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September 8, 2015

The Honorable Leon Rodriguez, Director
US Citizenship and Immigration Services
US Department of Homeland Security
20 Massachusetts Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20529

Dear Director Rodriguez:

We at the Secular Policy Institute, together with the below signed organizations, would like to draw your attention to an inappropriate phrasing in the Pledge of Allegiance in the context of immigration, and naturalization of new American citizens. It is our belief that the inclusion of the phrase "under God" may constitute a potential worldview issue for a significant number of immigrants, and the Pledge of Allegiance should revert back to its original wording. At a minimum, the words "under God" should be voluntary, as in public schools in the US.

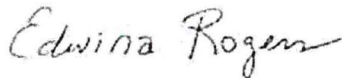
The original text of the Pledge, as composed by ordained minister Francis Bellamy in 1892, conveyed a meaning of patriotic communion in simple and neutral, yet powerful words. Although the Pledge was meant to infuse patriotism in the relatively young American nation, Bellamy invoked universal human rights of liberty and justice, and hoped his verse could be used by any democratic country. The America of 1890s was a nation being assembled from heterogeneous immigrants who needed patriotic unity despite differences. The America of the twenty first century continues to be a nation-in-the-making, with even more diversity among its immigrants.

The 1950s brought a significant change to the wording of the Pledge of Allegiance, and the phrase "under God" was added. The change surfaced as a Cold War rejoinder to "Godless Communism" during the era of McCarthyism.

While the majority of religious individuals in America may be Christian, the United States was constituted as a secular republic. And a modern nation has to recognize that there are people of different religious faiths, as well as those who do not worship at all. Those who arrive in the United States may espouse diverse worldviews and faiths, but they all arrive here hoping to hold and express their convictions freely, as promised by the Constitution. As new citizens swear their loyalty to a secular republic, the Pledge of Allegiance in its current inception conveys a meaning contrary to what a creed-free country ought to be. It implies an existence of a national religious doctrine, and denotes an expectation of acceptance of such doctrine by the new citizen.

The original Pledge of Allegiance contained no reference to God. And that was a good thing. While human liberties are universal and uniting, religious dogmas are inherently divisive. We believe the reference to a deity in the Pledge of Allegiance lands far from the document's originally intended meaning, and just as far from the foundations of the United States. Thus it seems appropriate to call for actions to restore the original text of the Pledge of Allegiance to official use.

Yours sincerely,



Edwina Rogers, CEO
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Signatories

21st Century Humanism – Alpharetta, Georgia, USA
ARP Sociedad para el Avance del Pensamiento Crítico - Spain
Atheist Alliance International – Washington, DC, USA
Atheist Community of Tulsa – Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA
Central Colorado Humanists – Salida, Colorado, USA
Central Iowa Coalition of Reason – Des Moines, Iowa, USA
Freethinkers of the Coachella Valley – Palm Desert, California, USA
Freethought Society – Pocopson, Pennsylvania, USA
Humanist Association of Orange County - Orange County, California, USA
Humanists of North Central Florida – Ocala, Florida, USA
Humanist Society of Redding, CA – Redding, California, USA
Lincoln Atheists – Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
Metroplex Atheists – Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, USA
NYC Atheists - New York, New York, USA
OMAHA (Omaha Metro Area Humanist Association) - Omaha, Nebraska, USA
Rossmoor Atheists and Agnostics – Walnut Creek, California, USA
Sidmennt, The Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association - Reykjavik, Iceland
Society for Humanistic Mormonism - USA
UnitedCoR – Washington, DC, USA
Watford Area Humanists - Watford, UK



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

October 5, 2015

Edwina Rogers, CEO
Secular Policy Institute
401 Ninth Street, NW, Suite 640
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Ms. Rogers:

Thank you for your September 8, 2015, letter regarding the Pledge of Allegiance and the naturalization ceremony.

The naturalization ceremony is a pivotal milestone in the naturalization process. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) aims to make administrative naturalization ceremonies positive, memorable moments in the lives of the participants. The Pledge of Allegiance is one aspect included in the standard naturalization ceremony in furtherance of this goal.¹

USCIS does not have the authority to change the Pledge of Allegiance, as its language is set by Congress and codified at 4 U.S.C. § 4 (2002). However, while applicants are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the naturalization ceremony, there is no legal requirement that they audibly recite the Pledge in whole or in part.

Thank you again for your letter and I hope this response sufficiently addresses your concerns.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Denise A. Vanison".

Denise A. Vanison
Chief, USCIS Office of Policy & Strategy

¹ See Volume 12, Citizenship and Naturalization, Part J, Oath of Allegiance, Chapter 5, Model Plan for Administrative Ceremonies, <http://www.uscis.gov/policymanual/HTML/PolicyManual-Volume12-PartJ-Chapter5.html>