

Maryland Democrat Seeks to Be One of a Kind in Congress

There are many secularists in the United States Congress, but a Maryland Democrat is trying to take it one step further.

State Sen. Jamie Raskin (D-Takoma Park) not only believes in “separation of church and state,” he’s a member of the American Humanist Association and an avowed atheist. And last Tuesday, he won the Democratic Party primary in the Eighth Congressional District—a solidly liberal district the Democrat candidate, U.S. Rep. Chris Van Hollen, won in 2014 with more than 60 percent of the vote.

Raskin, who teaches constitutional law at the Washington School of Law at American University, was first elected to the Maryland Senate in 2006. He was named Senate Majority Whip in 2012.

His campaign website promotes his positions in defense of abortion and LGBT “rights,” as well as his pledge to “challenge the NRA” and address “gun violence.” He also pledges his support to fight against efforts to repeal Obamacare.

It also highlights a comment he made 10 years ago prior to holding elected office:

“Senator, with all due respect, when you took your oath of office, you put your hand on the Bible and swore to uphold the Constitution. You did not put you hand on the Constitution and swear to uphold the Bible.”

Although he would not be the first atheist to serve in Congress, he may be the first to be elected while openly professing his unbelief. The first atheist in Congress, U.S. Rep. Pete Stark (D-Calif.), did not admit his unbelief until

he had already served.

Raskin was born into a Jewish family in Washington, D.C. His father, Marcus, served on the National Security Council staff under President John F. Kennedy, and later founded the liberal Institute for Policy Studies. His mother, Barbara, was a journalist and novelist.

He is a magna cum laude graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, where he was an editor of the *Harvard Law Review*. His wife, Sarah, is a former governor of the Federal Reserve Board and is now deputy secretary of the U.S. Treasury Department.