

Head of American Humanist Association to step down, make room for diverse leaders

by [Emily McFarlan Miller](#) in the [March 10, 2021](#) issue



(Photo courtesy of the American Humanist Association)

Roy Speckhardt announced on February 5 that he is stepping down from his position as executive director of the American Humanist Association.

Speckhardt said that after 15 years at the top of the organization, it was time for him to “step down and make room for new leadership,” noting that the most prominent organizations representing atheists and freethinkers have never had non-White leadership.

“It is my emphatic hope that my seat is filled with a Black or Brown humanist because our movement has gone too long without such diversity at the helm and this would open the door for the AHA to truly achieve its potential as a humanist and anti-racist institution,” he said in a written statement.

In an interview, Speckhardt said his decision was prompted by racial equity training he has participated in and a lot of “humanistic soul searching, especially during the pandemic.”

“I feel like this is a chance for our movement to move forward if we can,” he said.

Speckhardt was hired by AHA 20 years ago and appointed executive director in 2005.

In that time, the organization quadrupled its membership and moved its headquarters into a building in the heart of the nation’s capital. He’s especially proud of his work to help create the Congressional Freethought Caucus in the US House of Representatives, which now has 14 members, he said.

Speckhardt has always been committed to social justice, he said, but he feels AHA could have done more to lead on that, and sooner. He hopes new leadership will take that “another level up” and continue to normalize the presence of humanists, atheists, and other nontheists in Congress—and eventually the White House.

Speckhardt will remain in his position until a new executive director is hired. —Religion News Service