

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



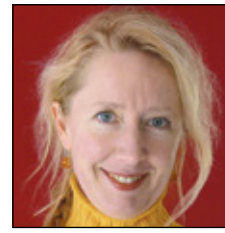
Denver FFRF chapter puts up 12 billboards

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Schools' troubled history with religion continues

PAGE 16



Safe and legal abortion is pro-life

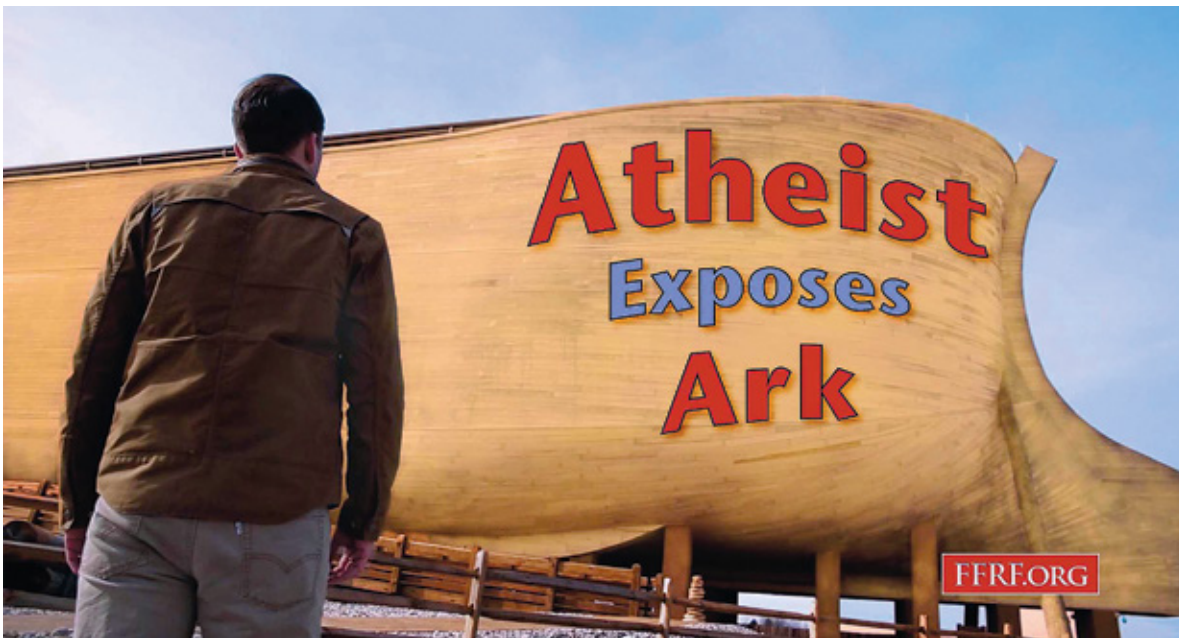
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Visiting the ark park on a lark



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel recently took a tour of Ken Ham's \$100 million Ark Encounter in Kentucky. Despite Ham's reports to the contrary, attendance has been way below projected numbers, and, according to Seidel, the ark is filled with logical and scientific impossibilities, including dinosaurs! See Seidel's story on page 13. View the digital ad at ffrf.org/ark-ad.

Poundstone joins lively lineup at convention

FFRF is excited to announce that well-known comedian Paula Poundstone, an "out" atheist, will perform at its 40th annual convention.

Poundstone joins Nation columnist, writer and poet Katha Pollitt as two of the latest additions to the impressive convention lineup for the weekend of Sept. 15-17 at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis.

Poundstone is one of America's top comedians. She is listed in Comedy Central's list of "100 Greatest Stand-Ups Of All Time" and has also won an American Comedy Award for Best Female Standup Comic. She routinely identifies as an atheist in her performances. Among Poundstone's claims to fame is her regular appearances as a panelist on NPR's funny weekly news quiz show, "Wait Wait . . . Don't Tell Me."

In 2016, Paula voiced the character "Forgetter Paula" in Disney/Pixar's Academy Award-winning animated feature film, "Inside Out." In June 2016, her first double-live CD, "North By Northwest: Paula Poundstone Live!" debuted at No. 1 on both Amazon's "Hot New Releases – Nonfiction" and "Comedy CD" lists.

In 1992, she became the first woman to host the prestigious White House Correspondents dinner



Paula Poundstone

See Convention on page 24

Taking on the Internal Revenue Service

Ministerial housing allowance goes before court once again

FFRF has filed a federal brief supporting its long-running challenge of the preferential tax treatment that the IRS provides to ministers of the gospel.

FFRF's brief, filed before U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb in Madison, Wis., on April 5, forcefully argues that the IRS is discriminating by allowing clergy — and only clergy — to exclude cash payments for housing from taxable income.

FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, as well

as the estate of President Emerita Anne Nicol Gaylor, were denied a similar benefit, although FFRF designates a housing allowance for them. Attorney Rich L. Bolton, who authored the brief, writes, "The Supreme Court has refused to allow government to preferentially favor religion with tax breaks that are not generally available to other taxpayers."

Besides the direct advancement of religion, the housing allowance fosters excessive government entanglement with religion. FFRF points out: "In order to ensure that this preferential tax benefit is limited to religious officials, §107(2)

requires complex determinations relating to the tenets, principles and practices of those churches that provide their clergy with cash housing allowances."

The IRS and several churches that intervened in the case filed on March 8 for summary judgment. FFRF's response brief debunks many of their claims. Both the IRS and the churches contend that the housing allowance, passed by Congress in 1954, is on par with housing provided more generally "for the convenience of the employer." But FFRF counters: "The historical evidence indicates that

See Housing on page 9

How I won \$1,000 betting on the Antichrist

By Derek Mathias

A few months ago, one of the many fundamentalist Christians I've argued with on YouTube claimed that President Obama is the Antichrist, and that he would seek a third presidential term.

Being aware of how our government works, I immediately bet the guy \$1,000 that Obama would step down after his second term. My fundie opponent was hesitant, but I challenged him to have the courage of his convictions and put his money where his mouth is. He finally agreed to take the bet, but with one change: If he won, he wouldn't take my money, but I would instead have to delete all of my anti-theism videos and never make another such video ever again. Of course, I agreed immediately.

As the weeks went by, I kept up a dialog with the

guy so that he wouldn't forget about our deal. And on Jan. 20, as you know, I won the bet. Of course, I was disappointed that we now have a wee-handed tangerine tweet monkey as our president, but at least I had \$1,000 coming to me from my fundie opponent. To his credit, with a little appeal to his honor, he sent the money.

This bet was about teaching a lesson, not about enriching myself, so I wanted to donate the money to a worthy organization. To that end, I've sent a \$1,000 donation to the Freedom From Religion Foundation to become a Life Member . . . because I just like the poetic justice of fundies helping to finance an atheist organization.

Unfortunately, the only lesson my opponent learned

See Antichrist on page 5



Derek Mathias shows off the \$1,000 he won betting a fundamentalist Christian that President Obama would not take a third presidential term.

Anthropolo-gee, this is interesting!

Name: Sue Kocher.
Where I live: Raleigh, N.C.
Where and when I was born: Grand Rapids, Mich., in 1956.
Family: I am second oldest of five children — one of the smaller Catholic families in our neighborhood at the time. My father was a devoted Catholic and deacon, but he died of a heart attack at 48, when I was 8 years old. My mother returned to waitressing and raised us on her own, with the help of Social Security and veteran’s benefits — my father having served as a radio-man in WW2. It was a bit rough some-times, but we had what we needed.
I have lost two siblings — my el-der sister to illness, my baby sister to estrangement. She no longer speaks to me except to spew anger and ha-tred because of my atheism and liber-al politics. Fortu-nately, I still have two siblings that I love and enjoy: my dear brother (who is also an atheist) and a younger sis-ter (also atheist, though not very “out” or thoughtful about it).
Education: I had a wonderful men-tor in my child-hood who helped me navigate the mystical waters of college applica-tions and financial aid. Thanks to her, I was accepted into a small liberal arts college, tuition-free, and graduated in 1979 with a major in anthropology. I be-came aware of the Peace Corps, and thought that would be a wonderful way to live and learn in a completely different culture before pursuing my studies in anthropology. I fancied being an ethnographer like Margaret Mead. Ha! So I went to Thai-land as a volunteer for two years, work-ing in family planning and village de-velopment in the poor provinces of the Northeast. I also worked in the Cambo-dian refugee camps that were hurriedly erected along the border after the end of the Vietnam war, during the genocid-al campaign of the Khmer Rouge.
How I got to where I am today: Those two years in Thailand changed my life in so many ways. I gave up my plans for an academic career because, by then, I was

hooked on travel and language learn-ing. I realized no one was hiring eth-nographers anymore, so I would more likely wind up teaching Anthropology 101 somewhere and being pressured to publish. The question was how to sup-port myself and still be able to live in in-teresting places. The answer was to get a master’s degree in teaching English as a Second Language. Which I did, at the University of Hawaii — those were some wonderful years! After my grad-uate studies, I taught academic English reading and writing in Japan, Australia and Turkey over a period of 12 years. Along the way I married a Turk, and we moved from Istanbul to North Carolina in 1996 — both of us ready for a career change. I’ve been here ever since — he moved on after an amicable divorce.
Occupation: I work at a large cor-poration that pro-duces complex an-alytics software for various industries around the world. I started as a tech-nical editor, and eventually worked out a niche for myself as corpo-rate terminologist. What I do is main-tain a database of terms, definitions and usage stan-dards that we use in our software and documentation. I get to interact with people in all areas and levels of the company and it keeps me on my toes.
My doubts about religion started: Looking back, I realize that I had doubts at a very young age. I don’t remember ever really believing in Santa Claus; I re-member pretending to believe. It was the same with religion. My mother had tried to continue our father’s re-ligious tradition, sending us to paro-chial school through the fifth grade. But her heart wasn’t in it, and looking back, we kids were all pretty much pre-tending our way through Mass, con-fessions, and the rest of it. I remem-ber making up sins in the confessional because I either felt I hadn’t sinned enough to waste the priest’s time, or I just couldn’t remember them all. I remember thinking how silly it was to be assigned 20 Hail Marys and 10 Our



Sue Kocher



Sue Kocher, left, taunts a Westboro Baptist protester with her sign.

Fathers by a man who was supposedly taking orders from God — but who was really just a man.
I kept a churchy journal when I was in third grade at Catholic School — someone had stolen it and ditched it in the boiler room, where it was found and returned to me 20 years later! I didn’t write in it much — mostly about the reptiles and amphibians I caught and kept as pets, or how much I dis-liked the bully at school who tripped me so that he could see my underwear under my plaid uniform skirt. But I found one page that stated, “Oh, how I love Jesus!” and I chuckled to myself, remembering how I wrote those words on Pascal’s wager — not believing it, but covering my bases just in case.
My first anthropology class was life-changing, because there I learned how vastly different human cultures are, how it’s possible for people to hold completely different views of re-ality and spirituality, and to be entirely convinced that “ours is the one, only and best” way to see the world. Study-ing the cargo cults of Melanesia, which were so bizarre and irrational, I real-ized that my own childhood religion was equally bizarre. I began to see all religions as culture-bound artifacts, serving various social and political in-terests, and no divine purpose.
When I lived in Thailand, I dabbled a bit with Buddhism. But when I saw Buddhism in practice, and met re-vered monks who lazed around smok-ing and eating like kings, and who sold amulets of themselves for good luck — I was disillusioned.
It wasn’t until I moved to North Carolina and became involved with skeptics groups, and later joined an atheist meetup, that I realized: That’s what I am! I am an atheist! And the more I learn, the more proud I am with this identity.
Person in history I admire: Oh, there are so many. But Anne Nicole Gaylor, principal founder of the FFRF, feminist, activist, crusader for reason, is right up there. She was a pioneer, intelligent and fierce. Richard Feyn-man was a pretty awesome guy. He was brilliant, he was hilariously funny, and he genuinely cared about the human race and about all life on our beau-tiful planet. Most of all, he was filled with wonder and awe about the world

around him, and knew how lucky he was to have experienced it for even a day, much less for a long lifetime.
Quotation I like: Anything by Doro-thy Parker. Here’s one: “The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.” Also, anything by Jack Handy. Here’s one: “If a kid asks where rain comes from, I think a cute thing to tell him is ‘God is crying.’ And if he asks why God is crying, another cute thing to tell him is ‘Probably because of something you did.’”
These are a few of my favorite things: Finding an interesting creature and knowing what it is — or finding out what it is. I love growing, eating and sharing edible plants. Zoos, especial-ly if they’re well designed and full of “enrichment” stuff. Walks in the woods with my dogs. My dogs, period. Calling my hens and seeing them all run at me with their stomping, swinging gait, like so many little fluffy dinosaurs.
These are not: Climate change and weirdly scary weather. The continuing pretense on the news and in conver-sations that there’s time to do some-thing about it later. Our reactionary Republican leaders in North Caroli-na. People getting away with negli-gent homicide or murder caused by religious fervor. People who run over turtles trying to cross the road, or who honk at me when I stop traffic to ush-er the critter to the shoulder.
Before I die: I want to see the Grand Canyon, Machu Picchu and the Galapagos.
Ways I promote freethought: My work with Triangle Freethought So-ciety, of which I am a founding mem-ber, is my approach toward thinking globally while acting locally. I think it’s imperative that we normalize atheism if we are to have any hope of replacing religion with reason. I’ve dabbled in activism through var-ious groups and for various causes, but now I consider atheist activism the most economical way to spend my activist time. Virtually every issue that I care about — social injustice, income inequality, homophobia, cli-mate change, nukes, war, environ-mental degradation, erosion of abor-tion rights, you name it — is aided and abetted by religious belief, and/ or by the rich and powerful who use religion to further their aims.

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

Darrow statue to inherit the lawn

‘Scopes Monkey Trial’ defense attorney to be honored in July

A statue of “Scopes Monkey Trial” defense attorney Clarence Darrow will join that of his legal counterpart in the 1925 case outside the famous courthouse in Dayton, Tenn., this summer.

Darrow is the lawyer who defended John T. Scopes against creationist prosecutor Williams Jennings Bryan, a three-time presidential candidate.

The sculptor is Zenos Frudakis, who is a member of FFRF and will speak at FFRF’s 40th annual convention in Madison, Wis., the weekend of Sept. 15-17. The installation of the statue is expected to take place on July 13, with the dedication on July 14. That is also the first day of the Scopes Trial Play and Festival.

A sculpture of Bryan was installed in 2005 and is on the south side at the front of the Rhea County Courthouse. The Darrow statue will be placed adjacent to the Bryan statue on the north side.

“Ralph Green, president of the Rhea County Historical and Genealogical Society, said the statue will make for a more complete story of the trial,” writes Ben Benton of the Chattanooga Times Free Press. “He said it lends authenticity to the play, which relies ‘about 90 percent’ on the trial transcripts. Green said historical society members felt Darrow would balance the story and give visitors to Dayton a look at the ‘two giants,’ who faced off over topics that still stir controversy and drew the

world’s eyes and ears to a small town in Tennessee.”

But many people in the conservative town are not in favor of the Darrow statue, writes Benton.

“Bill Hollin, a 23-year Rhea County commission veteran, is opposed to the Darrow statue because of his own religious beliefs and because he sees no reason to celebrate the man who lost the trial and whose opponent contributed so much to Dayton. ‘There’s a lot of people in the community that oppose it,’ Hollins said.”

“That’s strange, to put a statue of a liberal in Dayton,” Mike Scott told the Times Free Press. “But you can’t tell which side is the right unless you see the left.”

In July 1925, Dayton High School teacher John T. Scopes went on trial for violating state law by teaching that human beings evolved from a “lower order of animals.” Scopes was convicted and fined \$100, but the decision was reversed two years later by the Tennessee Supreme Court. The case raised debate on issues such as separation of church and state, academic freedom and the relationship between science and religion.

In 1977, the National Park Service named the Rhea County Courthouse a National Historic Landmark.

The events of the trial were made into the 1960 movie, “Inherit the Wind,” a fictionalized version of the trial starring Spencer Tracy as the Darrow character and Fredric March as the Bryan character.

Please look for more information on this Darrow statue project in FFRF’s May appeal, arriving via U.S. mail.

“If today you can take a thing like evolution and make it a crime to teach it in the public school, tomorrow you can make it a crime to teach it in the private schools, and the next year you can make it a crime to teach it to the hustings or in the church.

— Clarence Darrow, “Scopes Trial” courtroom speech, July 13, 1925



Sculptor Zenos Frudakis stands next to his statue of Clarence Darrow, which will be placed outside the Rhea County Courthouse in Dayton, Tenn., this summer.

Sign up for FFRF Darrow celebration July 13 in Chattanooga

You’re cordially invited to Freedom From Religion Foundation’s Clarence Darrow Dinner Party in Chattanooga on Thursday, July 13, celebrating the installation that day of a statue of the famed Scopes Trial litigator in Dayton, Tenn. The dinner party will be followed with the public dedication of the statue in Dayton on Friday. Dayton is about 40 miles from Chattanooga.

That Friday also marks the first day of the 29th annual Scopes Trial Play and Festival. You may wish to top off the day by going to the reenactment of the Scopes Trial play, performed annually in the historic court-house where the Scopes Trial took place in Dayton. The historic court-house and museum may be toured, and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1977.



Nicole Jacobsen

Talented sculptor Zenos Frudakis (see story above) will give a short visual presentation at the dinner party and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker will entertain at the piano. Special guest will be Nicole Jacobsen, who grew up in Dayton and whose family members were the unnamed plaintiffs in FFRF’s federal lawsuit ending a legacy of the Scopes trial — weekly bible instruction in the public schools by bible students from William Jennings Bryan Bible College. FFRF and the brave family won the case at the district level and at the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in 2004.

Register for Darrow Dinner Party now!

Registration per person is \$45, which covers the “Southern Exposure Buffet,” 20 percent service charge and 9.25 percent state tax. See menu below. Registration will be cut off on Wed., July 5, or when capacity is reached.

Register online at ffrf.org/Darrowdinner. Or register by phone at: 800/335-4021 Central weekdays.

Courtesy hotel block – reserve now!

While rooms last, the Chattanooga Hotel, 1201 Broad St., Chattanooga, Tenn., site of the dinner party, is holding a courtesy block of rooms on Thursday and Friday, July 13-14. Make your own reservations, using the code “Clarence Darrow Party.” (FFRF’s event webpage, ffrf.org/Darrowdinner, will also link directly to the hotel registration while rooms last.) Register promptly to avoid disappointment. Other nearby hotels include the Marriot and Staybridge. The rate of \$149 plus tax includes free WiFi.

Downtown Chattanooga has a lot of charm, offers attractions and easy walking, a variety of restaurants, an aquarium, a riverfront, an art district and pedestrian bridge.

Scopes Trial play tickets

Purchase tickets directly from the Tennessee Valley Theater at 423.365. PLAY (7529), Website: scopesfestival.com. (Tickets were not yet available for sale as of press time.) The play is conducted over two weekends, July 14-

15 and July 22-23, at the Rhea County Courthouse, 1475 Market St., Dayton, TN 37321. Space is limited!

Reserve promptly to avoid disappointment.

Southern Exposure Dinner Buffet

\$45 includes 20 percent service charge and 9.25 percent state tax

Confetti Cole Slaw
Three Bean Salad
Panzanella Salad (Chattanooga Sourdough)
Cajun Fried Turkey Breast, Blackened

Turkey Gravy
Marinated Pork Shoulder, Carolina Clear BBQ
Slow Cooked Roast Beef, Pan Sauce
Classic Mac n’ Cheese with Aged Cheddar & Gruyère Cheese
Beer Braised Collards
Sweet Potato Mash with Brown Sugar-Maple Butter & Pecans
Fried Green Tomato Slices, Roasted Red Pepper Chèvre Remoulade Cornbread Muffins, Honey Butter | Yeast Rolls | Biscuits
Includes coffee, tea, sweet tea, & desserts: Strawberry Short Cake | Banana Pudding | Fried Apple Pies | Pecan Pie

Return with payment to be received no later than July 6 to:
FFRF, Attn: Darrow Party, PO Box 750, Madison WI 53701

Clarence Darrow Celebration Dinner Party

Thursday, July 13, 6:30 PM

Chattanooga Hotel. Chattanooga, Tennessee

	Number Registering	Total Cost
Southern Exposure Buffet Ticket	\$45	\$
Appropriate for vegetarian		
Make check payable to: FFRF		

Names of all registrants

Address

City / State / ZIP

Phone

Email

Credit Card Number

Expiration Date / Security Code

Signature

Contact info for in-house use only

*Includes 20% service charge & 9.25% state tax

Or register online at ffrf.org/Darrowdinner

HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

A SIMPLE EXPLANATION FOR EVERYTHING

When the Syrians came down like a wolf on the fold,
Ahab of Israel sharpened his sword,
And soon the Jordan was running with blood.

Why did they kill?
They killed for the Lord.

When Muhammad ran off to Medina, he swore
He would roar back to Mecca, this time with a horde
Of warriors thirsting for infidel gore.

Why did they kill?
They killed for the Lord.

When the Pope’s Inquisition put thousands in chains,
Their bodies were broken and branded and gored,
And the innocent perished in spasms of pain.

Why did they kill?
They killed for the Lord.

When the Puritans filled all New England with dread,
Hunting down women whose thoughts they abhorred,
They strung up the witches until they were dead.

Why did they kill?
They killed for the Lord.

Now our Born-Again tell us God gives them the word:
Send infidels off to their blazing reward!
So far-away rivers are running with blood.

Why are we killing?
We kill for the Lord.



© Philip Appleman.
From *New and Selected Poems, 1956–1996*
Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. He is editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Darwin*. His published volumes of poetry include *New and Selected Poems: (1956-1996)*, *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (2012), *Darwin’s Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His newest book is *The Labyrinth: God, Darwin and the Meaning of Life*. He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both “After-Life” Members of FFRF. Phil’s books: ffrf.org/shop.

Crosses removed from public school windows

By Jeremy Wood



Photo by Jeremy Wood

Two crosses are seen in a public elementary school window in Hobbs, N.M. Jeremy Wood complained and had them removed.

On the morning of Sunday, Feb. 12, while playing with my kids at the playground of our neighborhood public elementary school in Hobbs, N.M., I noticed some crosses in a window facing the playground. This area of the school is mostly offices and large rooms, but since most of the rest of the window was blocked, I wasn’t sure what room the crosses were in. My children and I go to this park often, and this is the first time we had seen the crosses.

The next morning, I went to the school and asked if they were aware of the crosses in the window and that the presence of the crosses was a violation of the Constitution. The woman explained that she

IT PAYS TO COMPLAIN

was unaware of them and that my description of where they were outside would not be sufficient for her to ascertain where they might be in the building, and that my only option would be to call the district administration office.

So I called there and, after explaining the situation to the receptionist, was transferred to Terry Lopez, who introduced herself as the superintendent. Lopez informed me that she would look into the matter.

That first set of crosses was, thankfully, removed that afternoon. Unfortunately, while walking home, I noticed that another cross had popped up in what appeared to be a first-grade classroom. I called and thanked Lopez for the removal of the first cross and explained that another had popped up.

She said she would “let them know.” The next day, noticing the cross was still in the classroom window, I called just to make it clear that I wasn’t going to just go away, and this is when I first started feeling like I was getting the runaround. I went to school district website and found that Lopez was actually assistant to the superintendent and that TJ Parks was superintendent.

I emailed Parks and Lopez reminding them that all Americans are entitled to the same freedoms and asking them to uphold the Constitution. Happily, the crosses were removed soon after.

This was an eye-opening experience. I approached for help other people who have claimed to be friendly toward nonbelievers and was laughed at and told, “People aren’t gonna go for that around here.” While I am thrilled that the superintendent upheld the Constitution, this whole situation has showed me exactly how precarious our position is as nonbelievers in a tiny town.

OVERHEARD



Photo by Edward Kimmel
Terry McAuliffe.

Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe, after vetoing two Republican-backed bills aimed at protecting religious groups that oppose same-sex marriage.

Richmond Times-Dispatch, 3-23-17

This idea that the sins of our past are a byproduct of some general societal failing, rather than being the inevitable outcome of a church-run, state-supported policy of punishing women for out-of-wedlock pregnancies also finds an echo in the highest levels of government.

Sadhbh Walshe, writing in response to the almost 800 children who died and were buried in a mass grave outside a former home for unwed mothers run by Catholic nuns in Tuam, Ireland.

The New York Times, 3-30-17

If we begin to endorse candidates, then we are politicizing the church, diluting our message, and bringing unnecessary division among our people. It is sufficient that we can speak

on issues without endorsing specific candidates for office.

George O. Wood, general superintendent of Assemblies of God.

Religion News Service, 3-30-17

This bill makes a mockery of religious freedom by allowing public officials to discriminate against virtually anyone who fails to meet their personal moral standards.

Kathy Miller, president of the Texas Freedom Network, discussing Texas Senate Bill 522, which would allow county clerks to opt out of signing marriage licenses for gay couples if the clerk in question finds that doing so would violate “sincerely held religious beliefs.”

Houston Press, 4-3-17



Kathy Miller

Science and truth remarkably always need advocacy against the forces of nostalgia and fear and irrationality. . . . At the end of the day, policy has to be guided by facts and truth. . . . I represent one of the most educated districts in the country. And so, I think my constituents expect this of me.

U.S. Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut, who has proposed commemorating the birth date of Charles Darwin.

Danbury News Times, 4-13-17

FFRF welcomes 26 new Lifers, two Immortals

FFRF is pleased to announce and welcome its 26 newest Lifetime Members and two new Immortals.

Jack Pedigo and Dr. David Herbert have joined the ranks of Immortals, which is a designation for those kind members who have contacted FFRF to report that they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning.

Our 26 new Lifetime Members are Bapu Arekapudi, Tom Beckwith, Michael J. Briggs, Martha W. Carter, Charles Cedergren, Dr. John A. Davenport, James W. and Karen T. Dearborn, Naomi Diamond, Larry S. Duggan, Michael Epstein, Dr. Edward C. Field, Cindy Gross, Richard B. Hartman, James K. Haynes, Kayla Koeber, Joe Leslie, Max

L. Long, David McRorey, Stephen Mer-shon, Nancy Pennock, Jill Preotle, Sam Stark, Jr., James Walker, Janice I. Welch, and Scott K. Welch (no relation).

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000, designated as membership or membership renewal, and are deductible for income-tax purposes, as are all dues and donations to FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. It ensures no more renewal notices and goes into a rainy-day fund.

The states represented are California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, Utah, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists.

Foundation members wishing to receive online news releases, “action alerts” and “Freethought of the Day” should contact info@ffrf.org. Please include your name, email and physical mailing address.

A meeting of the freethinking minds

FFRF proud co-sponsor of two-day event in London on July 22-23

Notable freethinkers from around the world will come together this summer in London for a weekend of discussions and debates on freedom of conscience and expression.

The International Conference on Freedom of Conscience and Expression in the 21st Century will be held July 22-23 and is co-sponsored by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, among several other organizations.

FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker will among the more than 60 people scheduled to speak or perform during the conference. Discussions will include topics such as censorship and blasphemy laws, freedom of and from religion, apostasy, the limits of religion’s role in society, LGBT and women’s rights, atheism, secular values and more.

Other noted speakers include activist, blogger and writer Bonya Ahmed (who spoke at FFRF’s 2016 convention in Pittsburgh), scientist and author Richard Dawkins, philos-

opher A.C. Grayling, singer Shelly Segal, columnist for Charlie Hebdo Zineb El Rhazoui (who was out the day of the massacre), and and Iranian-born rights activist Maryam Namazie, who organized the prestigious conference. Namazie will be receiving the Henry H. Zumas Freedom From Fundamentalism Religion Award at FFRF’s 40th annual conference in Madison the weekend of Sept. 15-17. (See pages 23-24 for FFRF convention details and information.)

The conference will highlight the voices of people on the front lines of resistance — many of them persecuted and exiled — as well as address challenges faced by activists and freethinkers. It will also elaborate on the links between democratic politics and free expression and conscience, promote secular and rights-based alternatives, and establish priorities for collective action.

Speakers will come from dozens of countries around the world, including Algeria, Bangladesh, Canada, Egypt, France, India, Iran, Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan, Ireland, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories, Poland, Saudi Arabia,



FFRF is one of the co-sponsors of the International Conference on Freedom of Conscience and Expression in the 21st Century, which will be held July 22-23 in London.

Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, Tunisia, United Kingdom, Ukraine, United States and Yemen.

The conference is sponsored by FFRF, Atheist International Alliance, Bread and Roses TV, Centre for Secular Space, Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, Culture Project, Euromind,

Equal Rights Now, Fitnah, National Secular Society, One Law for All, Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, Southall Black Sisters, and Secularism is a Women’s Issue.

For more information or to sign up to attend the conference, go to secular-conference.com.

A winning pose



FFRF Member Marie Schaub stands in the spot where a Ten Commandments monument stood for decades outside Valley High School in New Kensington, Pa. Schaub was the plaintiff in FFRF’s victorious lawsuit against the school district, challenging the monument on school grounds. It was removed on March 21.



Vandalism not unexpected outside Creation Museum

By Jim Helton

When the Tri-State Freethinkers originally thought about adopting a highway, I could think of no better place to do it than in front of Ken Ham’s Creation Museum in Petersburg, Ky. We have been cleaning the highway for four years now.

As a group, we do about 40 volunteer projects every year. By far, our members’ favorite event is cleaning the highway leading to the Creation Museum. We adopted the highway as a way for us to clean up the environment, as well as let the people know driving by that there are rational people living in Kentucky.

When Ham first saw our signs, he wrote a blog post that basically thanked us for keeping the highway clean, but also said that we were still going to burn in hell.

He also sent us the following invite: “For our part, we would be willing to meet with these local freethinkers and chat with them. Let’s establish a dialogue and have a free exchange of ideas.” We tried to take him up on his offer, but as of today, Ken Ham has not sat down with us.

To be perfectly honest, I’m surprised it took this long for someone to vandalize our signs. While we were plan-

ning the protest of the opening of the Ark Encounter last July, we were surprised to discover that the highway in front of the life-size “replica” ark was available to be adopted. So, we adopted that one as well.

We will continue to clean up after Ken Ham on the highways and in our local schools.

Jim Helton is president of the Tri-State Freethinkers.



A vandal threw paint on the Tri-State Freethinkers Adopt-A-Highway sign in Kentucky, but members painted the lettering back on. “We were unable to remove the paint from the sign, so we just painted over it,” Jim Helton said. “I actually like the paint blotch remaining on the sign. It is a reminder of the all the work we have to do in order to be treated with equality and respect.”

Antichrist

Continued from page 1

is not to make bets with me. But there is an important lesson here that we can all take away from this: If people make essentially impossible but testable claims based on the bible or any other scripture, then bet them \$1,000 that it won’t happen. If they’re hesitant, goad them by appealing to their convictions. After all, their religion teaches them not to doubt their beliefs:

- James 1:6 — But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

- Matthew 21:21 — And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen.”

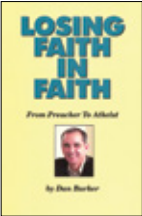
- Matthew 14:31 — Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

It’s galling to them when an atheist is more willing to put his certainty on the line than they are. Not only should you end up with some money you can use to do some good, but you may even teach someone that claims based on faith are indistinguishable from claims based on fantasy.

Oh, and one last thing: Thanks, Obama!

Derek Mathias, who creates antitheistic YouTube videos with the username “Underlings,” is from California and also a member of FFRF’s Greater Sacramento Chapter. Thank you, Derek!

Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist



How Dan “threw out the bathwater and discovered there is no baby there.”

By Dan Barker

Buy it from FFRF online shop.ffrf.org

Are one-quarter of Americans atheists?

New study puts number of nonbelievers much higher than previously thought

Trying to figure out how many Americans who don't believe in God is a tough undertaking for any researcher. Asking people simply if they are atheists doesn't generate a correct number, researchers say, because many people think the word "atheist" is too negative and don't want to be associated with it. But even asked if they don't believe in God, the number of respondents is still likely highly under-representative of the actual number, because people, in general, aren't willing to divulge that information openly.

But two psychologists from the University of Kentucky think they have found a better method. And their results are surprising.

Will Gervais and Maxine Najle have determined, with a somewhat high margin of error, that 26 percent of Americans are atheists.

"We can say with a 99 percent probability that it's higher than 11 per-

Estimated Percentage of Atheists in America*

■ An estimated 26% of Americans may be considered to be atheists.



Source: Results of study by Will Gervais and Maxine Najle, University of Kentucky*

cent," Gervais said.

Most reputable polls have shown that about 10 percent of Americans don't believe in God, and that number has been growing every year. But no poll has ever made the leap to say that a quarter of the population are atheists, although a quarter identifies as "nonreligious."

"There's a lot of atheists in the closet," Gervais said. "If they knew there are lots of people just like them out there, that could potentially promote more tolerance."

Gervais and Najle have submitted their results to the journal Social Psychological and Personality Science.

To get a more accurate reading on the number of atheists, Gervais and Najle set up a test of 2,000 people.

Half of the participants were asked to read through a list of statements such as "I am a vegetarian" or "I own a dog." Instead of answering yes or no to each, the participants only had to write down the number of statements that were true for them. Using this method, participants don't have to directly

acknowledge any specific condition.

The other half of participants got the same list, but with one statement added: "I believe in God."

By comparing the responses between the groups, the researchers could then estimate how many people don't believe in God. (Because both groups should, in theory, have a similar number of vegetarians, dog owners, etc., any increases in the number of agreed-to statements from the first group to the second should be reflective of the number of people who don't believe in God.)

Gervais and Najle replicated the study with a second sample of 2,000 participants, and got similar results to the first study.

As for the veracity of this research, the psychologists admit that it does have a wide margin of error, but they do stand by their contention that the number of reported nonbelievers around the country has been continually underreported.

"In time, we'll hopefully be able to refine our methods and find other indirect measurement techniques," Gervais says.

FFRF protests NASA religious grant

FFRF is again protesting a wrongful NASA grant of more than \$1 million in taxpayer money that was largely used for religious purposes.

In May 2015, NASA's astrobiology program awarded \$1.108 million to the Center of Theological Inquiry for "an interdisciplinary inquiry on the societal implications of astrobiology, the study of the origins, evolution, distribution, and future of life in the universe."

Center Director William Storrar stated at the time, "The aim of this inquiry is to foster theology's dialogue with astrobiology on its societal implications, enriched by the contribution of scholars in the humanities and social sciences."

FFRF sent a letter last year questioning the grant. The principal thrust of the grant was theological. The grant was patently unconstitutional, FFRF asserted, since government-funded scientific studies of theology create state-church entanglements.

As part of its investigation, FFRF requested records from NASA. After several denials by the agency and many appeals by FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, FFRF finally obtained about 550 pages of records. Comb-



ing through these pages, Seidel and FFRF's legal interns made two startling discoveries: First, there was damning evidence confirming that the grant was indeed unconstitutional, violating the separation of state and church. And, second, NASA Technical Officer Mary Voytek, the official managing the grant, has had a questionable and likely unethical relationship with Storrar.

With the NASA money, the Center of Theological Inquiry hired 11 theologians — 10 of them Christian — and only one actual scientist. That wouldn't be problematic if they were doing secular work, but they weren't. The work proposed for the grant included:

- Formulating a "Christian response" to scientific studies on morality,
 - Developing a new model of biblical interpretation.
 - Relating themes from First Corinthians, a book in the Christian bible, to astrobiology.
 - Reconciling a potential astrobiology discovery with Christian theology.
 - Looking at how astrobiology would affect the Christian doctrine of redemption.
 - Examining Christian ethics and Christian doctrines of human obligation.
 - Looking at societal implications of astrobiology with "theological ethics."
 - Writing a monograph on Christian forgiveness.
- "We are informing NASA that it cannot constitutionally fund theology," Seidel writes to NASA Astrobiology Institute Director Penelope Boston in his recent letter. "The Supreme Court has explicitly held that refusing to fund scholarships for theology is not religious discrimination under the First Amendment."



FFRF sends rebuttal to Air National Guard

After a concerned guardsman informed FFRF that ceremonies at the Pease Air National Guard Base regularly schedule chaplains to deliver Christian invocations at mandatory gatherings, FFRF urged the base to remove prayers from the ceremonies.

However, even after FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover noted that such practices are unconstitutional, the New Hampshire Air National Guard commander responded that religious promotion would continue.

"While base chaplains have the right to freely exercise their religion, they do not have a constitutional right to a government-sponsored microphone or to impose their religion on guardsmen attending a mandatory event," wrote Grover to Commanding Officer Colonel James Ryan. "Halting chaplain-led prayer at base events should offend no one. Guardsmen and military chaplains will remain free to practice their religion on their own time, in their own way."

Absurdly, 17 members of Congress signed an ill-informed letter penned by Rep. Doug Collins and Sen. James Lankford in support for the Air National Guard's constitutional violation.

Grover wrote to Collins condemning the congressional advocacy for government endorsement of Christianity. The decision to continue mandatory prayers contradicts the original purpose of military chaplains, Grover wrote, which is to accommodate the free exercise of religion by creating opportunities for service members to voluntarily participate in religious exercises.

Two Ohio officials sacrifice their jobs to uphold First Amendment

FFRF applauds the courage of two local Ohio officials who sacrificed their positions to uphold the First Amendment.

The village of Carey's Mayor Armand Getz and Law Director Emily Beckley took the initiative to stop the Lord's Prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance from being recited at Village Council meetings.

Shockingly, the pair received so many threats for their admirable actions that they resigned on April 1. And, sadly, the Village Council passed a resolution on March 20 to again introduce the Pledge, as well as a moment of silence, before each meeting.

Getz has served our nation with four years of active duty, saying his military background "serves to strengthen my resolve." He said, "If I thought for one minute that someone could conscientiously object to one or both the prayer and Pledge of Allegiance and not suffer any adverse consequences, I would have left it alone." Beckley



Armand Getz



had wisely given a legal opinion that the council dispense with prayer to avoid any potential lawsuit.

"It's stirring to actually find examples of public officials jeopardizing their positions for the sake of the Constitution," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "We are in awe of Mayor Getz and Law Director Beckley."

Getz and Beckley had the correct perspective; the Carey Village Council is mistaken.

"Reciting the Lord's Prayer at each Village Council meeting is unconstitutional," FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote in a March 30 letter to the Carey Village Council.

FFRF & Denver chapter place 12 billboards

FFRF and its Metro Denver Chapter placed a dozen timely billboards throughout the Denver area for a month-long run in March.

The billboards proclaim, “The only wall we need is between church and state.”

“We want the people of Denver and Colorado to know that there is an organization that will stand up and fight for the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state,” says Denver Chapter Director Claudette St.Pierre. “At no time in the history of the United States have our First Amendment rights possibly been more threatened than they are today.”

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor cites newly confirmed Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch as a threat to secular government and individual liberties, given his “natural law” philosophy derived from religious principles.

Denver residents are particularly familiar with Gorsuch and his judicial leanings, since he sat on the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which is based in the city.

However, Gorsuch is not in harmony with the sentiments of his fellow Coloradans. He is out of step with voters in his state, who last November overwhelmingly passed Proposition 106 — the End of Life Options Act — making it one of six states to pioneer rational and compassionate death-with-dignity legislation.

In one of his most egregious verdicts, Gorsuch ruled in 2013 that Hobby Lobby had a religious right to deny women workers forms of contraception that its founder opposes. The U.S. Supreme Court went on to uphold that ruling, giving Hobby Lobby, a for-profit corporation, a religious exemption from following the Affordable Care Act’s contraceptive mandate.

Gaylor calls Gorsuch’s position “untenable,” saying “religion cannot be allowed to trump women’s rights.”

The famed “wall of separation” phrase harks back to a letter that President Thomas Jefferson wrote the Baptists of Danbury, Conn., on Jan. 1, 1802, explaining that the Establish-



Members of FFRF’s Metro Denver Chapter show off one of the dozen billboards it and FFRF placed in the Denver area in March.

Nonbelief Relief gives \$10K to combat famine

FFRF’s charitable arm gives to UNICEF to help efforts in Somalia

Nonbelief Relief, a nonreligious humanitarian agency, is giving \$10,000 to UNICEF for famine relief efforts in Somalia.

International aid officials recently announced that they are facing one of the biggest humanitarian disasters since World War II. Both drought and war have devastated Somalia. Up to four famines — in Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria and Yemen — are breaking out at once, endangering more than 20 million lives, according to The New York Times.

“Those of us who are not religious care deeply about this world, our only world,” says Nonbelief Relief Director Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We appreciate UNICEF’s work in Somalia and nearby nations, and we want to help it save lives.”

Other donations made by Nonbelief Relief in 2017 include:

- \$5,000 to the International African American Mu-



seum being built at the site of the Charleston, S.C., wharf where more than 100,000 enslaved Africans were brought through at the main port of entry in North America. The museum, expected to be completed by 2019, will illuminate their lives, history and descendants.

- \$10,000 to **Open Doors for Refugees** (via Center for Community Stewardship), which has a \$100,000 fundraising goal for 2017 to aid displaced Syrians and other refugees in Madison, Wis.
- \$10,000 to the **World Food Program (USA)**, affiliated with the United Nations, “where needed most to ameliorate starvation, hunger and malnutrition.” Many of the starvation “hot spots,” such as Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Nigeria and Yemen have religion-based terrorism, warfare or disruption contributing to starvation, notes Nonbelief Relief. Last year, the charity gave the agency

\$20,000 for Syrian relief and \$10,000 for relief in Sudan.

- \$25,000 to the **Women’s Medical Fund**, co-founded by the late Anne Nicol Gaylor, who was the FFRF’s principal founder. The Women’s Medical Fund is an all-volunteer nonprofit based in Wisconsin and is believed to be the longest continuously operating abortion rights charity in the nation.

Nonbelief Relief was incorporated in 2015, with the Freedom From Religion Foundation as its sole member, and a board created to carry out the donations. It seeks to remediate conditions of human suffering and injustice on a global scale, whether the result of natural disasters, human actions or adherence to religious dogma.

Donations to Nonbelief Relief, which are deductible for income-tax purposes, may be made via FFRF by designating Nonbelief Relief in the donation dropdown. Your donation will enable Nonbelief Relief to continue to make humanitarian donations in the name of nontheism and freethought.

Quotable quotes from a nonagenarian atheist



Photo by Dan Barker

Ken Proulx, 91, one of FFRF’s most august members, is pictured with Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

Here are some of Ken’s words of wisdom:

“Instead of the cross, the symbol of the Catholic Church should be the rack and the stake.”

“If they would take these words ‘heaven’ and ‘paradise’ and put them under the microscope of aises, they’d realize they’ve only got noise, a disturbance of the air, nothing more.”

“There isn’t a single writer who makes a reference to this Jesus character when he was pulling out all these party tricks with fishes and loaves of bread. There isn’t an ounce of evidence Jesus even existed. People invent their own gods.”



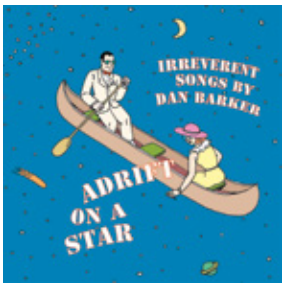
Photo by Chris Line

Editorial Assistant Molly Hanson sits in the Ken Proulx Cupola on the fourth floor of FFRF’s newly expanded Freethought Hall in downtown Madison, Wis.

What Is a Freethinker?

freethinker *n.*
1 A person who forms opinions about religion on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.

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FFRF VICTORIES

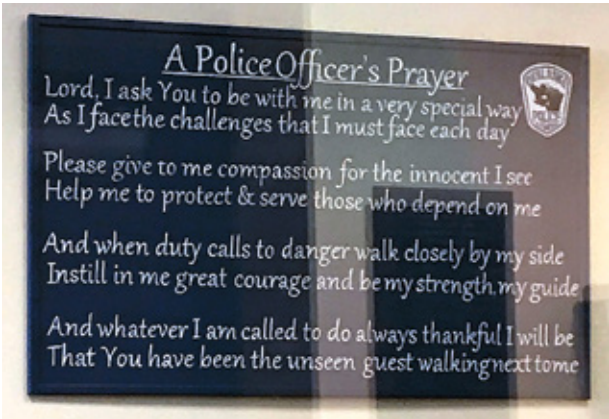
FFRF gets police station prayer display removed

A huge prayer display has been removed from a Wisconsin police station thanks to FFRF intervening on behalf of the Constitution.

A concerned area resident contacted FFRF to report that the Onalaska Police Department had a large religious display on the wall of a public room in a local police station.

It is laudable for the police department to recognize the challenges officers face and to promote compassion and courage in law enforcement. But these sentiments should not be couched in the religious message that a god should be the officers’ “guide” in their work, and is responsible for their success and safety, FFRF asserted.

“Displaying ‘A Police Officer’s Prayer’ in the police station demonstrates a preference for religion over nonreligion on behalf of the Onalaska Police Department,” FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote



to Onalaska Police Chief Jeffrey Trotnic in January. “By endorsing belief in a god, the Onalaska Police Department sponsors a religious message, which is ‘impermissible because it sends the ancillary mes-

sage to . . . nonadherents’” that they are not full members of the political community, to quote the U.S. Supreme Court.

Citizens interact with and rely on law enforcement officers during some of the most urgent and vulnerable times of their lives, FFRF reminded Trotnic. The Onalaska Police Department’s religious display conveyed a message to nonreligious citizens that they weren’t favored members of the political community. Law enforcement must be even-handed and avoid any appearance of bias toward some citizens or hostility toward others.

FFRF requested that the prayer display be removed immediately. The Onalaska Police Department recently informed FFRF that it has acceded to the organization’s request.

“Dear Mr. Jayne: The item in question has been removed,” Trotnic wrote back.

By Molly Hanson

Florida teacher stops praying with students

Florida’s Walton County School District put an end to classroom prayers in its public elementary school after FFRF got involved.

A concerned district family informed FFRF that a teacher at West DeFuniak Elementary was imposing prayer on her third-grade class. The year before, the teacher had been doing the same with her second-grade class. FFRF was told that she was lining her students up against a wall to sanitize their hands and then praying with them before lunch. When the family addressed the concern with the school principal, she failed to take action.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter Feb. 28 to WCSD Superintendent Russell Hughes.

Hughes responded on March 3 that he would begin the recommended investigation. FFRF was later informed that classroom prayers had ended.

FFRF shuts off Colorado school’s marquee



Thanks to FFRF, a Colorado public high school’s digital marquee will no longer display advertisements for Orchard Church.

Since 2012, Prairie View High School has permanently displayed the sign promoting a Christian message. It was donated by the church as a way of showcasing the unconstitutional partnership between the school and Orchard Church.

For years, the high school has allowed the church to use its building for religious services, and now the church plans to strengthen this alliance by building its own facility next door.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to School District 27J Superintendent Chris Fiedler on March 1.

District General Council Janet K.

Wyatt responded on March 20 that the sign listing Orchard Church activities would no longer be displayed starting in March and that all references to Orchard Church would be removed from the sign once the school year ends in May.

New Mexico museum film to be properly replaced

Starting this spring, the Bradbury Science Museum in New Mexico will show a new film to replace a movie that unnecessarily endorsed religion and distorted historical fact.

FFRF was informed by several concerned citizens across the country of religious imagery in a movie being shown at the Bradbury Science Museum, which is a part of a government-run laboratory. The movie, “The Town that Never Was,” displays religious iconography and prayers to Catholic deities in its first two minutes, apparently to contrast Catholicism with the Nazi regime.

“The clumsy attempt at contrast is a distraction that happens to endorse religion in an inappropriate manner,” wrote Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker to Bradbury Science Museum Director Linda Deck in November 2016.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a follow-up letter to Linda Deck on Feb. 21 asking for the religious imagery to be edited out. Deck responded on March 14 that a more appropriate history film would replace “The Town that Never Was.”

Soccer coach to stay hands and prayer-free

A California high school soccer coach will be keeping his hands and blessings off athletes after FFRF blew the whistle on the constitutional foul.

It was brought to FFRF’s attention by a concerned community member that the coach was leading his players in prayer before games, which involved the “laying of hands” ritual.

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to Los Banos Unified School District Acting Superintendent Dean Bubar on March 24. After receiving Ziegler’s letter, the district looked into the matter and discussed the First Amendment violation with the coach. Bubar wrote to inform FFRF on March 30 that the coach assured the district he would refrain from promoting or participating in religious rituals during the next soccer season.

California schools’ religious promotion ends

Two instances of unconstitutional religious promotion by staff in California’s Del Norte County Unified School District were brought to FFRF’s attention.

A weekly bulletin distributed to staff at Del Norte High School and put on display in the school’s hallway contained a religious saying at the end which read: “Your talent is God’s gift to you. What you do with it is your gift back to God.” FFRF was also informed that at the district’s Bess Maxwell Elementary School, a cafeteria worker had handed out pencils to students on Valentine’s Day with notes attached reading “Jesus [heart]’s You and I Do Too!”

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to Del Norte County USD Superintendent Jeff Harris on March 17.

Harris wrote back that day, informing FFRF that the high school principal had dealt with the religious wording in the bulletin and that the district administration was addressing the inappropriate gift given out on Valentine’s Day.

Prayers silenced by FFRF in Georgia school

Two teachers at Jones-Wheat Elementary School in Georgia’s Decatur County Schools District will no longer be teaching students to pray after FFRF got involved.

A concerned parent contacted FFRF to report that their child had recited prayers at home that they had learned in school. It was discovered that multiple teachers at the school had been engaging in the prayer practice resulting in the indoctrination of schoolchildren.

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler contacted Decatur County Schools Superintendent Tim Cochran on January 18.

After receiving Ziegler’s letter, FFRF was informed that Cochran held a meeting with all district administrators to remind each employee of the prohibitions on religious expression set forth by the Establishment Clause.

Michigan town removes religious memorial

FFRF and the Center For Inquiry were informed by a local resident of Alto, Mich., of an unconstitutional cross memorial monument at Alto Veterans Park.

The memorial displayed a black



cutout of a soldier kneeling and a Christian cross.

FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert and CFI Vice President Nicholas Little wrote to the Alto Downtown Development Authority to express concern over the religious display to honor all veterans, especially when 25 percent of military personnel identify as atheist or agnostic.

Markert and Little pointed out that the memorial sent out a message that the government only cares about the deaths of Christian soldiers and not non-Christian or nonreligious soldiers.

The organizations were informed on March 29 that the memorial had been removed and would not be reinstalled.

Montana youth minister deterred from schools

Religious leaders will no longer be permitted to prey upon school children for proselytization in Montana’s Missouri’s Forsyth R-III Schools after FFRF raised alarm.

It was brought to FFRF’s concern that a youth minister, Jeffrey Barrikman, from First Baptist Church, was given special access to students at Forsyth Middle School. Barrikman had been allowed onto school grounds as a “visitor,” a privilege he used to sit and speak with children during lunch. Back in 2015, the district had been put on notice of similar recruitment tactics by First Baptist Church.

On March 31, FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott cautioned the school district against its unconstitutional endorsement of First Baptist Church and allowance of evangelization during the lunch period.

“This predatory conduct is inappropriate and should raise many red flags,” Elliott wrote to Superintendent Jeff Mingus.

Mingus responded on April 7 informing FFRF that adjustments had been made to ensure that school visitors do not violate the separation of religion and school.

Times Square shows FFRF video ad



FFRF is promoting its secular video message — “The only wall we need is between church and state” — in giant lettering on a digital board that is 56 feet wide and 29 feet high, in the heart of Times Square at 1500 Broadway. The message is looping several times per hour from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m., and will air at least 5,460 times over a three-month period. The animated board was designed by FFRF Graphic Designer Roger Daleiden.

“With so many political developments preoccupying Americans, we don’t want the constitutional principle of separation between state and church to be overlooked,” says FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. “With the appointment of Judge Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court, the Establishment Clause is in danger.”

Texas Gov. Abbott files for protective order in FFRF case

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has filed for a protective order in an ongoing FFRF case that challenges his censorship.

FFRF received a state-issued permit to place, in response to a Christian nativity scene, an exhibit in the Texas Capitol in December 2015 honoring the Bill of Rights and winter solstice.

Abbott ordered the exhibit removed, calling the display “tasteless sarcasm” and claiming that FFRF was seeking to “mock our nation’s Judeo-Christian heritage.”

The motion, filed April 17, seeks to prevent Abbott from being deposed in the lawsuit that FFRF filed after its freedom of expression was muzzled.

Abbott’s motion for a protective order asserts that as a high-ranking government official, he is protected from having to testify. The motion also asserts, “Governor Abbott has no unique personal knowledge of any fact that is in any way relevant to this dispute.”

Last year, U.S. District Court Judge Sam Sparks ruled that FFRF’s case against the governor in his official and individual capacity could proceed.

After initially issuing the censorship letter, Abbott tweeted, “Mocking the Capitol Nativity Scene is Offensive. I Demand Removal of Satirical ‘Nativity Scene’ from Capitol.”

FFRF will file a response to the protective order motion, asserting that Abbott is subject to a deposition in the case. The case is scheduled for a trial in October 2018.

Housing

Continued from page 1

§107(2) was actually intended to provide a financial benefit to religious clergy without regard to any ‘unique’ housing relationships.” The principal sponsor, Rep. Peter Mack, argued during hearings, “Certainly, in these times when we are being threatened by a godless and anti-religious world movement we should correct this discrimination against certain ministers of the gospel who are carrying on such a courageous fight . . . caring for our spiritual welfare.”

FFRF and its members first brought suit to challenge the housing allowance in 2009 in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California. The case was later moved to Wisconsin, after the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision in another case limiting who may challenge certain government tax expenditures.

In 2013, U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb ruled in FFRF’s favor, finding that the clergy housing allowance was unconstitutional. She wrote that “the exemption provides a benefit to religious persons and no one else, even though doing so is not necessary to alleviate a special burden on religious exercise.”

The decision provoked a national near-hysterical outcry from churches and ministers, with practically every denomination, including the Unitarians and liberal Jewish, filing briefs against FFRF. FFRF has referred to the case as “David vs. Goliath” because virtually all religious groups weighed in against FFRF’s challenge to religious privilege.

In 2014, the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Barker and Gaylor did not have standing to bring the case because they hadn’t yet sought a refund of their housing allowance from the IRS. Accordingly, Barker and Gaylor filed for a tax refund in 2015 and were denied a housing allowance by the IRS.

In a June 27, 2016, letter the IRS stated, “IRC Section 107 specifically requires that to exclude a housing allowance from income you must be a minister of the gospel. The IRS does not have the authority to interpret this to include anyone other than those who meet this definition.” This proves the point FFRF is attempting to make in its lawsuit.

The case, *Gaylor v. Lew*, Case No. 3:16-cv-00215-bbc, is before Judge Barbara Crabb, U.S. District Court, Western District of Wisconsin.

Supreme Court leans over slippery slope

Missouri preschool case could be bad news for state-church separation

In what could be a dangerous precedent, the Supreme Court of the United States appeared to lean toward breaking down a portion of the state-church wall that has prevented religious institutions from receiving public money.

A Missouri day care and preschool owned by Trinity Lutheran Church had requested a grant from a state fund to help refurbish a playground’s black-topped surface with rubber particles. Missouri’s Constitution, like those in 38 other states, prohibits sending tax money to churches and church schools. When the state denied the funds, the school sued.

On April 19, most of the Supreme Court justices showed signs that they would be willing to allow funds to go this project, contending it is not specifically religious in nature and would therefore be discrimination based on religion. Only Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg indicated they felt it was a slippery slope that should not be crossed.

Sotomayor said she did not see how the state’s refusal to fund a play-

ground violates the First Amendment. “No one is asking the church to change its beliefs,” she said. “If the issue is discrimination based on religion, what about the benefits that go to churches? There’s plenty of people who would think the tax exemption goes too far.”

When Ginsburg asked the church attorney if it could “demand as a matter of federal constitutional right that the playground be funded, even though they have an admission policy that favors members of their church?” he said, “Yes.”

Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank thinks the lawsuit is another attempt by conservatives to chisel away at the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

“It was about interest groups whose business model depends on perpetuating the culture wars trying to frighten people into thinking Christianity is under siege,” he wrote. “It was a springtime version of the annual ‘war on Christmas.’”

The case could lead to a major shift in the law on church schools and public funding. Lawmakers in many states have been pushing hard for vouchers and scholarships to allow public funds to support religious schools.

It was unclear from the argument whether the justices would rule broadly in favor of church schools or focus narrowly on the playground because it had nothing to do with worshiping or teaching religion.

It initially appeared that the case might resolve itself when Missouri’s new Republican governor, Eric Greitens, announced that the state would no longer deny grants to church schools, thereby making the case seemingly moot. But the justices proceeded as if the case were still under the previous state policy.



Ruth Bader Ginsburg



Sonia Sotomayor

Pussy hats galore



Photo by Laryn Seering

FFRF member and hardworking volunteer Linda Josheff (center) offered to knit feminist pussy hats for interested staffers. Taking her up on her kind offer, pictured (from left with Linda) in the Anne Nicol Gaylor Lobby of FFRF’s office, Freethought Hall: FFRF Editorial Assistant Molly Hanson; Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor; Director of First Impressions Lisa Treu, Bookkeeper Eleanor McEntee and Publicist Lauryn Seering.

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Freedom depends upon freethinkers

IN THE NEWS

Church may form own police force?

Despite FFRF objection, Alabama Senate OKs bill

The Alabama Senate has voted to allow a church to form its own police force.

Lawmakers on April 12 voted 24-4 to allow Briarwood Presbyterian Church in a Birmingham suburb to establish a law enforcement department. The measure now goes to the House, and if it passes there, as expected, it will go to Gov. Kay Ivey for her signature.

The church says it needs its own police officers to keep its school and 4,000-person congregation safe.

Critics of the bill argue that a police department that reports to church offi-

cials could be used to cover up crimes.

FFRF has notified Alabama Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee Chairman Allen Treadaway and other members of the major problems with the bill.

“Our Founders sought to move away from this violence by relegating government and religion to separate spheres,” FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote. “Authorizing a church police force is precisely the unconstitutional unification of religious zeal and secular power they sought to avoid.”

The state has given a few private universities the authority to have a police force, but never a church or non-

school entity.

Experts have said such a police department would be unprecedented in the United States.

“The Alabama Statehouse is hurtling down an extremely slippery slope,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “A constitutional wreck is in the offing unless it changes course.”

The ACLU of Alabama also urged lawmakers to vote no to the Briarwood police force.

“Vesting state police powers in a church police force would violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment,” Randall Marshall, the ACLU’s acting executive director, wrote in a memo. “These bills unnec-



Briarwood Presbyterian Church

essarily carve out special programs for religious organizations and inextricably intertwine state authority and power with church operations.”

Court: Texas Board can begin with prayer

A federal appeals court ruled on March 20 that a Texas school board may begin its meetings with student-led prayers.

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rejected an appeal by the American Humanist Association, which said the practice by the Birdville Independent School District violated the First Amendment’s prohibition of a government establishment of religion.

Birdville’s school board, since 1997, has let students open meetings with statements that were usually prayers, often referring to Jesus and asking audience members to pray.

Writing for the appeals court, Circuit Judge Jerry Smith said the matter involved legislative prayer, because a school board was “more like a legislature” than a classroom.

Majority of states has all-Christian delegations

A recent Pew Research Center analysis of the 115th Congress compiled by CQ Roll Call shows that more than half the states (28) have delegations that are composed entirely of Christians. These delegations range in size from three members to 38. In none of these states is the general population more than 86 percent Christian.

Other findings show that:

- Even though less than half of all American adults are Protestant, six states have delegations that are 100 percent Protestant.
- Catholics, who make up 31 percent of Congress and 21 percent of the adult population, are included among the congressional delegations of all but 11 states.
- There are 20 states that have at least one non-Christian member of Congress.

Sacred rivers in India given human status

A court in northern India has given the Ganges and Yamuna rivers the status of “living human entities.” Both rivers are considered sacred in India by the majority Hindu population.

The high court in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand said this would help in the “preservation and conservation” of the highly polluted rivers.

It added that the “legal status” ensures that polluting the rivers would now

amount to harming a human being.

The court said in its ruling that Hindus had “deep faith” in the two rivers and they “collectively connect with them.”

Facebook threatened for blasphemy in Pakistan

Pakistan’s government wants social media networks, including Facebook, to remove material deemed insulting to Islam or the Prophet Muhammad. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif warned that those posting such content would be “strictly punished.”

“If we do not get a response from social media, I do not care about anyone, there is nothing greater than our faith,” Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan said. “If social media and especially international social media stays on this route, then we will have to take strong action regarding social media.”

He did not specify what action might be taken. Those convicted of blasphemy can face the death penalty under Pakistani law.

Quarter of UK Christians say no Jesus resurrection

A quarter of people who describe themselves as Christians in Great Britain do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus, a survey commissioned by the BBC suggests.

However, almost one in 10 people of no religion says they do believe the Easter story, but it has “some content that should not be taken literally.”

A fifth of nonreligious people believe in life after death, the poll suggests.

The survey also shows:

- 17 percent of all people believe the biblical story of the resurrection word-for-word.
- 31 percent of Christians believe the biblical story of the resurrection, rising to 57 percent among “active” Christians (those who go to a religious service at least once a month).
- 50 percent of those surveyed did not believe in the resurrection at all.
- 20 percent of nonreligious people say they believe in some form of life after death.
- 9 percent of nonreligious people believe in Jesus’ resurrection, 1 percent of whom say they believe it literally.

Indiana man receives ‘ATHE1ST’ license plate

A man who was initially denied an Indiana license plate reading “ATHE1ST” now has the personalized plate.

The Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles denied Chris Bontrager’s first request in February without citing a specific reason. The bureau’s denial letter to Bontrager noted the agency could refuse a personalized plate if it had a connotation offensive to good taste or decency, was misleading or deemed improper.

Florida Senate votes for religious expression

Florida’s public schools would have to let students lead religious prayers during the school day and at school-sanctioned events, under a proposal that the state Senate approved recently.

State Sen. Dennis Baxley heralded his bill as a way for lawmakers to “take a stand for liberty,” because it makes

explicitly clear the rights to religious expression that students and teachers have in public schools, regardless of their faith.

But Democrats worry the measure goes beyond existing protections of religious freedom and violates the constitutional separation between church and state. They also fear it could lead to students and teachers being ostracized or discriminated against if they’re of non-Christian faiths or nonreligious.

Virginia governor vetoes ‘religious freedom’ bills

Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe struck down two Republican-backed bills aimed at protecting religious groups that oppose same-sex marriage.

McAuliffe, a Democrat in the last year of his four-year term, vetoed the bills, calling them “another attempt to stigmatize” LGBT Virginians.

“You already have religious protection. Why would you push this bill out that does absolutely nothing?” McAuliffe said. “All you’re doing is trying to divide people. And I’m just not going to tolerate it.”

Republican leaders have said the vetoes show McAuliffe’s disinterest in working with the Legislature and have argued some of the bills aren’t as divisive as the governor makes them out to be.

By 2035, Muslim births to overtake Christian ones

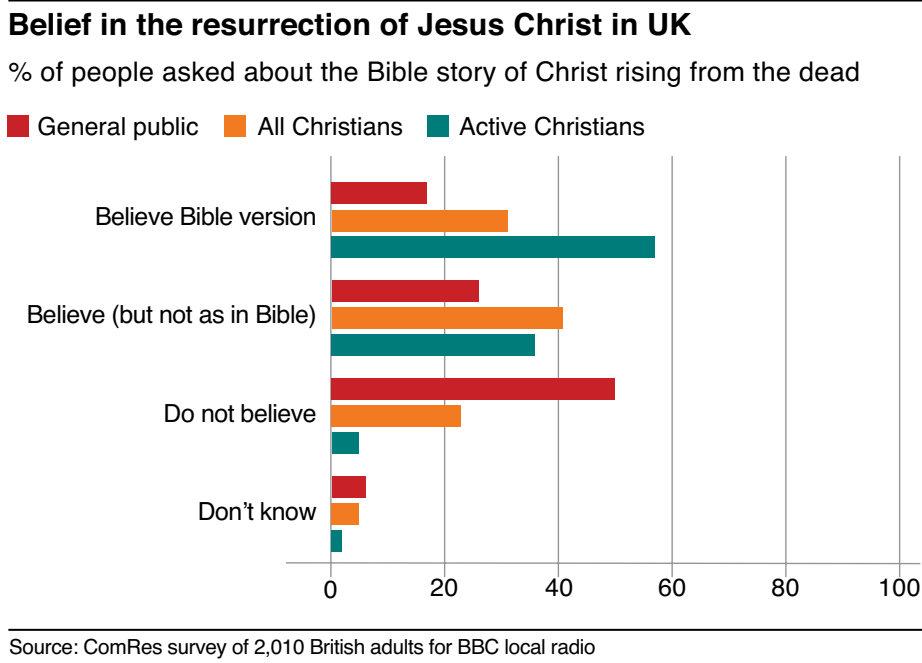
Worldwide in the next 20 years, the number of babies born to Muslims is expected to surpass the births from Christian parents, although there will still be more Christians in the world.

Muslims now account for 24 percent of the world population, compared with 31 percent for Christians.

But a new study by the Pew Research Center found that due to higher fertility rates and a relatively young population, the share of babies born to Muslims is growing.

So while 31 percent of all births between 2010 and 2015 were in Muslim families as compared with 33 percent in Christian ones, the proportions are expected to be nearly equal at around 225 million in the early 2030s.

People who identify with no religion, who now make up 16 percent of the world population, had 10 percent of the world’s babies during that period. But in four decades, 9 percent of babies will be born to the religiously unaffiliated.



FFRF supports the Johnson Amendment

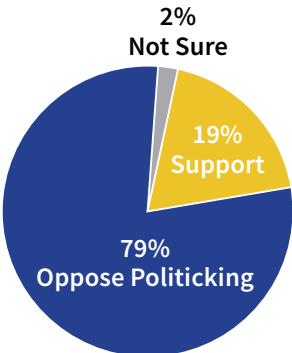
Americans oppose mixing church and politics

“Americans already argue about politics outside the church. They don’t want pastors bringing those arguments into worship.” — *Scott McConnell, executive director, Lifeway Research (Southern Baptist Convention)*

President Donald Trump has said he wants to repeal the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits all 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates. The argument for abolishing it is that it restricts the free speech rights of churches and other religious groups.

But FFRF, like most Americans, is strongly against repealing the Johnson Amendment.

Four out of five Americans oppose politicking from the pulpit, according to a 2016 survey by LifeWay Research, the Southern Baptist Convention’s research arm. Fully 79 percent oppose pastors endorsing candidates during a church service. More



Source: LifeWay Research

than 8 in 10 believe it’s inappropriate for churches to use their resources for political campaigns.

The Pew Research Center confirms that “most Americans oppose political endorsements from churches.” Pew Research found that only 33 percent of Republican respon-

dents and 26 percent of Democrats approved of churches endorsing political candidates.

It doesn’t prohibit free speech

Pastors and clergy are free to personally endorse and support candidates, and often do. Under the Johnson Amendment, they can also sermonize or comment on moral issues (war, abortion/contraception access, civil rights, poverty, etc.). They can even comment on the job performance of public officials. They can engage in nonpartisan “get out the vote” campaigns.

What the Johnson Amendment wisely prevents is intervention in a political campaign by any 501(c)(3) tax-exempt group, including churches.

Why does it prohibit politicking?

Being a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) — in which donations to the organization are tax deductible — is a major privilege. American taxpayers essentially subsidize 501(c)(3)s, with the understanding that they will engage in charitable or educational endeavors, not political campaigning. It would

What the Johnson Amendment wisely prevents is intervention in a political campaign by any 501(c)(3) tax-exempt group, including churches.



undermine the very nature of 501(c)(3)s to funnel tax-exempt money to political campaigns or use tithes for partisan purposes. The Johnson Amendment is a neutrally applied law that properly bars any (c)(3) nonprofit, not just churches, from engaging in partisan politicking.

What would a repeal do?

Basically, it would convert churches into unaccountable PACS. (Churches are financial black holes, uniquely exempted from filing the Form 990 tax return that other (c)(3) groups must file with the IRS. Church donations to political campaigns would be uniquely untraceable and unregulated.)

It also would allow individuals to make unlimited tax-deductible contributions to political campaigns via church tithes and donations.

And it would allow any 501(c)(3) nonprofit (not just churches) to campaign on behalf of candidates.

What would the ‘Free Speech Fairness Act’ allow?

All 501(c)(3) nonprofits (not just churches) could campaign on behalf of candidates, meaning formerly nonpartisan voter registration drives could endorse specific candidates.

Church congregations could be converted into political machines. For example, church bulletins

could be converted into campaign fliers, sermons into political endorsements, congregations into unregistered PACs.

No need to ‘fix’ amendment

The Johnson Amendment isn’t a threat to our democracy. But allowing tax-exempt entities to engage in political campaigning would be. It would destabilize our political system by creating an avenue for unregulated money to finance political campaigns with zero accountability.

Repeal of the Johnson Amendment would also negatively impact churches. Inevitably “less tax-deductible contributions would go to churches and charities for their core activities, especially in election years,” Father Thomas Reese wrote in the National Catholic Reporter. “Money would be diverted from churches and charities to tax-exempts devoted to politics.”

Ugly political fights would divide congregations and denominations.

The hasty calls to repeal the Johnson Amendment are so ill-considered they haven’t even addressed the disparate treatment of (c)(4) lobbying groups, equally barred from engaging in partisan politicking. Observers have pointed out lobbying groups would be incentivized to adopt (c)(3) status, further eroding the tax base and blurring the line between education, lobbying and partisan politicking.

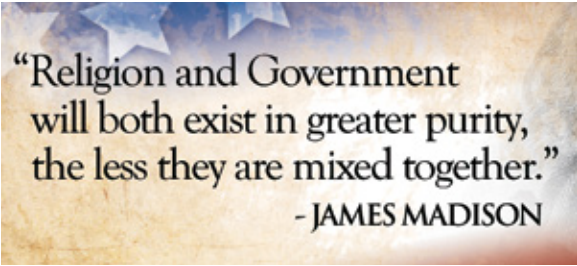
What others are saying

“Churches would be smart to oppose repeal.” — *Father Thomas Reese, National Catholic Reporter*

“For 60 years, this law has played an essential role in maintaining public confidence in, and support for, the charitable community Allowing the endorsement of political candidates is tantamount to allowing political agents to use the public’s goodwill towards the charitable sector as a vehicle to advance, through financial contributions, their own partisan political will.” — *Daniel Cardinali, president and CEO of Independent Sector*

“Nonpartisanship is vital to the work of charitable nonprofits. It enables organizations to address community challenges, and invites the problem-solving skills of all residents, without the distractions of party labels and the caustic partisanship that is bedeviling our country.” — *Tim Delaney, president of the National Council of Nonprofits*

To read more, go to: ffrf.org/johnson-amendment.



Take a freethinking Bahamas cruise in 2018!



Take a five day-cruise on the luxurious Norwegian Epic along with other freethinkers, including FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker, in an event sponsored by FFRF’s Florida chapter.

Looking to get away for a few days with other like-minded people? Then join the Central Florida Freethought Community on a five-day cruise to the Bahamas in March 2018.

FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker will be the special guests and will speak during the cruise (and Dan may even play the piano).

The trip is March 3-7, 2018, and leaves from Port Canaveral, Fla. Ports of call in the Bahamas include Great Stirrup Cay and Nassau. You’ll be traveling on the Norwegian Epic, which includes an aqua park with a 200-foot Epic Plunge, a bowling alley, an ice bar and a Vegas-style casino, among many other amenities and activities.

Go to FreethoughtCruise.com to sign up or to get more information. Book now for the best prices and choose from one free amenity per cabin. Full payment isn’t due until Dec. 1.

Safe and legal abortion is, in fact, pro-life

This op-ed first appeared in The Capital Times in Madison, Wis., on April 4.

By Ingrid Andersson

I recently attended the premier of the documentary “Playing Dr.” by Owen Road Productions. The film focuses on the 20-week abortion ban passed in Wisconsin in 2015. Apparently, few Wisconsinites have heard of this ban. Abortion at 20 weeks is rare. The law is based on the “junk science” assertion that fetuses at 20 weeks feel pain. I don’t know whether or not fetuses feel pain. I am told there is reputable science that suggests plants feel pain. Pain appears to be a ubiquitous self-protective mechanism throughout Earth’s plant and animal families.

But everyone knows pain is subjective. How can the potential and brief pain of a 20-week abortion be placed over a raped girl’s pain? Or over a devastated couple’s pain when they hear, at their 20-week ultrasound appointment, that their fetus is developing abnormally and will certainly die? Nobody talks about the very probable eventual pain of a growing little body wracked with nonviable deformities. These are the realities behind 20-week ultrasounds. As if that pain were not enough, Wisconsin offers no option to a pregnant woman after 20 weeks, even in the case of lethal fetal anomalies, except to continue pregnancy for weeks on end, until her body goes into the pain of labor and gives birth to a baby already dead or dying. What is “pro-life” about that? Who, exactly, is blocking women from basic humane and preventive health care —



Ingrid Andersson

and why? What is moral about forced pregnancy and motherhood, under any circumstance? There is a long and documented history of maternal suffering and mortality prior to safe and legal abortion, whether due to the relentless burdens and terror of unwanted pregnancy, or to the dangers of unsafe abortion methods. We should be celebrating safe and legal abortion for what it is: Pro-life!

“I believe the pro-choice majority must hold accountable the individuals who program American minds against abortion.”
— Ingrid Andersson

Yet the word “abortion” triggers a strong negative reaction — sometimes murderous — in Americans. It is a conditioned cultural reflex. The reaction is triggered in spite of little or no understanding of abortion in real practice or real lives. In women who choose abortion, the reaction can induce guilt and shame. In providers of abortion, it induces fear for personal and family safety. Women like myself, who grew up grateful for reasonable access to abortion (in an era when *Roe v. Wade* stood intact as a brilliant and revered piece of

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT WISCONSIN'S ABORTION BAN

- 99% of all abortions occur **before 20 weeks**.
- A woman experiencing serious **health complications** or severe **fetal abnormalities** would be prevented from accessing the care she needs.
- Victims of **rape and incest** would have no opportunity to decide what is best for themselves.
- Medical experts oppose the ban. You know, **actual doctors**.
- Doctors would face **prison** time for providing abortion care to women- even to preserve their health.
- Women and families would have no opportunity to make their own **personal, private** health care decisions.
- Politicians who support the ban will **stop at nothing** to end access to birth control and abortion.

ppawi.org/abortionbans

judicial writing) tend to stay silent on the subject, to avoid personal or professional repercussions. I believe the pro-choice majority must hold accountable the individuals who program American minds against abortion. They are in our capitols, media, pulpits, mosques and special interest groups. By separating abortion from dogma, maybe we can make progress against critical threats to life. While Wisconsin is one of the most restrictive states for abortion, it is one of the most liberal for gun possession and industrial polluters. As Garrison Keillor puts it, “It would appear that the Republicans believe the right to life ends 15 minutes after birth.” I believe we who have had abortions can reframe abortion discourse in America by telling our real abortion stories. We can reclaim the lan-

guage of morality and our right to sustainable life. We can begin our stories with the words of the late Anne Gaylor, a great Wisconsin truth-teller and co-founder of FFRF and the Women’s Medical Fund: “Abortion is a blessing.” FFRF Life Member Ingrid Andersson is a nurse-midwife with Community Midwives in Madison, Wis. She is on the board of Women’s Medical Fund, Inc., an organization founded in 1972 to help fund abortions in Wisconsin, and a member of the Madison and Dane County Fetal and Infant Mortality Review team. Ingrid wrote this article after one of her prenatal clients discovered, during her 21-week ultrasound, that the fetus had multiple lethal anomalies. Ingrid dedicates this article to that woman, as well as to her own 80-year-old mother, Karolina Johnson, a survivor of Chicago mafia abortions during the pre-Roe era.

March for Science 2017



The FFRF Metro Denver Chapter participated in the March for Science in Civic Center Park, Denver. “We had the opportunity to have a table in the community science education section,” writes FFRF member Claudette St.Pierre. “We provided important information regarding how FFRF continues to advocate for keeping religion out of our public schools by spotlighting some of the latest “wins.” We handed out over 100 of the FFRF membership brochures, including “Top 10 Public School Violations” and the new brochure on vouchers.



The nationwide (and worldwide) March for Science was held April 22, coinciding with Earth Day. Hundreds of thousands of people marched around the country to help bring awareness of the importance of science to the past, present and future of the planet. Several thousand marched in Madison, Wis., where these photos were taken by FFRF’s Legal Intern Chris Line.

Close encounters of the creationist kind

FFRF attorney shoots commercial at Ken Ham’s \$100M Ark Encounter

By Andrew Seidel

It is a monstrosity — a \$100 million lie directed at children. What better place to show the importance of the FFRF’s work than this taxpayer-funded monument to ignorance? So we shot our latest commercial at Ken Ham’s Ark Encounter.

Here were some of my takeaways.

Low attendance

It’s been a rough few months for Ham. His ark opened to a dismal crowd, and the numbers were so bad that he had to revise his attendance estimates after three months. Grant County, which gave Ham \$175,000, and nearly 100 acres of land for \$1, is upset because the ark has “not brought [the county] any money.” Williamstown, the town nearest to the ark, made a similar complaint months ago.

Oh, and let’s not forget that FFRF forced a Virginia town, Christiansburg, to cancel its city-planned, city-sponsored trip to the ark.

I visited the ark on a weekday in February — not what you’d expect to be a busy day — but still, it was deserted. There was nobody on our tour bus. There were no lines. I half expected to see the cliché of a tumbleweed spiraling through the exhibits. We ate a truly terrible buffet lunch in the ark’s cafeteria, which was also desolate.

There was one large group of people at that table behind me, but they were contractors working on expanding the park. From noon to 12:30 p.m., what should be the busiest time, perhaps 35 people came through a dining room that seats 1,500.

When Ham was seeking public tax benefits and incentives, he hired a company that predicted his park would get 2 million visitors every year; about 5,800 people each day. The state hired an independent company that estimated about 325,000 for the first year, dropping to 275,000 a year after that. That’s about 900 a day, and then 750 a day thereafter.

The reality we witnessed favors the state’s study. I asked one of the workers in the forsaken commissary how many people were expected to visit the park that day. “About 450,” she responded, nearly 1/13th (or 8 percent) of Ham’s predicted average. Clearly Ham’s wishful thinking isn’t influencing reality.

Childish defensiveness

The tone of the exhibits is defensive, overly so. Every sign brought to mind a child caught standing over a pillaged birthday cake, icing smeared all over his face, vehemently denying an obvious truth.

Take this sign, one of the first we encountered: “Skeptics often mock the concept of the ark and its animals, so they develop questions designed to make the ark look foolish. However, when one thinks about the ark from a biblical perspective, the skeptics’ questions end up looking foolish.”

A belief in the literal truth of the ark story is foolish; this belief doesn’t need any help from us. Let me translate this sign for you: “Skeptics think the claim that this really happened is false, as dictated by reason, common sense, science, logistics and about a million other simple facts. But, if you ignore reason and facts



FFRF Attorney Andrew Seidel takes a selfie in front of a revealing sign at the Ark Encounter in Williamsburg, Ky.

and just listen to the bible, we’re right!” This is nothing new — and it doesn’t take \$100 million to regurgitate it.

But that’s the argument: Ignore that reasonable voice, listen to your preacher. Genesis 7:20 says that the waters submerged the world’s highest mountains in 15 cubits (22 feet) of water. We are supposed to ignore the many nagging questions that claim presents. Questions such as:

- Is there even enough water to rain that much? It would take, conservatively, about ten Atlantic Oceans to rain as much as the bible claims.
- The ark was surfing at nearly 30,000 feet above the normal sea level for a year. How did these people and animals breathe at that elevation?
- How did they withstand the -40 F temperatures at that altitude?
- How did the animals survive after the flood? The flood would have wiped out every ecosystem and all the food that went along with it.

Ham’s park attempts to answer the most obvious questions, such as: “How did Noah fit 9 million species on the ark?” But Ham fails miserably at this. The answers all boil down to that sign: The bible is right, everything else is wrong. And in trying to answer the skeptics, the entire ark comes off as whiny, uptight, and petulant — just like the child and the ruined birthday cake. Reality simply cannot be denied, even with \$100 million.

Unconvincing

The first real exhibit consists of a bunch of empty cages. Rather than animals, speakers play a soundtrack that includes animals squawking and squealing, with a storm in the background. The visitor is meant to feel what it would be like on the ark, but, if anything, it’s underdone.

Think about what it would be like on that boat with thousands of defecating, caged animals, one window, no ventilation system, no lights, and the worst storm in history raging. And think about living like that for a year.

Like the first exhibit, everything is meant to show how plausible the ark story is, but applying the slightest thought shows just how unconvincing it all truly is.

How does one fit those 9 million species on the boat? According to Ham, Noah didn’t. He took on animal “kinds,” which don’t appear anywhere in the scientific taxonomy. The breakdown goes: Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species. You’ll notice that “Kind” isn’t on there. But

“Kind” does appear in the bible, so Ham hangs his creationist hat on that hook. Anyway, Ham says that Noah took on kinds that later evolved (he painfully tries to say it’s not evolution), into all the species we see today.

My favorite exhibit, by far, was the “Pre-Flood World.” Ham intends this section to show that the world was so evil that it deserved to be slaughtered. It is meant to show humanity’s wickedness. The “Senseless Slaughter, Abuse of Creation” mural is a prime example.

Ham is trying to argue that the “senseless slaughter” of animals is “wicked.” But Ham built the ark because his god senselessly slaughtered almost every single creature on Earth!

God is infinitely more wicked than this gleeful gent. Ham built his park to venerate the same wickedness he’s condemning.

The mural perfectly, if inadvertently, encapsulates the cognitive dissonance religion requires.

As the serpent in the ark says: “If I can convince you that the flood was not real, I can convince you that Heaven and Hell are not real.” True enough.

Ignoring bible

Believers frequently overlook the inconvenient parts of the bible and

Ham is no different. For most of the ark, Ham sticks to the bible. But not all of it. There is at least one huge error and one huge omission.

The error is that the ark isn’t waterproof. Genesis 6:14 says that the ark is “covered inside and out with pitch.” Ham’s ark is not. Pitch is a black, tar-like waterproofing substance. As you can see, Ham took the terrible liberty of ignoring his god’s word and leaving out the pitch.

I found Ham’s omission disappointing, though unsurprising. Ham missed this atheist’s favorite part of the ark story: the end.

We all know most of the story: God is so angry with his playthings that he murders everyone. And not just people, but every animal, too. To his credit, Ham does not shy away from the fact that this story centers on what would have been the most colossal genocide in history.

Everyone but Noah, his unnamed wife, his three sons (Ham, Shem, and Japheth), and their three unnamed wives, is murdered. The supernatural barbarian saves this family because, as he tells Noah, “you alone are righteous before me in this generation.”

Believers assume that “righteous” means moral, but that’s because they forget the end of Noah’s story. After the family disembarks, Noah plants the first vineyard, gets soused, and passes out. Naked. His son, Ham, stumbled on the scene. When Noah awakens from his stupor, he’s angry that Ham stumbled upon his nudity. Instead of self-introspection, Noah curses Ham’s son Canaan — his own grandson — to be a slave.

He blesses his son Shem and then says, “let Canaan be his slave.” He does the same for his son Japheth.

What kind of morality is this? Who would worship such a tyrant? Who would construct a \$100 million monument to this immorality? It turns out, nobody. Even Ham, an intransigent biblical literalist, ignores this ending, as far as I could tell.

Oh, and I almost forgot. According to Ken Ham, there were dinosaurs on the ark.



Photo by Andrew Seidel

A replica of a dinosaur is part of the exhibit of animals that Ark Encounter founder Ken Ham thought were on Noah’s ark.

Thomas W. Jendrock Student Activist Award

Speaking up started early for Kelly Helton

Kelly received a \$1,000 scholarship in part thanks to FFRF member Thomas W. Jendrock. She will also be speaking as a student activist at FFRF's 40th annual convention Sept. 15-16. (See back page for convention details.) She is the 12-year-old daughter of Life Member Jim G. Helton of Kentucky, founder of Tri-State Freethinkers, who notes all of Kelly's activism is initiated by Kelly herself.

By Kelly Helton

My activism started in elementary school when my brother Grover challenged the school by refusing to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. I saw firsthand how one person could make a difference. So I decided I would sit, as well. The difference was I sat in the front of the class at the time, so everyone could see. Several other students ended up sitting once they realized it was an option.

In middle school, we were singing so many religious songs that one of my classmates said, "I feel like I'm in church." Clearly, this was an issue. So, I told my teacher how singing religious songs made some of my classmates and

myself feel uncomfortable. My teacher knew who my dad was and didn't want to be sued, so she said she would try to figure something out. The next day, all the religious songs were removed from my class. However, the other classes still had religious songs. Since my choral teacher continues to put religious songs in our classes, the Tri-State Freethinkers will be sending out a letter.

I have been volunteering at Planned Parenthood for quite some time now. I go to almost every protest and rally. One day, we were going to the state Capitol and we knew there were going to be counter-protesters. My mom was concerned, so she told me I wasn't allowed to go. My dad was getting ready to leave and I knew I had to go, so I snuck into the back seat of his car. As he was getting onto the highway, I popped out of the back seat



Kelly Helton

and said, "I told you I was going!" We had to meet other supporters to catch a chartered bus, so there was no time to turn around.

My dad called my mom and told her what happened. She was furious, but there was nothing my dad could do. She told him not to let me out of his sight. When we got there the counter-protesters separated us. I ended up by the podium with state senators and my dad nowhere in sight.

Afterward, my mom asked how things went and if there were any problems. My dad told her everything went fine and he stood by my side the whole time. Unfortunately for him, I was on the front page of the news, pictured next to the senators with my dad nowhere in sight!

I wanted to make a difference so I asked my dad if I could speak at a Planned Parenthood rally. My dad spoke with Stephanie from Planned Parenthood and gave me most of his speaking time. Ever since then I have been requesting to speak. So far, I have spoken at Planned Parenthood, International Women's Day in Cincinnati, Tri-State Freethinkers and NaNoCon.



12-year-old Kelly Helton speaks to the crowd during the International Women's Day rally in Cincinnati.

The most important issue the world faces is the struggle for equal rights. I felt I could make a difference locally, so I started to speak up and encourage other people to speak up as well.

Richard and Beverly Hermesen Student Activist Award

Harassed for questioning of authority

This special scholarship of \$5,000 is generously endowed by longtime FFRF members and supporters Richard and Beverly Hermesen.

By Cidney Fisk

During my junior year of high school, I protested an amendment to the Colorado Constitution that would give fetuses personhood status. I wore a costume urging voters to vote "no" on the amendment. I was asked to take the costume off because of my student government teacher, who claims, "God made babies, and abortion is murder."

Later in that year, I posted on Instagram that I "don't particularly like attending Delta High School." After this was noticed by staff members, I was called into the counseling office where two faculty members waited for me. They had asked me to remove my post. They told me my behavior was "negative" and if it continued they "would hate to see me lose leadership positions and letters of recommendation." This was a threat.

They also told me I could not fight every battle, citing my objections to school policy. After a while, I felt as though other secular students probably felt the same way and deserved a safe space. I sought to start a secular student alliance, but was denied a staff facilitator.

In October of my senior year, I found out through a staff member that we would be forced to watch a presen-



Cidney Fisk

tation on sexual education that was entitled the "W.A.I.T. Training Program." I researched the program and read reviews on it and found it was a faith-based program. I questioned the staff about the program. They promised it would be perfectly legal and fine.

My parents, a friend and I attended a presentation by Shelly Donahue, a traveling speaker of faith-based abstinence-only information. While there, she attributed the downfall of America and the increase of sex to Planned Parenthood and the Obama administration. Religion was cited several times throughout the presentation.

Donahue then appeared for an assembly at Delta High School on Oct. 18, 2015. I had organized a silent protest in which my friends and I wore shirts with anti-abstinence-only sex-ed slogans.

In Donahue's slideshow that accompanied the presentation, a crucifix appeared on every slide. In her presentation, she noted that "Having sex before marriage brings you further from God."

In both my junior and senior years, I was a member of student government classes. I was awarded A's in both semesters in class during my junior year, as well as in the first semester of my senior year.

But when college application and scholarship deadlines rolled around, my application for the Boettcher full-ride scholarship was flagged by a member of the foundation. I also had met all the qualifications for the Daniels full-ride scholarship. I was denied both scholarships and didn't make it to semifinals or finals in the application process.

"I no longer feel like a criminal for not believing in a god."
— Cidney Fisk

When I applied to college, the guidance counselor refused to send in my transcripts to the places I applied. I had submitted my request far before the deadline. Three days before it was due, my transcripts still were not in. After several confrontations by my parents with the counselor, my transcripts barely made it to my chosen schools on time.

Another instance where I felt harassed was when Delta Middle School was handing out Gideon bibles, and allowing students to hassle others for not accepting the bibles. This prompted the Western Colorado Atheists and Freethinkers and the Satanic Temple to try to distribute their literature in Delta Public Schools. When the school board decided that it had to let them do so, the Grand Junction Sentinel interviewed me about what I had thought about the issue. I came out publicly as an atheist in this article.

The day before and of the distribution, death threats against me and any other atheists were posted on message boards on Facebook. Most of the threats were made by fellow students. My dad filed a police report and notified the administration. Neither of them did anything about it.

The day after the article was published and the distribution occurred was a Saturday and the first day of spring break. In the days prior, I had checked my grades and all was fine. But that Saturday, my grade in Student Council/government went from a 98 to a 69. The teacher had input three months' worth of F's. I had no idea what caused this dramatic drop. My parents and I emailed the teacher

who had dropped my grade. When I returned to school, the teacher and my principal called me into a meeting in which they had tried to explain the decline of my grade. They mentioned the newspaper article four times and assured me it was not about that. I think that's suspicious. In the end, they noted my "questioning of authority," particularly religious authority, as the reason for my decline in grades. They told me I was being highly disrespectful. They told me that if I wanted my grades to go up, I would "shut up" and "fake it 'til I make it."

After graduation, I told my story to some blogs and media outlets and once again became a target of harassment.

Students from Delta High School and members of the community said horrible things about me on social media, urging me to be exiled, calling me an attention whore and a liar, and criticizing my parents for raising me. There was even a planned protest to cut truck pipes and blow exhaust on me and my family during my scholarship presentation organized by Western Colorado Atheists and Freethinkers.

But in the end, I found solace in the secular community. My move to Denver has been life-changing. I no longer feel like a criminal for not believing in a god.

"I am a 2016 Delta High School graduate. I'm a freshman at the University of Denver, where I am studying political science and public policy. I'll be turning 20 this year. I enjoy traveling with my college debate team in order to participate in British parliamentary style debate. So far, I've made it to Colorado Springs, San Diego and Tacoma. I'm excited to be engaged in both secular and political communities, and I can't wait to see what the future holds for me."

Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Award

Nicole Niebler’s activism sprang from ‘aha’ moment

Nicole received a \$2,000 Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Award from FFRF. This scholarship is made possible thanks to generous FFRF members, a Washington couple who prefers to remain anonymous. (See accompanying story.)

By Nicole Niebler

Even though I’ve been an agnostic atheist since high school, I had not been exposed to any sort of activism until college. Growing up in a conservative Catholic family in suburban Milwaukee, I only started to stand up for secular values when I joined the Freethought Society at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, now known as the UW-Eau Claire Secular Student Alliance (SSA). Joining the Freethought Society instilled a drive in me to stand up for progressive values and set me on a path toward more secular activism.



Nicole Niebler

My turning point for secular activism was planning an impromptu counterdemonstration to combat the hate brought to campus by inflammatory preacher “Brother Jed.” Fellow SSA members and I created and held signs next to him that stated various positive messages, such as “Smile. You’re beautiful!” among other secular, uplifting phrases. Although seemingly miniscule, that first event sparked my passion for secular activism.

At my first SSA conference that following summer before I transferred to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I met officers of a group called Atheists, Humanists and Agnostics (AHA) from UW-Madison. While I had already applied for an officer position with the group, little did I know I would meet some of the most inspiring and treasured people. Their friendship, kindness and introspection would heavily impact my life.

With my graduation right around the corner, I have been the president of AHA for two years after serving as a volunteer and a service chair for a year. With AHA, I have helped the organization host several prominent speakers, lead two annual Freethought Festivals, participated in numerous weekly secular peer support meetings, and hosted more social events than I could possibly count.

The mission of AHA is to build a secular community and to promote a discussion of one’s faith or lack thereof on campus. This mission is one I fully stand behind and have poured thousands of hours into fulfilling because I believe it is of utmost importance to provide welcoming secular communities

for young people in a world where nonbelievers are seen as immoral, angry, pessimists and where Christianity is a necessity of being a good human being. This unequal societal juxtaposition of immoral nonbelievers to moral Christians fuels me to continue to be an activist. Recently, I filed a complaint against a local housing complex — the Lumen House — regarding its discrimination against non-Catholics via an unfair rental scholarship for Catholics that must be signed by the priest of a Catholic church. I refuse to stand by while fellow students and citizens of Madison are discriminated against simply because they do not follow a particular religion. Everyone deserves to be treated equally, regardless of religious beliefs, affiliations or lack thereof.



Photo by Chris Line

Nicole Niebler protests with others at a rally against the Westboro Baptist Church.

Among other things, I am a humanist. I will do everything within my power to fight for what’s right, whether that is providing a community for those looked down upon in society, taking a stand against discrimination and unequal treatment, or being a positive example of an agnostic atheist for friends and family members to illustrate that we can be good without God.

A native of Pewaukee, Wis., Nicole Niebler attends the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is pursuing a major in dietetics and a certificate of global health. In her spare time she enjoys singing and playing ukulele at open mic nights, painting, and cooking from scratch.

Amazing couple seed student award, legal fellowships

A Washington State couple, who prefer anonymity, this spring gifted more than \$250,000 (one share of Berkshire Hathaway stock) to FFRF.

They have approved \$150,000 to be held in reserve for the Thomas Jefferson Student (or Youth) Activist Awards, and the rest to create the Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellowship for two years. The FFRF Board has recently created two legal fellowships, which are one- to two-year positions to be filled by new law school graduates. The fellowships supplement the work of FFRF’s current five staff attorneys. The first Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellowship will begin this year.

The couple, who are Lifetime Members of FFRF, have funded a \$1,000-a-year Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Award for more than a decade, and indicated they wish to ensure the award continues. The scholarships will be \$1,000 to \$2,000, and will be awarded at least annually.

The 2017 Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Award has gone to Nicole Niebler. See her write-up about her activism on this page.

“We are so tremendously grateful to our two members, who live a modest lifestyle, for their incredible generosity,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “They will make it possible for FFRF to continue to recognize and reward activist students, and to retain eager and dedicated law school graduates to enhance FFRF’s legal department.”

Gaylor notes it was “terribly exciting” to oversee a gift of stock from Warren Buffett’s famed Berkshire Hathaway. “I’m a big fan,” she says. Buffett is an agnostic whose earnings now underwrite many valuable charities as established by himself or family members, including funding of abortions for indigent women in the many states that deny Medicaid recipients abortion services on religious grounds.

“This couple has been so supportive on so many fronts,” adds FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. “On behalf of the many young people who will benefit from this major gift, thank you to you-know-who-you-are!”

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Devilishly good license

FFRF Member Stephen Van Eck of Pennsylvania sent us a shot of his license plate (and accompanying bumper stickers). Van Eck writes, “The story of the denied ‘ATHE1ST’ plate in Indiana makes me grateful Pennsylvania didn’t give me any trouble for my own personalized plate. Also, when I read the story about West Virginia attempting to make the bible its official state book, I contacted all the representatives sponsoring it to inform them that I’m making the bible my official toilet paper.”

Schools’ troubled history with religion continues

FFRF’s lawsuit against Mercer County shows the fight must go on

This article first appeared on the Religion News Service site and has been reprinted with permission.

By Linda K. Wertheimer

A dark chapter in our public schools’ tumultuous history with religion is repeating itself in Mercer County, W.Va.

A mother, who is an atheist, is fighting to stop her school system’s weekly, overtly religious Christian bible classes so her child, a kindergartner, will not be ostracized for opting out when the child will be required to take them next year in first grade.



Linda K. Wertheimer

I hope she wins. Legally, the federal civil suit the mother and the Wisconsin-based Freedom from Religion Foundation recently filed against Mercer County schools is clear-cut. It is unconstitutional to preach the bible to students in school. Not only are these classes unconstitutional, they’re counterfactual; the “Bible in the Schools” course includes a lesson on creationism, asking students to imagine that humans and dinosaurs existed at the same time, defying common sense and contradicting widely accepted scientific proof that this is untrue.

But there’s another pressing reason to keep these classes out of public schools: to prevent ostracizing of religious minorities and atheists. The mother, in fact, used pseudonyms for herself and her child in the lawsuit because she feared the girl would be picked on. Though she has the right to opt her child out, it will set her apart. I know that from personal experience.

My family moved to northwest Ohio in 1974, when I was in the middle of fourth grade. The elementary school I started attending still conducted religious education classes even though it was roughly a quarter century after the Supreme Court’s seminal ruling in *McCollum v. Board of Education*.

In its 8-1 decision, the court ruled that holding weekly religious education inside public schools was unconstitutional after Vashti McCollum, an atheist, had sued Champaign, Ill., public schools on behalf of her three sons.

Because one of her sons did not attend religious education classes, he was often teased at school and beaten up on the way home, a fact that influenced the judges’ decision.

During my first week in my new school in northwest Ohio, a woman paid by local churches came into my classroom and began teaching bible stories about Jesus and leading us in Christian hymns. My parents complained and I was excused from the weekly classes and banished to the library.

My peers noticed my absence, and some questioned why I left. “I’m Jewish,” I said. They asked if I believed in Jesus. I said no. “You’re going to hell,” they said. For the first time in my life, I felt different and embarrassed because I was a Jew.

My parents could have sued to stop the classes — and hopefully the teasing from peers — but they never did, out of fear of making us stand out even more. After another family threatened to sue, the school finally eliminated the classes in the 1980s, almost 30 years after the nation’s highest court had outlawed them.

At least 250,000 students still participate in bible classes during the school day in various states, according to Released Time Education, a Christian organization that runs such programs. Those numbers would not include similar programs run by Mormon organizations in Utah. Most organizations, though, run the classes in a nearby church or nonschool building, following a 1952 Supreme Court ruling in *Zorach v. Clauson*. Legally, students can be released from school for religious classes, provided the classes are voluntary and run off school grounds.

In 2017, nearly 70 years after the *McCollum* ruling, Mercer County is unusual because it is running its bible course inside classrooms. There are no statistics available on how many students opt out of bible classes, which began in Mercer County in 1939.

A former Mercer County schools parent, Elizabeth Deal, told CBS News on Feb. 8 that she took her daughter out of the school system because of the way her child was treated after choosing not to take the bible course. Other children told Deal’s daughter that she and her parents were going to hell.

In the 1940s, Jim McCollum, one of the plaintiffs in the Supreme Court case that established the law on these classes, recalled a classmate who was outed as Jewish because he opted out of in-school bible class. The boy was beaten and his glasses were broken.

Schools can and should educate children about the world’s religions or the role the bible plays in literature and history. Now ought to be a time when schools are focusing on creating understanding of many religions, rather than making non-Christians easier targets for bullying.

Linda K. Wertheimer is a former Boston Globe education editor and author of Faith Ed., Teaching About Religion In An Age of Intolerance.

THEY SAID WHAT?

We don’t teach evolution in school because it’s settled science. We teach it because it isn’t creationism. Why is that?

North Dakota state Sen. Dick Dever, going on a tangent when discussing North Dakota’s law that prohibits some retail stores from being open on Sunday mornings.

Valley News Live, 3-17-17



Samuel Alito

Alito, a Catholic, speaking to a group sponsored by a Catholic lawyers’ organization.

Baltimore Sun, 3-22-17

What happened, happened. I made a mistake, a serious one, but mistakes happens in life — I’m not a bad guy. People tried to bury my dream because of one mistake, but I asked God for forgiveness, so I’m carrying on with my career, dude.

Brazilian soccer player Bruno Fernandes de Souza, who was released in February after serving partial sentence for murdering his girlfriend and having her body fed to his dogs.

The Guardian, 3-19-17

And, obviously if it happens in someone’s life, it may not be the best thing that ever happened, but — so you’re saying that God is not sovereign with every activity that happens in someone’s life and can’t use anything and everything in someone’s life and I disagree with that.

Oklahoma state Rep. George Faught, when asked by fellow Rep. Cory Williams if rape and incest are the “will of God.”

New York Times, 3-23-17



George Faught

That’s the kind of person she is, a person who believes in prayer, a godly mother and wife. In fact, when Mike was a congressman, Karen would send out prayer requests to people — to pray for them as a family, that God would give them the strength to do all that they had to do.

Vicki Lake, wife of the Pences’ former pastor, speaking of Karen Pence. Vice President Mike Pence follows the “Billy Graham” rule and won’t eat unchaperoned with a woman other than his wife, Karen, or attend functions where alcohol is served without her by his side.

Washington Post, 3-28-17



Eddie Lucio Jr.

I don’t believe in separation of church and state. Everything that I do, I look at it as an act of faith, of moral obligation, that I have for all people but that had nothing to do with that.

Texas state Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr., a Democrat, citing his Catholic faith as a reason for voting with Republicans in favor of a bill that would prohibit transgender-friendly bathroom policies.

Austin American-Statesman, 4-4-17

It’s important for us to go back to the basics of our U.S. and state constitutions that used that phrase. I’m also trying anywhere and everywhere I can to respect our creator.

Kentucky state Sen. Albert Robinson, who sponsored the Senate measure to include the words “in the Year of Our Lord” in the adopted date of all the chambers’ simple resolutions and floor citations.

Lexington Herald-Leader, 4-12-17

Donations in Pence’s name now over \$100K

Gifts in the name of vice president help FFRF fight for Constitution

FFRF is delighted to announce that as of March 31, it has received a \$100,000-plus boost to its legal fund via donations in Vice President Mike Pence’s name.



Mike Pence

FFRF began its “Give dollars and cents to counteract Pence” campaign in early November.

“We warmly thank the 1,905 donors to date who have given from \$1 to \$5,000,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

FFRF’s campaign urges: “Send a message to Mike Pence and his boss: The only wall we

need is between church and state. Your gift to FFRF’s legal fund in Mike Pence’s name will be subversive (and deductible for income tax purposes). We’ll use your kind donation to fight the imposition of religion by our government under the guise of ‘religious

liberty.’ We’ll put your donation to work to shore up the fence Pence needs to honor: the wall of separation between state and church.”

Pence has been sent a letter totaling the donations to date and a list of the names of those donors who indicated permission to name them.

Pence, considered to be making many of the nominations and announcements propitiating the Religious Right, famously declared, “I’m a Christian, a conservative and a Republican, in that order.”

As a member of Congress, the evangelical Christian co-sponsored “personhood” legislation calling for constitutional rights from the moment of fertilization. Pence was an early leader in efforts to defund Planned Parenthood. When he became Indiana governor, he created a huge backlash by signing a bill to allow religion-based discrimination against LGBTQ and was forced to moderate the law. Under his reign, Indiana became one of the most restrictive states toward abortion in the country.

FFRF thanks those who have already contributed toward this campaign, which will continue as long as the threat by the current administration continues in Washington, D.C.

‘Why doesn’t FFRF go after Muslims?’

This oft-asked question assumes FFRF is only targeting Christianity

By Andrew Seidel

One of the most frequent questions that FFRF gets asked by members of the Religious Right is: “Why doesn’t FFRF ever go after Muslims?” Todd Starnes, America’s leading purveyor of the Christian persecution complex, has advanced this argument. At the end of an article about a public school in Maryland that supposedly indoctrinated children into Islam, Starnes writes: “Why hasn’t the Freedom From Religion Foundation weighed in? What about the American Civil Liberties Union? Their silence is peculiar. I suspect their reaction would have been a bit different had La Plata High School been baptizing children and forcing them to memorize John 3:16.” From a practical standpoint, the answer to this question was easy. FFRF acts on complaints from our members or members of the public, and no one had complained to us about this situation until it was already a lawsuit. But that is not the point Starnes wanted to make. He sought to make us appear biased and paint us as anti-Christian, rather than pro-separation of state and church.

FFRF does take issue with the government promoting or favoring any religion, including Islam. Groups seeking to uphold the Constitution may appear to “target” Christians only because we “target” the violators. As the majority, Christians are simply more likely to violate the Constitution. Pew Research numbers reveal that the U.S. Muslim population is at 1 percent, Jewish at 1.8 percent and Hindu at 0.7 percent. In contrast, self-identified Christians are at 70.6 percent.

FFRF accordingly receives very few complaints about Muslim violations. We get few complaints about Jewish, Hindu, Wiccan or other minority religious entanglements with government, either. When FFRF receives any bona fide complaint about any Establishment Clause violation, we research it and try



to take action, depending on the facts and the legal precedent. This is not just a question of numbers. Of course, the greater proportion of Christians in the population means there is a higher probability any given malefactor is Christian. But in a democracy, where government is structured so that majority rules on certain issues, it is usually the majority that will violate the rights of the minority. In fact, this is precisely why the Bill of Rights exists — to protect the minority from the tyranny of the majority. Put another way, atheists, agnostics, freethinkers and minority religions in this country have never had the unwarranted privilege Christians have asserted as members of the majority. Christian persecution is not the problem in America; Christian privilege is.

FFRF doesn’t consider that we “go after” anyone of any religion. We “go after” violations of the Establishment Clause. We work to uphold a valued constitutional principle. But we are pleased to provide examples of some of the types of violations involving minority religions that we have taken action against. They include:

- The Seattle mayor who planned to give his State of the City address in a mosque. In response to FFRF in February, the mayor changed the nature of his speech, although it was still given in the mosque.
- The Muslim college professor we challenged for promoting his personal religion in the classroom. FFRF sent out a press release on this complete with audio clips and PowerPoint slides, to Starnes’ Fox News buddies, but he didn’t report on it.
- Our protests of a Buddhist shrine on public land in California.
- Our notice to a Brooklyn school that its play, which emphasized Islam and the importance of having faith, especially during difficult times (to be performed in front of elementary school students), was unconstitutional.

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker has debated several Muslim as well as Christian proponents. We’ve given prominent critics of Islam, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Taslima Nasrin, awards for their intellect and bravery. FFRF’s charitable arm, Nonbelief Relief, has allocated tens of thousands of dollars to help nonreligious Bangladeshi bloggers who have been threatened because of their views to relocate. We would shudder at the prospect of our nation “under Allah” or the Quran, just as we work against basing our secular laws on the bible and its deity. The Religious Right that claims Muslim violations are ignored wants FFRF to ignore violations involving imposition of its deity and its “holy book.”

We believe a secular government is the only path to peace and true religious liberty, and that means our government may not endorse or promote any religion.

Andrew Seidel is an FFRF staff attorney. Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor contributed to this article.

IN MEMORIAM

Clara Johnson, a ‘dynamo,’ dies at 92

One of FFRF’s earliest members, Clara Johnson, 92, died on March 24 in Evanston, Ill. Johnson, a women’s activist, joined FFRF in May 1978, one month after its national founding. She became a Life Member in 2005.

In her obituary article in the Chicago Tribune, Johnson’s former daughter-in-law, Julia Takarada, said, “She was a dynamo. She fought injustice whenever and wherever she encountered it.” Johnson’s close friend Anne Sheffield is quoted in the Tribune as saying, “Clara may have looked like somebody headed to the grocery store or about to cook dinner for her family, but she was anything but. She was one of the strongest feminists I’ve ever known. And, boy, was she smart!”

Johnson was born in Macoupin County in southern Illinois, one of seven children. In her 30s, she married Eugene McGrew and settled in Peoria, although they later divorced. After getting a college degree in chemistry, she took an internship at East Alton Manufacturing Company, where she helped make explosives used during World War II. She later worked as a scientific aide with the U.S. Department of Agriculture at the Illinois Northern Regional Research



Clara Johnson

Lab in Peoria and later became a chemist for the lab, working there for 40 years. In 1974, Johnson joined the Peoria National Organization of Women (NOW) and worked for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, along with other feminist causes. In 1976, she ran an unsuccessful write-in campaign for mayor of Peoria as a feminist challenger to the all-male list of candidates. During the 1980s, Johnson served as office manager at the Illinois NOW headquarters. In 1989, she and nine other women founded Prairie Moon, a feminist bookstore, which she helped run until its closing in 1999. In 2004, she was included in the National Women’s Hall of Fame’s Book of Lives and Legacies. Besides FFRF and NOW, she was also involved with other activists groups, including the League of Women Voters, NAACP and American Atheists.

Mildred Fischer was author, teacher, editor

FFRF Lifetime Member Mildred (Morris) Fischer died on Feb. 2. She was born in New York City on Nov. 10, 1924, and attended elementary and high school in New York and the College Of The City of N.Y. She met Al Fischer at Theodore Roosevelt High School.

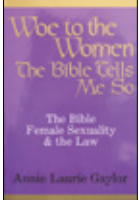
Mildred worked in several publishing houses in Manhattan and was the secretary to the president of Vanguard Press. She married Al and they moved to Phoenix in 1950. Together they established a newspaper, the South Phoenix Round-up, which they operated for seven years. Mildred was the editor. For the following eight years, they operated Publishers Press. They sold the printing operation and moved to central Phoenix, where Mildred received bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Arizona State University. She taught one semester at Central High School and then worked at the Phoenix Public Library. After that, she taught English, creative



Mildred Fischer

writing and classical mythology at Glendale Community College for 30 years. As an author, her first book was *Arizona Cookbook*. She also collaborated with her husband and wrote *Mexico’s West Coast Beaches*, *London Theater Today*, *Arizona Museums* and a children’s coloring book, *Ms. Liberty*. She and Al started Golden West Publishers, which specialized in cookbooks and Western nonfiction. Mildred was president of the Valley Memorial Society. She and Al traveled extensively throughout Europe, Russia and Mexico. She is survived by her husband, Al; her sister, Dr. Irene Reiter; three children and their spouses, Linda and Dick Thomas, Lee and Shayne Fischer, Bruce and Bobbi Fischer; and three grandchildren.

**Woe to the Women:
The Bible Tells Me So**



A concise, easy-to-read book that will challenge your concept of the bible as “a good book.” Illustrated. 264 pages.

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

**Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org**

LETTERBOX

Living in ‘Fundieville’ keeps me on my toes

I ran across your organization in 2008 and have followed it since. I have put off joining, mostly out of laziness. So enclosed is my membership form and \$500.

West Palins, Mo., is pure Fundieville. Two years after a new city hall was built, an “In God We Trust” sign was put up in the lobby just two weeks after a woman asked for it at a council meeting. No discussion. A year ago, the city and county police put the phrase on bumper stickers.

The hospital here is nuts, too. I have upset many doctors, nurses and staff since I moved here in 2005. There were constant religious comments from two doctors I now refuse to see. One has a large poster in his lobby proclaiming how great Jesus is.

Since 2008, I have tried to educate the locals as much as I can. A couple of my letters pointing out the fallacies of the bible were printed in the newspaper. The owner of the paper was not a believer and also loved to annoy the believers. Unfortunately, I’ve had four letters turned down by the new owner/editor.

Thomas Partain
Missouri

‘History of Disbelief’ worth your time

The wonderful three-part BBC series, “A Rough History of Disbelief,” ably hosted by Jonathan Miller, is available in its entirety for free on YouTube. The series is a rigorous defense of atheism and rationalism and explores how disbelief in God and faith emerged over the centuries, starting with the ancient Greek philosophers and ending with modern science and discussions with Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett. Miller is always calm, analytic and engaging and never resorts to ridicule those who in the past and present have clung to religion and often actively resisted or even persecuted freethinkers.

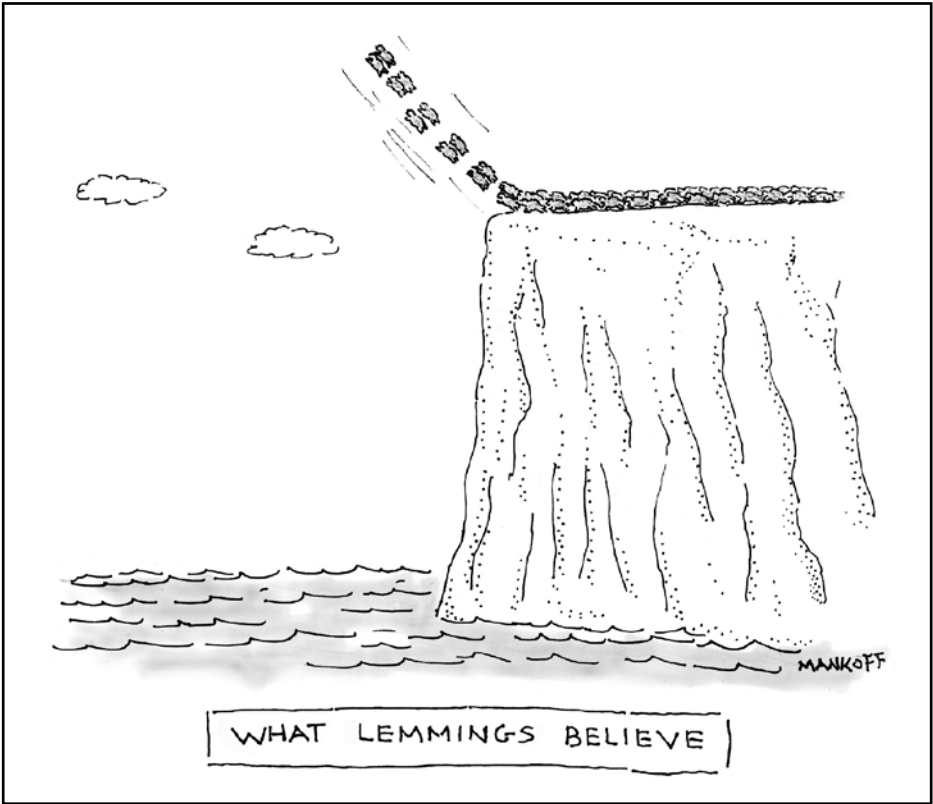
I first saw this series on WNET, the New York City PBS station, over 10 years ago. I recall that each episode was assigned a strange time slot, i.e., Sunday nights from 11:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m., with repeats later in the week at 3 a.m. I also recall that half of the PBS stations in the United States disgracefully refused to carry the series at all, including the PBS station for suburban Long Island, a rather liberal area. No DVD of the series was ever made available in the U.S. This was a sad commentary on the reluctance of media executives to offend the sensibilities of the faithful majority by airing an intellectually stimulating series defending religious skepticism, a series that was broadcast in Great Britain without fanfare.

Dennis Middlebrooks
New York

Next four years are gonna keep FFRF busy

It looks like you folks are going to have a rough four years, especially with the Department of Education. Enclosed is a check for a Lifetime Membership, although I intend to give an annual contribution as well. Best of luck in the coming years!

Richard Hartman
Minnesota



Bob Mankoff announced in March that he was stepping down as cartoon editor of The New Yorker after 20 years. “I did this [cartoon] after that Heaven’s Gate cult [the group involved in a mass suicide in 1997 in California]. This one has been reproduced a lot. From my point of view as an atheist, it’s a cartoon about religion. But it can also just be about mindlessly following a leader.”

Bible-waving worked for Trump with evangelicals

It has been established, beyond any shadow of doubt, that Donald Trump is a liar, an uninvited groper of women, a tax avoider, a mocker of war heroes and the handicapped, a hater of people with different skin color, religion and ethnicity, several times bankrupt and three times married — so far. He has cheated employees, banks, investors and students at his fake Trump “university.” In other words, he is the exact opposite of what Christians would consider a good, considerate, honest, morally upright, humble and decent citizen, respectful of family values and a promoter of good will. One would think the so-called evangelicals would be very strict and rather picky before they support someone running for office.

Trump, however, knew better! He didn’t have to — nor did he bother to — live up to the evangelical ideal in order to gather their support. All he had to do was wave a bible and declare it a better book than even his own! How modest — and shrewd! The evangelicals immediately flocked to Trump and supported him in the presidential election, big time. That’s all it took! Nothing he had done, nothing about his behavior, not even his blatant immorality, mattered anymore.

All it took to fool the gullible, evangelical masses was a bible wave! And a bible, of all things — a collection of impossible made-up stories, created by ancient people trying to outdo each other with scary stories. The only really scary part is that those stories very likely changed the results of the election, giving the highest and most important office in the world to someone not only uniquely unqualified, but so dishonest that he would stoop so low and use the old and tired bible-waving trick!

That such a cheap trick still works in a modern society is very scary! Bible-waving trumps all behavior, so to speak.
Jorg Aadahl
California

Worthwhile purposes deserve our support

I support FFRF because life has many worthwhile purposes — among them, defending the separation of church and state.

Benito Franqui
California

Elderly couple proud of FFRF’s accomplishments

FFRF is the most rewarding organization to have made our long life worthwhile. I longed for years for someone to come along and take the fight to the enemies. You have accomplished more in your few years than all the other freethought institutions together.

Alton (99) and Marjorie (101) Eliason
Connecticut

A brand new member compliments Reagan

I have infinite respect and admiration for Ron Reagan. He should make more ads!

Lesley Heller
New York

Freethought Today a great companion

I decided that today was the day to tell you how much you have helped me over the years — and that Freethought Today is still my favorite reading material.

I live alone — except for my cat — but Freethought Today is my breakfast companion. I keep my old issues and try to pass them along. Yesterday I came across the April 2006 issue with my story when South Dakota was facing a problem with the Religious Right in the Legislature.

I’m now 86, and I’m grateful that my mind is still capable of doing most of what I want to do. My body, however, is another story!
Margaret Minkel
South Dakota

Weekly updates another feather in FFRF’s cap

As a longtime Life Member, I feel the need to thank FFRF and Amit Pal for the Special Weekly Report email updates about FFRF. I also like the celebratory, casual and conversational tone of these updates.

And I once again want to thank FFRF for the various terrific billboards, bus signs, and the like. As for the excellent big ads in major media, they’re the right info presented with the right tone, but also graphically good. This includes the important inclusion of the eye-grabbing coupon at the bottom to help defray costs of the ads while ultimately gaining more new members.

To everyone at FFRF from top to bottom, keep up the fine work. It’s the smartest and most aggressively impactful of all the various freethought organizations I belong to!

Richard James
California

Happy to see picture in paper with Jerry Coyne

Janie Malless and I were thrilled to see our picture with Jerry Coyne in the January/February Freethought Today. We are looking forward to our next trip to Madison.

Thanks for all of the good work you do. It’s an odd world we live in today . . . from the top down.

Steve Kern
Indiana

Deconversion from faith can come in many forms

Decades ago, my work took me to Mackinaw City, Mich., every couple of months. When I was there, I would attend the Church of the Straits, a confederated Presbyterian-Methodist church. Two weeks before one of my visits, there was a terrible airplane crash into Lake Michigan, where about 65 people were killed. There were two teenage girls aboard who were friends, and one of them drowned while the other survived.

When I next visited that church, the minister invited the young girl who survived that crash to come forward. She went up to the pulpit, told her story of survival, and said, “God has blessed me and saved my life, and I shall devote the rest of my life to serving him.” As she spoke, a couple in the pew two rows in front of me rose, with the wife crying and wiping her eyes with a handkerchief. They walked out of the sanctuary. I asked the family next to me what that was about. They said, “Oh, that’s the father and mother of the girl who drowned.”

This arbitrary action by God — saving one young girl while letting the other die — was most certainly a deconverting experience for the parents of the girl who drowned and perhaps for others in the congregation who witnessed this occasion.

Let us recognize that there are religious folks who may deconvert and leave their faith because of adverse experiences they encounter in their life. Thus let us recognize the diversity among us and be accepting of all.
Theodore M. Utchen
Illinois



Christian vanity shines through in rural areas

I’ve been in northern Michigan for nearly 30 years after moving from New York City.

I knew I was in trouble during my first Christmas in Michigan. One of our file clerks asked me if I had finished all of my Christmas shopping. I politely answered, “No, I’m Jewish, and I don’t celebrate Christmas.” She didn’t miss a beat. “Oh, did you at least get your tree up?” she asked.

Ah, rural America.

By the way, I always love the Crankmail!

Steven J. Zweig
Michigan

Taxpayer money shouldn’t go to religious nonsense

As I recently celebrated my 79th birthday, I reflected on the terrible times we live in. Of the many upsetting items in the news, I am mostly depressed by the use of taxpayer money to subsidize the brainwashing of our children with religious nonsense. The Founding Fathers were wiser and recognized that all religious “knowledge” is hearsay in nature and thus has no standing in court.

I am a scientist by training and lifestyle. One of my projects was at Kennedy Space Center in the 1960s. The closest we have to factual knowledge comes from the application of the scientific method: observation and recording, continued analysis and hypothesis, experimentation and quantification, and theory with peer review.

There is much that remains unknown, but science also includes the study of probabilities, which frequently gives guidance.

These principles guide my life and I would call this my religion. To spend tax dollars on the meanderings of an ancient storybook is a violation of my rights. The Establishment Clause of the Constitution tells us this is not a Christian country.

The state of Tennessee is moving to pass a “voucher” law. Hopefully it will fail, but if not, I am very grateful for the work of your organization and am enclosing a check for \$2,000 to be used as you see fit. I wish you continued good health and success.

Jim Bacon
Tennessee

Thanks for calling out NASA on religious grant

Your news item about the grant NASA made to the Center of Theological Inquiry in 2015 is astonishing! I admit I had to read it twice when I saw those two names together in one sentence.

Thanks to FFRF for uncovering such a preposterous state-church entanglement! It’s difficult to believe that someone in NASA actually gave money (\$1.108 million, as a matter of fact) to a religious organization!

This is an odd grant. Now just how do you take a strictly scientific program — astrobiology — and combine it with the superstition of religion to make an “interdisciplinary inquiry”? That’s like mixing cake flour with stones and expecting an edible product!

Since this grant was made in May 2015, some results should be in by now, and the public has a right to know just what exactly have they determined for all that money.

So thanks to FFRF for discovering this unconstitutional boondoggle, and for calling NASA on it!

Janet Brazill
Colorado

Heaven isn’t all it’s cracked up to be

In heaven, one supposedly will have no work, no concerns over food, health or death. Everyone will be happy doing absolutely nothing. Nope, it doesn’t work that way.

We are at our happiest when we are doing things, accomplishing something, planting a garden, weeding our flowers, working at a homeless shelter — not sitting endlessly. These are the things that make life worthwhile.

When Christians think of their heaven, they really don’t think of it. They never stop to wonder what they will be doing for billions upon billions of years. The heaven concept is completely ridiculous, yet almost every newspaper obituary has some reference to it.

As Emily Dickinson said, “Parting is all we know of heaven and all we need of hell.”

Joseph Cunningham, 91
FFRF Board Member
Illinois

CRANKMAIL

For your reading enjoyment, we have culled some of the hate mail we get at FFRF. These come to you as written, unedited.

Rising Sun High School: I just wanted to contact you and make my intentions known. I see you are threatening Rising Sun High School due to a play called The Children of Eden. I am currently looking into options on how we can address this. If you force the school to cancel this production done by CHILDREN, I will look into a counter suit against you to reimburse the school for money spent on this production including staff wages and time spent by the children. Also reimbursement to all the ticket holders who have pre-purchased tickets for this three day showing. I am sure in this conservative county many would be interested in getting on board with this. Your message is one of hypocrisy and it is time organizations like yours are shown for what they are. I will make it my mission. You don’t want religious views forced down your throat, yet you force your anti religious views down the throat of others. Enough is enough. — **Jason Howell**

Your self-righteous BS: Considering that none of you can PROVE there is no “God” and that it is nearly universal that ALL human groups tend to adopt the concept of a “higher” being, you folks have NOT SCIENTIFIC BASIS for your position — in fact your argument is more of a religion than any intellectual process! You guys are just a bunch of FAKES who have not true logical basis for what you claim to be “TRUTH” and “FACT”. In face, your speech is no more fact based than that of the religions you attack. — **David Gillis**

leave Christians alone: Tired of your organization “BULLYING” people into taking down crosses or face a lawsuit. The separation of church & state was to keep church from interfering with state and state from interfering with church. It doesn’t give you guys the right to SHIT on everyone’s religious beliefs. If I want to put a cross up in a public park, I will. Stop treading on us or you’ll find yourself in the middle of a huge class lawsuit. — **Dan Sanders**

FFR: Your group is just as disgusting, hateful, loathsome and repulsive as the liberals who have ruined the Democrat Party. You are also as low as they are and that is so low they can’t even pipe sunlight to you. Your who premise is based on an INCORRECT ruling by a liberal judge, who based his decision on his ideology rather than the Constitution. You are so ignorant and stupid that you haven’t even read the Constitution so you could see the true intent that the Founding Fathers meant by what they wrote in the Constitution. — **Wally Moses**

Crosses Orange County Courthouse: Do you people have anything better to do than stick your noses into other peoples business that doesn’t even concern you? You’re not even in Texas & not anywhere close & yet you stick your nose into something that doesn’t concern you & you’re stirring up trouble. Why not mind your own business. The Crosses at the Orange County Courthouse are not bothering anyone & have been there for years. That’s what’s wrong with this country. It’s people like YOU taking God out

of things. This country needs help & i’m glad Donald Trump is doing stuff to bring back America & The United States in the Right direction. I can tell you now those Crosses won’t be taken down. Stay out of Texas & leave Orange County alone. Just like the Cross in Port Neches Park you so Desperately tried to get taken down. Yeah right. If you don’t like Crosses then close your eyes!! — **Linda Nunez**

Cosnitution: YOUR ORGANIZATION IS DESPICABLE, BUT I AM SURE YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT. WELL CHANGE IS COMING WHEN WE PUT 2 CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS ON THE SUPREME COURT. WE WILL OVERTURN ROE V WADE AND SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE. IN THE FUTURE OUR CHILDREN WILL PRAY IN SCHOOLS AND CROSSES WILL BE EVERYWHERE IN SCHOOLS AND ALL GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS IN JESUS NAME AMEN — **Kenneth Stewart**

Leave us alone: Please leave people that want ti pray alone y’all just give it a rest yiur poking your nose inti things thats best left alone if people want ti pray let them it dont matter where they are or when just let them do it im a nonpracticing jew and if i should chosse ti pray i will and dint care where i am at. — **Ed Silverman**

Taos New Mexico: This Foundation is by far the corniest and most useless foundation in the world. You have absolutely no right to try to change traditions that are deep within the New Mexico culture. If you feel offended than please stay out of my town and don’t ever come back. The entire town of Taos New Mexico is against this silly request to take down the cross in Taos Plaza. The world and all of its long lasting Traditions does not have to cater to your so-called Foundation! If your foundation never shows its face in Taos New Mexico again.... good riddance! — **Marcos Herrera**

ISLAM in the public schools!: You are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites! All your lawsuits against Christianity, but what do you do now that the teaching of the Islamic religion has invaded the public schools and under Obama has evolved into actually indoctrinating the children into the faith?! Probably to scared to bring lawsuits against that! NO, your only concern is to destroy the actual Christian history of the United States from being learned by the children! Pathetic organization! — **Ann Warwick**

Prophecies!: Forget everything about what the Bible says except all the prophecies. You can’t deny prophecy because by its very definition is “history told before it happens.” The Bible has literally hundreds of prophecies both in the OT and NT. To date, the accuracy of these prophecies is 100%. This cannot be denied or overlooked. The prophecies alone about Jesus and his birth, Life, death and resurrection total approximately 300 prophecies. Do you know what the odds are of even a few of these coming to pass are? The prophecies alone land to be incredible way in which this amazing book was written over the centuries. If you can dispute these then I will become an atheist! Give it your best shot! — **Norman Saib**

Reason-able response

Volunteers from the Metro Chicago Chapter of FFRF put up this banner display on April 14 in Chicago’s Daley Center Plaza, where it stayed until April 22. It was put up to protest the proselytizing Catholic prayer shrine which is erected by the Divine Mercy Project each year during the Christian “holy week.” The Catholic display, including a large wooden Latin cross, a 9-foot banner of Jesus, and “kneelers” for people to pray, went up April 13

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Wade C. Davis, 65, Dallas: Felony theft. Davis, pastor of Munger Avenue Baptist Church, is suspected of phoning more than \$400,000 from the church between 2012-16. “He began transferring money to the 501(c)(3) account, which he had a debit card to,” said congregation member Richard Greagor. “That’s where the fun began.” Longtime church members allege they tried to fire Davis but he refused to leave and locked them out of the church. A civil suit has been filed. *Source: Fox 4, 3-30-17*

Jeffrey R. Goss, 56, Tulsa, OK, and **Ronald Robinson, Turley, OK:** Respectively, possession of child pornography and receiving child pornography and accessing with intent to view child pornography. Charges against Goss, principal of the Christian Education Alliance housed at Tulsa Hills Church of the Nazarene, and Robinson, pastor of a Christian outreach ministry called Third Place Community Foundation, are unrelated except that they allegedly used the same online chat room. Court records show Goss’ online activity indicated he preferred children 10 to 12 years old of either sex. *Source: KOTV, 3-30-17*

Osher Eisemann, 60, Lakewood, NJ: Theft, money laundering, corporate misconduct and misuse of government funds. Eisemann, a rabbi and founder of the School for Children with Hidden Intelligence, which serves special-needs students, is accused of using a fundraising nonprofit to launder \$630,000 in public tuition funds and use the money in his clothing business. The private school gets about \$1.8 million in tuition from area public school districts. *Source: nj.com, 3-29-17*

Robert Keith, 46, West Orange, NJ: Credit card theft, money laundering and forgery. Keith, pastor of New Ebenezer Baptist Church, is accused of stealing \$700,000 from a plumbing company starting in 2015 while working as bookkeeper. It’s alleged he used his religious credentials to enhance the legitimacy of his bookkeeping business. *Source: WNBC, 3-28-17*

Ronald P. Ewing, 59, Jennings, MO: 3 counts of statutory rape. Without identifying where Ewing serves as pastor, court documents allege he met the 16-year-old through church and had sex last November and December at the Deluxe Motel, the Vegas Inn and the Days Inn, all in St. Louis. A photo on Ewing’s LinkedIn page matches one on a website for Zion Temple Missionary Baptist Church. *Source: Post-Dispatch, 3-27-17*

Twenty-two Israeli men aged 20-60 were arrested in several cities with large ultra-Orthodox communities on suspicion they committed dozens of sex crimes against women and minors the past 2 years which were covered up by haredi leaders. Protesters tried to stop some arrests by attacking police and throwing rocks at their vehicles. It’s alleged that in most cases, men suspected of abuse were ordered to seek therapy from other members of the ultra-Orthodox community, who failed to report allegations to police. *Source: Times of Israel, 3-27-17*

Chethan Sharma, 25, Shravanabelagola, India: Theft. Sharma, a Hindu priest, is accused of duping a businessman out of half a kilogram of gold in December with the pretext of performing a puja for prosperity. *Source: The Hindu, 3-26-17*

James R. Rankin, Hurst, TX: Possession of child pornography. Rankin, associate pastor at Bellevue Baptist Church, was arrested after taking his computer to Best Buy for maintenance. The store alerted police to possible illegal content on the computer. An affidavit alleges Rankin claimed he had the images for research on “a possible lesson involving Cupid, love and human trafficking seven to eight years ago.” But police noted that dates associated with some images were as recent as February. *Source: Star-Telegram, 3-24-17*

Justin K. White, 38, Columbus, IN: Insurance fraud and contributing to the delinquency of a minor. White, senior minister at First Christian Church, is accused of staging a burglary with a juvenile at his home while he was preaching and claiming the loss of \$11,000 of cash and property. The other charge involves seeking to have a juvenile commit an act that would be a felony if committed by an adult — dealing a narcotic drug. White allegedly needed money to pay off a drug debt. *Source: The Republic, 3-24-17*

Travis Nichols, 39, West Columbia, TX: 2nd-degree sexual assault. Nichols, youth pastor at Iglesia Centro Cristiano, is accused of assault-

“You’re lucky I don’t get a hold of you and knock you to the floor.”
— Pastor Biddle to cop

ing a female congregation member who is now 18. *Source: KPRC, 3-22-17*

Antonio Jones, 47, Roanoke, VA: Indecent liberties with a minor and 2 counts of aggravated sexual battery. Jones, Kingdom Harvest Church International pastor, is charged with molesting family members under age 15 between 2008-11. *Source: WDBJ, 3-22-17*

Michael H. Baker, 55, Columbia, SC: 3rd-degree criminal domestic violence. Baker, senior pastor at Greater St. Luke Baptist Church and chaplain for 2 law enforcement agencies, is charged with twice pushing his wife to the floor, injuring her hand, on March 16. Answering another call 4 days later, a deputy allegedly found him sitting in his wife’s car, stopping her from leaving after she’d come to pick up her belongings and found he’d changed the locks. *Source: The State, 3-22-17*

Joel Waltz, 47, Boone, IA: Sexual exploitation by a counselor or therapist. Court documents allege Waltz and the victim met at Grace Community Church while he was youth pastor. The girl, now 20, was 11 and in foster care at the time. She alleged Waltz texted her in 2012 that he was in love with her and that the relationship became sexual in 2013 on church mission trips with other teens. Ames police received a report in April 2014 that they were seen kissing “passionately” in the parking lot at LifeServe Blood Center. She told police that when she turned 17, she started sending nude photos to him via Snapchat. *Source: News Republican, 3-21-17*

Stormy K. Ledbetter, 30, Pauls Valley, OK: Lewd acts to a child under 16 and forcible oral sodomy. Ledbetter is charged with assaults last October on a 10-year-old boy in her home, where she lives with her parents. Her father is Pauls Valley Church of the Nazarene pastor and former police department chaplain. Claude Ledbetter told a reporter his daughter is innocent and has been wrongfully accused. *Source: KFOR, 3-21-17*

Abel Eku, 57, Benin: Eku, pastor of Christ Chosen Church, is charged with attempting to bomb the church where he served for 25 years by planting explosives in the auditorium in January. Eku told reporters he was angry about being dismissed as pastor due to marital discord with his wife. He claimed he had second thoughts af-

Miel Hispanic Church, is charged with assaults on a girl younger than 13 during a 7-month period in his church office starting last September and progressing to intercourse. A mentally challenged teen girl also reported to police she’d been abused by Aboytes, said the warrant request. *Source: Herald & Review, 3-16-17*

Larry Biddle, 74, Edinburgh, IN: Intimidation and resisting law enforcement. Biddle, pastor of Edinburgh Wesleyan Church, is charged with confronting an officer about a citation he received for his recreational vehicle, which was parked behind his church and home. Trash was piled on the ground and an open septic line was leaking fluid, the police report said. Biddle allegedly grabbed the citation out of the officer’s hands and said, “You’re lucky I don’t get a hold of you and knock you to the floor.” Told he was under arrest, Biddle sat down and refused to put his hands behind his back, the report said. *Source: The Republic, 3-12-17*

David “Dabo” Boyd, Wheelwright, KY: Distribution of matter portraying a sexual performance by a minor. Boyd, pastor of Wheelwright Baptist Center since 2012, resigned after law enforcement executed a search warrant. He’s married and has 2 sons. *Source: WSAZ, 3-10-17*

Elias S. Rosales, 40, Lafayette, IN: Attempted child molesting and 2 counts of child molesting. Rosales, pastor of Iglesia Pentecostes Evangelica, is accused of molesting a 6-year-old girl who was visiting his daughter at their home Feb. 28 and March 1. The girl alleged in a probable cause affidavit that Rosales “placed her hand on his penis over his clothes” and “put his hands up her shirt . . . until she pushed him away.” Rosales told officers serving a search warrant that she “may have accidentally touched his penis,” the affidavit said. *Source: Journal & Courier, 3-9-17*

Rodney Scott, 50, Fayetteville, NC: 21 counts each of statutory sex offense, crimes against nature, indecent liberties with a child, child abuse sex act and 21 other sex offenses during a 13-year period. Eight alleged victims have come forward. Scott was an area representative for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and coached a boys team that played in a Christian basketball league from 2013 until January. He worked as safe schools coordinator at Pine Forest High from 2011-13. *Source: WRAL, 3-8-17*

Roy Bolden, 33, Providence, RI: 1st- and 2nd-degree child molestation and 3rd-degree sexual assault. Bolden, an apostle at Legion of Christ Ministries and chairman of the Providence Republican City Committee until his arrest, is accused of

Vandevender was athletic director and basketball coach. He’s the son of Trinity Christian Church founder Dennis Vandevender. It’s alleged that as vice president of Truth Center Inc., Vandevender withheld \$388,442 in state taxes from employee paychecks that was never paid to the state Department of Revenue. *Source: Fayetteville Observer, 2-14-17*

Pleaded / Convicted

Andrew L. Jackson, 31, White Hall, AR: Guilty by jury of 2 counts of rape. Jackson, youth pastor in 2014 at Victory Tabernacle of Hot Springs United Pentecostal Church, was originally charged with 13 counts of rape, with 10 involving a 16-year-old and 3 counts involving her sister, age 13 at the time. The younger girl told investigators she often spent the night at the Jackson home, sleeping with Jackson and his wife on a sectional sofa. She said they first had sex while his wife was asleep on another section. Her sister alleged they had sex “at least 10 times” and that Jackson said if she told anyone he would burn up her family’s house with her and her family inside. *Source: Sentinel-Record, 3-31-17*

Peter Low, 65, Heybridge, England: Pleaded guilty to possession of a prohibited image of a child and 3 counts of possession of indecent images of children. Low was suspended by the Anglican Diocese of Chelmsford as vicar at 2 parishes after the images were discovered last July. *Source: essexlive.com, 3-29-17*

A federal judge found **Hien Minh Nguyen, 57, San Jose, CA,** guilty of 14 counts of bank fraud. Nguyen, pastor of St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, earlier pleaded guilty to tax evasion involving \$19,000. From 2005-11, Nguyen also served as director of the Vietnamese Catholic Center and routinely withdrew center money for personal expenses, prosecutors said. *Source: sfgate.com, 3-21-17*

John C. Reid, 69, Stockton, England: Pleaded guilty to fraud while serving as pastor of St. Bede’s and St. Cuthbert’s Catholic parishes from 2009-13. The amount involved is about \$62,000. Several related charges were dropped in a plea agreement. *Source: ITV, 3-21-17*

Trevon Gross, 47, Jackson, NJ, and **Yuri Lebedev, 39, Jacksonville, FL:** Guilty by jury of conspiracy and bribery charges. Gross, lead pastor of Hope Cathedral, allegedly took \$150,000 in donations to his church and used its credit union to evade scrutiny of banks wary of processing payments involving the virtual bitcoin currency. An illegal bitcoin exchange Coin.mx was involved and was also linked to a probe of a data breach at JPMorgan Chase that exposed more than 83 million accounts. *Source: Reuters, 3-17-17*

Mark Q. Stafford, 52, O’Fallon, MO: Pleaded guilty to mail fraud and filing a false tax return. Stafford, founding pastor of New Birth Power Plex Ministries, also operated an investment firm and admitted misrepresenting investments to 31 clients from 2007-16, resulting in losses of \$1.08 million. He also failed to file tax returns for 2011 and 2013 and understated his 2011 income by \$150,000. Valarie Stubblefield said she and her father invested \$87,000 money with Stafford. “How could you be a preacher and be scamming people you know?” she asked. *Source: Post-Dispatch, 3-15-17*

William L. Helker, 47, Pine City, MN: Pleaded guilty to foreign distribution of child pornography, which involved children as young as 5. Helker, associate pastor at All Saints Lutheran Church, was arrested last October. It’s alleged he exchanged child porn with a man in Finland. The plea agreement said Helker possessed 900 images and 300 videos and that he created “sexually explicit collages” with superimposed photos of children, including placing a child’s head on an adult body in a pornographic setting. *Source: Fargo-Moorhead Forum, 3-13-17*

Kevin Gugliotta, 55, Mahwah, NJ: Pleaded guilty to dissemination of child pornography. Gugliotta, parochial vicar at Holy Spirit Catholic Church allegedly downloaded porn to a personal laptop from his second home in Gouldsboro, PA, and then uploaded files to a chat room on 20 separate occasions last summer. The site alerted law enforcement. He was suspended from ministry in 2003 for allegedly molesting a teen boy in the 1980s before he was a priest but was reinstated in 2004. *Source: Asbury Park Press, 3-10-17*

Sentenced

Wesley A. Brown, 54, Flagler Beach, FL: 7½ years in prison and 22½ years’ probation after a jury convicted him of 19 counts of embezzlement, grand theft and securities fraud. Restitution is yet to be determined for 6 victims at 2 churches where Brown recruited investors in a \$2 million Ponzi scheme between 2010-12. He was associate pastor at Calvary Chapel.



“He used his position of power, used his position of friendship, to steal and lie from people in his church,” Assistant State Attorney Tim Pribisco said. *Source: News-Journal, 3-29-17*

Thomas B. Fleming, 67, Worcester, MA: 3 years’ probation and \$90,105 restitution after pleading guilty to money laundering involving 5 victims. Prosecutor David Tobin said Fleming, a retired Catholic priest reportedly suffering from an undisclosed mental condition, took part in a scam to defraud “vulnerable, older women” on a fictitious dating website in hopes of getting himself a new car. *Source: Telegram & Gazette, 3-24-17*

Timothy D. Miller, 39, Managua, Nicaragua: Time served and 1 year probation after pleading guilty to conspiracy for helping Lisa A. Miller (no relation) abduct her daughter and flee the U.S. in 2009 to keep the girl away from her former same-sex partner. She and the girl, now 14, are still at large. Timothy Miller is a Mennonite missionary and pastor.

Lisa Miller and Janet Jenkins separated in 2003 and a Vermont court gave custody to Miller and visitation rights to Jenkins. When Miller moved back to Virginia, she joined a conservative Christian church and unsuccessfully petitioned the court to stop visits by Jenkins. *Source: Buffalo News, 3-23-17*

Alex “Shaya” Lichtenstein, 45, New York City: 32 months in prison, \$20,000 fine and undergo alcohol addiction treatment. Lichtenstein, leader of a Hasidic neighborhood patrol, was found guilty of bribing police to obtain handgun permits that he sold to members of a Borough Park ultra-Orthodox community for as much as \$18,000 each. *Source: NY Post, 3-16-17*

Mayer Herskovic, 24, Brooklyn, NY: 4 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of participation in a 2013 gang assault on Taj Patterson, a gay black man, blind in one eye. Two other members of Herskovic’s Hasidic neighborhood watch group took plea deals earlier. *Source: NY Post, 3-16-17*

Jay L. Preston, 58, Paola, KS: 13 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of aggravated indecent liberties with a child. Preston, pastor of Grace Revolution Church of the Nazarene and CEO of My Father’s House homeless shelter, was charged with “lewd fondling or touching” of 2 children born in 2008 and 2006. *Source: Kansas City Star, 3-13-17*

Michael W. Hill, 54, Chanute, KS: 10 years in prison and 10 years’ probation after pleading guilty to 2 counts of attempted capital sexual battery. Hill allegedly assaulted the 11-year-old victim in 1990 when he lived in Florida. The girl, who was his daughter’s friend, didn’t make the allegation to authorities until 2002.

When he was arrested in 2015, the Kansas-Nebraska Conference of Seventh-day Adventists removed him from ministry. *Source: WJXT, 3-10-17*

Cyril Rowe, 78, Bournemouth, England: 4 years in prison after being convicted of 3 counts of indecent assault between 1978-82 when he was pastor of St. Matthias Anglican Church.

The victim, a former choirboy, died of motor neurone disease at age 47 the same day the guilty verdicts were rendered but died before being told. Unable to speak, he had testified from hospice using eye-tracking technology which turned his blinks into words, its first such use in a British court.

“You have shown absolutely no remorse and very little insight into the harm you caused to a little boy,” Judge Peter Johnson told Rowe. *Source: Evening Standard, 3-10-17*

Robert Dolan, 73, Colorado Springs, CO: 30 days in jail and 8 years’ probation after pleading guilty to 10 counts of sexual exploitation of a child and invasion of privacy for sexual gratification. Dolan, a retired theology teacher at St. Mary’s High School and YMCA member, was arrested in 2015 after a Y employee saw him using his phone to photograph a group of boys undressing.

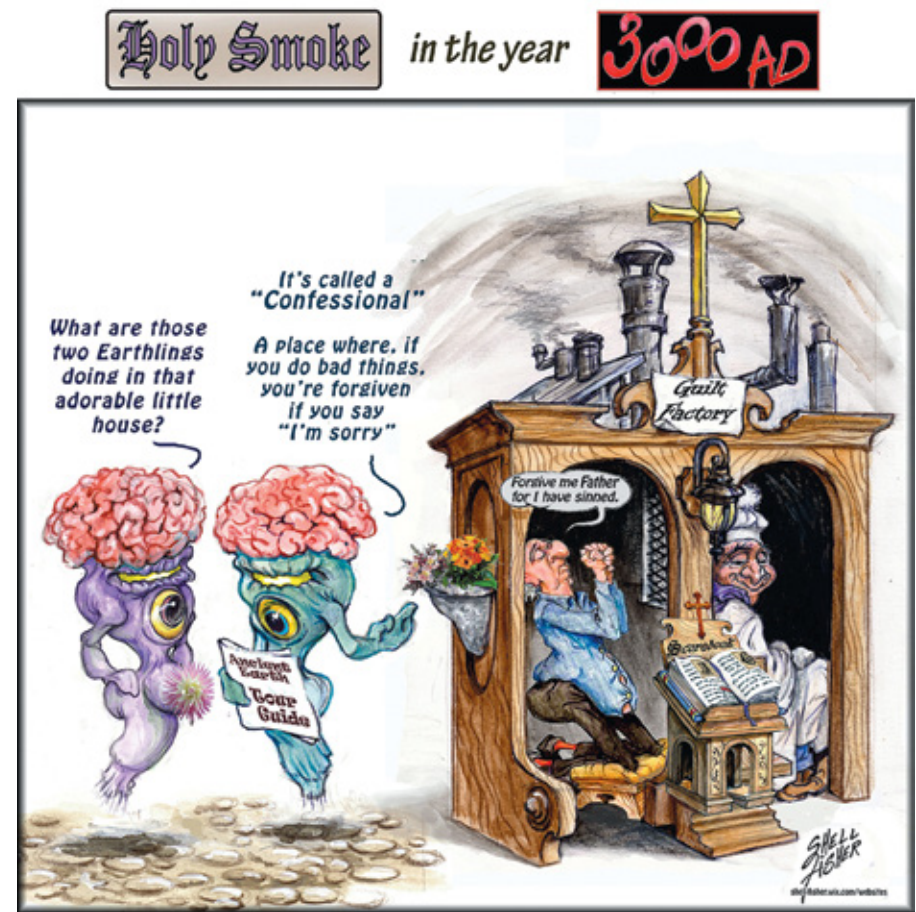
He claimed he was only playing a cellphone game but officers later found more than 300 photos of nude or partially nude boys. *Source: The Gazette, 3-10-17*

Paul Hanniford, 55, Kingston, Jamaica: 20 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of sexual intercourse with a minor. Hanniford, pastor of Pentecostal City Mission Church, was charged with raping a 13-year-old girl at his home after choir practice in March 2015.

Prosecutors said he gave the girl’s 5-year-old brother a bowl of cornflakes to occupy him while Hanniford took her into the bedroom. The boy heard her crying and witnessed the assault through a bedroom window. Afterward, Hanniford returned the children to their mother at the church. *Source: Jamaica Gleaner, 3-10-17*

Daniel MacKay, 42, Eugene, OR: 30 days in jail, 60 days’ community service, 3 years’ probation and participation in a program to address his behavior after a jury found him guilty of 3 misdemeanor counts of prostitution. MacKay, the married pastor of St. John’s the Wonderworker Serbian Orthodox Church, was arrested in October during a sting in which a detective posed as the 17-year-old girl whom he earlier had sex with. MacKay testified he met with the teen and gave her money several times only because she appeared to be homeless and in need.

“You paid for sex with a youth who had no money, no food, no place to stay and no family



resources,” Judge Karrie McIntyre told MacKay. “Your statements here today show a lack of accountability for your actions.”

In a text message to Detective Curtis Newell, MacKay said they should “do it BB” after being asked to bring a condom. MacKay testified “BB” referred to Burrito Boy, where they had eaten earlier. Newell testified “BB” is slang for unprotected sex called “bareback.” *Source: Register-Guard, 3-9-17*

Jan Arnow, 69, Marysville, IN: 15 months in prison and \$195,000 restitution for defrauding the federal government by cashing her dead husband’s Social Security checks and submitting her own false application by hiding her remarriage. Arnow, director of the Center for Interfaith Relations, admitted cashing checks for 11 years after her husband died in 2003.

She received a 4-year sentence in 2012 for wanton exploitation of an adult, identify theft, fraudulent use of a credit card and unlawful taking but was placed in a diversion program for 5 years. She also paid \$12,000 in restitution involving a cancer patient, now deceased, for whom she was a caretaker. *Source: Courier-Journal, 3-8-17*

John D. Young, 55, William Knott, 48, and Aleshia Moffett, 42, Prichard, AL: 20 years in prison for aggravated child abuse at Restoration Youth Academy, a Christian boot camp for troubled teens. Young and Knott are both pastors and Moffett was head girls counselor at the now-closed facility where 36 children were removed in 2015.

The investigation started in 2011 after an official saw a naked boy crouching in a 6-by-8-foot isolation room. Former students told reporters that Knott and other drill instructors would force cadets, often mismatched in size, to box each other in the middle of the night.

“They would always have somebody, normally me, pray before we’d have the boxing match. Will [Knott] told me to pray nobody got killed,” said Lucas Greenfield, 14 at the time. “I was like, really? You’re the one making them fight.” *Source: Christian Post, 3-1-17*

Gregory J. Olson, 52, Ryder, ND: 4 years in prison and \$1.25 million restitution after pleading guilty to wire fraud and 4 counts of tax evasion. Olson was indicted in 2012 for stealing \$1.47 million in 2006-09 from Calvary Lutheran Church in Las Vegas, NV, where he was treasurer and property manager.

He also failed to report the stolen money as income, resulting in tax avoidance of \$542,700. *Source: KSNV, 2-23-17*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

The **Salvation Army of North and South Carolina** and **4 employees** are being sued in separate suits by parents of 2 girls who allege molestation by **Armando Gonzalez** at a Salvation Army Sunday school in Charleston, SC.

Gonzalez, 65, has been criminally charged with molesting a girl in his care at the school and is in custody. Three girls as young as 4 have accused him of touching them under their skirts.

The suits allege Gonzalez was a known sexual predator when hired and that public information showing that was available. He was arrested in 2003 for inappropriately touching a 17-year-old girl. *Source: Post & Courier, 3-20-17*

Victory Christian Center, Tulsa, OK, and

Tulsa dentist **Bert G. Franklin** are being sued by Roxanne Randall for the July 2016 wrongful death of her 19-month-old son Lincoln. Franklin, 35, is charged with murder. Randall was in a relationship with Franklin but claims she didn’t know he was married with 4 children.

The suit accuses Victory Christian of negligence for not reporting alleged abuse by Franklin against his own daughter in 2016. Randall’s attorneys say Franklin sat on Victory Christian’s board of directors and was a financial donor. The church settled a suit in 2013 after officials were accused of covering up sexual assault of a child by a youth leader.

The Oklahoman cited home surveillance video purportedly showing Franklin making a kicking motion and throwing something to the floor. The video later shows him holding what appears to be Lincoln’s limp body. *Source: Courthouse News Service, 3-10-17*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Catholic Diocese of Honolulu** settled a lawsuit for undisclosed terms filed by “John Roe 6” and “John Roe 7,” who allege they were sexually assaulted as high school students in the 1960s by Christian Brothers priest **George DeCosta**, now 79. Plaintiffs’ attorney Mark Gallagher said there was no dismissal of claims against DeCosta, the school or the Christian Brothers.

Gallagher also represents 2 claimants in pending suits against DeCosta and the diocese which allege abuse in 1965 and 1983. *Source: Tribune-Herald, 3-23-17*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles** settled a suit for undisclosed terms brought by “John CP Doe,” 29, who alleged he was molested by **Alfred Hernandez**, who retired in 1996 after 18 years as pastor at St. Ignatius of Loyola Church in Los Angeles and died in 2014.

The plaintiff was 6 in 1993 when his teacher told him to go with Hernandez, the complaint states: “Upon entering the rectory, Hernandez sat the plaintiff on a couch and began caressing his leg,” eventually working up to sodomy in a later attack while ordering the boy to read from the bible. “Hernandez deliberately picked specific portions of the bible with plaintiff recalling being made to read from Galatians.” *Source: NBC-LA, 3-22-17*

The **Hindu Society of Carrum Downs, Australia**, underpaid an assistant priest hired from India to work in a commercial kitchen almost \$78,000 in 2011-12, said a federal court, upholding an ombudsman’s ruling. The unidentified man, in his 30s, left employment after severely injuring his hand on a flour grinder in the kitchen at Shri Shiva Vishnu Temples.

The man, who had a religious worker visa, also told the court he believed he had been hired as an assistant priest and was disappointed to be assigned to kitchen work. *Source: Herald Sun, 3-22-17*

Finances

The **Montana Catholic Diocese of Great Falls-Billings** has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in order to reorganize its assets before settling claims by at least 72 alleged victims of clergy sex abuse. A trial had been scheduled for July 10.

Attorney Vito de la Cruz, who represents 34

plaintiffs, said abuse occurred from the 1950s through the 1980s and that many accusers were Native American students in mission schools.

Montana’s other diocese, based in Helena, filed earlier for bankruptcy and subsequently set up a \$21 million fund to compensate 362 victims. Fifteen Catholic dioceses have now filed for bankruptcy. *Source: Great Falls Tribune, 3-31-17*

Legal Developments

The New York City Board of Health has identified **2 of 6 mohels** who infected newborns with herpes during the ultra-Orthodox Jewish circumcision rite known as metzitzah b’peh but won’t release their names. “People are entitled to their privacy,” said Health Commissioner Mary Bassett. As a result, parents will have to ask their mohel if they’ve been banned by the city.

During metzitzah b’peh, the mohel sucks blood from the wound instead of using a sterile pipette. The latest infection was reported in early March. A 2012 law requiring parents to sign a consent form has been poorly enforced, critics say. At least 11 boys contracted herpes from the practice between 2004-11, with 2 dying and at least 2 others suffering brain damage. *Source: The Gothamist, 3-30-17*

Jacob M. Malone, 34, Chadds Ford, PA, former pastor at Calvary Fellowship, had his plea agreement rejected by Judge Jacqueline Cody, who called the circumstances “way too serious” to justify only 2 years in prison. Under the rejected terms, he would have pleaded guilty to corruption of minors, institutional sexual assault and endangering the welfare of children.

The victim, now 20, met Malone at age 12 in 2009 when he was her youth pastor in Arizona and she didn’t have a father in her life. She agreed to move in with Malone and his wife in 2014 and help look after their 3 children. In March 2016 she gave birth to Malone’s daughter. In a victim’s statement, she recounted occurrences before school and before Malone left for work at the church, “as I lay in bed not moving, hoping you would get the message that I didn’t want it.”

When Cody asked District Attorney Emily Provencher why the agreement didn’t include rape charges, she said there was concern the commonwealth couldn’t prove absence of consent. *Source: The Inquirer, 3-29-17*

Six Israeli rabbinate officials convicted in 2014 of aggravated fraud, forgery, money laundering and bribery had their appeals denied by the Supreme Court of Israel. The scheme, which took place between 1999-2003, involved helping hundreds of military and security personnel fraudulently obtain certificates from the Chief Rabbinate regarding the completion of advanced religious studies, entitling them to monthly salary bonuses. In return, the rabbis received millions of shekels in kickbacks. A shekel is worth about 28 cents. *Source: Jerusalem Post, 3-12-17*

Removed / Resigned

John Fitzgerald, 68, Conway, PA, on leave as pastor of Our Lady of Peace Catholic Parish since 2014 due to a sexual abuse allegation from the 1990s, had his request to retire granted by the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

The diocese in a statement said the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith could not determine “with certainty whether the abuse did or did not occur.” *Source: WPXI, 3-21-17*

Samuel B. Slocum, 65, a Catholic priest in the Diocese of Erie, PA, has been defrocked by the Vatican. He was convicted in 2012 of having an inappropriate relationship with a 15-year-old boy when Slocum was pastor at Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Lewis Run.

Slocum was not accused of sexual abuse but of continuing to contact the teen even after the boy’s mother told him to stop. He was sentenced to 2 years’ probation. *Source: goerie.com, 3-18-17*

Anglican Bishop **Gregory E. Thompson, 60,** Diocese of Newcastle, resigned effective May 31 in the wake of reports about child sexual abuse in the diocese. The Anglican Church in Australia has paid \$31 million to 459 victims but only 40% of victims have been compensated.

A report to the Royal Commission said children were on average 11 years old and 75% male. Of the alleged perpetrators (94% male), 247 were ordained clergy and 285 were laypersons. There were 1,115 reported complaints made to 22 Anglican dioceses between 1980 and 2015. *Source: Newcastle Herald, 3-17-17*

Rodney Smith, Beaver Falls, PA, was placed on leave as pastor of Chippewa United Methodist Church after “some questions were raised” about the church’s annual financial audit, said Gregory Cox, director of connectional ministries for the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Smith had been pastor of the church since July 2001. *Source: Beaver County Times, 3-16-17*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

Solidarity rally



FFRF Member Justin Scott spoke to a group of more than 400 people who turned out for a Muslim solidarity rally at the Mother Mosque in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on March 26. Justin writes: “I had the opportunity to represent atheism, on behalf of the Eastern Iowa Atheists, during the rally at the Mother Mosque, the longest-standing mosque in North America. One of the highlights of the experience was right before I spoke. I asked how many of the people in the crowd knew an atheist, expecting only a handful of hands. The response was incredible: It appeared that almost every hand in the crowd went up. I had to get a selfie!”

Justin Scott Iowa State House April 5, 2017

FFRF Member Justin Scott is a member of the Cedar Valley Atheists and Eastern Iowa Atheists. Scott is the first atheist to give the opening invocation to the Iowa State House.

Instead of closing your eyes and bowing your heads today, please keep your heads up and your eyes open to be fully alert in this moment.

As you convene here in the People’s House, let me implore this body to invoke the Holy Trinity of Science. Made up of reason, observation, and experience, this Trinity has allowed humanity to explore the deep reaches of space, develop life-saving medicines, and vastly improve the human experience.

This body should be able to tackle the many difficult issues facing the great people of the state of Iowa without allowing confirmation bias, cognitive dissonance, or intellectual dishonesty to blindly guide positions and votes.

The Trinity I invoke today isn’t rooted in any kind of doctrine or dogma. In its pursuit of truth, it doesn’t care what our feelings are or what our deeply held beliefs are on a particular issue. Truth can sometimes be uncomfortable, but it plays a large part in the ongoing evolution of our species.

There’s only one catch with this kind of Trinity, though. It only works if



Justin Scott stands outside the Iowa State House on April 5 prior to his giving of the invocation.

you’re willing to change your opinions on issues if it delivers an outcome that doesn’t align with your deeply held beliefs.

This is especially worth remembering as all of you are entrusted to uphold and maintain the dignity and bodily autonomy of all Iowans, regardless of their worldview, sexual orientation, gender identity, or even political ideology.

Refusing to accept what the evidence says has real world implications for all Iowans. Incorporating this Trinity today, tomorrow, and every day, you do the work of the people, which will allow you to do the most good for the most Iowans.

In closing, let this Trinity guide you and protect you. May this Trinity inspire you and be honest to you. May this Trinity lift up the truth upon you and give you peace.

Thank you.
Justin was a guest on Freethought Radio (ffrf.org/news/radio) on April 6.

SECULAR INVOCATIONS

Nothing Fails Like Prayer CONTEST

Our goal is to encourage secular citizens to flood government meetings with secular invocations that demonstrate why government prayers are unnecessary, ineffective, embarrassing, exclusionary, divisive or just plain silly.

The “best” secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF’s annual convention, receiving a free trip to Madison, Wis., on the weekend of Sept. 15–17, 2017, along with a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

MORE INFO AT:
ffrf.org/nothing-fails-like-prayer

FFRF ON THE ROAD



Host Dave Rubin, left, and FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel talked for more than an hour about atheism, state-church separation, free speech, the Constitution and more while filming “The Rubin Report” in Los Angeles. “The Rubin Report” is a political news talk show airing on YouTube. The full audio of each episode is also available as a downloadable podcast. Watch it here: bit.ly/AndrewOnRR.



FFRF’s Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert (front row, third from right) spoke to the University of Minnesota’s Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH) group on March 30. Markert talked about “Becoming a Champion of the First Amendment.” Included in this photo are the CASH officers: Rachel French (white pants in front), Lucas Meyers (blue hat), Alice Blesi (to the right of Meyers), David Schlosser (back right) and Nicole Peterson (front right).



While traveling in Ecuador, FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover and his fiancée Elise (left) found some fellow freethinkers! Pictured from far right to left are Betsy Stalter, and Joshua, Maureen, Ben and Russell Watson. Already familiar with FFRF through Freethought Radio, members of the group now intend to join FFRF. Sam guesses this is what atheist missionary work looks like.



FFRF Attorney Liz Cavell (pictured), along with FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert, attended the Lawyers for Good Government — Wisconsin Chapter inaugural conference in Lake Geneva, Wis., on March 31-April 1. FFRF had a table at the nonprofit expo portion of the conference, which encouraged lawyers to sign up for pro bono work with FFRF and other nonprofit organizations. There were about 75 lawyers at the conference, and five signed up to join FFRF’s network of cooperating attorneys. We were also able to distribute informational materials about FFRF and our fliers on expanding school choice programs and repealing the Johnson Amendment. Cavell and Markert also attended conference sessions on suing the state, lobbying, executive power, basics of immigration law, political gerrymandering and the future of health care in America.

FFRF’s convention: All you need to know

Hotel accommodations

FFRF offers convention blocks at three hotels this year to accommodate more registrants!

Hilton Madison Monona Terrace, 9 E. Wilson Street, is the official convention hotel and closest to Monona Terrace. Rooms are \$183 (single/double/triple/quad). Call 608-255-5100 to make a reservation for the “Freedom From Religion Foundation” group rate. The group rate reservation cut-off date is Aug. 16 (unless rooms sell out).

Best Western Premier Park Hotel, 22 S. Carroll Street, is right on the Capitol Square, newly remodeled, and just 0.3 miles from Monona Terrace, about a 6-minute walk. Rooms are \$189 (one bed for 1-2 people), \$209 for 2 beds (1-4 people), or \$249 for suites. Call toll-free 800-279-8811 or local 608-285-8000 to reserve rooms in the “Freedom From Religion Foundation 2017 Block.” The group rate reservation cut-off is Aug. 14 (unless rooms sell out).

Sheraton Madison Hotel, 706 John Nolen Drive, is 2 miles away from Monona Terrace on a lakeside walking/ biking path, with shuttle service available. Call 608-251-2300 or 866-716-8134 (toll-free) to reserve a room at \$149 (single/double/triple/quad). The group rate reservation cut-off date is Aug. 15 (unless rooms sell out).

About Monona Terrace

Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center was first designed by Wisconsin native and internationally renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright in 1938 as a cultural, governmental and recreational building. While Wright’s design was used for the building’s exterior, the interior was redesigned by Wright apprentice and Taliesin architect Tony Puttnam to house state-of-the-art exhibition, meeting and public space. The space opened its doors after nearly 60 years of debate on July 18, 1997.

Today, nearly 390,000 people say “see you at Monona Terrace” each year.

Address: 1 John Nolen Drive
Madison, WI 53703



Monona Terrace as seen from Lake Monona.

For information on the speakers at the convention, see page 24.

FFRF open house

Friday, Sept. 15, 9:30 a.m. - noon



Early birds are invited to tour FFRF’s beautiful, newly-expanded office, Free-thought Hall, in downtown Madison, prior to the formal convention opening. Complimentary refreshments (light pastries, coffee, tea, orange juice, plus Champagne/Mimosas) will be served in the elegant Charlie Brooks Auditorium.

Reflect on a bench in front of FFRF’s granite monument dedicated to Athe-ists in Foxholes “and other freethinkers who have served our country with val- or and distinction,” in the Rose Zerwick Memorial Garden & Courtyard.

Take a self-guided tour of FFRF’s national headquarters (with its five-floor addition) with the help of a souvenir brochure, featuring highlights of the building and FFRF history. Socialize with staff and other FFRF members as you peek into the building.

Visit the Joel B. Landon and Wanda

K. Beers Freethought Library for a pho- to op with “Mr. Darwin,” an amazingly life-like, silicone mannequin of Charles Darwin by artist Sam Wheatley.

Take a cruise

Friday, Sept. 15, 10:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

FFRF convention attendees are in- vited to take a boat cruise on Madison’s Lake Monona Friday, Sept. 15, prior to the start of the convention. The Monona Terrace Community & Convention Cen- ter, home to FFRF’s convention, over- looks the scenic lake.

For \$50 per person, you’ll be treated to a two-hour tour with a buffet, fea- turing clam chowder, chips and Cajun dip, vegetarian variety platter, seafood salad, chicken salad, pasta salad, fruit salad, sliced deli meats/cheeses and assorted desserts. There is a cash bar for beverages. The tour begins at 10:45 a.m. and ends at 1 p.m. We’ll have bus service to take you from Freethought Hall or the Hilton to the boat launch and back to the hotel, or you can walk the route. Maps will be available. Unfortu- nately, the yachts are not wheelchair ac- cessible, as the walkways are tight and there are narrow stairs to the banquet area. There are two yachts and a total limit of 86 passengers. If you are coming as part of a group, FFRF will make sure your group is aboard the same boat.



Convention Menu

Friday, Sept. 15

Bucky’s Tailgate Buffet (\$32)

A traditional Wisconsin tailgate par- ty! Wisconsin Waldorf Salad, home- style potato salad, fresh vegetable and relish tray, beer-boiled Johnsonville bratwurst with Wisconsin sauerkraut and chopped fresh onion, grilled bone- less chicken breast, fresh-sliced toma- to and crisp lettuce, Wisconsin calico baked beans, condiments and buns, coffee, tea or milk. Cash bar.

Saturday, Sept. 16

Non-Prayer Breakfast (\$20)

Wisconsin cheese and chive scrambled eggs, apple-smoked bacon, rosemary wedge potatoes, ketchup compote, chef’s assortment of petite muffins, orange juice, coffee, tea and milk. Veggie option.

Saturday ‘Grab and Go’ box lunch (\$20)

Includes your choice of roasted chick- en or grilled vegetables on Kaiser roll with tomato, lettuce with condiments on the side, chips and a can of soda.

Saturday Banquet Dinner (\$40)

Chicken Wellington: Delicate puff pastry filled with a boneless chicken breast, apple smoked bacon, shallots and mushrooms, served with mush- room-brown rice pilaf, fresh seasonal vegetable blend.

Portobello Wellington: Delicate puff pastry filled with fresh portobello mushrooms, herbs, shallots and risotto and served with grilled tomato.

Both entrees served with dinner rolls and butter, house salad with champagne- mustard vinaigrette, beverage (coffee, tea, or milk) and chocolate raspberry torte.

Bar opens at 6 p.m. Dinner served at 6:30 p.m.



Photo by John O’Hara

The Forward! Marching Band band will play during FFRF’s first-ever “Tailgate Party” buffet dinner Friday night. Founded in Madison, Wis., in 2011, Forward! Marching Band gained members and experience marching around the State Capitol in the snow and rain in the crucible of a groundswell of protests held that spring. “We believe in using music to help fuel social change, have fun and build community.” Forward! Marching Band is an ever-changing group of musicians of all skill levels, with diverse ages, musicianship and abilities. Instruments run the gamut from traditional band instruments to home-brewed xylophones and washboards. “We love costumes, silly hats and spectacle.” It brings lively tunes to protests, marches, rallies, parades and community events.”

COMING NEXT ISSUE



James A. Haught

Futile to analyze God’s mercy

REMINDER

The June / July issue of Freethought Today is combined and will be delivered by late June

Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning



Arrange a bequest in your will or trust, or make the **Freedom From Religion Foundation** the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account or IRA.

It’s easy to do.

For related information (or to request a bequest brochure), please phone Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900.

P.O. Box 750
Madison, WI 53701

Yip Harburg, from his book *Rhymes for the Irreverent*

Published by FFRF

A Nose Is A Nose Is A Nose



Mother, Mother,
Tell me please,
Did God who gave us flowers and trees,
Also provide the allergies?

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

Convention

in its 72-year history.

She joins an already strong cast of speakers and entertainers for the exciting convention. Others on the docket include Pollitt, Maryam Namazie, Steven Pinker, Cara Santa Maria and Michelle Goldberg, to name a few.

But the convention is more than just speakers and entertainers. Start it off with a tour of the newly remodeled and expanded Freethought Hall on the morning of Friday, Sept. 15. It's only a couple blocks from the convention site. Visit the third-floor Freethought Library, where you can get your picture taken with a life-sized replica of Charles Darwin.

After the Freethought Hall tour, take a trip around Lake Monona on a cruise boat, where you'll spend two hours on the picturesque lake, which includes great views of the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed convention center. **The convention officially starts with speakers and awards at 3 p.m. Friday**, which is an earlier start than usual. For dinner on Friday, join us for the Wisconsin Tailgate Party buffet, which will feature the Forward! Marching Band.

(For more information about the convention, turn to page 23 or go to ffrf.org/outreach/convention.)

The other scheduled speakers at the convention include:

Pollitt is well known for her column in *The Nation*, "Subject to Debate," which the *Washington Post* has called "the best place to go for original thinking on the left." She will



**Sign up before June 30
for the discounted rate.**

be receiving FFRF's Forward Award at the convention.

In 2011, the New York City native won the American Sociological Association Award for Excellence in the Reporting of Social Issues. Her 1992 essay on the culture wars, “Why We Read: Canon to the Right of Me . . .” won the National Magazine Award for essays and criticism, and she won a Whiting Foundation Writing Award the same year. In 2013, her column won a Maggie Award from the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, as did her 1993 essay “Why Do We Romanticize the Fetus?”

She has previously received FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award and Freethought Heroine Award.

Namazie is an Iranian-born secularist and human rights activist, commentator and broadcaster living in London. The spokesperson for Iran Solidarity, One Law for All and the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain will be receiving the 2017 Henry H. Zuma Freedom From Fundamentalist Religion Award.

Harvard's Pinker is FFRF's honorary president, a cognitive scientist, psychologist, linguist, and popular science author. He is one of the world's foremost writers on language, mind and human nature. He is a previous winner of FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

Santa Maria is a Los Angeles-area Emmy and Knight Foundation Award-winning journalist, science communicator and host of the weekly science podcast, "Talk Nerdy with Cara Santa Maria" and cohost of the podcast *Guide to the Universe*. She is also FFRF's Freethought Hero.



Goldberg, from Brooklyn, is an author, columnist for Slate and frequent MSNBC commentator on the Religious Right. Goldberg's first book, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*, was a finalist for the 2007 New York Public Library's Helen Bernstein Book Award for Excellence in Journalism.

Veal is president of People of Color Beyond Faith, president and host of the Black FreeThinkers Radio Network, IT trainer, and community and social justice activist.



Zimmerman is an American satirical singer-songwriter and guitarist with a repertoire of irreverent songs. He wrote a series of satirical musical revues in the 1980s that were produced by the San Jose Repertory Theatre.

Frudakis, of Philadelphia, is an award-winning sculptor of public monuments, portrait statues, busts and figurative sculptures. He'll be

talking about creating his newsmaking statue of Clarence Darrow, to be installed in July on the lawn of the Rhea County Courthouse, site of the Scopes Trial, in Dayton, Tenn.

Davidson is an American composer and flautist and is a member of the Stockbridge Mohican nation of American Indians. He has composed for Zeitgeist, the Kronos Quartet, Joffrey Ballet, the National Symphony Orchestra, and Chanticleer.

Helton, a 12-year-old seventh-grader from Kentucky, will give a short talk about her activism, including sitting down for the Pledge of Allegiance and successful efforts to get her public school to stop playing religious songs.

A roster of victorious state/church plaintiffs will be named Freethinkers of the Year. **Marie Schaub** is the successful plaintiff in FFRF's lawsuit against a Pennsylvania school district over a Ten Commandments monument outside her daughter's high school. (See page 5.) **Jesse Castillo** and **Kevin Price** were victorious in removing Christian crosses from Brewster County sheriffs' cars. **Jerry Bloom**, the plaintiff in FFRF's successful federal lawsuit, *FFRF and Jerome H. Bloom v. City of Shelton, Conn.*, filed last year against censorship of FFRF's winter solstice display.

FFRF Co-President **Dan Barker** will also perform at the piano with his own repertoire. As always, FFRF's legal team will present its yearly Accomplishments panel, revealing the inside scoop on FFRF's 2017 legal cases. The legal department includes Staff Attorneys **Rebecca Markert, Patrick Elliott, Andrew Seidel, Elizabeth Cavell** and **Sam Grover**.

For full convention information, go to ffrf.org/outreach/convention.



40th NATIONAL CONVENTION
MADISON | SEPTEMBER 15-17, 2017

Number Registering Cost

Friday Tailgate Party Buffet (Dinner) \$32 \$
5:00 p.m. to 6:45 p.m.
 Regular Vegetarian

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

Non-Prayer Breakfast \$20 \$
 Country Breakfast Veggie Breakfast

“Grab and Go” Box Lunch \$20 \$
 Chicken Sandwich Veggie Sandwich

Saturday Dinner \$40 \$
 Chicken Wellington Portobello Wellington (veggie)

(Include Subtotal from previous column) ► Total \$

If you have allergies or other dietary restrictions not accommodated by the above meal selections, please note those here:

(Make checks payable to FFRF) Return with payment to:
FFRF, Attn: Convention | P.O. Box 750 | Madison, WI 53701

Names of all registrants _____

Names of all registrants _____

Address _____ City / State / ZIP _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Credit Card Number _____ Expiration Date / Security Code _____

Signature _____

Contact information for in-house use only.

2017 Convention Registration Form & Info

Registration Fees

► **Early Bird Deadline: Register for only \$40! Prices rise \$20 June 30.** ◀

	Number Registering	Cost
Member	<u> </u> \$40	\$ <u> </u>
Spouse or Companion <i>(non-member accompanying member)</i>	<u> </u> \$45	\$ <u> </u>
Child / Student with ID	<u> </u> Free	\$ <u> </u>
Non-member <i>Or join for \$40 and save money!</i>	<u> </u> \$95	\$ <u> </u>

Meals / Events

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

Freethought Hall Open House Free
9:30 a.m. to Noon. Please RSVP, tickets required.

Betty Lou Cruise on Lake Monona \$50* \$
10:45 a.m. to 1 p.m.
**includes lunch buffet and bus to dock from Hilton and FFRF office and back.
Children 12 months old or younger – Free.*

 Regular Vegetarian **Subtotal \$**