



Reprinted from Moment Magazine, January/February 2009, "Ask the Rabbis" column

Should the U.S. Have a Chief Rabbi?

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

Years ago at Purim I pulled out my rabbinic robe, long-relegated to the closet, and donned a headdress of feathers, posing perhaps a bit irreverently, as a Native American. When asked who I was, I said, "I'm the chief rabbi of New York."

If that was silly, the possibility of a chief rabbi of the United States is more fanciful, and also undesirable and unrealistic. Not just in America, but also around the globe, we are many Jewish cultures with a range of practices, beliefs and identifications. No one rabbi, or lay leader for that matter, could possibly inspire or represent all of us. Just consider the noisy dissent when any Jewish organization purports to express the Jewish position on any matter.

Our multiple voices must be expressed, not just within the Jewish community, but also within our country. However, in the U.S. public square, the largest minority—secularists—is often unacknowledged, if not condemned. Hopefully, President Barack Obama will build bridges to this community, too.