

Annual Report from the Co-Presidents Dan Barker & Annie Laurie Gaylor

# 41<sup>st</sup> Freedom From Religion Foundation Year in Review — 2019

## We're 30,000+ 'happy heathens'

FFRF, staying stable at slightly more than 30,000-plus current, dues-paying members, has been informed by Humanists International (formerly IHEU) that we're the third-largest nonreligious organization in the world! (The two largest are Norwegian Humanists and British Humanists.)

FFRF has not only received its 10th consecutive four-star evaluation this fall from Charity Navigator (among only 2 percent of charities), but this fall received a perfect score! "Less than 1 percent of the thousands of charities rated by Charity Navigator have earned perfect scores," says its website. "This exceptional designation from



Charity Navigator sets Freedom From Religion Foundation apart from its peers and demonstrates to the public its trustworthiness."

Below are highlights and metrics of FFRF's accomplishments in 2019, as this goes to press in mid-November. Unless otherwise noted, stats reflect the first 10 months of 2019.

## FFRF brings you a little irreverence



Because we can use a lot less religion and a lot more humor, FFRF published a new book in 2019, *Cartoons for the Irreverent*, posthumously celebrating the wit of editorial cartoonist Don Addis, the longtime cartoonist for the St. Petersburg Times. If you can make someone laugh about a controversial subject, aren't you halfway there to

converting them to your point of view? This unique collection of cartoons by Don Addis will bring a smile, while making you think. As with all FFRF books and products, it can be ordered via [ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop).

## FFRF awards record \$85,450 in student scholarships

FFRF gave a record number of cash scholarships in 2019 to freethinking students in five distinct essay competitions. Seeking to reach a new generation of prospective attorneys, FFRF debuted a fifth competition this year geared at law students. These scholarships are FFRF's investments in the future of freethought.

This year, the William J. Schultz Memorial Scholarship for college-bound high school seniors helped a total of 19 winners (including nine \$200 honorable mentions) with \$17,750 in prizes. Our David Hudak Essay Contest for Students of Color awarded 30 college students

### 2019 High School Students Essay Contest Winners



(including 17 honorable mentions), paying out \$20,850 in award money. Our college competition, a memorial to Michael Hakeem, a sociology professor, awarded a total

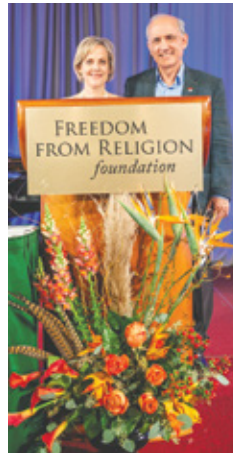


Photo by Ingrid Laas

of \$17,750 in scholarships to 16 college students. **Generous Lifetime Member Professor Brian Bolton personally sponsored his 10th year** of FFRF's graduate student essay competition, which had 19 winners and a total of \$17,850 in prizes. Six law students won our inaugural law school competition, with a total of \$11,250 in scholarships.

Essays are published in *Freethought Today*.

## FFRF gives almost \$30,000 in tuition relief scholarships

Thanks to the stupendous generosity of member **Lance Bredvold**, FFRF has debuted a new tuition relief scholarship for needy freethinking students. This fall, FFRF awarded a total of \$18,500 scholarships to five first-year college students.

Additionally, FFRF's **Catherine Fahringer Student Activist Award** of \$10,000 continued to underwrite the annual Black Skeptics of Los Angeles scholarships, given to students of color or disadvantaged students who are first in their families to go to college. Four students received each \$2,500 based on merit and need.



## \$5,000 in student activist awards

- **Thomas Kendrick Student Activist \$500 Awardee Alex McDaniel**, 6, who protested mandatory Pledge of Allegiance in his Illinois kindergarten class.

- **"Strong Backbone" Student Activist \$1,000 Awardee**, a recent Michigan grad, who protested performing as part of her school chorus at multiple churches.

- **\$2,000 Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Awardee Zoe Dean**, 17, who got into trouble for blowing the whistle on proselytizing in her Kentucky biology class.

- **Al Luneman \$1,500 Student Activist Awardee Sydney Kelly**, of North Carolina, who bravely protested graduation prayers.

## FFRF non-litigation legal work ends over 200 state/church entanglements

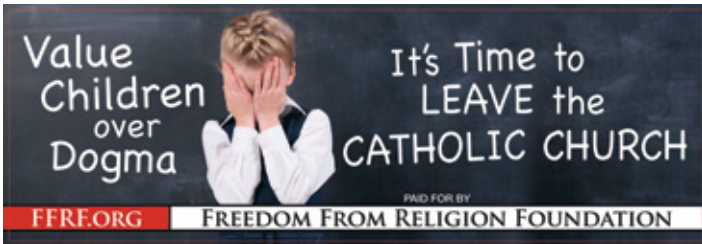


Photo by Chris Line

Legal Director **Rebecca Markert** has overseen a restructuring of our legal department, composed of 10 attorneys and two legal assistants, into three teams: Intake, Litigation and Education/In-house. Joining the intake team overseen by attorney **Maddy Ziegler** is **Chris Line**, who started as an intern, and served a productive two-year legal fellowship.



Photo by Ingrid Laas



Our newest legal fellows (short-term positions created for new law school grads) are **Dante Harootunian**, our Patrick O'Reiley Legal Fellow, and **Brendan Johnson**, our Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellow. We're excited that former fellow **Colin McNamara** has joined the American Humanist Association staff! Since the last convention, FFRF intake has written nearly 900 individual complaint letters. From October 2018 - October 2019, **FFRF ended 239 significant non-litigation violations** through education. A majority involve stopping religion in public schools. FFRF's newspaper Freethought Today reports victories and major complaints.

### Lots of FFRF litigation victories

**FFRF v. Chino Valley (Calif.) Unified School District.** FFRF won a firm victory in our challenge of over-the-top religion, prayer, bible reading and proselytizing at school board meetings. Our district level victory was affirmed by a three-judge panel at the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The courts awarded FFRF and its attorney nearly \$300,000 in fees and costs.



**FFRF v. Mercer County Bd. of Education (W.Va.).** Our lawsuit against egregiously unconstitutional "Bible in the Schools" classes halted the classes, but FFRF is still seeking assurances the classes will not resume. The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in our favor.

**FFRF v. Morris County.** In a huge win, the Supreme Court this year refused to hear an appeal of FFRF's unanimous victory before the New Jersey Supreme Court, barring public grants of tax dollars to repair churches. We were represented in that appeal by renowned legal scholar Erwin Chemerinsky.

**Williamson et al. v. Brevard Co. (Fla.).** FFRF, AU, the ACLU and ACLU of Florida have successfully challenged the practice by the Brevard County Board of County Commissioners of discriminating against nontheists seeking to deliver solemnizing messages to start meetings. The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in July 2019 that the commissioners' practice is unconstitutional. The victory is final!

FFRF has five ongoing cases. This past year, we are seeing the effects of almost 100 appointments by Trump to the federal judiciary, with four court losses, one of which is just in round one.



### FFRF advertising makes news and waves

In a media coup, FFRF was able to place **FFRF's Ron Reagan TV commercial during the Democratic debate on CNN on Oct. 15**, where it became the top trending search on Google. Fox News reported: "Ron Reagan was not on stage Tuesday night for the Democratic



presidential primary debate, but his provocative plug for a prominent atheist group earned him the top spot on Google after he declared himself a 'lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in hell.'

FFRF followed that with another historic ad campaign, running the first nontheistic commercials during **"60 Minutes" three Sundays in a row** through mid-November, featuring **FFRF's Honorary President Steven Pinker, author of *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Science, Reason, Humanism and Progress***. Earlier in the fall, we signed up many new members from a run of the Reagan commercial for two weeks on **"The Daily Show with Trevor Noah,"** made possible by generous donor **Joel B. Landon**.

**FFRF got significant mileage with its billboards in 2019.** (See graphics throughout.) Among them: a billboard campaign in Chicago exposing the Catholic Church's child sex abuse scandal, underwritten by an FFRF member who was himself a child victim.

Utilizing the creative genius of **Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Steve Benson**, FFRF turned several of Steve's cartoons into successful billboards, including protests of passage of laws mandating "In God We Trust" in public schools in South Dakota and Kentucky. We are placing a billboard utilizing Steve's poignant "Handmaid's Tale"-esque graphic on a billboard in Madison, Wis. We used that graphic for ads in The New York Times, The Nation, Ms., and The Progressive, following passage of religiously inspired bans on abortion in multiple states. Working with **Aleta Ledendecker and our East Tennessee chapter**, we placed our iconic "God & Government a Dangerous Mix" billboard message in Maryville, Tenn. See our two freethinking students of color billboards, one posted in Knoxville, Tenn.; the other in Palo Alto.

### Strategic Response Team & lobbying

**FFRF's Strategic Response Team (SRT)**, headed by **attorney Andrew L. Seidel**, works to lobby, track and educate about pending legislation, to shape public opinion with articles and editorials, to draft statements, press releases and action alerts, and stop imminent state/church violations needing immediate action.

An exciting development was the hiring of **FFRF's first lobbyist, FFRF Director of Governmental Affairs Mark Dann, working for you full-time in D.C.** We warmly thank **Stephen and Diane Uhl** for their extraordinary support of this endeavor and FFRF's Educate Congress Campaign. Mark convinced the Senate to insert a provision into the Health and Human Services Appropriation bill that directs government agencies to



Photo by Chris Line

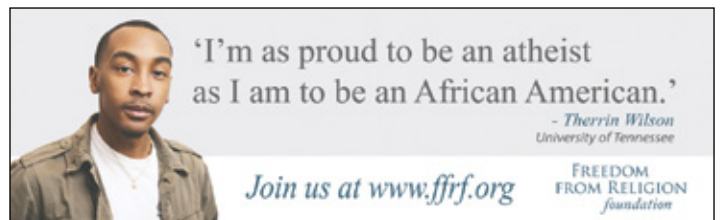
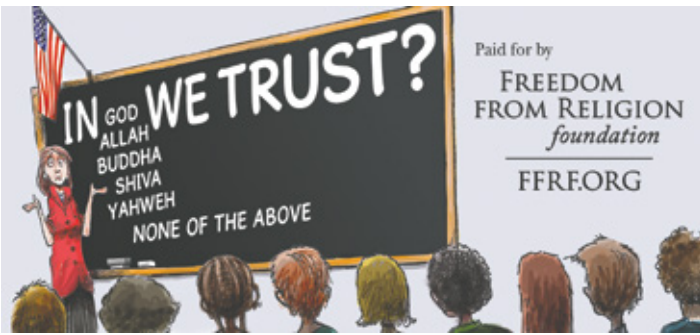


Photo by Chris Line



coordinate with secular providers for addiction recovery. With his help, SRT had **67 meetings with legislators** on Capitol Hill.

Mark and FFRF hosted a lovely reception on Capitol Hill with the Congressional Freethought Caucus featuring special guest



**Rafida Bonya Ahmed**, who survived a street attack by Islamist terrorists in Bangladesh that killed her husband, **prominent atheist Avijit Roy**, in 2015. **U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman** spoke.

Since the last convention, the SRT team released 37 statements, 53 press releases, 55 articles, op-eds, blogs or letters to the editor.

Our official ethics complaint against Judge Tammy Kemp for handing convicted defendant Amber Guyger a bible generated more than 500 media stories and trended on Twitter.

The 77 action alerts, ably overseen by Editorial Assistant **Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey**, connected FFRF supporters and legislators 102,669 times, a 500 percent increase over last year. **FFRF Attorney Ryan Jayne** tracked and analyzed 447 bills in 48 states and federally.

## FFRF is in print, over the airwaves and online

**Freethought Today**, which comes out 10 times a year, has been publishing since 1984, and is edited by veteran newsman **PJ Slinger**. It is available as a hard copy or digitally.

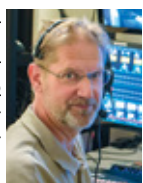


Photo by Chris Line

We keep our **video director Bruce Johnson** busy, with one weekly TV show, a near weekly Facebook Live! program, and a weekly "Newsbite" video (all available on FFRF's YouTube channel).

**"Freethought Matters" TV show is airing now in 12 cities, 27 percent of the U.S. market!** FFRF took

its half-hour talk show format program from nine to 12 major cities and will continue broadcasting next year. Watch Sunday mornings in the major markets (or Sunday night in Madison, Wis.) or you can catch the new shows by each Friday on **FFRF's YouTube Channel**.



Photo by Chris Line



**"FFRF's Ask an Atheist" Facebook Live!** continues to feature FFRF's diverse, talented staff, plus occasional guests, tackling nontheistic or legal topics and questions. The program runs live on Facebook every Wednesday at noon Central, except the last Wednesday of the month.

**FFRF's weekly "Newsbite" and Weekly Wrap.** To help make it easy for you to keep up with everything FFRF does, **FFRF Director of Communications Amit Pal** writes an appealing "cheat sheet" we call the "weekly wrap," emailed to members every Friday. The wrap hypes our weekly **"Newsbite,"** a short video featuring an FFRF staff member giving the inside scoop on a timely FFRF development. Thanks to Bruce for all that production value.

**'Freethought Radio'** with irreverent views, news, music and interviews, hosted weekly by Dan and Annie Laurie, finished its 13<sup>th</sup> lucky year on the air (**Janesville and Madison, Wis., Columbia, Mo., College Station/Bryant, Texas, Ithaca/Watkins Glen, N.Y., Philadelphia, WOOM-LP, Vermont-New Hampshire's "Black Sheep Radio"**). As a podcast, the program had 355,333 downloads in the first 10 months of 2019, with 8,410,971 downloads since its beginning in mid-2006. Listen at [ffrf.org/radio](http://ffrf.org/radio) or through your favorite podcast provider. Our TV, Facebook and radio shows are produced in the **Stephen Uhl Friendly Atheist Studio** in Freethought Hall, which was enlarged at the beginning of the year.

## FFRF stays in the news!

FFRF's Director of Communications **Amit Pal** has written or overseen 261 news releases about FFRF educational or legal actions, with assistance from **Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey** and the Strategic Response Team. Those press releases generated more than **1,455 individual news stories** plus **151 local and regional TV news segments**. We link to all news and TV coverage about FFRF at [ffrf.org/news/media](http://ffrf.org/news/media).

Publicist **Lauryn Seering** reports that FFRF posted **54 Freethought Now! blogs**, by staff members hosted by Patheos, at: [patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow/](http://patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow/). FFRF has more than **472,506 Facebook** followers, **63,994 Twitter** followers, and **20,766 YouTube** subscribers. We've had **573,297** views of our videos, with **7,479,536** total minutes watched so far in 2019.

## Record Outreach – speaking, campus & events

**FFRF staff made a record 74 appearances so far in 2019, in 21 states, D.C., Puerto Rico** plus five other countries: Iceland, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and United Kingdom. FFRF Co-President Dan Barker had 38 speaking engagements, including six debates. Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel made 20 appearances, most connected with the exciting debut of his book, published by Sterling Publishing, *Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism is Un-American*. (FFRF, in a campaign underwritten by generous **Brian Bolton**, also sent each member of Congress a copy of his book.) Andrew's state/church debate at the University of Louisville was **broadcast on C-SPAN2 – a first for FFRF!** Other attorneys also spoke around the country.



FFRF again sponsored a legal panel, at **the Religion News Association's annual convention** in Las Vegas in September, reaching many religion reporters. The timely topic: "The Rise of Christian Nationalism." Presenters included **FFRF's Andrew Seidel**, journalist and author **Katherine Stewart** and RNA's national reporter **Jack Jenkins**, with FFRF Communications Director **Amit Pal** moderating. Amit also participated in a sparks-flying panel on the rise of Hindu nationalism.



FFRF was proudly the largest financial co-sponsor of the **first Women of Color Beyond Belief conference** in Chicago Oct. 4-6, put on by **Black Nonbelievers President Mandisa Thomas** and other organizers, and will co-sponsor next year's conference as well. We also have agreed to be a financial cosponsor for the first open-to-the-public convention of **Ex-Muslims of North America**, planned for summer 2020. FFRF helped sponsor an international event in Amsterdam, "Celebrating Dissent," in late summer, where Annie Laurie spoke.

### 23 chapters around the United States

FFRF is pleased to announce three new chapters (for a total of 23). Welcome to **Central Indiana**, directed by Ryan Cadwell; **DFW Freedom From Religion** (Dallas), directed by Randall Theo, and **Valley of the Sun** (Phoenix-area), directed by Zenaido Quintana. FFRF salutes the hardworking volunteers who run and participate in all chapters. Please check here to see if you can get involved in one in your area: [ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters](http://ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters)

### 2019 Boards/Staff

FFRF's Executive Board of Directors are: **Dan Barker** (co-president, half a vote), **Stef Moritz**, secretary; **Cheryl Kolbe**, director at large; **Sue Kocher**, director at large; **Annie Laurie Gaylor** (co-president, half a vote), **Stephen Hirtle**, chair, **Todd Peissig**, director at large, **Steve Salemsen**, treasurer; **James Zerwick**, director at large, and **Mike Cermak**, director at large.

**FFRF's State Representatives are:** Bob Arekapudi, IL, Daniel Barker, WI, Darrell Barker, WA, Charles Bender, IN, Sheri Bender, IN, Lance Bredvold, MT, Robin Buckallew, NE, Chris Calvey, CO, Tom Cara, IL, Fairfid Caudle, NY, Dianne Centa, OH, Michael Cermak, PA, Sheridan Chapin, NY, Dianne Cooper, IA, Margaret Downey, PA, Ken Eck, MN, Zenos Frudakis, PA, Annie Laurie Gaylor, WI, Kevin Gough, CT, Ed Hensley, KY, Mikel Hensley, KY, Stephen Hirtle, PA, Cheryl Hofbauer, IL, Ken Hofbauer, IL, George Iddon, WA; Julie Iddon, WA, Linda Josheff, WI, Sue Kocher, NC, Cheryl Kolbe, OR; Marc-Andre Lachance, ON, Aleta Ledendecker, TN, Philip Lentz, AZ, Steven Lowe, DC; Douglas Marshall, MI; Rob Moore, WI; Stefanie Moritz, WI, Paul Novak, IA, Todd Peissig, WI, Randy Pelton, OH; Judy Saint, CA, Steve Salemsen, WI, Tom Schottmiller, PA, Sue Schuetz, WI; Nick Sheridan, MD; Jane Shoup, WI, Stefan Shoup, WI, Steve Solomon, MO; Claudette St.Pierre, CO; Bonnie Stormo, SD, Gary Stormo, SD, Steve Trunk, CA, Tom Waddell, ME, David Williamson, FL, Jocelyn Williamson, FL, and James Zerwick, WI.

**FFRF's distinguished Honorary Directors.** Harvard's **Steven Pinker**, author of *Enlightenment Now*, serves as honorary president. Other distinguished honorary directors are: **Sen. B. Carroll**, **Jerry Coyne**, **Richard Dawkins**, **Daniel C. Dennett**, **Ernie Harburg**, **Jennifer Michael Hecht**, **Susan Jacoby**, **Robin Morgan**, **Mike Newdow**, **Katha Pollitt**, **Ron Reagan**, **Robert Sapolsky**, **Edward Sorel** and **Julia Sweeney**.

**FFRF Staff.** FFRF's staff of 26 full-time plus two part-time workers is overseen by **Director of Operations Lisa Strand**. **Kristina Daleiden**, who was legal assistant last year, returned to her previous post as programs manager after we "lost" **Monica Schwartz** to grad school in the fall. We just welcomed as our new second legal assistant **Greta Martens**. **Astoria Goldsby**



Lisa Strand



Astoria Goldsby

became our enthusiastic new store manager after **Ben Tolle** also returned to school. Cartoonist and new grad **Kati Treu** continues to provide occasional clerical and amazing graphic help (stay tuned).

**Legal interns.** Our four summer law student interns were: **Joshua Engelkemier** and **Alex Schmidt**, both University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School; **Derek Hein**, Marquette, and **Ryan Shaner**, Chicago-Kent College of Law. Undergrad legal interns included **Mendel Jimenez** from Vassar and **Eleanor Pressler**, UW-Madison, who is continuing her internship this fall. Both received summer stipends thanks to a **scholarship generously endowed by Dr. Paul Redleaf**. Our spring undergrad legal intern was **Liana McGregor**, UW-Madison.



Photo by Chris Line

**Volunteers.** FFRF thanks student essay readers and other office volunteers **Don Ardell**, **Linda Aten**, **Jeff Brinkman**, **Bill Dunn**, **Judy Jacobs**, **Linda Josheff**, **Bill Keys**, **Vince Jenkins**, **Dan Kettner**, **David Petrashek**, **Jessica Kopish**, **Kathy Kunz**, **Katya Maes**, **Gloria Marquardt**, **Jerry Ryan**, **Sue Schuetz** and **Karen Lee Weidig**. Hardworking convention volunteers included **Todd Peissig** and **Eric Lawrence**.

### Convention Recap – 42<sup>nd</sup> Convo Oct. 18-20, 2019, Madison, Wis. San Antonio, here we come!



Steve Benson drawing Rachel Laser.



U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan.

FFRF's 42nd annual national convention in Madison, Wis., Oct. 18-20 attracted 660 individuals from 38 states, D.C. and Canada. Honorees included **U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan**, who declared he was "one of us" during his talk; **American United's new president, Rachel Laser**, **Black Nonbelievers founder Mandisa Thomas**, **Friendly Atheist Hemant Mehta** and **Center for Reproductive Rights President Nancy Northup**. **Author Sarah Vowell** was memorably interviewed by Co-President Dan Barker. Videos of most speeches may be viewed online: [ffrf.org/convention2019](http://ffrf.org/convention2019) and most convention speech transcripts will run in Freethought Today.

We hope to see you next year in **San Antonio during the weekend of Nov. 13-15, 2020**, where we've already lined up a phenomenal roster of speakers. (Look for exciting announcements in January!)

Photo by Ingrid Laas