanic American Freethinkers
Institute for Humanist Studies
Institute for Science and Human Values
Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers
Muslims for Progressive Values
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
Recovering from Religion
Secular Coalition for America
Secular Student Alliance
Society for Humanistic Judaism
Unitarian Universalists Humanists

CC: Ambassador David Saperstein
Melissa Rogers