

A report to FFRF members from the co-presidents

Freedom From Religion Foundation Year in Review — 2017

By Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker
Co-Presidents
Freedom From Religion Foundation

**FFRF has never been larger,
more successful — or more
needed!**

FFRF has grown by more than 6,000 since the last annual report, exceeding 30,000 current members. And we've never been busier. We've been reveling in a series of court victories: a total of **nine judgments or settlements in our favor this year**. In the past two years, FFRF has won an unprecedented 15 rounds, settlements or decisions. (Turn to Legal Victories for more.)

A timely new project is representing you via FFRF's **Educating Congress** campaign (made possible thanks to **Stephen Uhl**, who matched member donations). FFRF's smart young attorneys, mostly working in pairs (taking a cue from the Mormons!), made three separate week-long lobbying trips to Congress in 2017, visiting hundreds of offices in both the House and the Senate, distributing FFRF literature and acquainting congressional staff with the views of America's growing population of "Nones." We're already gearing up for next year's lobbying trips.

2018 is FFRF's 40th anniversary year



Anne Nicol Gaylor

Despite the alarming political climate, FFRF is in a celebratory mood on the eve of our 40th anniversary year. Founded regionally in 1976 by feminist activist **Anne Nicol Gaylor** and college student **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, FFRF formally incorporated as a national group on April 5, 1978!

Kicking off the anniversary year on a euphoric note was **FFRF's memorable 40th anniversary convention** in Madison, Wis., in September, attracting more than 700 members from 48 states plus the District of Columbia. The memorable speeches are being reprinted in *Freethought Today*. Videos of most speeches may be viewed online: ffrf.org/convention2017. FFRF will be launching a new TV talk show, "Freethought Matters," to air first in Madison, Wis., on CBS next year. Among the guests so far are **Steven Pinker, Katha Pollitt, Michelle Goldberg, Greta Christina** and other authors, newsmakers and activists. Freethought views must be heard if civil rights and liberties are to be retained.

FFRF proudly erects Darrow statue in Dayton, Tenn.

One of the year's most gratifying achievements was the com-



Photo by Chris Line

Reason's greetings from FFRF staff.

pletion of the "missing link" at the home of the Scopes "Monkey Trial" in Dayton, Tenn. FFRF member **Bill Dusenberry**, touring the Scopes Trial Museum several years ago, noticed a statue to religionist William Jennings Bryan, who prosecuted John Scopes for teaching evolution, on the courthouse lawn. But there was no balancing homage to freethinking attorney Clarence Darrow.

Now there is! Fast forward to the week of the 92nd anniversary of the "Monkey Trial" this past July. FFRF commissioned internationally acclaimed sculptor **Zenos Frudakis** to create a lasting tribute to Darrow and evolution. A fanatic pictured on Facebook with a rifle made scary threats about raising an insurrection and taking down the statue. But the dedication went off without a hitch.

Joining Dan and Annie Laurie to celebrate at a pre-dedication dinner were freethinkers from 24 states. FFRF State Representative **Margaret Downey**, who played a key role in the endeavor,



Margaret Downey

or, emcee'd the dedication on July 14. The keynoter was actor **John de Lancie** ("Q" in the *Star Trek* series), who portrayed Darrow in a long-running play. Also speaking were Darrow biographer **Andrew Kersten**, Dan, Annie Laurie and Zenos. As de Lancie noted, while standing in front of the courthouse: "In the world of the religious versus the secular, this is ground zero, the epicenter."

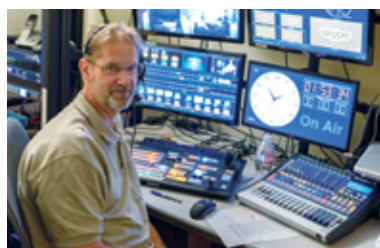
What Darrow stood for at the Scopes Trial is as timely and imperative today as in 1925. The magnificent statue is our permanent gift to Rhea County and the entire nation.

FFRF actions widely covered

FFRF's Director of Communications **Amit Pal** has written or overseen a record 338 news releases, most detailing the accomplishments of FFRF's nine staff attorneys. Every Friday, Amit's appealing weekly wrap is emailed to you updating FFRF's actions of the week. Those actions generated more than 1,750 **bona fide news stories** from January to Nov. 15, plus 168 **local and regional TV news segments**. The national **CBS This Morning** did a fantastic story about FFRF's lawsuit over religious bible indoctrination in elementary schools in Mercer County, W.Va. **Dan Barker** and **Andrew Seidel** acquitted themselves ably on separate appearances on Fox News.

Publicist **Laurny Seering** reports that FFRF posted 88 new blogs by staff members at **Freethought Now! blog**, hosted by Patheos, at: patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow/. FFRF has more than 468,000 Facebook followers, 55,000 Twitter followers and 10,537 YouTube followers. If you're not one of them, try us out! More than 100 urgent action alerts have been written and sent out by Editorial Assistant **Molly Hanson** since January. It's never been easier for you to contact members of Congress when FFRF alerts you to emergencies, thanks to software acquired due to a grant from **Todd Steifel**. Thank you, Todd.

FFRF adds new video features: TV show & Facebook Live!



Bruce Johnson

To combat the 24/7 drum-beat of religion over the airwaves is our new foray into video. Thanks to the recent hire of **Bruce Johnson**, a veteran of public TV production, FFRF has produced 22 **"FFRF's Ask an Atheist"** segments, running

on Facebook Live! noon Central Time Wednesdays. Attorney **Andrew Seidel**, new director of strategic response, is regularly featured as one of several hosts. View the shows at your leisure on FFRF's YouTube channel. Bruce also does a great job producing the weekly **Newsbite** video, an inside look at topical FFRF actions, which is sent out in the weekly wrap Fridays and viewable on FFRF's YouTube channel.

FFRF produced 52 new segments of **Freethought Radio** in 2017. Freethought Radio has had 7.5 million podcast listeners since 2006, and averages 10,000-20,000 downloads per show. Our 48-minute podcast, broadcasting in several cities, is hosted by Dan and Annie Laurie and includes your favorite authors, activists and FFRF staff. Listen at: ffrf.org/radio. FFRF's Ask an Atheist radio show and Freethought Matters are produced in the



Photo by Chris Line

Freethought Matters

Thank you (again), Steve!

Freethought Today soon mobile friendly. We hope by New Year's that a mobile-friendly app will soon enable you to enjoy FFRF on your phone, iPad or laptop. The print edition will continue so you can savor the contents and well-received redesign unveiled in January. Freethought Today Editor **PJ Slinger** undertook the "face lift" of Freethought Today with graphic designers **Roger Daleiden** and **Jake Swenson**.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF's mighty legal accomplishments – 2017

Court victory after victory! Of FFRF's eight court victories in 2017, three are final. FFRF prevailed in our censorship lawsuit against Shelton, Conn., which allowed religious displays in its park but had barred ours. Our litigation removed a two-ton monument from the front of a high school in New Kensington, Penn., after an exhaustive five-year battle. FFRF litigation also successfully removed a 14-foot cross from a public park in Santa Clara, Calif., where it had sat unlawfully since the '50s.



Successful plaintiff Marie Schaub

Other 2017 court victories:

- In March, FFRF won a decision, with the ACLU of Indiana, declaring impermissible the 50-year "tradition" of a **live nativity pageant** in Elkhart, Ind., public schools. Unfortunately, the judge approved a nativity with mannequins, so we appealed and so did the school district. Oral arguments were heard on Halloween before the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

- In July, FFRF, along with the American Humanist Association, won a federal court ruling declaring unconstitutional a **25-foot cross** standing in Bayview Park, Pensacola, Fla., for half a century. The city retained the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty to assist in its misguided appeal.

- On Sept. 28, a federal judge ruled in favor of FFRF and its plaintiffs that the **Christian cross on the county seal and flag** of Lehigh County, Pa., are an unconstitutional endorsement of religion. The county has voted to waste taxpayers' money and appeal FFRF's victory.

- On Sept. 30, a federal judge ruled in favor of plaintiffs and FFRF, Americans United and the ACLU that **nontheists may not be barred** from giving invocations at governmental meetings in Brevard County, Fla. The county has (what's new?) voted to appeal.

- On Oct. 6, a federal judge ruled for a second time in favor of FFRF's nationally significant challenge of the **preferential clergy housing allowance**. The benefit permits "ministers of the gospel" to exclude from taxable income any salary designated as a housing allowance. Stay tuned!

- On Oct. 13, a federal judge ruled that Texas Gov. **Greg Abbott improperly removed FFRF's winter solstice "Bill of Rights Nativity"** (see below) from the state Capitol in 2015.

- On Nov. 14, a federal judge ruled moot our challenge of egregious indoctrination via **bible classes in public schools** in Mercer Co., W. Va., because our lawsuit stopped the classes.

All these cases are made possible by local plaintiffs with standing. Thank you, one and all.

Photo by Andrew Seidel



New and ongoing litigation. This March, FFRF and three plaintiffs sued Texan Roy Moore wannabe **Judge Wayne Mack**, who opens courtroom proceedings with daily prayer and even bars the doors once prayer starts.

FFRF filed an important challenge on the National Day of Prayer, May 4 this year, of **President Trump's** announcement that his "religious liberty" executive order allows churches to endorse political candidates from the pulpit. Our case extracted a concession from Trump's very own Justice Department that he can't overturn the Johnson Amendment by fiat.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals recently heard oral arguments in the appeal of a court decision strongly in FFRF's favor barring **school board prayer in Chino Valley, Calif.** FFRF's case against **millions of dollars in taxpayer support to remodel churches** is on fast-track before the New Jersey state Supreme Court. Also ongoing is our case with the ACLU of Kentucky **on behalf of FFRF Member Ben Hart**, who was denied a personalized license plate saying "IM GOD" by the state of Kentucky.

On Oct. 11, a conservative federal judge ruled in *Barker v. House of Representatives* that it's OK for the Roman Catholic priest who serves as U.S. House chaplain to exclude nonbeliever and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker as guest chaplain. While the vast majority of invocations are by Christians, and while minority religionists have been allowed to give guest invocations, no atheist or nonbeliever is allowed. What an insult!

FFRF ends 233 violations through education. Since January, FFRF has sent more than 956 official complaint letters, winning **233**

significant victories. About half the legal complaints FFRF makes involve defending the rights of the youngest and most vulnerable: public school students. FFRF details major complaints and victories every month in *Freethought Today*.

Staff attorneys filed six amicus briefs on behalf of FFRF, including in the pending major Supreme Court *Masterpiece* cake case, involving a Christian who claims his religion permits him to violate civil rights law.

Advertising FFRF and freethought

FFRF's Ron Reagan TV commercial ("Hi, I'm Ron Reagan, unabashed atheist, not afraid of burning in hell") ran periodically on MSNBC's **Rachel Maddow Show**, as well as on CNN. Welcome to thousands of new members who joined as a result!



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Ron Reagan

FFRF continues to run one-third page ads in **Scientific American**, featuring testimonials by scientists or scientific thinkers, including honorary directors of FFRF. Ads have also appeared in *The New York Times*, among others. FFRF has stepped up digital advertising. A popular video in 2017, "**An atheist exposes the Ark**," was written and produced by **Alec Loftus** and features FFRF's **Andrew Seidel** touring and exposing the creationist bastion.



Our newest digital campaign plays on Ron Reagan's popular lines: "unabashed atheist, not afraid of burning in hell." Make a freethinking statement at ffrf.org/unabashed you can use as your Facebook graphic or banner. Or make and share your own statement with an "out of the closet" virtual billboard at ffrf.org/out.

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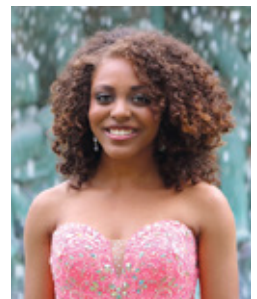
Facebook graphic or banner. Or make and share your own statement with an "out of the closet" virtual billboard at ffrf.org/out.

\$40,850 awarded in four student essay scholarships

This year the **William J. Schultz Memorial Scholarship**, for college-bound high school seniors, helped 17 students, with \$10,150 total in prizes. Our new **David Hudak Essay Contest for Students of Color** awarded \$10,050 to 14 high school seniors. Our college competition, a memorial to **Michael Hakeem**, a sociology professor, awarded a total of \$10,000 in scholarships to 18 college students. Generous Lifetime Member **Professor Brian Bolton** sponsors the graduate student essay competition, which had 13 winners receiving a total of \$9,450 in prizes.

\$27,000 in student activist awards

FFRF gave \$10,000 from the **Catherine Fahringer Memorial Student Activist Award** once again to four ongoing, freethinking college students of color in financial need, in partnership with Black Skeptics of Los Angeles. FFRF awarded its **Richard and Beverly Hermsen Student Activist Award** of \$5,000 to **Cidney Fisk** and to "**John Doe**," one of FFRF's Indiana plaintiffs. The **Strong Backbone Student**



Essay winner Lydia Mason

Activist Award of \$1,000, endowed by a kind octogenarian, went to **Cierra Fields**. The 2017 **Thomas W. Jendrock Student Activist Award** of \$1,000 was bestowed on **Kelly Helton**, now 13, from Kentucky. The **Paul J. Gaylor Memorial Award** of \$1,000, endowed by Annie Laurie Gaylor, went to **Peter Opitz**. The **Allen P. Wilkinson Student activist Award** of \$1,000 went to **Seth Manning**. **Nicole Niebler** received the **\$2,000 Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Award** endowed by a kind Washington couple, and **Ashlynn Bradley** the \$1,000 **Cliff Richards Memorial Student Activist Award**.



Kelly Helton

Outreach – speaking, campus and other events

FFRF staff has made 26 appearances in 14 states, three countries abroad and on five college campuses. FFRF Co-President **Dan Barker's** 10 appearances included four debates, including a panel on religious liberty at the **National Constitution Center** in Philadelphia with **David Saperstein**. Dan, who is fluent in Spanish, made national news as speaker at the premiere public function of **Freethinkers of Honduras**. He also spoke to the **Humanists of Guatemala**.

FFRF Legal Director **Rebecca Markert**, with Legal Associate **Elizabeth (Liz) Cavell**, represented FFRF at the Gateway to Reason conference, and, with Legal Fellow **Ryan Jayne**, at the Secular Student Alliance's national gathering. Liz and FFRF Attorney **Andrew Seidel** spoke at Florida FreeFLO. Andrew testified before the **Colorado Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights** on the importance of preserving the Blaine Amendment. Senior Associate **Patrick Elliott** debated religious tax exemption in Minnesota, and Legal Associate **Sam Grover** spoke at Winchester Academy, Wis., among other appearances by staff. **Annie Laurie** was invited by the **French Embassy** to appear on a panel about women, religion and politics as part of its Albertine Festival, curated by feminists **Gloria Steinem** and **Robin Morgan**, who is an FFRF honorary director.



Maryam Namazie

FFRF proudly co-sponsored the historic **International Conference on Freedom of Conscience and Expression in the 21st Century** in London July 22-24. Convened by Iranian-born **Maryam Namazie**, this year's **Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Awardee**, it was the largest gathering of ex-Muslims in the world. FFRF also co-sponsored a farewell tribute in Washington, D.C., in November to

Barry Lynn, outgoing executive director of Americans United.

FFRF sponsored a legal panel with Rebecca and Andrew, a lunch talk by Dan and a short presentation by Amit Pal at the **Religious News Association Conference** in Nashville in early September.

19 chapters around the United States

FFRF welcomed two new chapters this year, Kenosha Racine Atheists & Freethinkers (KRAfT), in Wisconsin, run by **Rob Moore**, and Unfettered Freethinkers of South Sound, in Washington, run by **Darrell Barker**. They join 17 other chapters around the country run by dedicated and hardworking volunteers. Seek one out in your area: ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters

2016 office/staff/Board updates

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 Salemson**, treasurer; **James Zerwick**, director at large, and **Mike Cermak**, director at large. We thank outgoing Board Member **Joe Cunningham**, 92, for almost three decades of dedicated counsel.

Meet FFRF's distinguished Honorary Directors. Harvard's illustrious **Steven Pinker**, whose new book *Enlightenment Now* will be out soon, serves as honorary president. Other distinguished honorary directors are: **Jerry Coyne**, **Richard Dawkins**, **Daniel C. Dennett**, **Ernie Harburg**, **Jennifer Michael Hecht**, **Susan Jacoby**, **Lawrence Krauss**, **Robin Morgan**, **Mike Newdow**, **Katha Pollitt**, **Ron Reagan**, **Robert Sapolsky**, **Edward Sorel** and **Julia Sweeney**.



Steven Pinker

Photo by Ingrid Laas

FFRF Staff. FFRF's full-time staff of 24 is overseen by **Director of Operations Lisa Strand**. New staff positions include: **Bruce A. Johnson**, video producer, and **Molly Hanson**, editorial assistant. **Kristina Daleiden** replaces **Alyssa Schaefer** (inspired by FFRF to start law school) as programs assistant and **Monica Schwartz**, is our able office assistant. We also said goodbye to Digital Product Manager **Tim Nott**. **Kati Treu** provides occasional student help.

Maddy Ziegler was promoted from legal fellow to intake attorney, and **Ryan Jayne** from legal fellow to staff attorney/strategic responder. New Legal Fellows are: **Chris Line**, Patrick O'Reiley Legal Fellow, and **Colin McNamara**, Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellow, endowed by Len and Karen Eisenberg (*thank you!*). FFRF welcomed as law clerks **Lucas Swank**, **Nathan Niemeyer**, **Russell Busch**, **Dante Harootunian**, **Cory Paul**, **Mark Noel** and **Benjamin Becker**. Undergrad interns included **Evan Stang**, **Kat Kerwin**, and **Ryan Christensen** (Redleaf Intern).

Volunteers. FFRF thanks student essay readers and other office volunteers **David O Staats**, **Kathy Kunz**, **Bill Dunn**, **Nora Cusack**, **Linda Josheff**, **Phil Josheff**, **Sue Schuetz**, **Jessica Kopish**, **Vince Jenkins**, **Stefanie Moritz**, **Jeff Brinckman**, **Dan Kettner**, **Karen Lee Weidig**, **Kati Treu**, **Linda Aten** and **Todd Peissig**.

San Francisco, here we come, Nov. 2-4, 2018!

FFRF's 40th annual national convention in Madison Sept. 15-17 contrasted with erudite cautions about Religious Right threats by notable columnists **Katha Pollitt** of *The Nation* and **Michelle Goldberg** of *The New York Times*, with humorous breaks by atheist comedians **Paula Poundstone** and **Julia Sweeney**.



Paula Poundstone at convention.

Photo by Ingrid Laas

FFRF's distinguished **Honorary President Steve Pinker** provided more welcome good news, granting the audience a sneak preview of his new book, *Enlightenment Now*, in his first talk about the forthcoming book. Pinker documents the amazing strides humankind has made since the Enlightenment.

Mark your calendar for a good time at the Hyatt Regency on the Embarcadero, **San Francisco**, the weekend of **Nov. 2-4, 2018!**