

# 7 National Secular Groups Join in Las Vegas to Protest Wells Fargo Discrimination Against Atheists

## Overview

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Seven national secular groups, meaning their members are either atheist or advocate for separation of church and state, gather this week with many others to protest Wells Fargo's history of discrimination. We protest an April 2014 incident where a Wells Fargo branch, at 1121 South Las Vegas Blvd, Las Vegas, denied notary public services to John Whiteside, an atheist and founder of a minority church whose mission rejects God. John is a decorated veteran who won the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism in combat. Discrimination against atheists, called atheophobia or secularphobia, is bigotry and should be rejected by society like it rejects homophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism. We ask Wells Fargo to apologize and train staff to oppose discrimination against atheists. We ask the Nevada Equal Rights Commission to conduct a proper investigation supporting the rights of nonbelievers.

## Who Are Secular People?

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Secular people can be religious, spiritual but nonreligious, or atheist, but they share three goals:

- Ending discrimination against those who don't believe in God
- Better separation of church and state
- More reason and science in government decision-making

## How We Know It Was Discrimination

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The National Notary Association's Public Code of Professional Responsibility prevents notaries from refusing to notarize a document that they personally don't like. Notaries simply check IDs. They are not lawyers or government watchdogs. "The Notary shall not refuse to perform a lawful and proper notarial act because of the signer's race, nationality, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, politics, lifestyle, age, disability, gender or sexual orientation, or because of disagreement with the statements or purpose of a lawful document."

Whiteside's ID was accepted and he had an account at Wells Fargo. The only explanation for his rejection is discrimination against his church's minority status and godless mission.

## Wells Fargo's History of Discrimination

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- In 2012, Wells Fargo paid \$175 million to settle a federal discrimination lawsuit saying Wells Fargo engaged in a pattern of "systemic discrimination" in which some 30,000 black and Hispanic borrowers across 36 states were charged higher fees and interest rates than their white counterparts.
- In 2014, Cook County sued Wells Fargo for pushing bad housing loans onto Chicago area minorities.
- In 2014, Los Angeles also sued for discriminatory lending against minorities.
- In 2014, Wells Fargo paid \$5 million in a federal settlement accusing the bank of discriminating against women who were pregnant or had recently given birth.
- In 2011, the State of Illinois also sued Wells Fargo for discriminatory lending against minorities.
- In Nevada, in 2014, Wells Fargo paid \$290,000 to four female bank tellers to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit, the terms including annual anti-discrimination training.

## Why This Is Important

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Discrimination by one employee at one branch is not that big a deal, but when John Whiteside asked Wells Fargo and the Nevada Equal Rights Commission to investigate, they stonewalled him. Unlike other minority groups, atheists who are discriminated against just aren't taken seriously. This elevates a single incident to a case of corporate-wide and state government support for discrimination. That's important.

## Is Discrimination Real?

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Why do religions get special privileges under the law? Because society says that religious organizations are better than secular nonprofits, and religious people are superior to atheists. Just last month, the star of Duck Dynasty fantasized about a brutal rape of atheists, and he was not fired from his show. Hate speech against atheists, called atheophobia or secularphobia, is bigotry and should be unacceptable.

According to Pew polls, 2% of Americans are openly atheist, and “secularists”, those who don’t belong to an organized religion or who wish for greater separation of church and state, number as much as 20% of the United States. We are too numerous to be hated and marginalized. Yet a 2011 study at the University of British Columbia and University of Oregon found that Americans hate atheists more than they hate rapists. These bigoted attitudes tear apart families and communities, reduce secularists to second class citizens under the law, and marginalize nonbelievers from public discourse. That must change.

## Who Are the Protesters?

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In 2010, friends of magician Penn Jillette, including John Whiteside, noted that religions get special privileges under the law. They thought, why not found our own church, give it a ridiculous name, The United Church of Bacon, and then ask for the same privileges? This would underscore the bias in society to call religious organizations and religious people better than secular organizations and secular people. Whiteside’s real, legal church now has 4,000 members and does not claim tax-free status. It accepts no donations, but in 2014 it raised nearly \$100,000 for other charities in autism, cancer, and secularism.

The protesters include Las Vegas and Hollywood performers, and leaders of 7 national secular groups:

- **American Atheists** is the premier organization fighting for the civil liberties of atheists and the total, absolute separation of government and religion. See [www.atheists.org](http://www.atheists.org).
- **American Humanist Association** strives to bring about a progressive society where being good without a god is an accepted and respected way to live life. See [www.americanhumanist.org](http://www.americanhumanist.org).
- **Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers** educates and trains military and civilian communities about issues relating to nonbelievers in the US Armed Forces. [www.militaryatheists.org](http://www.militaryatheists.org).
- **Secular Student Alliance** empowers secular students to proudly express their identity, build welcoming communities, and promote secular values. See [www.secularstudents.org](http://www.secularstudents.org).
- **Secular Coalition for America** lobbies Congress on behalf of secular people. [www.secular.org](http://www.secular.org)
- **Secular Policy Institute** is the world’s largest secular think tank and world’s largest coalition of secular groups. See [www.secularpolicyinstitute.net](http://www.secularpolicyinstitute.net).
- **United Church of Bacon** at [www.unitedchurchofbacon.org](http://www.unitedchurchofbacon.org)

## Our Goals

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We ask Wells Fargo for an apology, to affirm that they won’t discriminate against atheists or minority faiths, and to include atheists as a protected minority in their anti-discrimination training for staff. We ask the Nevada Equal Rights Commission to affirm that atheists and minority churches should be protected from discrimination and to investigate this incident beyond a perfunctory glance.

## What Should Supporters Do?

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- Sign our petition at [www.unitedchurchofbacon.org](http://www.unitedchurchofbacon.org) to draw attention to discrimination.
- Contact John Whiteside through the website to offer support.
- Close your Wells Fargo account and tell them why.
- Be proud of your nonbelief. Speak openly to friends and your community. Join a secular group.

## Media Contacts

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