

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.<sup>1</sup> Worldwide, the religiously unaffiliated number over 1.1 billion, per the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life.<sup>2</sup>

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.

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

<sup>2</sup>*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