

Will Atheists Attempt to Disrupt GOP Debate?

Tuesday, a group called United Coalition of Reason announced it was planning to protest outside the Iowa Events Center, the site of Thursday night's FOX News Presidential Debate, with a press released titled:

"Godless Expression of Free Speech From Atheist Voters at Final GOP Debate"

United COR's Central Iowa and Eastern Iowa chapters were expected to participate in a demonstration from 5-8 p.m. Central Time outside the debate venue. This is the main time frame during which those who plan to attend will arrive at the convention center.

"The point of our demonstration is that we represent the fastest-growing minority, yet we are ignored by the candidates," Central Iowa COR coordinator Rory Moe said. "According to the Pew Research Center's May 12, 2015, study, (the number of) adults that identify with no religion has grown to 23 percent over the past seven years. This number rises to more than a third of those 33 years old and younger. There are more of us than either Roman Catholics or mainline Protestants and are second only to evangelical Protestants. Of the religiously unaffiliated, 31 percent are atheist or agnostic—well over 17 million voters. We will be silent no longer and deserve to be appropriately recognized in the democratic process, rather than being relegated to the fringe of campaign targeting."

"We want to ensure that the Jeffersonian 'wall of separation' between religion and government remains firmly in place," Eastern Iowa COR coordinator Rocky Gissler added. "An elected government official takes an oath to uphold and defend

the Constitution that applies to all citizens, and their 'sincerely held beliefs' should not supersede the supreme law of this country. When religious bias is allowed to influence our laws, it can result not only in discriminatory actions toward whole groups of people, such as the LGBTQ community, but grievous harm to individuals. For example, child health and safety laws should apply equally to everyone regardless of the religious affiliation of that child's parents, school or child care facility. There should be no religious exemption when it comes to the health and welfare of a child, although a recent report from the National District Attorneys Association highlights that 43 states provide religious exemptions for withholding medical care. No child should be subjected to potential harm because their parents' religious beliefs."

Among those who will be participating with the United COR protesters is Justin Scott, the atheist citizen-journalist who has been following the presidential candidates and asking them how they will protect "non-theists' rights." The video of his questioning Marco Rubio last week has now been watched more than 8 million times.

"With a growing number of presidential candidates basing much of their candidacy on their religious beliefs, it's especially important that atheists and non-theists get in front of these candidates and demand to know whether they intend on representing all Americans, not just the religious ones," he said. "We've been ignored for long enough, and it's time that Des Moines and Washington, D.C., know that we aren't going to sit back and watch our country turn into a theocracy."

Religion and worldview expert Dr. Alex McFarland, who also is founder of the Truth for a New Generation apologetics conferences, said the right candidate will respect all beliefs, lean on the Constitution and look to God for guidance. His colleague, apologist and pastor Jason Jimenez, agreed.

"These atheists have every right to gather and protest outside the GOP debate tonight," he said. "But using the slogan, 'Keep your theocracy out of our democracy' is so far from the truth. Any one of the Republican candidates running for president have demonstrated their love for the Constitution, their respect for different religious beliefs and their passionate defense to protect and preserve the rights of all Americans—including these atheists. Their protest would be better served outside the Democratic debate, where people like Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders undermine our freedoms, and if elected president, will implement policies that will wipe out any chance of these young atheists from having a bright future in America."

McFarland and Jimenez both serve as co-directors of Stand Strong Ministries. Each year, they are able to reach thousands of young people, encouraging them to stand strong for their faith.

"As much as these atheist voters would like it to be true, the Constitution does not guarantee freedom from religion but freedom of religion," McFarland said. "If a candidate seeks to run for President while standing firm on his or her belief in God and Christian ideals, yes, all views must be respected. But that respect goes both ways. The Constitution—and the Bible for that matter—are intended to protect and free everyone, not just a few. This is further proof that some Americans, specifically atheists, are still confused about 'the wall of separation of church and state.' Thomas Jefferson was concerned about the government overreaching into their governance of religion, not the other way around."