For those who call themselves humanists, there tends to be a passion in doing so. Perhaps this is the case because it is a positive philosophy of life; a forward-thinking way of living; a choice about how to treat yourself, others, and the world. Being a humanist often means being socially progressive and taking positions about issues such as women’s reproductive rights, the environment, animal rights, secular government, and civil and equal rights. Humanists are proud of their life choices and beliefs; they want others to know and understand humanism, and why it is so important in their lives. However, this passion and desire to share with others has not translated well into public policy. The American Humanist Association (AHA), which has been around for more than seventy years, has several articles on its website, including Humanist Manifesto III, which outline what humanism means and what it is to be a humanist. Although humanism is not well understood by the general public, there are self-professed humanists serving in political office, for example, in the US Congress, and as of this publication, several state legislators across the United States have self-identified as humanist or nonreligious, an excellent sign of progress.
What Do Humanists Know about Politics?

If you identify as a humanist as you read this, can you name the elected officials representing you? For US readers, your US representative? Your state representatives? Your mayor? Your city council member or similar local representative? Do you know who represents you on your local school board? If you can answer “yes” to each question, excellent—and you are well ahead of not only most US citizens, but most US humanists. If you cannot name the previous political figures, why not? These are the people who have been elected and usually are paid to represent you at every level of government about policies related to your tax dollars, which decide what children are taught in school, plan economic and business strategies, and determine many more vital public issues. But even more importantly, do any of these public and elected officials know who you are? If the persons elected into public office (or sometimes appointed) do not know who you are, how can they fairly and accurately represent you? It is incumbent on constituents to ensure that elected public officials know who they are representing. The squeaky wheel in public policy gets the attention. This is the key to why humanists are not having a significant impact on public policy that equals their numbers in society and why the general public has little understanding of humanism in general.

Humanism and humanists often lend themselves to helping other causes—which is generous and selfless. But in doing so, humanists dilute their ability to specifically lobby and advocate for humanism itself. In order to see humanism in public policy as often as the words “atheism” and “atheists,” humanists need to be a bit more selfish with their activism and advocacy. To make public officials and the general public understand the value of having humanists support an issue, humanists need to demonstrate and assert the value of humanism first and above other social issues. This is not to say that humanists should give up on being part of other movements or stop volunteering or supporting issues and causes they are passionate about. It does mean that humanists