

## Secular Coalition for America to Meet with White House Officials on National Policy

Nontheist Advocacy Group, Administration to Cover Religious Medical Neglect of Children, Proselytizing in Military, Faith-Based Initiatives

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Marking the first time in history a presidential administration has met for a policy briefing with the American nontheist community, on February 26 the Secular Coalition for America will engage with White House officials on issues of great concern to the secular movement.

President Obama was the first U.S. president to acknowledge nonbelievers in an inaugural address, an event which began a constructive and meaningful relationship between the administration and American nontheists. When administration officials meet with the country's national nontheist advocacy organization for this briefing—joined by a group of other nontheists from every corner of the nation and all walks of life—it will be the latest indication that the secular movement is gaining significant momentum, and that secular Americans, numbering in the tens of millions, are a constituency that must be included.

"We are very pleased that the Obama administration is affording us this opportunity to present our positions on issues of high importance, issues of freedom and fairness that affect every American, regardless of belief," said Secular Coalition for America Executive Director Sean Faircloth. "Our Founders knew that there was no place in American government for the privileging of religion, or of one belief over another, and that will be a central theme in our interaction with the White House."

Daniel Dennett, celebrated philosopher, author of the influential book *Breaking the Spell*, and member of the SCA Advisory Board, highlighted the significance of the meeting, noting, "The category 'no religion' is the fastest growing category in America, and it is high time political leaders begin to take us seriously as a voting group whose approval they should hope to deserve."

Issues that the Secular Coalition for America plans to address in their meeting with administration officials include:

**Protecting Children from Neglect and Abuse:** Liz Heywood will describe her harrowing childhood struggle as she was refused medical attention when stricken with painful, debilitating illness. While there are federal standards to protect children from medical neglect, there continues to exist an exemption to these minimum standards when religion becomes the

motivation behind the neglect. Parents whose children are physically endangered by so called “faith-healing” and “Faith-healing treatment providers” must be held responsible by law for participating in the denial of proper medical treatment. Similarly, religious child care centers, for the sake of the children for whom they are responsible, must be subject to the same health and safety laws as secular child care centers that receive federal funding.

**Ending Military Proselytizing:** Ensuring that the rights for which our men and women in uniform fight—among them freedom of conscience—are respected at all levels of the U.S. military, so that no service-member is ever coerced into religious participation, subject to proselytizing, or discriminated against because of their beliefs or lack thereof.

Kathleen Johnson, Vice President of American Atheists, and Jason Torpy, President of Military Atheists will recount their own experiences with religious discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces.

**Fixing Faith-Based Initiatives:** Taking all necessary steps to make certain that religious organizations receiving federal funding for social welfare programs cannot discriminate in hiring on the basis of religion, that program beneficiaries are never subject to proselytizing, and that secular options are made equally available to those in need.

"There has been a movement toward theocracy in America that is too often overlooked," said Faircloth. "As a result, good Americans, including children, have been harmed, and men and women in uniform denied their rights. This strikes at the very core of American values. The Secular Coalition for America seeks justice for every citizen, regardless of creed."

For comment from the Secular Coalition for America or from scheduled presenters, contact Paul Fidalgo at 202-299-1091 / paul(at)secular.org.