

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

42nd Freedom From Religion Foundation Year in Review — 2020

FFRF Tops 33,000 Members

We reached an all-time high this fall of more than 33,000 dues-paying members. All national surveys show the steady growth of the “Nones,” with Pew reporting that secular Americans made up 28 percent of registered voters — nearly double what it was 10 years ago. This secular surge, which FFRF has played a pivotal role in, is heartening. As FFRF’s slogan has maintained for more than 40 years: *Freedom depends on freethinkers.*

Who Are FFRF Members? 2020 Membership Survey

Getting to know you. Over 12,000 of you responded to our membership survey! We learned that the typical FFRF member is a retired, married man, 50 or older, and is a self-described atheist with a four-year college degree. You likely left Protestantism because “religion doesn’t make sense” and are a first-generation freethinker. Our typical member has spoken out about state/church entanglements and freely discusses lack of religion.

FFRF’ers are an educated bunch: 80% have at least one four-year degree (compared to 34% of the general population) and 18% are in the teaching profession or retired from it (compared to 2% of the population). Fully 21% are retired or active U.S. military (compared to 8% of the population). Other interesting facts: 13% are vegetarians or vegan, and 33% engage in regular volunteer work.

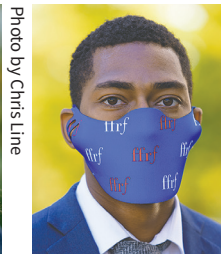
Secular voter poll. We took advantage of the election year to ask broader questions. We found that 98% of you are registered voters. The data shows with startling clarity that nonbelievers embrace a



humanistic social policy in vastly higher numbers than the general U.S. population, on hot-button issues such as abortion, LGBTQ rights, women’s rights, death with dignity and even many economic issues. Support for prison/police reform, universal health care, gun safety, reduced or free public college tuition all garnered at least 80% support. View details here: bit.ly/2IfADtR



“In Science I trust” face mask modeled by Legal Director Rebecca Markert.



New Legal Fellow Joseph McDonald models another FFRF face mask.

2020 Legal Accomplishments

New lawsuit challenges religious test to vote. FFRF filed suit in October over a mandatory religious oath, “So help me God,” on an Alabama voter registration form. This federal lawsuit got international coverage.

Still winning in the courts. FFRF won three final victories this year:

- In February, FFRF, with Americans United and the ACLU, **put an end to a discriminatory religious invocation policy in Brevard Co., Fla.**

Plaintiffs were Florida activists and humanist groups, plus our chapter, The Central Florida Freethought Community, directed by plaintiff **David Williamson**, who’d been denied the right as nontheists to give freethought invocations to start county meetings. After we won, the county dropped invocations!

- In April, FFRF and Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington settled our lawsuit with HUD against Secretary Ben Carson, who had dodged **records requests related to a White House bible study.** HUD agreed to offer two sessions of in-person mandatory fee waiver training and to issue updated fee waiver guidance for employees. Here’s to more sunshine!

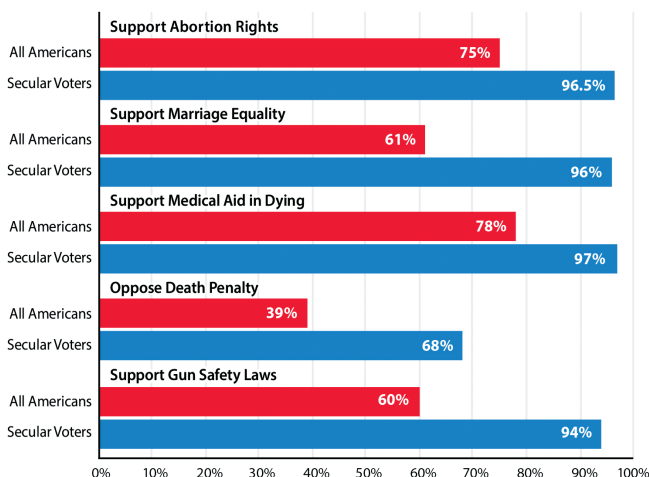
- In August, FFRF and Humanistas Seculares de Puerto Rico enjoyed a rapid victory over a federal lawsuit filed just this year, **stopping a mandatory, hour-long, biweekly Christian prayer led by teachers** at an elementary school. Our secular humanist plaintiff’s children were threatened with tardy marks for skipping the prayers. The settlement requires the Department of Education to circulate a memo to all public school employees about nondiscrimination and secular education, plus train all employees at the school. ¡Arriba!

Our plaintiff Ben Hart, FFRF’s 2020 Freethinker of the Year, finally received his previously censored personalized



2020 Freethinker of the Year Ben Hart.

Views on Hot-Button Social Issues
Secular Voters vs. All Americans



license plate (preprinted with “In God We Trust”) saying “IM GOD” from the State of Kentucky. FFRF and the ACLU of Kentucky won the lawsuit in November 2019. Case closed!

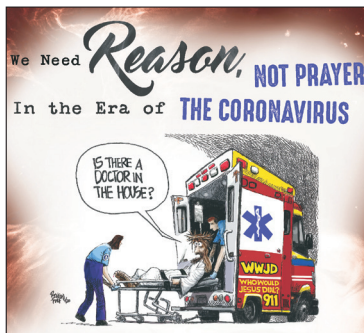
Six ongoing cases continue against 1) Texas Gov. Greg Abbott for censoring FFRF’s Bill of Rights nativity display (we’re winning), 2) bible classes in West Virginia schools (we’ve stopped them), 3) a “Night of Prayer” in a Kentucky jail, 4) a Ten Commandments monument in front of the Arkansas Capitol, 5) recitation of the Lord’s Prayer by the city council in Parkersburg, W.Va., and 6) courtroom prayers by a Texas justice of the peace.

Acting on many state/church complaints. From September 2019 to Sept. 30, 2020, the legal staff has written **844 complaint letters** to public officials over First Amendment violations (512 of them in 2020 through October). FFRF also sent hundreds of letters in six “mass mailings” to public officials. The majority involve religion in the public schools. So far we’ve handled **1,610** requests for help.

Nonlitigation Victories. We achieved roughly **230 significant nonlitigation victories.** So far in 2020, FFRF has won **183 victories.** These include multiple scrubblings of religion from governmental/school Facebook or website postings, removal of a bible display from a library playground, barring Gideon distribution of bibles to young students, and halting public funds to religion.

Our legal department of 10 attorneys (including two short-term legal fellows) plus two legal assistants is ably overseen by **Legal Director Rebecca Markert.** Recent law-school grad **Joseph McDonald** is our new Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow, replacing **Dante Harootunian**, who took a federal clerkship. **Stephanie Dyer** joined us as a new legal assistant late this fall.

FFRF advertising Makes News and Waves



The artwork for these recent New York Times Ads was created by editorial cartoonist Steve Benson.



Ron Reagan in *Le Devoir*.

FFRF continued to place the powerful 30-second TV spot by the obliging Ron (“unabashed atheist ... not afraid of burning in hell”) Reagan during several major Democratic debates on CNN, where once again it trended over social media. Ron gave a fascinating interview to the Quebecois daily, *Le Devoir*, about his views. The ad appeared as finances permitted several times this year on MSNBC’s “Rachel Maddow Show,” attracting many new members.

FFRF ran striking ads in The New York Times, The Nation, The Progressive and Scientific American — all excellent sources to reach new members and supporters and to educate the public. [See some of the graphics from these ads above.]

Strategic Response Team



FFRF’s Strategic Response Team modeling gift SRT jackets.

It’s been a busy year for FFRF’s Strategic Response Team (SRT), energetically headed by FFRF Attorney Andrew L. Seidel, which lobbies, tracks and educates about pending legislation, shapes public opinion with editorials, drafts statements and action alerts, and responds to imminent state/church violations. FFRF was approved this year for membership in the influential **Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.** SRT’s three full-time members are Andrew, Attorney Ryan Jayne and Director of Governmental Affairs Mark Dann, who is based in D.C. SRT works with editorial, executive and legal staff, particularly editorial assistant Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey, who handles Action Alerts.

SRT responded to multiple COVID-19 state/church entanglements, drafting a memo sent to all governors and many officials advising them not to exempt religious gatherings from COVID-19 mandates; protested tax monies going to churches under Paycheck Protection Project, and exposed secret conference calls between the Trump administration and evangelical supporters on funneling money in their direction.

Since last October, SRT drafted more than **90 public statements** or press releases, 39 articles, op-eds, blogs or letters to the editor, commented on **20 formal rule changes** proposed by the Trump Administration and sent more than **120 action alerts**, which connected FFRF’ers with elected representatives **175,745** times. Ryan Jayne tracked and analyzed nearly 500 bills, most at the state level. SRT had **72 meetings (mostly remote) with legislators** on Capitol Hill. Mark worked in tandem with the Congressional Freethought Caucus on five key bills that either passed the House or committee, secured as a Caucus event guest the journalist Katherine Stewart, author of *The Power Worshippers*, and booked the distinguished **U.S. Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton** to appear on FFRF’s TV show.

Major actions included opposing Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s Commission on Unalienable Rights and fighting Amy Coney Barrett and other Christian Nationalist judicial nominees. Highlights included writing to the feds to protest unconstitutional funding for a “Hookers for Jesus” program and complaining about Kanye West performing a church service in a jail, a complaint that went viral. “We’ve shown the value and need for a nimble unit that understands FFRF’s missions, viewpoint, and which can swiftly counterpunch Christian Nationalists,” says Andrew.

FFRF Invests in the Future — Over \$100,000 in Scholarships to Freethinking Students in 2020

We consider our scholarships to freethinking students to be among our most important achievements—an investment in the future of freethought. We’re delighted to have seen record submissions this year.

\$29,000 in Scholarships to David Hudak Memorial Students of Color 2020 Winners



Many Student Essays Awarded in Six Contests. FFRF is pleased to be partnering with Humanistas Seculares De Puerto Rico in providing more than **\$16,000 in cash scholarships for Puerto Rican Students** with 10 major winners and four honorable mentions. FFRF awarded \$28,150 to 16 major winners and nine honorable mentions in its **David Hudak Memorial Students of Color Essay Competition**; \$23,650 to 29 ongoing college students in the 2020 **Michael Hakeem Memorial Essay Contest**; \$9,500 divided among four law students in the 2020 **Cornelius Vanderbroek Memorial Essay Contest for Law Students**; and \$26,100 to 15 major winners and 16 honorable mentions in its **William Schulz Memorial High School Essay** contest. (The **Brian Bolton Grad School Contest** is shortly to be announced.)

Student Activist Awards. FFRF gave \$1,000 each in **Cliff Richards Memorial Scholarships** to three nonreligious students from **Historically Black Colleges and Universities**. Thanks to grants from the **Yip Harburg Lyric Foundation**, FFRF announced its first three **Yip Harburg Youth Activist Award** winners, going to three diverse students who are not religious and are majoring in the arts. These were given in partnership with the Secular Student Alliance. FFRF's **Strong Backbone Student Activist Award** this year, generously contributed by an octogenarian FFRF'er, was \$1,000 to **Dustin Daniels**, a high-school sophomore who bravely opposed a Ten Commandments plaque inside his Tennessee school.

\$20,000+ in Tuition Relief Scholarships. FFRF awarded \$5,000 each to four students, in its second annual distribution of the **Forward Freethought Tuition Relief Scholarships** funded by generous FFRF benefactor Lance Bredvold. In 2020, the impressive student winners, all first in their families to attend college, were selected by **Black Skeptics Los Angeles**. Additionally, BSLA and FFRF partnered in giving the first-ever **Lorraine Hansberry Scholarships** to five recently graduated humanist students.

FFRF Makes Its Own Media

Freethought Today newspaper. We congratulate Freethought Today editor **PJ Slinger** and FFRF Graphic Artist **Roger Daleiden** for not missing a deadline as we “went remote” with production. Ditto with “FFRF’s Ask an Atheist” Facebook Live — Multimedia Producer **Bruce Johnson**, with graphics by **Jake Swenson**, produced the live show with almost exclusively remote guests and hosts. Watch on Wednesdays at noon Central or catch on FFRF’s YouTube channel.

“Freethought Matters” TV show airs in 12 cities, 27 percent of U.S. market. Our weekly talk show broadcasts Sunday morning

in **Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York City, Phoenix, Portland, Ore., Sacramento, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.**, plus Sunday nights in **Madison, Wis.**, as well as on **FFRF’s YouTube Channel**. A highlight was Hollywood legend and actor **Ed Asner**, who wowed staff with an unforgettable visit. “Remote” guests have included **Ron Reagan**, FFRF’s Honorary President **Steven Pinker**, comedian **Julia Sweeney**, and the **Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton**, member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus. Look for another Hollywood legend — **John Davidson** — in December!

“Freethought Radio,” hosted weekly by Dan and Annie Laurie, entered its 15th 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 292,326 downloads in the first 10 months of 2020, with 8.8 million downloads since its beginning in 2006. Listen at ffrf.org/radio or through your favorite podcast provider.

FFRF Makes News! Since January, FFRF’s Director of Communications **Amit Pal** has written or overseen 280 news releases about FFRF educational or legal actions, with able assistance from **Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey** and the Strategic Response Team. Those press releases generated more than 725 individual **news stories** plus 21 **local and regional TV news segments**.

Publicist Lauryn Seering reports that FFRF posted 110 **Freethought Now!** blogs by staff, guest blogger **Jim Haught** and interns. FFRF has nearly 69,000 Twitter followers, 460,000 Facebook friends and 32,500 YouTube subscribers, with more than 885,000 views in 2020.



Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor interview Ed Asner.

Outreach & Speaking — Even During the Pandemic

The pandemic put a dent in FFRF’s normal speaking tours, but with Zoom and Google Meet coming to the rescue, FFRF staff participated in **40 events** so far this year—12 in person, 28 virtual. **Zoom events took place in a dozen states as well as India, Spain and Australia!** **Andrew Seidel**, author of the popular book, *The Founding Myth*, took the lead with 22 events, Dan with 10 and other attorneys and Annie Laurie with a smattering.

FFRF was a financial co-sponsor of the national conference of **Secular Student Alliance**, where **Andrew** spoke, and where FFRF’s Director of Governmental Affairs **Mark Dann** interviewed U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin. Andrew was also part of “Legacy: The Story of Dissent Throughout the Years” presented by **Black Nonbelievers of DC**. Other highlights include participating in the **Secular Day of the Dead** on Nov. 1, a Zoom event spearheaded by FFRF State Rep **Margaret**

Downey, during which **Dan** gave the keynote “¡Adios a Dios!” speech in both English and Spanish.

22 Chapters Around the United States

FFRF is pleased to announce its newest chapter, **FFRF Cincinnati Metro**, formed by this year’s Freethinker of the Year honoree, **Ben Hart**. We said goodbye to our Albuquerque chapter directed by **Ron Herman** and other volunteers for many years, and our Portland chapter, run by Board Member **Cheryl Kolbe**. Both chapters accomplished much to further the FFRF cause. We congratulate them and the many dedicated volunteers in all chapters, making “good trouble” locally and providing programming for local members. To get involved: ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters

2020 Office/Staff/Board Updates

FFRF’s Executive Board of Directors: **Stephen Hirtle**, chair, **Steve Salemson**, treasurer; **Cheryl Kolbe**, secretary; **Dan Barker** and **Annie Laurie Gaylor** (co-presidents, each with a half vote) and directors at large: **Mike Cermak**, **Sue Kocher**, **Todd Peissig**, **David Tamayo**, **James Zerwick**. We gratefully thank **Stef Moritz**, outgoing Secretary, for her amazing help, insights



Stef Moritz



David Tamayo

and hard work, and are pleased to welcome new director **David Tamayo**.

FFRF’s State Representatives: Bob Arekapudi (IL), Dan Barker (WI), Darrell Barker (WA), Charles Bender (IN), Sheri Bender, (IN), Lance Bredvold (MT), Robin Buckallew (NE), Chris Calvey (IL), Tom Cara (IL), 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-André 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 Salemson (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), 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: **Sean. 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**. We were thrilled to welcome actor **Ed** (“Lou Grant”) **Asner**, filmmaker **Jeremiah Camara** and distinguished law professor **Geoffrey Stone** as new honorary directors.



Jeremiah Camara



Geoffrey Stone

FFRF Staff. FFRF’s staff of 27 full-time plus two

part-time workers is overseen by **Director of Operations Lisa Strand**. A heartfelt shoutout to **IT Director James Phetteplace**, with assistance from **Communications Coordinator Lauryn Seering**, for making possible an almost seamless transition to remote work for our staff. This transition was aided by Lisa’s prescient work to take many vital documents and communication systems “paperless” well before the pandemic.

2020 Legal interns. Our three remote summer law student interns were: **Ryan Sendelbach** and **Sammi Babcock**, rising second-year law students from the University of Wisconsin, and **Kat Grant**, rising second-year law student from Indiana University. We’re fortunate that **Kat** stayed on this fall and former summer intern **Josh Engelkemier**, University of Wisconsin, returned for an externship.

Ph.D. student **Barbara Alvarez**, **FFRF’s first Anne Nicol Gaylor Reproductive Rights Intern**, has been an invaluable aid to the Strategic Response Team, writing many memorable blogs on the religious war against reproductive rights.



Barbara Alvarez

Thank you, volunteers! FFRF volunteers worked remotely judging hundreds of student essays, assisted by FFRF’s essay coordinator, **Lisa Treu**. Take a bow: Don Ardell, Linda Aten, Darrell Barker, Bill Dunn, Judi Jacobs, Linda Josheff, Dan Kettner, Jessica Kopish, Kathy Kunz, Sue Schuetz, Karen Lee Weidig, Katya Maes, David Petrashek, Gloria Marquardt, Stephen Hirtle, Mandisa Thomas and David Tamayo.

44th Annual Convention, Boston, Nov. 19–21, 2021

If science, reason and a vaccine prevail, we look forward to an in-person, post-pandemic celebration in Boston the weekend of Nov. 19–21, 2021. The amazing line-up we had to postpone from this year — including **Margaret Atwood**, **Gloria Steinem** and a host of activists such as **Black Skeptics Los Angeles founder Sikivu Hutchinson**, **Hispanic American Freethinkers founder David Tamayo**

and authors such as **Katherine Stewart** — will be enlarged to include such stars as Supreme Court commentator **Linda Greenhouse**.

2020 Awards: FFRF gave its **2020 Freethinker of the Year Award to plaintiff Ben Hart** [see legal report], our **Clarence Darrow Award to actor Ed Asner** and the **Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award of \$10,000 to Nate Phelps**, remarkable atheist son of the founder of the Westboro Baptist Church.



Margaret Atwood



Gloria Steinem

Photo by George Whiteside

We hope you will stay safe, and that we’ll see you in Boston next year.#



Ed Asner with his Clarence Darrow Award.