

Representative Stark, an open 'nontheist' First openly nontheistic member of Congress: First openly nontheistic member of Congress

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Representative Fortney “Pete” Stark (D., Calif.) is the first openly “nontheistic” member of Congress, the Secular Coalition for America has announced.

The coalition said Stark, who has represented San Francisco’s East Bay since 1973, acknowledged his atheism in response to a questionnaire sent to public officials in January. In a March 12 statement, Stark said he is a Unitarian who does not believe in a supreme being.

“I look forward to working with the Secular Coalition to stop the promotion of narrow religious beliefs in science, marriage contracts, the military and the provision of social service,” Stark said.

Herb Silverman, president of the Secular Coalition for America, said “the only way to counter prejudice against nontheists is for more people to publicly identify as nontheists. Representative Stark shows remarkable courage in being the first member of Congress to do so.”

Only 45 percent of Americans said they would vote for a “generally well-qualified” atheist, according to a February Gallup Poll; atheists ranked lowest on a list that included Mormons (72 percent), candidates on their third marriage (67 percent) and homosexuals (55 percent).

The Washington-based coalition, which lobbies on behalf of atheists, humanists and other nontheists, said, “Few if any elected officials, even at the lowest level, would self-identify as a nontheist” in response to its survey. Only three other elected officials agreed to be identified: a school board president in Berkeley, California; a member of a school committee in Maine, and a town meeting member from

Massachusetts. –*Religion News Service*