



Fat Chance

Why Pigs Will Fly Before America
Has an Atheist President



Ray Comfort

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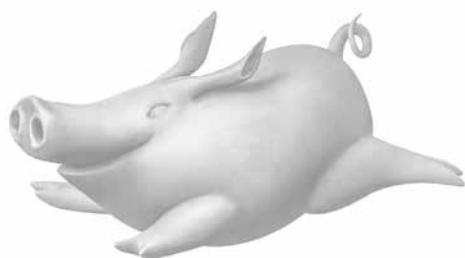
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Chapter One

Why Are There No Atheists in Congress?



American Atheists, Inc., the group founded by notorious activist Madalyn Murray O’Hair, boldly (and incorrectly) claims there are 35 million atheists in America. That number is highly exaggerated, as we will see; still, if there were even a third of that figure, most atheists must wonder why there isn’t one fellow nonbeliever serving on Capitol Hill today. Some would argue that there has been one avowed atheist: Rep. Pete Stark. But after admitting his atheism, his support began to tumble. He was able to defeat one Democratic challenger, then lost the next election to a Christian:

So far, only one sitting congressman, Pete Stark of California, has ever admitted to being an atheist while in office. First elected in

1972, Stark came out of the atheist closet back in 2007, but he lost his re-election bid in 2012 after serving in the U.S. House for 40 years.¹

In a *Huffington Post* article titled “Here Are All the Atheists in Congress,” another congressman was said to be an atheist, who “came out” after his retirement in 2013:

A few months after retiring, former Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) also announced his nonbeliever status, a declaration he made more than 25 years after coming out as the first openly gay member of Congress. That Frank felt more comfortable going public with his sexuality in 1987 than he did with his secular beliefs at any point during his House career says a lot about the stigma surrounding atheism in electoral politics.²

However, in his memoir, published in 2015, Rep. Frank corrected that misunderstanding and refuted the atheist label:

Subsequently, after leaving office, I half-jokingly objected when Bill Maher, one of my favorite TV hosts, asked if I felt uncomfortable sitting next to a pot-smoking atheist on the set of his show. I replied that there were two of us on that stage who fit those categories. The media reached the conclusion that I had come out as an atheist. *In fact, I am not an atheist.* I don’t know enough to have any firm view on the subject, and it has never seemed important to me. I have had a life-long aversion to wrestling with questions that I know I can

never answer. My tolerance for intellectual uncertainty is very low.³

But what about Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, a socialist and 2016 Democratic presidential candidate? Some atheists are hopeful that one of their own could end up in the White House even this year. Of the four most likely candidates at this point, outspoken evangelical Ted Cruz is a Southern Baptist, Donald Trump grew up Presbyterian, and Hillary Clinton identifies as a Methodist. But CelebAtheists.com has a listing for Sanders and asserts "Bernie indicates he doesn't believe in God":

Larry Sanders sums up his brother's views this way: "He is quite substantially not religious." . . . In October of 2015 Bernie Sanders was on Jimmy Kimmel live. Bernie didn't profess a theistic belief, indicated he didn't believe in god, and promoted the ideals [of] humanism. . . . Jimmy Kimmel says "A moment ago you said God forbid, you say you're culturally Jewish, *do you believe in god?* Bernie instantly says, 'No' while Jimmy is mid-sentence."⁴ (emphasis in original)

The website lists him under "Ambiguous." I find that listing a God-believer as "Ambiguous" on Celeb Atheists is like listing Hillary Clinton on Celeb Republicans. But more importantly, Sanders did not say "No." According to *The Washington Post*:

When late-night TV host Jimmy Kimmel asked Sanders in October whether he believes in God and if that matters to the American people, the senator seemed to avoid a direct

response: "I am what I am," he said. "And what I believe in, and what my spirituality is about, is that we're all in this together."⁵

In an article titled "Bernie Sanders disappoints some atheists with his 'very strong religious' feelings," the writer stated,

Presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders dashed the hopes of some atheists when he declared he had "very strong religious and spiritual feelings" at a Democratic town hall. "It's a guiding principle in my life, absolutely, it is," Sanders said Wednesday (Feb. 3) when a New Hampshire voter asked him about his faith. "Everybody practices religion in a different way. To me, I would not be here tonight, I would not be running for president of the United States, if I did not have very strong religious and spiritual feelings." The statement came a week after the Vermont senator told *The Washington Post* he is "not active in any organized religion" but believes in God.⁶

This is consistent with what he said in a November 2015 interview with *Rolling Stone*. After noting that he had a Jewish upbringing but was not observant, he was asked directly, "Do you believe in God?" Sanders replied, "Yeah, I do. I do."⁷

Jack Jenkins, Senior Religion Reporter for Think Progress, acknowledges,

Outside of prominent roles in television or the music industry, being elected to national office is often one of the most visible steps

a minority group can take to win acceptance in American society. Yet, for the millions of Americans who openly identify as atheist, the goal of political representation currently remains just out of reach: At present, no one in the 113th Congress identifies as an atheist.⁸

The same remains true of the 114th Congress. Gary Scott Smith, writing in *The Washington Post*, agrees that Congress remains out of reach for nonbelievers: "Being identified as an atheist in the United States today is still such a major political liability that a candidate holding this position probably could not gain a major party's nomination for president or even the Senate."⁹ Jack Jenkins offered his thoughts on why atheistic views aren't likely to be heard in the halls of Congress:

The most practical reason for the lack of atheists in Congress is that, generally speaking, unbelief polls pretty terribly with the American people. A Pew Research survey conducted in May found that Americans consider atheism the least attractive trait for a candidate to possess, with voters more likely to back a candidate who smokes marijuana, has never held office, or has had an extramarital affair than a self-professed atheist.¹⁰

In an article titled "Americans are deeply religious, so will we ever see an atheist president?" Gary Scott Smith elaborates on the difficulty of an atheist being elected:

In numerous surveys, at least half of Americans state that they would not vote for

an atheist. While the numbers of those who declare that they would not vote for an atheist have declined in the new millennium, a 2014 Pew Research Center poll found that Americans are less likely to vote for an atheist than any other type of candidate. . . .¹¹

Then he puts his finger on why ham will be flying over the White House roof before an atheist will be elected president:

First, many Americans perceive atheists to be untrustworthy, insensitive and morally rootless. Despite their recent campaign to improve their image, a 2014 Pew poll found that Americans rated atheists more unfavorably than any religious group including Muslims. Second, in other polls, most respondents (as many as 72 percent) said they want the president to have strong religious beliefs. Many Americans also say they want presidents to seek God's guidance about the major decisions they must inevitably make.¹²

Hans Villarica, writing in *The Atlantic*, reported on a study that concluded atheists were as trustworthy as rapists:

Distrust, not disgust, is the motivation behind believers' antipathy against atheists. In one of the six trials, participants found a description of an untrustworthy person to be more representative of atheists than of Christians, Muslims, gay men, feminists, or Jewish people. Only rapists were distrusted to a similar degree.¹³

Distrust of atheists isn't confined to American culture. A 2015 study in the United Kingdom found that people's distrust of atheists is deeply ingrained, "*with even many atheists having an instinctual distrust of each other.*"¹⁴ Another study asked participants to choose between an atheist and a religious candidate for a job. For a high-trust job such as daycare workers, people were much more likely to prefer the religious candidate over the atheist. The results of this study were reported in a *Scientific American* article titled "In Atheists We Distrust," in which the author wrote,

It wasn't just the highly religious participants who expressed a distrust of atheists. People identifying themselves as having no religious affiliation held similar opinions. [Researcher] Gervais and his colleagues discovered that people distrust atheists because of the belief that people behave better when they think that God is watching over them. This belief may have some truth to it. . . . When we know that somebody believes in the possibility of divine punishment, we seem to assume they are less likely to do something unethical.¹⁵

Why would the average American prefer an inexperienced, dope-smoking adulterer to lead the country, rather than an atheist? There are three primary reasons.

The First Reason

If an individual knows that God sees him and will subject him to divine punishment, he can be more trusted to do what is morally right. While the words

“God-fearing” are often maligned, we know that if a man truly fears God he won’t lie to you, steal from you, or kill you. This is because he has the biblical promise that His Creator will hold him accountable for how he treats others.

Atheists, of course, don’t believe that God sees them and have no fear of judgment for any “bad” behavior. Their code of ethics is that morality is determined on earth, not in heaven. Because they believe there are no moral absolutes, which are true for all people in all times, their ethics can vary from one place to another and from one year to the next. If society says that something is morally sound today, then it becomes morally sound for them. Many have no solid moral code when it comes to lying, stealing, adultery, fornication, blasphemy, abortion, homosexuality — and even pedophilia. High-profile atheist Richard Dawkins, for example, doesn’t condemn what he calls “just mild touching up”:

I am very conscious that you can’t condemn people of an earlier era by the standards of ours. Just as we don’t look back at the 18th and 19th centuries and condemn people for racism in the same way as we would condemn a modern person for racism, I look back a few decades to my childhood and see things like caning, like mild pedophilia, and can’t find it in me to condemn it by the same standards as I or anyone would today.¹⁶

How could anyone so lack a fear of God that he could condone the sexual abuse of children in any era? Those who have no fear of judgment by a holy God can also easily justify “fibbing” if it suits their needs. During the

2016 presidential race, for example, America Atheists, Inc., stretched the truth about how many atheists are in the United States. They tweeted a meme in which they pictured Senator Marco Rubio saying, “America does not make sense unless we believe in a Creator.” Under his words they added, “Speak for yourself. 35 million American atheists.”¹⁷

In other words, Americans who profess atheism are presumably a powerful political voice. The problem is that there aren’t anywhere near 35 million atheists in the United States. Pew Research Center’s 2014 Religious Landscape Study found that just 3.1 percent of American adults described themselves as atheists when asked about their religious identity.¹⁸ That translates to fewer than 10 million people.

But adding more than 25 million to the figure is no big deal when you don’t believe in moral absolutes. Others cite even more extravagant figures. Writing in *The Washington Post*, Gregory Paul and Phil Zuckerman claim, “Surveys designed to overcome the understandable reluctance to admit atheism have found that as many as 60 million Americans — a fifth of the population — are not believers.”¹⁹

David Silverman, president of American Atheists, Inc., has also been accused of intentionally stretching the truth. Describing Silverman’s statements on a CNN special titled “Atheists: Inside the World of True Non-believers” (airing March 23, 2015), a Duke University researcher wrote:

During the program, Silverman made a few factual errors that should bother even the most ardent atheist. Early on, he said that one in three Americans under the age of 30 is an atheist, but even under the loosest, most

awkward definition of an atheist (someone who doesn't believe in any god or gods), the actual number is off quite a bit. Thirty-two percent of millennials are *unaffiliated*, meaning they say they don't belong to any particular religious group. That doesn't make them atheists, though — 86 percent of unaffiliated millennials say they believe in God, meaning only about 5 percent of millennials are atheists (though, according to Pew, only 3 percent identify as such). It's understandable to make this slip-up once or twice, but Silverman has been corrected on this basic oversight for about four years. After so long, it's hard not to suspect that the mistake is calculated.²⁰

Past Generations and Atheists

Neither have atheists been trusted by past generations, which have deemed atheists unfit for the White House since our nation's founding. It must be remembered that most of America's founders believed in God and the Bible. As they relied on God in forming this great nation, they expected its officials to continue to rely on God for wisdom to lead it. Even today, the president is sworn in by raising his right hand toward heaven and placing his left hand on a Bible while taking the oath of office, typically ending "So help me God."

James Madison, integral in the drafting of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, declared in 1785:

Before any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe. . . .²¹

If submission to God was necessary to be considered a good citizen, how much more to be a good president? John Witherspoon, who signed the Declaration, believed atheists were therefore not qualified for office:

He is the best friend to American liberty who is the most sincere and active in promoting true and undefiled religion, and who sets himself with the greatest firmness to bear down profanity and immorality of every kind. *Whoever is an avowed enemy of God, I scruple not to call him an enemy to his country.*²²

Lest any think this is discrimination that would be deemed “unconstitutional” today, it certainly was not to the men who wrote the Constitution. John Jay, one of the Founding Fathers and the first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, was even more direct. He wrote in 1816: “Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”²³

Founding Father Noah Webster summarized what he and many others — from our nation’s birth to today — would consider the qualifications for the president of the United States:

It is alleged by men of loose principles, or defective views of the subject, that religion and morality are not necessary or important qualifications for political stations. But the Scriptures teach a different doctrine. They direct that rulers should be men who rule in the fear of God, able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness. . . .

When a citizen gives his vote to a man of known immorality, he abuses his civic responsibility; he sacrifices not only his own interest, but that of his neighbor; he betrays the interest of his country.²⁴

So one reason atheists are rejected as political candidates is that they are deemed untrustworthy, because they have no fear of God. In the next chapter we will look at the second reason there are no atheists in Congress.