



The Freethought Society News

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Boy Scouts of America Announce New Levels of Acceptance but Still Exclude Nontheists

by Margaret Downey

While the gay community is rejoicing and celebrating a change in the membership policies of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), I remain unimpressed and dissatisfied. Yes, the BSA's national office, as of July 27, 2015, allows troops to accept gays to join, participate and be hired, but their position forbidding the inclusion of nontheists has not changed. The exact wording released by BSA is:

Duty to God and duty to country, as expressed in the Scout Oath and the Scout Law, are the fundamental tenets of Scouting and always have been. It remains the position of the BSA that these ideals and principles are central to teaching young people to make better choices over their lifetimes.

BSA's national executive board includes 71 civic, corporate and church leaders. The more lenient membership rules that will allow participation of the gay community were adopted by almost 80 percent of BSA board members who participated in a conference call to vote. Not surprisingly, the Mormon Church was quick to denounce the decision. The following statement was circulated by the Mormon Church just minutes after the BSA change was announced:

"The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is deeply troubled by today's vote by the Boy Scouts of America National Executive Board."

In an effort to avoid a mass exodus of fundamental Christians and other conservative religious groups, BSA will allow church-based local units (approximately 70 percent of BSA troops) to exclude gay adults from voluntary leadership roles such as Scoutmasters, and Cub Scout den/pack leaders. The Mormon Church, however, remains "troubled." They are upset that gay people will be allowed to participate at all.

Throughout my 25-year battle to end all BSA discriminatory membership rules, BSA has made very slow progress. I applaud the overall acceptance of the gay community, but denounce the ongoing ban against openly nontheist Scouts. Nontheists cannot join BSA as Scouts, leaders, volunteers, or employees. We are not permitted to participate in BSA at any level. If BSA officials discover a nontheist amongst its ranks, immediate expulsion is sure to follow. Nontheists remain at the bottom of the socially-accepted totem pole. We are so far below the radar that discrimination against us is rarely mentioned in media coverage.

The Freethought Society (FS) has reported many incidents of this type of bigotry in the pages of this newsletter over the years. The stories we have covered are heartbreaking and exemplify the damage being done to both the victims of discrimination and those who observe the injustice. Too often, the media ignores discrimination against nontheists and praises BSA for having done away with their prejudices. It is our job to remind everyone that nontheists remain victims of unfair negative stereotyping and bigotry.

When BSA declared itself a private organization in 2000, they did so in order to be able to set their own membership criteria. That reclassification, from a "public" to a "private" organization should have come with penalties and recruitment changes, and BSA should have lost their Congressional Charter as a civic group. It is up to the nontheist community to prevent BSA from recruiting at public schools. If BSA only wants religious members, let them recruit only in private religious schools! Civil entities such as schools, national parks,

etc. should not provide assistance, support or endorsement for a group that discriminates in any way — against any citizen!

FS, along with many other national nontheist groups, will continue to protest against BSA, even though they have traveled halfway down the road of tolerance. There are miles to go, however, until they reach the campground of Diversity and Acceptance. I hope to see a time when nontheists are judged by our abilities — not our philosophical worldviews.

I am calling for an increase in efforts to educate the media, public school officials, and community members that BSA is still discriminating against a minority. We all must step up, speak out and not be complacent about being deemed unworthy to participate in the world's largest youth group. BSA's acceptance of the gay community happened because of many pressures that were placed on their national board and executives. We must apply the same strategies in order to eliminate discrimination against nontheists.

There are several efforts that must be made. To begin with, all nontheists should be informing their local public schools that BSA is not "out of the woods" in regard to being nondiscriminatory. BSA still adheres to exclusionary practices and many families will be affected.

We must keep pressuring BSA to eliminate their biases against the nontheist community. Their discriminatory membership policy must be pointed out to the public, media, public school system and businesses.

Find out if your public school system is allowing BSA on the grounds during school hours to recruit. They only want religious members, so they should recruit only in religious schools. FS can help and guide you in this important effort. We are available to attend school board meetings and can assist you with calls, email and letters.

If you see endorsement, support and entanglement between public school officials and BSA, take photos and be sure to keep evidence such as flyers and recruitment materials. Document dates, names and important information to help gather information to file a complete complaint.

FS joins the effort of the Openly Secular campaign to contact businesses that can help keep the pressure on BSA to drop their anti-nontheist membership policy. Below is a list of 23 companies that formerly revoked their funding from BSA due to the ban on gay leaders. Letters, emails and phone calls to them must be made. Please request that they continue withholding funds from BSA until the ban against open and proud nontheists is lifted.

Some points to make are that BSA explicitly excludes atheists from their membership, and their bylaws and policies state that a belief in God is foundational to becoming "the best kind of citizen." This statement suggests that secular boys and leaders are deficient in some way, even though 23 percent of Americans say they have no religious affiliation.

The companies who are reconsidering their support of BSA have nonreligious customers and employees. These companies have already proven a commitment to equality and this request simply asks them to show the same concern for boys from nontheist families.

Please take a moment to send a message that discrimination against a nontheist is wrong. Please add your voice to ours and contact the following companies to stress that BSA is still a bigoted and discriminatory organization

when they are unaccepting of the nontheist community. Please send a copy of the letter/email you send to FS:

Levi Strauss & Company

Attention: Charles V. Bergh
1155 Battery St.
San Francisco, CA 94111
(415) 501-7777

newsmediarequests@levi.com

J.P. Morgan

Attention: James Dimon
800 Connecticut Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20006
(212) 270-6000

American Airlines

Attention: Doug Parker
P. O. Box 619616
MD 5675 DFW Airport, TX 75261
(817) 967-1577

mediarelations@aa.com

Medtronic, Inc.

Attention: Omar Ishrak
c/o Cindy Resman
Communications Director
710 Medtronic Parkway
Minneapolis, MN 55432
(763) 505-0291

cindy.resman@medtronic.com

Wells Fargo

Attention: John G. Stumpf
c/o Oscar Suris
Director of Corporate Communications
420 Montgomery St.
San Francisco, CA 94104
(415) 396-3300

oscar.suris@wellsfargo.com

Portland General Gas and Electric

Attention: Jim Piro
P. O. Box 4404
Portland, OR 97208
(503) 464-8444

Hewlett Packard

Attention: Meg Whitman
c/o Sarah Pompei
Director of Global Media Relations
300 Hanover St.
Palo Alto, CA 94304
(650) 236-0954

sarah.pompei@hp.com

Caterpillar

Attention: Douglas R. Oberhelman
c/o Rachel Potts
U.S. & Corporate Media Relations Manager
501 Southwest Jefferson Ave.
Peoria, IL 61630

potts_rachel_a@cat.com

The Providence Journal
Attention: Karen Bordeleau
75 Fountain St.
Providence, RI 02902
(401) 277-7332

kbordele@providencejournal.com

Textron, Incorporated
Attention: Scott C. Donnelley
c/o Dave Sylvestre
Media Relations
40 Westminster St.
Providence, RI 02903
(401) 457-2362

dsylvestre@textron.com

IBM Corporation
Attention: Ginni Rometty
6710 Rockledge Dr.
Bethesda, MD 20817
(914) 499-6435

CVS/Pharmacy Stores
Attention: Larry J. Merlo
c/o Carolyn Castel
Vice President, Corporate Communications
One CVS Dr.
Woonsocket, RI 02895
(401) 770-5717

carolyn.castel@cvscaremark.com

Carrier Corporation
Attention: Mary Milmo
PO 4808, Carrier Parkway
Syracuse, NY 13221
[Website Contact Form](#)

Intel
Attention: Brian Krzanich
2200 Mission College Blvd.
Santa Clara, CA 95054
[Website Contact Form](#)

UPS
Attention: David P. Abney
55 Glenlake Parkway, NE
Atlanta, GA 30328
(404) 828-7123
pr@ups.com

Merck & Company
Attention: Kenneth C. Frazier
2000 Galloping Hill Rd., K1-4157
Kenilworth, NJ 07033
(908) 740-5633
mediarelations@merck.com

General Mills
Attention: Ken Powell
P. O. Box 9452
Minneapolis, MN 55440
(763) 764-6364
media.line@genmills.com

Ernst & Young
Attention: Mark Weinberger
c/o Amy Call Well
Director, Media Relations
1101 New York Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 327-6476

AT&T
Attention: Randall L. Stephenson
c/o Fletcher Cook
Corporate Issues
208 S. Akard St.
Dallas, TX 75202
fletcher.cook@att.com

Lockheed Martin
Attention: Marillyn Hewson
c/o Dan Nelson
Corporate Media Inquiries
6801 Rockledge Drive
Bethesda, MD 20817
(301) 897-6230
dan.nelson@lmco.com

Major League Soccer
Attention: Don Garber
c/o Dan Courtemanche
Executive Vice President, Communications
420 Fifth Ave., 7th Floor
New York, NY 10018
(212) 450-1225
dan.courtemanche@mlsoccer.com

Alcoa
Attention: Klaus Kleinfeld
c/o Monica Orbe
Director, Corporate Affairs
201 Isabella St.
Pittsburgh, PA 15212
(212) 836-2632

United Way
Attention: Brian Gallagher
701 N. Fairfax St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 683-7882
media@unitedway.org

Gays are allowed in this tent and can participate in all BSA activities.



Nontheists are not allowed in this tent or any other BSA activities.

