



Protecting the Equal Rights  
of Nonreligious Americans

January 16, 2025

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The Honorable John Thune  
Office of the Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Office of the Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Thune and Schumer,

We are writing to urge you to oppose the nomination of Pete Hegseth to be Secretary of Defense. We will not belabor here his lack of experience, his lack of success at running small organizations, his many recently-renounced statements opposing women in the military, or the questions about his character. Most recently, during his Armed Services Committee hearing, he seemed to say that the Geneva Conventions are more aspirational than they are legal requirements all troops should follow. Collectively, these problems should be disqualifying.

As organizations dedicated to the separation of state and church, freedom of religion or belief, and upholding the rights of non-believers, we have deep seated concerns about Mr. Hegseth's authoritarian and Christian nationalist beliefs. Mr. Hegseth has made a number of highly concerning statements: "Voting is a weapon, but it's not enough," he wrote in *American Crusade* from 2020; and "We don't want to fight, but, like our fellow Christians one thousand years ago, we must." Also, "Our American Crusade is not about literal swords, and our fight is not with guns. Yet."

Mr. Hegseth's appreciation for the Crusades is evident from yet another statement, that people who enjoy the benefits of western civilization should "thank a crusader." The Crusades began as a Papacy-inspired military expedition to recapture Jerusalem from Muslims and later evolved into campaigns against Christians in Europe who violated the Pope's desire for Christian homogeneity and hegemony. This is what draws Mr. Hegseth's admiration.

A 2019 Defense Department survey found that 30 percent of people in the military do not identify themselves as Christian, similar to the 37 percent of the overall population. Mr. Hegseth opposes DEI initiatives, calling them discriminatory ideologies that "turn off the young, patriotic, Christian men who have traditionally filled our ranks." His vision of the ideal military clearly does not include people of other faiths or no faith.




Atheists. Agnostics. Humanists. Americans.

Mr. Hegseth's Christian nationalist beliefs and statements such as "[ours is] the only powerful, pro-freedom, pro-Christian, pro-Israel army in the world" raise questions about how the 30 percent of non-Christians, or 900,000 servicemembers and employees, would be treated under his authority.

During his hearing, Mr. Hegseth frequently mentioned his opposition to lowering standards in the military. Confirming him would clearly lower the standards of what we expect in a Secretary of Defense. He also said one of the keys to his success as a leader has been "hiring people smarter and more capable than me." We urge you to vote against his nomination so that we can instead move on to one of those people Mr. Hegseth had in mind.

Sincerely,

  
Steven Emmert  
Executive Director

The Secular Coalition for America includes the following member organizations:

American Atheists	American Ethical Union
American Humanist Association	Association of Secular Elected Officials
Atheist Alliance of America	Black Nonbelievers
Center For Inquiry/Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science	
Camp Quest	Ex-Muslims of North America
Freedom From Religion Foundation	Freethought Society
Hispanic American Freethinkers	Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers
Recovering From Religion	Secular Student Alliance
Secular Woman	Society for Humanistic Judaism
The Clergy Project	Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association