

February 12, 2019

Raúl M. Grijalva
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva,

The undersigned organizations, who advocate for the rights of the nearly 95 million Americans who are nonreligious, write to express our deep concern with the House Committee on Natural Resource's recent vote to retain the phrase "so help me God" in the oath taken by hearing witnesses.

We were incredibly heartened when early reports claimed that the committee was preparing, at your direction, to vote on an amendment that would make the "God" clause optional. Removing the requirement to recite this clause is a long-overdue step that would bring the committee in line with the overwhelming majority of Americans who support the constitutional separation of church and state in law and in spirit. We saw the vote as an opportunity for the new Congressional majority to show leadership in making our government inclusive of *all* Americans regardless of their religious belief or lack thereof.

We were shocked when a religious television network reported that you later called the draft proposal a "mistake."¹ It is never a mistake to fight for religious equality and inclusive government. The requirement to swear loyalty to a deity is a clear violation of the religious freedom enshrined in the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution, which requires the government to maintain neutrality not just between different religions, but also between religion and non-religion.²

According to the Pew Research Center, 29 percent of adults in the United States have no religious beliefs.³ To Americans with deep and sincerely held beliefs that are non-religious, a mandatory "God" clause sends the message that they are second-class citizens and not "real" Americans. In a country founded in part on the separation of church and state, it is unacceptable for the legislature to undermine religious freedom by elevating theistic religious belief above other beliefs.

¹ EWTN News Nightly. Eternal Word Television Network. January 30, 2019.

² See *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968). (The Establishment Clause "mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and non-religion.")

³ Pew Research Center, August 29, 2018. See: <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/08/29/the-religious-typology/>

In closing, we urge the Committee to reconsider its decision to retain the “God” clause in the witness oath. The absolute separation of church and state is not a mistake. It is foundational to the United States of America.

Sincerely,

Center for Inquiry
American Humanist Association
Secular Coalition for America
American Atheists
Freedom From Religion Foundation
Society for Humanistic Judaism
Atheist Alliance of America
Secular Student Alliance
Freethought Society
Recovering from Religion
Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations
Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers