

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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David v. Goliath

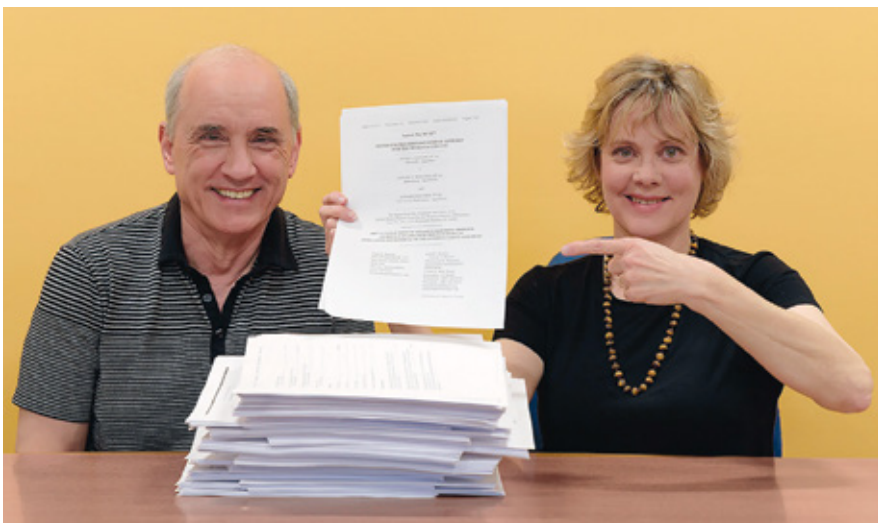


Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor show off the seven friend-of-the-court briefs against FFRF's lawsuit to end the parsonage tax exemption, including a 200-plus page brief by the Church Alliance.

FFRF battles thousands of 'ministers,' churches

FFRF faces appeal over parsonage tax exemption

This article first appeared on FFRF's Freethought Now! blog at patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow on May 9.

By Andrew L. Seidel

Names. Two hundred and four pages of names in minuscule, 11-point font (that violates federal court rules). Those 204 pages, filled with 8,899 names, are attached to a legal brief submitted against one of FFRF's most important legal challenges — a challenge that seemingly has every church and minister in the nation, no matter how conservative or liberal, weighing in against us.

The substance of this brief, the actual legal argument, is only 12 pages. Thin on the law, it puts on a show of brute strength, seeking to wow the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals with numbers instead of substance.

The Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), which authored this anything-but-brief, allowed any self-proclaimed "minister" to sign on to the document. Whether ADF checked or in any way vetted those hangers-on is not clear, but it seems unlikely, given that they simply had people fill out a webform. In fact, it appears that ADF simply copied and pasted a spreadsheet into the document it submitted to the court.

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Members of Congress, others support FFRF against House chaplain

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker's discrimination case against Rev. Pat Conroy, the chaplain of the House of Representatives, has received a boost. Several members of Congress, secular groups and religious groups — including Jewish, Sikh and interfaith — have weighed in, asking the court to strike down the House chaplain's discriminatory invocation practices.

In May, U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., who sponsored Barker's guest chaplain request, signed on to a brief along with U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., and U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md. Their court action marks the first time one, let alone multiple, sitting members of Congress have filed a brief supporting FFRF.

In May 2016, Barker initially filed suit because Conroy, a Roman Catholic priest, refused to allow him to give the opening invocation before Congress, claiming that atheists cannot solemnize important occasions. The chaplain invented several requirements that Barker met, including being ordained (Barker is a former minister) and addressing a higher power (Barker planned to address the highest power in this nation, "We the People"). None of these invented requirements was applied to other guest chaplains. Moreover, atheists and nonbelievers have delivered invocations at city councils, county boards and even in state legislatures around the country.



Mark Pocan



Jamie Raskin

In October 2017, U.S. District Judge Rosemary M. Collyer, a President George W. Bush appointee, ruled against Barker, so he appealed.

On May 21, secular and religious groups and those three members of Congress filed friend of the court briefs supporting Barker.

Reps. Pocan, Huffman and Raskin, who made history in April when they announced the formation of the first Congressional Freethought Caucus, argue that "The First Amendment's Establishment Clause does not permit Congress or its chaplains to discriminate against atheists and agnostics who have been duly invited by their elected representatives." The brief also points out that nonbelievers "can and do solemnize legislative sessions" and provides examples.

Americans United for the Separation of State and Church has authored a strong brief that several groups have

See *Chaplain* on page 2

FFRF sues over Arkansas Capitol monument

FFRF and a coalition of plaintiffs filed a lawsuit on May 23 against Arkansas Secretary of State Mark Martin seeking the removal of a massive Ten Commandments structure from the grounds of the Capitol.

In June 2017, the state placed a Ten Commandments monument at the Capitol, which ironically was destroyed within 24 hours by a religious fanatic. In April, a second Ten Commandments monument was installed at the same site, this time with protective barriers to prevent intentional destruction. FFRF and its co-plaintiffs assert that this installation is in clear violation of constitutional precepts. The plaintiffs include FFRF, the American

Humanist Association, the Arkansas Society of Freethinkers, as well as seven individual plaintiffs who are religious and nonreligious citizens of Arkansas.

"The state of Arkansas has erected an enormous religious monolith on government property in blatant disregard for the First Amendment to the United States Constitution," the suit states. "The new monolith — a 6-and-1/3-foot tall Ten Commandments statue — stands prominently on the state Capitol grounds."

The suit details how the Arkansas Legislature initiated this move.

"In 2016, the Arkansas General Assembly enacted Act 1231, the Ten Commandments Monument Display Act,"

it states. "The purpose of the act was to permit the placing of a monument to the Ten Commandments on the grounds of the Arkansas state Capitol. The exact text of such a monument was prescribed by the General Assembly."

State Sen. Jason Rapert was the primary sponsor of the legislation. Rapert also created a Go Fund Me campaign to raise money for the monument.

The suit points out that the Assembly went ahead with its plans in spite of objections to the placement of the Ten Commandments monument at public hearings by religious adherents of many stripes, as well as nonbelievers,

See *Monument* on page 2



Arkansas state Sen. Jason Rapert stands next to the newly installed Ten Commandments monument on the Capitol grounds.

Supreme Court sides with bakery owner

FFRF wrote amicus brief in support of Colorado Civil Rights Commission

The Supreme Court missed an opportunity to strengthen the U.S. Constitution on June 4, instead ruling narrowly that a state civil rights commission violated the free exercise rights of the owner of a Colorado bakery.

In *Masterpiece Cakeshop Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, a bakery backed by the Religious Right sought to radically redefine “religious freedom” as the right to impose one’s religious beliefs on others. The Colorado bakery refused to bake a cake for a gay marriage, contending the owner’s rights under the Free Exercise of the First Amendment let his business discriminate against LGBTQ customers.

FFRF wrote an amicus brief opposing this argument, noting that the right to believe is protected absolutely, but the right to act on those beliefs can be regulated by the government, especially when those actions impact the legal rights of others.

Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote the 7-2 majority opinion, in which Justices Stephen Breyer and Elena Kagan, typically viewed as liberal justices, joined. Kennedy begins by acknowledging the sincere religious beliefs at issue, and notes, “while those religious and philosophical objections are protected, it is a general rule that such objections do not allow business owners and other actors in the economy and in society to deny protected persons equal access to goods and services



Shutterstock image

On June 4, the Supreme Court ruled, in a narrow decision, that the Colorado Civil Rights Commission had violated the Constitution’s protection of religious freedom when it ruled against a baker who refused to bake a cake for a gay couple.

under a neutral and generally applicable public accommodations law.” This is the general rule for which the remainder of the decision is but a caveat.

That remainder is a finger wag to the Colorado Civil Rights Commission. Kennedy essentially argues that the commission’s “treatment of [the bakery’s] case has some elements of a clear and impermissible hostility toward the sincere religious beliefs

that motivated his objection.”

Though the decision will be promoted by the Religious Right as a sweeping victory, the court did not give them what they wanted.

The court did not redefine religious liberty as an unqualified license to discriminate or give the bakery the green light to discriminate in the future. The opinion can even be read as punting on the most important issue. Essentially, Kennedy tortured the facts enough to conclude that the bakery didn’t get a fair hearing and was subject to hostility from the commission.

The commission’s chair had said that Masterpiece Cakeshop owner Jack Phillips was correct to want respect for his beliefs, but that he must also respect the beliefs and will of the people as embodied in Colorado law.

“Under our Constitution, the right to believe has always been absolute, but the right to act on that belief has ended where other people’s rights begin,” says FFRF’s Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote the dissent, in which Justice Sonia Sotomayor joined. They were clear: The statements Kennedy relied on “do not evidence hostility to religion of the kind we have previously held to signal a free-exercise violation, nor do the comments by one or two members of one of the four decision-making entities considering this case justify reversing the judgment.”

“No matter how you slice it, religion is divisive, comments Dan Barker, FFRF co-president.

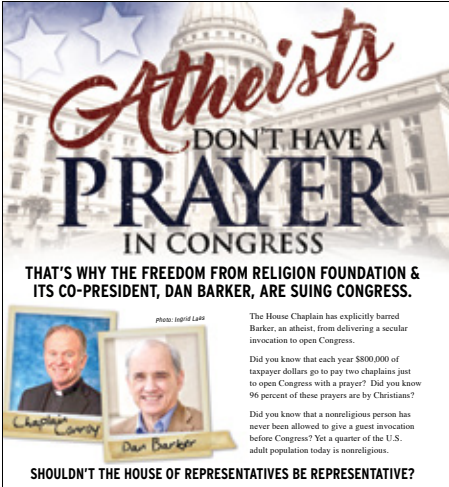
Chaplain

Continued from page 1

signed on to, including the Anti-Defamation League, the American Ethical Union, the Interfaith Alliance Foundation, the Jewish Social Policy Action Network, the National Council of Jewish Women, the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Sikh Coalition, the Union for Reform Judaism, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Women of Reform Judaism, the Men of Reform Judaism, and the Unitarian Universalist Association.

These groups argue, “In addition to the prohibitions against religious discrimination, the House chaplain’s conduct violates the Establishment Clause’s bar against religious entanglement.”

In fact, the criteria the chaplain “has been using to determine who may serve as a guest chaplain and to exclude Mr. Barker inherently leads the House to become entangled in inappropriate religious inquiries and judgments,” the brief states. It notes that one of the chaplain’s requirements, the require-



ment to be ordained, “discriminates against adherents of faiths that do not ordain clergy, such as Muslims, certain Buddhists, Bahais, and Quakers.”

The Center for Inquiry and American Atheists have filed a separate brief in which they argue that the chaplain’s rules are discriminatory and violate the Constitution, including that the religious test to become a guest chaplain violates Article 6: “[N]o religious test

shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.”

The American Humanist Association contends in its brief on the basis of extensive precedent that a government “practice that categorically excludes atheists from delivering invocations is . . . plainly unconstitutional” and that the “principle of religious freedom was trampled on by the district court’s decision, which accordingly, must be reversed.”

“I’m touched by the breadth, depth and quality of the support I’ve received,” says Barker. “The fact that so many groups representing minorities — religious and nonreligious — have expressed their solidarity shows how dangerous the district court’s decision is. If the House of Representatives, which is supposed to be representative, can discriminate against me for not believing, who’s next?”

FFRF filed its opening appellate brief on May 14. In it, FFRF has documented that Conroy relies on many “guest chaplains,” with such guests

delivering about 40 percent of invocations, or more than 800 in the past 15 years. Yet when an atheist was invited to give the opening remarks, Conroy imposed requirements that intentionally discriminated against him.

The brief points out that House rules specify the sole duty of the chaplain is to pray at the commencement of each day’s sitting of the House. No requirements or written rules exist for guest chaplains.

“God does not an invocation make,” wrote Attorney Richard L. Bolton, the outside counsel who drafted the FFRF brief. “Constitutionally acceptable invocations may include religious references, but religion is not essential to the solemnizing purpose of legislative invocations.”

Conroy evinced “discrimination, pretext and hostility toward Barker, based on his status as a nonbeliever,” the brief concludes.

The chaplain’s response is due no later than July 12. FFRF will have two weeks to reply to that brief.

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Monument

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who emphasized that the monument violates both the U.S. and the state Constitutions.

The lawsuit, which was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas by FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott and three others, seeks a declaration that the monument is unconstitutional, an injunction directing the defendant to remove the monument, and costs and attorneys’ fees. Earlier this year, a city in New Mexico was ordered to pay \$700,000 in attorneys’ fees after unsuccessfully defending a Ten Commandments monument in court. FFRF has also prevailed in recent years in two cases that succeeded in removing Ten Commandments monuments from Pennsylvania schools.

¡Arriba el librepensamiento!



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker revels in the scenery and history of Machu Picchu while in Peru for the first international Latin American Freethought Gathering May 24-26.

Peru conference shows freethought expansion

By Dan Barker

It is heartening to see that freethought is alive and well in Latin America. The *Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano de Librepensamiento* — the first international Latin American Free-thought Gathering attended by about 250 people — took place in Arequipa, Peru, from May 24–26. The event, primarily organized by ophthalmologist Hector Guillén and lawyer/author Ricardo Zavala, both of Arequipa, was sponsored by the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the International Humanist and Ethical Union, as well as about 25 local and regional atheist/humanist/skeptic groups in Latin America, such as CFI Argentina and SNAP Peru. Speakers from many countries described the growth of freethought and critical thinking in Central and South America and the continuing challenges to free speech, women’s rights, gay rights, sex education, human rights, science education, and state/church

separation in countries still largely dominated by the Catholic Church and heavily influenced by pseudoscience. I was honored to be invited to give the opening speech: “The importance of a secular state.” For three cerebral-packed days, we participated in or listened to 29 speeches, six panels, three workshops, and the formal presentations of five new freethought books written by Spanish-speaking authors. Attendees came from 12 different countries, and the speakers represented Costa Rica, Peru, Chile, Mexico, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, Colombia and Argentina, as well as the United States and Italy. As I listened to scientists, lawyers, doctors, bible scholars, historians, feminists, gay-rights and human-rights activists, I was struck by the excitement, intelligence and conviviality of all the participants. These people really want to combat dogma, superstition and irrationality in their laws and society. They want to live in a secular world free of religious coercion. The conference occurred, coincidentally, the week after the resignations of all 34 Chilean bishops due to the priestly pedophilia scandal in that country and the pope’s complicity in protecting the image of the Catholic Church. During my opening remarks (in Spanish), after noting that Peru has more than 3,000 varieties of potato, I quipped that the conference would surely be feminist in tone, since “*Les gusta la papa, pero no el papa.*” — “You like the (feminine) potato, but not the (masculine) pope.” The influence of religion is definitely weakening in that part of the world — partly due to the priestly scandals — but the church is not eager to abandon its privilege. Most of the Latin American nations, although officially *laicos* (secular), are still considered “confes-

sional” countries, under the lingering laws based on Catholic dogma. Peru, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Paraguay, Bolivia and Mexico all have Catholic-dictated wording in their constitutions to the effect that “life begins at conception.” The church has enormous influence in other laws, civil as well as military. The Holy See has been working diligently, authoring bills to promote religious instruction in the schools, to outlaw divorce, and to direct tax money to fund or repair churches. All South American countries have diplomatic relations with the Holy See and concordats with the Vatican formalizing the relationship between the church and the government. For example, Article Three of the Bolivian Constitution says: “The state recognizes and sustains the Apostolic Roman Catholic religion. It guarantees the public exercise of all other cults. The relations with the Catholic Church will be regulated by concordats and agreements between the Bolivian state and the Holy See.” Argentina, Costa Rica, Peru, Panama, Paraguay and El Salvador have similar

wording. Most Latin American constitutions invoke “Dios” in their preambles, and although they guarantee religious freedom to the people, the Catholic Church is granted a privileged status. The consensus at the conference is that currently the most secular countries in Latin America are Cuba, Mexico and Uruguay — and Chile is “on the way.” The worst problems appear to be in Central America, with proposed legislation to insert bible teaching in the public schools and to outlaw speech that “insults religion,” even though most countries, on paper at least, guarantee freedom of speech. A recurrent theme at the gathering was that the best way to weaken the influence of religion is to laugh at it. No wonder the church wants to outlaw blasphemy! At the end of the conference, the attendees produced the Arequipa Declaration, arguing for secular government and true religious freedom, which can be read on the Facebook page “*Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano de Librepensamiento Perú 2018.*” The organizers are now planning a second conference for 2020, which may take place in Chile or Colombia. ¡Arriba el librepensamiento! (Up with freethought!)

These people really want to combat dogma, superstition and irrationality in their laws and society.



FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor (hobbled by a broken foot from a fall earlier in Cusco, Peru) enjoy a brief respite during their Machu Picchu excursion.



Barker, front row center, poses with the other speakers at the *Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano de Librepensamiento* in Arequipa, Peru. The event was sponsored by FFRF and the International Humanist and Ethical Union, as well as about 25 local and regional atheist/humanist/skeptic groups in Latin America. Back row at far left: Richard Zavala; back row fourth from left: Hector Guillén.

HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

WHY LAMARCK BECAME EXTINCT

“Acquisitions wrought by nature and preserved by reproduction.”
— Lamarck, *Philosophie Zoologique*

Deep in the sleepy fields of August,
Who’s making that chirr—cicadas or locusts?
And who’s that, eating the buzzing bugs—
Mr. Toad or Mrs. Frog?
And who’s the bird with the frog in his throat?
Is it a heron or is it a stork?

In this whirl of a world that so often confuses,
Here’s a helpful fact:
Porpoises have rounded noses.
Dolphins have a beak.

That settles that, right off the bat,
But one more fact won’t hurt us:
All tortoises are turtles, but
Not every turtle’s a tortoise.

We’re on the spot, Free Will or not:
We may think it bathetic,
But the shape we’ve got was not begot
By choice—it’s all genetic.

Our torsos may not be immortal,
But wishing will never usurp us.
Moral: a dolphin can never turn turtle,
And you can’t be a tortoise on porpoise.



From Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie

© Philip Appleman.
Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. He is editor of the Norton Critical Edition of Darwin. He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both “After-Life” Members of FFRF. Phil’s books: ffrf.org/shop.

A grand concert at Freethought Hall



Classical pianist Jarred Dunn made use of the Diane Uhl Steinway grand piano in the Charlie Brooks Auditorium at FFRF’s Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis., performing a concert and live recording April 10. The international, award-winning pianist played Chopin and Debussy selections. Winner of the 2018 Lithuanian International Chopin Competition, Dunn has been a pianist for 26 of his 29 years. He has performed worldwide. His interpretations have been hailed as “evocative and mystical” and “technically perfect.”

He has a forthcoming book, *The Piano Matters* (Yale University Press) with David Duval. He is a double graduate of the University of Toronto and studied at The Juilliard School. He completed his Master of Music degree and post-graduate diploma in piano at the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice, Poland.



Dunn, left, stands with FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor prior to the recording of his concert performance. “It was divine to have our Steinway played by a virtuoso with the most exquisite touch,” Gaylor said. “Exactly how Chopin ought to be played — he would have approved, too.”

Dunn was interviewed this year on FFRF’s Freethought Radio, where he spoke about his migration from his parents’ cult-like religion into the refuge of music and atheism. Go to ffrf.org/radio and scroll to Jan. 11, 2018.

Also watch Dunn’s interview on FFRF’s “Freethought Matters” TV show on FFRF’s YouTube channel.

Freethought Today caption contest!



Photo by Chris Line

This month’s caption contest is a painting of Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger when he was a fifth-grade acolyte at his parents’ church. To enter, please write a humorous or witty caption of what PJ is thinking in this painting. Email your response to caption@ffrf.org by July 11. The winner, chosen by FFRF staff, will receive an FFRF T-shirt! We will announce the winner and top runners-up in the August issue.

FFRF welcomes its 25 new Life, After-Life Members

FFRF is proud to announce and recognize its 23 newest Lifetime Members, two After-Life Members and two Immortals.

The two new After-Life Members are Michael Steiner and Troy Myers. After-Life Membership is a tongue-in-cheek membership category of \$5,000 for those who want their donation to “live on” after them.

The 23 newest Lifetime members are Donald Ardell, Susan Blake, Emma J. Chase, Gregory Clay, David Cummings (gift from Jerry Cummings), John Cumminskey, Harold Ishaku Daniel, Beth Deitch, Samuel A. Donow, Mark Elliott, Kent Habecker, Richard Hayden, Rob Hinton, Jennifer Larkin (gift from Jerry Cummings), Laura Maxson (gift from Jerry Cummings), Stephen May, Winston Morris, Marilyn Needleman, Connie Schofield, Roger Skinner, Steven Tompkins, Michael Vada and Dianne Vidmar.

Individual Life Memberships are \$1,000, designated as membership or membership renewal, and are deductible for income-tax purposes, as are all donations.

States respresented include Arkan-

sas, Arizona, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, Nevada, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

Two members have also become Immortals: David Driscoll and Philip Lentz. The Immortals category is a donation designation for those members who have contacted FFRF to report they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning. Thank you, all!

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Freedom depends upon freethinkers

D.C. lobby day allows FFRF to promote its goals

As part of its Educate Congress Campaign, FFRF has been working hard to represent nonbelievers on Capitol Hill and to keep state and church separate. In April, FFRF sent Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel and Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott to Washington, D.C., for a lobby day hosted by the Secular Coalition for America (SCA).

FFRF is a member of SCA, which is a “nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to amplifying the diverse and growing voice of the nontheistic community in the United States.” Every year, SCA hosts its lobby day, where constituents from around the country visit D.C., and, with the help of SCA and its member organizations, lobby Congress on important issues.

Seidel moderated a panel on the First Amendment Defense Act and the Do No Harm Act, with attorneys from the Human Rights Campaign, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and the Center for Reproductive Rights.

He also penned an op-ed for Religion News Service, “Redefining religious freedom as religious privilege,” that focused on First Amendment Defense Act and was in every SCA packet that went to more than 90 offices for meetings and was discussed during the morning training.

During the lobby day, FFRF staff worked with SCA constituents who were flying solo, including Chauncey Williams from Colorado. As Williams, Elliott and Seidel were waiting in Sen. Cory Gardner’s office, Sen. Cory Booker walked in and exclaimed, “I hereby claim this office in the name of all Cor-ys.” Then he went into a closed-door meeting with Sens. Jeff Merkley, Rand Paul, Elizabeth Warren and Gardner.

Seidel and Elliott were able to drop in on Reps. Jamie Raskin and Jerry McNerney and thank them for creating the House’s first Freethought Caucus



FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott and FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel stand outside the U.S. Capitol building during a recent lobbying trip.

“on behalf of our 33,000 members who are thrilled to see this happen.” This brought big smiles to staffers’ faces. Seidel and Elliott also met with several offices to discuss a number of issues important to the secular community, including the First Amendment Defense Act (boo!), the Do No Harm Act

(yay!), and vouchers (boo!). Along the way, they did have some fun, too. They were able to meet and briefly chat with Rep. Beto O’Rourke and thank him for leading the charge defending the Johnson Amendment. He insisted on a fist bump. Seidel and Elliott were happy to oblige.



FFRF Member Chauncey Williams of Colorado stands outside Sen. Cory Gardner’s office.

Elliott and Seidel also saw Scott Pruitt, a long-time foe of FFRF, and his extensive security entourage perp walk into his widely televised House hearings. Seidel and Pruitt tangled quite a bit when Pruitt was attorney general of Oklahoma. They had a back and forth of letters and op-eds when Pruitt tried to defend the distribution of bibles in public schools. FFRF opposed Pruitt’s nomination to run the EPA and submitted questions to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee for use in grilling Pruitt. FFRF has been keeping an eye on Pruitt using the bible to justify environmental policy.

At the end of the day, the SCA awards dinner offered plenty of opportunities for networking with FFRF’s secular movement peers, journalists and congressional staff.

Barry Lynn, former long-time head of Americans United, was on hand to receive an award for his lifetime commitment to the separation of state and church. Sen. Mazie Hirono, Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, Pennsylvania state Rep. Brian Sims, Rep. Jared Huffman and activist Gayle Jordan also accepted awards. In his acceptance speech, Huffman announced the formation of a historic group, the congressional Freethought Caucus. (See Page 15 for story.)

Lobbying senators and representatives directly is one more vital way FFRF can help uphold the constitutional separation of state and church and promote nontheism.

Exemption

Continued from page 1

There’s an old legal adage that’s been reworked many times over: “When you don’t have the law, argue the facts. When you don’t have the facts, argue the law.” In none of its permutations does the quote end: “and when you’ve got nothing, just list off a bunch of ‘names.’” But that’s ADF’s brief. It is neither brief nor truly legal. It’s a cudgel, meant to stun the judges into ignoring the law.

The law that FFRF is challenging (and that ADF is defending) is inherently preferential to religion. Section 107(2) of the Internal Revenue Code allows churches to designate portions of salary to “ministers of the gospel” as a housing allowance.

That income is then excluded from the minister’s personal income. So, if

the church pays its minister \$100,000 and designates \$20,000 of that as a housing allowance, the minister only pays income tax on \$80,000.

That means taxpayers are basically subsidizing the mansions of mega-preachers such as Kenneth Copeland or Scott Furtick. It’s nearly a billion dollar tax break for “ministers of the gospel.”

That phrase — “minister of the gospel” — so obviously meant to privilege religious leaders, made the district court’s decision in favor of FFRF easy: “Although defendants try to characterize §107(2) as an effort by Congress to treat ministers fairly and avoid religious entanglement, the plain language of the statute, its legislative history and its operation in practice all demonstrate a preference for ministers over secular employees.”

For nearly a decade, FFRF has been fighting a lonely battle against this unconstitutional privilege the government has bestowed on religion. Because the law is truly indefensible, the government has scrambled to end every FFRF challenge to it — FFRF is now on permutation number three — on proce-

dural grounds.

The government’s goal has been to avoid a decision on the merits of the case. But supporters of the housing allowance appear to have run out of procedural dodges and it looks like the 7th U.S. Circuit will soon have to decide the case on the merits.

That’s where the ADF’s voluminous brief comes in. The group, along with many others, mostly religious, filed an amicus brief in the case. That is, it filed a “friend of the court” brief. According to the Supreme Court, amicus briefs are meant to “bring to the attention of the Court relevant matter not already brought to its attention by the parties.” That is, the briefs should have new, valuable argument or bring a unique perspective to the case, one the parties have not considered or litigated.

Amicus briefs should not rehash the arguments already made, because, in the words of the Supreme Court, a brief like that “simply burdens the staff and facilities of the court and its filing is not favored.”

The ADF’s 200-plus page brief encapsulates all the amicus briefs filed to

protect the parsonage allowance. None of them raises new arguments for the court. Instead, they restate, recycle and reuse the central arguments. Like the ADF brief, they rely on volume over substance. Briefs came from nearly every point on the Judeo-Christian spectrum, even the most liberal end, including the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ.

The stack of briefs is meant to show that there are countless houses of worship and leaders of religious congregations who want to keep this lucrative income tax break.

In a way, these briefs actually prove FFRF’s point that it and its leaders have been injured by being denied the same housing allowance offered to ministers of the gospel. By inundating the judges with briefs, churches and religious legal groups prove that this provision of the tax code is a huge financial benefit only given to religious leaders. That’s discrimination. That’s religious privilege. And that means it’s unconstitutional.

FFRF is committed to overturning anything that violates state-church separation. We’ll do so even if we are standing alone, armed only with the Constitution, against a religious Goliath.

Andrew L. Seidel is FFRF’s director of strategic response.

Women Without Superstition:
“No Gods — No Masters”

Collected writings of 50 women freethinkers of the 19th & 20th centuries. 51 photographs.

Edited by
Annie Laurie Gaylor

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FFRF NEWS

New Jersey county appeals FFRF’s victory

The New Jersey Supreme Court on April 18 unanimously ruled that Morris County’s 16-year practice of awarding historic preservation grants to houses of worship violates the Religious Aid Clause of the state Constitution, which states, in part, that citizens cannot be compelled to pay for churches.

On May 7, the Morris County Board of Freeholders voted to retain the Becket Fund, a religious lobbying firm founded by conservative Roman Catholics, to draft an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court of the county’s defeat in front of the state’s top court.

The court’s ruling sided with FFRF, which sued the county freeholders to stop the grant-giving to churches. Twelve houses of worship that received \$4.6 million in 34 preservation grants between 2012 and 2015 were also named as defendants in the foundation’s lawsuit. They don’t have to return any funds but are precluded in the future from eligibility for the grants.

Becket Fund, like other similar groups, offered to represent the government “at no charge to the county.” It reportedly assured officials that “there will be no cost to county taxpayers.” As FFRF has warned gov-



The Presbyterian Church in Morristown, N.J., asked for \$1.04 million in grants from Morris County.

ernments in the past, this is a familiar bait-and-switch tactic that places all the risk on taxpayers while tricking them into thinking there is nothing to lose.

Contrary to Becket’s contention, an appeal could be a very costly endeavor for Morris County taxpayers. The Becket Fund might not charge the county, but the county will still be responsible for FFRF’s le-

gal fees and costs, unless the United States Supreme Court decides to hear the case *and* to overturn the state Supreme Court’s unanimous decision. FFRF’s legal fees and costs are already nearly \$250,000, a number that will climb sharply with any attempt to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Several local governments have been pushed into dire financial straits because of these “pro bono” offers from Christian-right law firms. Governments have had to take out loans, turn to crowdfunding and beg for money from national organizations such as Focus on the Family. The fundraising appeals have always fallen short, keeping the burden on the taxpayer.

That’s why Morris County taxpayers should be furious that their county unconstitutionally spent their hard-earned dollars to repair churches and have now decided to throw even more taxpayer funds into the same losing lawsuit.

The county has far better ways to spend tax revenue — and should not let a slick law firm convince it otherwise.

FFRF condemns religious attack on Planned Parenthood funding

FFRF is condemning the Trump administration’s move to strip millions from important health care providers for disadvantaged women.

The administration is considering rewriting the rules of Title X, which is a federal program that pays for birth control and preventative health. Congress passed it unanimously in 1970 to help low-income families access affordable family planning services. That is the population the program currently serves.

The Trump administration will push for a new rule that, according to reports, will require a “physical as well as financial separation” between any entity that provides abortions and one that receives taxpayer funds. There’s no doubt this

is intended to cripple Planned Parenthood, even though 97 percent of its services are unrelated to abortion.

Taxpayer-funded abortion is already prohibited by the Hyde Amendment, which was passed three years after *Roe v. Wade*.

So defunding Planned Parenthood will not stop the already non-existent taxpayer-funded abortions, but will instead hurt the low income, the young, minorities and women.

President Trump’s attacks on women’s right to choose are about one thing: shoring up his religious base.

In January, Trump spoke to the March for Life. Trump addressed the group via video, the first sitting president to do so.



Pence attended in person the previous year, the first time a vice president has ever done so. Pence also promised to end “taxpayer funding for abortion and abortion providers.” And he mentioned his god on four separate occasions.

Trump, not to be outdone, mentioned his god five times. He also mentioned an executive order on religious freedom that FFRF sued him over, forcing his lawyers to admit to a court of law that the order was meaningless.

FFRF protests Ohio Senate’s discrimination of nontheists

FFRF is taking the Ohio Senate to task for its discriminatory invocation practices.

Ohio Senate Clerk Vincent Keeran has made it clear that nontheists will not be allowed to give invocations to the Senate, and that only prayer to a deity will suffice.

“The Supreme Court has not redefined prayer to include secular, nonreligious speech,” Keeran said in response to a letter from FFRF. He goes on to state that an invocation before the Ohio Senate must “be given by an ordained representative of that faith, it must appeal to a higher power, and the individual must be sponsored by a member of the Legislature.”

This policy is blatantly unconstitutional, FFRF contends.

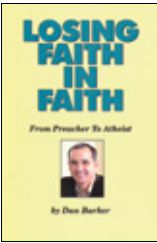
Northern Ohio Freethought Society Vice President Sam Salerno contacted FFRF in September 2017 regarding the discriminatory treatment he was subjected to in his attempt to give a secular invocation to the Senate. After Salerno’s numerous attempts, the office of state Sen. Mike Skindell had finally replied to him by email, attaching a memo that listed the guidelines for Senate invocations and asking to see a copy of Salerno’s remarks. These guidelines said nothing about a “higher power” or ordination. Salerno provided his invocation as requested, but heard nothing for nearly a year.

FFRF sent a letter in December 2017 to Senate President Larry Obhof on behalf of Salerno and the Northern Ohio Freethought Society. Salerno met all the requirements that he was told were necessary to deliver the invocation under the guidelines, FFRF asserted.

The Senate’s suffocating oversight and systematic delay of Salerno’s request to give a secular invocation amounts to an “intrusion of government in the constitutional sense” that may “result in establishment of religion,” FFRF declared, quoting the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Ohio Senate must allow non-believers to give invocations, FFRF contended.

**Losing Faith in Faith:
From Preacher to Atheist**



By Dan Barker

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

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Freedom depends on freethinkers

Fighting the glare of prayer



On May 3, the National Day of Prayer, a “Pray for America” event was held at the Warren, Mich., Civic Center. There to counteract the event were, from left, Reason Station founder and FFRF Life Member Doug Marshall, FFRF Member Sally Sayes and, hiding her face behind Dan Barker’s book, Maggie Huntone, with FFRF Member Bruce Kopetz kneeling in front. “As you might imagine, we table staffers received several cutting glances from the enraptured supplicants who filled the Civic Center atrium, but civility prevailed overall,” Kopetz wrote. “But only Christian cults were represented. The substantial Islamic presence in Warren didn’t participate, nor was Judaism represented.”

FFRF offers ‘A’ badge for Scouts

Even as the Boy Scouts of America is overhauling its membership and nomenclature to be inclusive, it still has a blind spot regarding a marginalized group: the nonreligious.

“For 108 years, the Boy Scouts of America’s flagship program has been known simply as the Boy Scouts,” the Associated Press reports.” With girls soon entering the ranks, the group says that iconic name will change. The organization [on May 2] announced a new name for its Boy Scouts program: Scouts BSA.”

FFRF welcomes this move, as it did the group’s repeal of its ban on gays. But it decries the fact that the Scouts will still discriminate against the non-religious and their families, excluding atheists, agnostics and nonbelievers. After it announced last fall that the membership was being opened up to girls, the leadership reiterated its prejudice.



“We believe this nation needs and deserves more youth focused on the foundations that still serve as bedrock of our movement — duty to God and country with a desire to help other people at all times,” said an October statement signed by the organization’s national president, commissioner and chief Scout executive.

“FFRF maintains instead that no young person who discriminates can grow into the best kind of citizen,” counters FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

FFRF has come up with a creative way to address the Boy Scouts’ prejudicial attitude toward nonbelievers. At the urging of its member Richard Kirschman, it has produced a badge similar to the scouts’ merit badges, which are typically sewn on uniforms or sashes.

The badge, featuring a red “A” based on a symbol of atheism and agnosticism popularized by distinguished scientist and atheist Richard Dawkins, is being issued in collaboration with the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science.

Scouts who wish to earn this badge are asked to help disprove the group’s misguided claim that nonbelievers cannot be good citizens. At Dawkins’

suggestion, the scout or youth seeking a badge need only send FFRF a short essay addressing the Boy Scouts of America’s claim that nonbelievers can’t be good citizens. FFRF will not charge scouts money for the badge.

The badge is intended to reward scouts who are persevering in an organization that basically has instituted a “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy about atheist and agnostic participants, but has regularly expelled open nonbelievers.

“If any young person, Scout or not, fulfills the requirements, we’d be delighted to reward them with this badge,” adds Gaylor. “This is their chance to be rewarded for critical thinking and to earn a keepsake at the same time. We hope someday very soon that the Scouts will repeal its discriminatory policy and also adopt an official merit badge rewarding critical thinking.”

So far, 38 have earned FFRF’s badge of honor

Since FFRF instituted its atheist badge program for those in Boy Scouts (or Girl Scouts), we have sent out 38 badges to those who have earned them.

Scouts who wish to earn this badge are asked to help disprove BSA’s misguided claim that nonbelievers cannot be good citizens. The Scout is required to send FFRF a short essay that addresses BSA’s claim that nonbelievers can’t be good citizens.

To apply for a badge, submit a brief essay, which should include your full name, age, mailing address and contact information to: freethought-badge@ffrf.org.

The following are excerpts from the essays of some of the Scouts who gave earned an “A” badge (and who gave FFRF permission to use their names).



Seth Hoisington, an Eagle Scout, said he felt closeted as an atheist during his Scouting years.

I am an atheist Eagle Scout. I earned the highest rank almost two years ago, but I recently left Boy Scouts for many reasons. Among them was the fact that I felt closeted at Scout meetings. I had finally had it after enduring six years of a prayer before and after meetings and even being coerced into saying a prayer before my troop on numerous occasions.

I follow all the 12 points of the Scout law except one: Reverent. I cannot pledge my duty to a God which I do not believe exists. And to my leaders, that is reason enough to say that I am not an Eagle, that I have broken the

Scout Oath. Although, to me it feels more like an Oath of Silence.

I think it is just wrong for the BSA to judge someone solely on their beliefs. I have good atheist friends from Scouts who I know are good people. I also know some rotten theists who earn the Eagle rank. This shows that whether or not someone believes in God has no bearing on their character and their ability to earn the Eagle Scout rank.

Seth Hoisington

This essay is from our Girl Scout Troop. We are 6th- and 7th-graders from Long Island, N.Y.

We strongly believe that everyone on this Earth is born to be good, regardless of their beliefs and culture. Growing up, our parents are our examples of how to be good people and citizens of our country. Religion is a learned custom or belief and if our parents don’t have one, we as children will have to learn and believe what we are taught. There is nothing necessarily wrong with believing in a higher power, as it can be inspirational and a way to guide you in your life.

Being a good citizen embodies both the Boy Scouts’ and Girls Scouts’ laws. Doing good deeds daily is more important than preaching from a human-written book. Serving your fellow humans, especially in our military, is such a big sacrifice that it’s the ultimate show of service for others. That’s just one example of good citizenship.

Being Girl Scouts, we have done quite a lot of service within our community and it’s very fulfilling to do good for others without any payment. Service to others is our way of showing that a good deed shows good character. When we serve others, it is how we show compassion, kindness, love, care and empathy to others.

Belonging to a religion is just a belief, while being a good person shows character, strength and conviction that will help make the world a better place.

Troop 3537, Wantagh, N.Y.

I am an Eagle Scout. In my Eagle Board of Review, one of the last questions they asked me was if there was anything I would change about Scouting. I said I felt the organization was very theocentric and would have liked it better if it didn’t endorse one reli-

gion over another. They assured me that they believed the BSA tried its hardest to make things as inclusive as possible. However, there are dozens of examples where this is false: Prayers at meals, church services, the Twelfth Point of the Scout Law (Reverence), and other constant admissions of faith. Personally, I have always taken the Twelfth Point to mean that I should respect the fact that there are those who disagree with me, and that I should respect their right to. However, I doubt anyone out of my troop would accept that. In fact, when I was being coached for my Board of Review, I was told that many reviewers would not pass me if I did not make an admission of faith. Thankfully, I was not asked. I have no doubt that eventually Scouting will discard these shackles of favoritism and truly embrace all walks of life.

Frank J. Yagl

Luckily for me, I never experienced any of the problems that so many other atheist Scouts have, but that could be due to the fact that all of my troops were sponsored by the U.S. military rather than churches. The only time religion had any impact other than lip-service in the Scout Oath and Law, was when it came to rank. I left Scouts at 17 with a rank of “Life Scout.” While my leaving was not directly tied to the fact that I am a lifelong atheist, the fact I left as a Life Scout was, as I had no way of obtaining the required letter of “religious recommendation” for my Eagle Scout badge, without violating the Scouting ideals of trustworthiness and honor.

Despite the BSA’s admonition “that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing his obligation to God,” I feel that I have done just that, starting with the fact that I refused to compromise my morals even though it meant I would never attain something that I had spent (at that point) so much of my life working toward.

Justin Hinton

What is it that makes an “obligation to God” valuable? It is obvious that such an obligation can result in both good and bad consequences. It is obligation to God that causes jihads, legitimizes homophobia and stifles critical thinking skills. On the other hand, ob-

ligation to God can help teach moral lessons and can provide incentives for helping others. However, I have yet to see any demonstrably good deed that could only be achieved by the religious. Atheists are perfectly capable of serving the community and bettering themselves, not out of obligation to God, but out of obligation to themselves and to their community.

Benjamin Thomas



Josh Haazard holds his new “A” badge while showing off the arm tattoos he got after the 2016 election.

I’m 35, and I became an eagle scout in 1999, while having become an atheist in 1997 and mostly keeping quiet about it, due to a variety of reasons a teenage boy might in a world where he was already struggling to become an adult among adults who held their imaginary friend in such high regard.

In my own way, I’ve been fighting for your cause for decades. With the country in its current incarnation, I felt it was important to get these words out in the public eye as often as I could.

Josh Haazard

I’m an Eagle Scout — at least I used to be one, until I returned my pin to the BSA 15 years ago because of the organization’s stance on atheism. I’m so happy to see the new FFRF atheism merit badge and would love to add one to my heavily adorned sash. I wrote a piece for the Washington Post ([wapo.st/2IYUVr4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/2014/07/21/yuvr4/)) about my action back in 2002. It is shameful that the BSA has not yet seen the light.

Rick Weiss

FFRF VICTORIES

FFRF stops outside proselytizers in schools

By Molly Hanson

FFRF has ended unconstitutional religious promotion within a Chicago suburb school district.

A concerned community member of Community Consolidated School District 15 reported to FFRF that the district allows outside adults to engage in one-on-one meetings with students at several district elementary schools, usually during lunch. The adults are affiliated with a faith-based organization named Kids Hope USA that connects “one church” with public schools under the guise of mentorship. Kids Hope USA believes the most effective aspect of its program is that it prays for students.

While the adults purportedly discuss only secular topics with students, and do not inform students that “prayer partners” are secretly praying for them, FFRF was informed that these adults had been abusing their access to students by advertising for a religious event.

In a letter sent to Superintendent Scott Thompson, FFRF informed the district that, in fact, Kids Hope USA’s website suggests that promoting religious events is a fundamental goal of its program: “Principals are advised

that parents may choose to someday send their children to events at the church, only after parental permission is granted.”

FFRF warned the district that, regardless of parental permission, it is inappropriate and unconstitutional for a public school district to allow church representatives unique access to invite students to religious events, during the school day on school property, after developing a personal one-on-one relationship with those students.

“No outside adults should be provided carte blanche access to minors — a captive audience — in a public school,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne to Thompson. “The district may not allow its schools to be used as recruiting grounds for churches during the school day.”

The district responded to FFRF with assurances that the violation would not recur.

“The district is updating its own administrative procedures to ensure that all volunteer mentors are informed that they must refrain from praying or proselytizing while at school, including encouraging students to attend religious events,” a legal representative of the district informed FFRF.

LifeChurch expelled from Oklahoma school

An Oklahoma public school has updated its policy to protect students from religious coercion, thanks to FFRF.

A concerned parent within Owasso Public Schools in Owasso, Okla., informed FFRF that Owasso Seventh Grade Center was allowing representatives from LifeChurch, an evangelical church, to enter the school during Wednesday lunches to hand out church flyers and proselytize to students. The representatives were also pestering students and asking them why they were not going to church.

“It is inappropriate and unconstitutional for the district to offer religious leaders unique access to befriend and proselytize students during the school day on school property,” wrote FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Chris Line. “It is well settled that public schools may not advance or promote religion.”

Owasso Public Schools responded on May 29, informing FFRF that there would be no more in-person proselytizing going forward.



The district has since implemented a new policy requiring school visitors to receive permission from Owasso Seventh Grade Center Principal Eric Nantois. Additionally, school visitors will only be able to speak with one student per lunch period and must obtain written permission from that student’s parent.

By Molly Hanson

Kentucky school ends graduation prayer

A concerned parent of a student at Crofton Elementary School in Hopkinsville, Ky., contacted FFRF to report that the school’s sixth-grade graduation on May 23 began with a Christian prayer delivered by a local minister.

FFRF Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellow Colin McNamara wrote to a legal representative of Christian County Public Schools on May 24, requesting assurance that the district will not schedule prayer as part of any school events in the future.

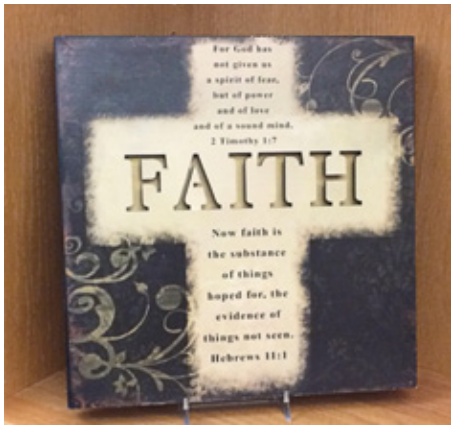
Christian County Public Schools responded on June 4, informing FFRF that the district superintendent has counseled the principal at Crofton Elementary School on keeping religion out of public school-sponsored events.

Tennessee school stops state-church violations

FFRF has put an end to multiple state-church violations within a Tennessee school district after receiving a couple of complaints regarding religious promotions.

A Stone Memorial High School student reported to FFRF that the school — part of the Cumberland County School District in Crossville, Tenn. — was displaying overt religious symbols and messages in its library. One display was a picture with a Latin cross, two bible verses and the word “faith” in all capital letters.

Additionally, a faculty member of the district reported to FFRF that in April, Director of Schools Janet Graham sponsored a luncheon that included school administration-led prayer with students, administrators and community members. FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote to the school district on May 16 asking that it remove its religious endorsements and take steps to ensure



that future district-sponsored events do not include prayer.

On May 29, FFRF was informed by the district that the religious displays have been removed from the library and that future events will include a moment of silence rather than prayer.

New Mexico schools commit to neutrality

FFRF has educated a New Mexico school district on its constitutional obligation to keep religion out of its public schools.

It was brought to FFRF’s attention that the 2018 Shiprock High School graduation ceremony began and ended with scheduled religious prayers. Students delivered the invocation and delivered the closing benediction. FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote to Central Consolidated School District on May 22, informing the district that the Supreme Court has struck down prayers at school-sponsored events.

Acting Superintendent Terri Benn responded to FFRF on June 4, writing that the district would be committed to a policy of religious neutrality going forward.

Colorado council allows nonreligious prayers

FFRF has ensured that a Colorado city council will not discriminate against nonbelievers in its council meetings.

FFRF was informed that the Monte Vista City Council decided at a council meeting earlier this spring that it would begin opening its meetings with prayer. Comments made at the meeting by council members and local residents suggested that the council was intending for the prayers to be exclusively religious, prompting FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line to send a letter to Monte Vista Mayor Dale Becker.

In a letter received by FFRF on May 31, the city reported that, while it would be going ahead with its plan to open meetings with invocations, it acknowledged that it may not discriminate in who gives the invocation.

Virginia district stops mandated staff prayer

FFRF has helped end mandatory staff meeting prayers within a school district in Luray, Va.

An employee of Page County Public Schools informed FFRF that Superintendent Donna Whitley-Smith was including prayers during meetings that involved school administrators. During those meetings, meals were served and Whitley-Smith was calling upon the director of human resources to lead employees in saying grace.

FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott wrote to the district on May 11 informing it that, as a government entity, the district has a constitutional obligation not to promote religion.

The district responded on May 23 notifying FFRF that it had ended the prayer practice.

Ohio school district to censor endorsements

It was reported to FFRF that last August, New Philadelphia City Schools in Ohio organized a prayer event and promoted it on its official Facebook page. FFRF wrote on May 30 to ensure the district does not organize or promote

religious events.

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line pointed out that the promotion of religious events alienates those whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with the message being endorsed by the school.

An attorney representing New Philadelphia City Schools responded on June 1, informing FFRF that the district had not organized the event — which was organized by local churches — and had not approved the social media post. The district has provided training to its staff regarding proper use of social media, including issues related to the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The post promoting religion has been removed from the district’s Facebook account and, since the incident, the district informed FFRF that it has been monitoring social media activity more closely.

Indiana school ends religious art projects

FFRF has ensured that all lessons being taught at an Indiana elementary school will be free of religious ideology.

Earlier this spring, FFRF sent a letter to the School City of Mishawaka district after a concerned parent contacted the state-church watchdog to report that a first-grade teacher at Liberty Elementary School assigned an art project to students focused on the biblical nativity story. The teacher reportedly taught her class that Christmas was Jesus’ birthday and read a book about it to the class.

“As you are certainly aware, public schools have a constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne to Superintendent A. Dean Speicher.

The district recently assured FFRF that the teacher had been reminded of her obligations to remain neutral in matters regarding religion in her role as a public school teacher and that the promotion of Christianity would not recur.

IN THE NEWS

Millennials less likely to believe in biblical God

Much of the latest news based on religious polling shows that, as a society, Americans are rejecting religion more and more, especially the younger generations.

Still, a large majority of Americans says it believes in God or a higher power. However, those in the Millennial generation are much less likely to say they believe in the God as described in the bible than the older generations.

Only 43 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 29 say they believe in God, according to a survey from the Pew Research Center. Almost an equal share, 39 percent, say they believe in some other higher power or spiritual force.

By contrast, about two-thirds of those over the age of 50 say they believe in the biblical God, while a little more than a quarter say they believe in a spiritual force other than God.

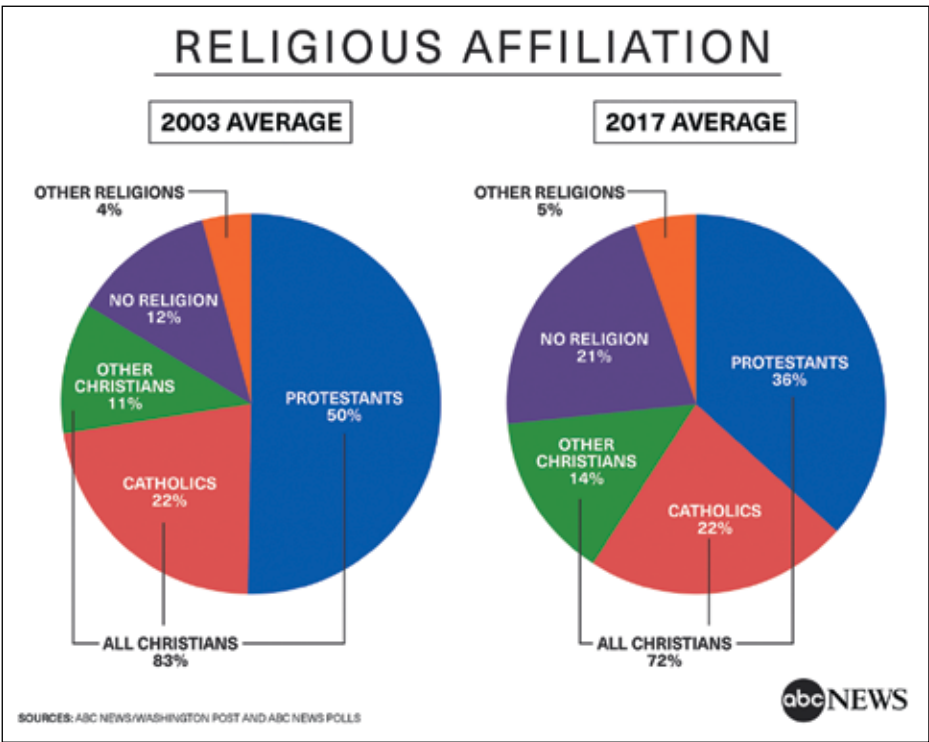
Only about 1 in 20 older Americans does not believe in a God or higher power, while 16 percent of the youngest cohorts say they do not believe.

Younger Americans are also less likely to attend church services on a regular basis, according to another Pew survey conducted in 2017. Among those who said they attended church services at least once a week, just 17 percent were between the ages of 18 and 29. More than half, 52 percent, were over the age of 50.

Evangelicals against same-sex marriage

Opposition to same-sex marriage is now limited almost entirely to white conservative Christians. White evangelical Christians are one of the few groups for which a majority remains in opposition.

The Public Religion Research Institute’s 2017 American Values Atlas



showed growing support for LGBT rights, including a majority of U.S. Muslims backing same-sex marriage for the first time. Muslims, by a margin of 51 percent to 34 percent, favor same-sex marriage.

Fifty-eight percent of white evangelical Christians and 53 percent of Mormons — an overwhelming majority of whom are white — are opposed to allowing gay couples to marry.

The denomination with the most opposition, though, is Jehovah’s Witnesses, a group which is 36 percent white, 32 percent Hispanic and 27 percent black. Just 13 percent support the right.

As a whole, 63 percent of Americans now back allowing same-sex couples to marry, up from 52 percent four years ago.

All major racial groups now have a majority in favor. Republicans, though, remain opposed at 51 percent.

Church attendance down for Catholics

Weekly church attendance among Catholics in the United States has been on a steep and steady decline over the past decade, according to Gallup’s polling results.

Gallup’s data found an average of 39 percent of Catholics reported attending church within the past seven days between 2014 and 2017, compared with 45 percent from 2005 to 2008.

Within the same period of time, weekly church attendance among Protestants — defined by Gallup as people who identify as Christian, Protestant or any specific Protestant faith — remained relatively unchanged, declining by about 1 point to 45 percent.

The largest decrease in weekly church attendance among Catholics

occurred between the 1950s and 1970s, when it fell from nearly 75 percent to less than 50 percent.

“In particular, older Catholics have become less likely to report attending church in the past seven days — so that now, for the first time, a majority of Catholics in no generational group attend weekly,” Gallup said.

Young people — between the ages of 21 and 29 — remain the least likely to attend church weekly in either group at 25 percent among Catholics and 36 percent among Protestants.

Protestants in sharp decline in U.S.

The nation’s religious makeup has shifted dramatically in the past 15 years, with a sharp drop in the number of Americans who say they’re members of a Protestant denomination — still the nation’s most prevalent religious group — and a rise in the number who profess no religion.

On average last year, 36 percent of Americans in ABC News/Washington Post polls identified themselves as members of a Protestant faith, extending a gradual trend down from 50 percent in 2003. That includes an 8-point drop in the number of evangelical white Protestants.

Reflecting the change among Protestants, the share of Christians overall has declined from 83 percent of the adult population in 2003 to 72 percent on average in 2017. In the same time, the number of Americans who say they have no religion has nearly doubled, to 21 percent.

Results correspond with other research. The Public Religion Research Institute found that 24 percent of Americans identified as “atheist,” “agnostic” or “nothing in particular” in 2017, up from 14 percent in 2004.

Louisiana schools must display ‘In God We Trust’

Public schools in Louisiana will have to display the national motto of “In God We Trust” on their buildings by August 2019, after Gov. John Bel Edwards signed the bill into law on May 23.

Public school authorities must now display the national motto in each building used by a school under its jurisdiction. The law also requires Louisiana’s social studies curriculum to teach students about the motto by the fifth grade, a provision that expands upon the existing law that orders schools to teach students about the U.S flag and other “patriotic customs.”

Louisiana’s Legislative Fiscal Office stated in a fiscal note attached to the law that local school districts will not experience a “material impact” in expenses under this law. Although the schools are free to choose how they want to display the motto, the law states the minimum requirement of display can be a paper sign.

Senate Dems introduce bill to amend RFRA

Prominent Senate Democrats introduced a bill on May 22 that would amend the 25-year-old Religious Freedom Restoration Act to prevent the law from being used to justify discrimination against people, including gay, lesbian

and transgender citizens.

Although it is unlikely to pass in the Republican-controlled Congress, the Democrats’ bill, called the Do No Harm Act, shows the party’s stance toward a thorny question in the hands of the Supreme Court — how to choose when both LGBT people and conservative Christians feel their civil rights are at risk.

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act, referred to as RFRA, has become a favorite law among conservative Christians, who say that it protects their rights to abstain from practices they disavow.

The Democrats’ bill would amend RFRA to say that it does not protect the religious liberty of one person when the civil rights of another would be impinged.

Most evangelicals against U.S. accepting refugees

Opinions about whether the United States has a responsibility to accept refugees — which were already deeply polarized — have grown even more so, according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in April and May. The survey comes as the nation is likely to admit its smallest number of refugees in decades.

Roughly half of Americans (51 percent) say the United States has a responsibility to accept refugees into the country, while 43 percent say it does not, the national survey found. That is changed

only slightly from February 2017.

By more than 2-to-1 (68 percent to 25 percent), white evangelical Protestants say the United States does not have a responsibility to accept refugees. Other religious groups are more likely to say the United States does have this responsibility. And opinions among religiously unaffiliated adults are nearly the reverse of those of white evangelical Protestants, with 65 percent saying the United States has a responsibility to accept refugees into the country.

Religious motto on cash ruled constitutional

A federal court has ruled that printing “In God We Trust” on U.S. currency doesn’t amount to a religious endorsement and therefore doesn’t violate the U.S. Constitution. The 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago made the ruling May 31 in a lawsuit brought by a self-declared Satanist, Kenneth Mayle.

A lower court tossed the suit citing a reference in a Supreme Court decision that a motto on currency isn’t displayed prominently and thus people are not forced to publicly advertise views that clash with their own.

Mayle later made an appeal to restore the lawsuit, but the 7th Circuit shot down his efforts, calling the motto a “historical reminder” of the country’s heritage.

Michael Newdow first submitted

a complaint in the Southern District of New York in March 2013, asserting that the motto violates the Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution as it serves to proselytize unbelievers. But later that year, U.S. District Court Judge Harold Baer, Jr., rejected Newdow’s arguments, opining that “the inclusion of the motto on U.S. currency . . . does not violate the Establishment Clause.” FFRF also sued over the godly motto on currency in the 1990s.

DeVos: Ease restrictions on religious college aid

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, a lifelong advocate of Christian education, moved to loosen federal regulations on religious colleges and universities, after a Supreme Court decision that restricted states from denying some kinds of aid to religious institutions. The measure is part of a sweeping deregulatory agenda for the Education Department.

Officials appear to be targeting regulations that would pose a legal risk after the Supreme Court ruled last year that states must sometimes provide aid to faith-based organizations.

In the decision, *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia Inc. v. Comer*, the court ruled that Missouri had engaged in unconstitutional religious discrimination when it denied a church-run preschool publicly funded tire scraps for its playground.

Political group or church? You can't be both

This column first appeared in *The New York Times* on April 16 and is reprinted with permission.

By Katherine Stewart

Consider that, through the miracle of tax breaks, some of your tax dollars will effectively be going to support groups that finance campaigns against same-sex marriage and gun safety. A number of these groups are also entitled to raise money from other sources for political purposes, without filing the disclosures that are required of other individuals and entities. Why? They've got God on their side.

Last fall, for example, according to forms filed with the Internal Revenue Service, Focus on the Family, a conservative Christian organization



Katherine Stewart

that promotes socially conservative views on matters of public and family policy, declared itself a church. Focus on the Family doesn't have a congregation, doesn't host weddings or funerals and doesn't hold services. What it does do, with its nearly \$90 million annual budget, is deliver radio and other programming that is often political to an estimated audience of 38 million listeners in the United States and beyond. It has funded ads against state legislators who support bills intended to prevent discrimination against LGBT people and it leads programs to combat what it calls "gay activism" in public schools.

Why would such a group want to call itself a church? Short answer: money. Churches can raise tax-deductible contributions more easily, and with fewer restrictions, than other nonprofits can. They also enjoy additional tax shelters, such as property tax exemptions for clergy members — or was that conservative radio personalities?



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Next, churches can also enjoy the benefits of dark money. Unlike other groups, churches are required to disclose essentially nothing about who or what supplies them with their funds. And Focus on the Family, like a number of other groups on the Religious Right, may worry that its opposition to same-sex relationships will land it on the wrong side of anti-discrimination law. After all, the "moral behavior standards" in their employee guidelines prohibit "homosexual acts."

The Family Research Council, a close partner that for a time merged with Focus on the Family, is registered as a nonreligious nonprofit, rather than as a church. But one of the council's principal aims is to convert America's churches, or at least conservative ones, into partisan political cells. It seeks to place what it calls "culture impact teams" in churches to "advance Kingdom values in the public arena."

The way that Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council see it, the bible offers specific information about how people ought to vote. Scripture, they say, opposes public assistance on principle ("God has charged

believers to help the poor and widows and orphans," the council's culture impact team manual explains). Apparently, the bible is also against gun control and supports privatization of schools through vouchers. It tells us that same-sex relationships are an abomination. It does not want women to have access to comprehensive reproductive care. Environmentalism, according to the source the manual recommends to church groups, is a "litany of the Green Dragon" and

"one of the greatest threats to society and the church today." Other sources the manual recommends promote the notion that the Earth is 6,000 years old.

There is no mystery about which political party the bible supports, at least as these groups see it. In the run-up to the 2016 election, James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family and its former leader, praised Donald Trump and explained that the prospect of a Hillary Clinton presidency "scares me to death." Their claim that they are nonpartisan is laughable.

If you were worried that the amount of money flowing into politics was bad for our democracy, imagine what will

If you were worried that the amount of money flowing into politics was bad for our democracy, imagine what will happen when you add a divine exception.

happen when you add a divine exception, allowing partisans to spend freely on behalf of their chosen candidates and causes under the cover of churches. Notwithstanding the Johnson Amendment prohibition on direct electioneering by churches, it's happening in all but name.

In 2016, Ralph Reed, the chairman of the Faith and Freedom Coalition, spoke at the Road to Majority Conference, which brings together politicians and leaders of the Religious Right. Reed promised to distribute 35 million "nonpartisan" voter guides through churches and help bring voters to the polls. No one funding his operation, or listening to his speech, could have had any doubt who would benefit from his work. Later that day, after Reed stepped off the stage, Donald Trump stepped on to it.

The proof of the effectiveness of this political-religious machine can be read from the exit polls of the 2016 election. Four-fifths of white evangelicals supported Mr. Trump.

When challenged about their blatantly partisan activism, these groups invariably cry out that their religious liberty is under attack. It isn't. They are welcome to their opinions and free to expose them to the sunlight of the public square. The real issue here is money and transparency. Tax breaks don't come free; they're just ways in which the government allocates your tax money. And if the government is going to allocate money in a certain direction, you should be able to see where it's going.

The process corrupts religion, too. Religion has long thrived in America because most religious leaders respected the separation of church and state, an arrangement that has served our country very well. Under our current law, religious groups are exempt from certain tax and reporting burdens. Political groups are not. Churches need to decide which one they are.

Katherine Stewart is the author of *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children*.

'Be happy': Don Ardell promotes wellness

This article was first published May 3 in *The Gabber*, the weekly newspaper of Pinellas County (Fla.). It is reprinted with permission. Don Ardell is a member of FFRF.

By Angelina Bruno

Don Ardell: winning triathlete, published author, wellness advocate and Gulfport, Fla., resident. Even with multiple triathlon world championship titles and over 10 books published, Ardell isn't ready to slow down.

His latest accomplishment is national championship title at a duathlon in Greenville, S.C. On the weekend of April 7, Ardell completed his race (5K run, 18K cycle and a second run of 2.85K) in one hour and 29 minutes. The twist? Ardell is 79 years old.

"It's because of my age I do triathlons," said Ardell. "I can't afford not to."

Ardell was born in Philadelphia in 1938 and has lived across the United States, calling states like California, Minnesota and North Carolina home. Now Ardell and his wife, Carol, split time between a condo in Gulfport and a home in Madison, Wis.

Ardell has focused his life around wellness, health and aging, publishing



Photo by James A. Randell, courtesy of Don Ardell
FFRF Member Don Ardell, a 79-year-old triathlete, shows no signs of slowing down, even after a stroke.

titles like *High Level Wellness: An Alternative to Doctors, Drugs and Disease* in 1976 and *Aging Beyond Belief* in 2007. Originally, Ardell thought he wanted to work in city planning, but in 1977 got his

doctorate in health and public policy from Union Institute and University in Cincinnati.

His approach to aging and wellness is holistic, he says, focusing on both mental and physical health. On a list for three easy tips for wellness, he includes "associate with positive people," and "be happy."

But health has its ups and down, even for athletes. Shortly after the 2015 ITU World Championship in Chicago marked a big moment for Ardell. He found himself sitting on the edge of the sidewalk during a run by the Salvador Dali museum in downtown St. Petersburg, unsure on what had landed him there.

"I'd just had stroke," said Ardell, reflecting on that day. "And I'd never had a health problem in my life!" A passerby told him he'd had a stroke, but he refused to believe it. "Hey, I'm in great shape," he told the group that'd gathered. "Leave me alone." A doctor happened to be nearby and convinced Ardell to seek professional health care. Ardell later left the scene in an ambulance.

After tests at a nearby hospital, Ardell learned he had atrial fibrillation, a heart condition that causes irregular

heartbeat leading to other conditions like strokes, blood clots and heart failure. Ardell says he's seen no after-effects from the stroke, however. The 79-year-old still races and exercises, and while he's not as fast as he used to be, he's says he's still faster than others in his age group.

It seems Ardell isn't letting atrial fib, as he calls it, slow him much.

In the works for Ardell is a new book, titled *Not Dead Yet: World Champions 75+ Offer Tips on Successful Aging*. In this book, Ardell and 17 other world champion triathletes, 75 years of age and older, give their tips on successful aging and happiness. The book is still in the writing stages, but Ardell says it will be published by a major publisher. For more information, the website *not-deadyethebook.com* has biographies and photos of all of the featured athletes.

In his section on the site, Ardell puts emphasis on the importance of happiness in longevity and health, quoting his favorite orator Robert Green Ingersoll. "Seek out and pick up every jewel of joy that can be found in your path ... the time to be happy is now, the place to be happy is here and the way to be happy is to make others so."

Does faking religion lead to depression?

This article, edited for length, originally appeared on The Daily Beast website on March 3, and is reprinted with permission.

By Brandon Withrow

At this year's National Prayer Breakfast, President Trump called the United States a "nation of believers." The highly Christian language of his speech — focused on the bible and being "created in Jesus Christ" — underscored for some the president's focus on Christian nationalism and the exclusionary nature of his vision for America.



Brandon Withrow

Of course, there can be real problems when a nation circumscribes who belongs and who doesn't by whether they are people of faith. That type of social duress can be culturally and personally unhealthy. In fact, according to a recent study in the journal *Society and Mental Health*, individuals who consider leaving a faith, but do not, tend to experience more depression than those who decide to leave.

The research, done by Matthew May, assistant professor of sociology at Oakland University, analyzed the still data-wealthy Portrait of American Life Study (PALS), which focused on the religious life of 2,610 participants from 2006-2012.

"PALS," says May, "is the only data set that asks people if they have seriously considered dropping out of religion."

May looked at those who left a religion altogether ("leavers"), those who considered dropping out of religion, but did not ("stayers"), those who never considered leaving ("stable affiliates"), and the nonreligious ("stable Nones"). Tracking responses from the Portrait of American Life Study, he was able to show a correlation between depressive feelings and remaining in a faith for "stayers."

"Although most people never think about dropping out of religion," May tells *The Daily Beast*, "a growing number of people are leaving the pews. Social scientists tend to give a lot of attention to these 'leavers.'"

These are "the Nones" — the spiritual, but not religious, atheists, and agnostics — and, according to the Public Religion Research Institute, they are roughly 24 percent of Americans.

But, as May points out, "we haven't given much attention to the people who think about leaving and decide to stay." This group intrigues him the most, and he sees room for more research into what drives their struggle.

"We all have many identities that reflect the different roles we occupy," says May. "Each of these identities comes with certain expectations, and we tend to look to others to see if we are meeting these expectations." Distress occurs when our identities do not match what we believe others expect of us — and this instability can be especially true for those considering leaving religion.

Doubters vulnerable

Caleb Lack agrees with the results of May's study, seeing a strong player in doubt. He serves as associate professor of psychology and practicum coordinator at the University of Central Oklahoma, and director of the Secular Therapy Project. The Secular Therapy Project connects the nonreligious who need mental health services with mental health professionals.

"I'd say it both matches our experience and isn't unexpected based on what we know about how uncertainty impacts us," says Lack. "If we exist in a state of uncertainty, such as what exists if I am not sure about, or wavering back and forth between religious belief and doubt then people are naturally more vulnerable to developing anxiety and depression."

There are good reasons to not underestimate the instability of doubt, says Lack.

"Doubt is often framed in religious communities as showing that you aren't a 'good' Christian or that the devil is tempting you and you are too weak to resist," Lack explains. "Given that, many people who have



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doubts either get shamed by their communities when they express doubt or feel shame at their 'weakness.'"

This may, he says, lead individuals to withdraw from their social support groups, such as friends or family.

Kevin (last name withheld to protect his privacy), a 40-year-old seminary graduate, knows the difficulty of extricating oneself from a faith tied to family.

"There are definitely times where I get the feeling of being trapped and unable to express my true thoughts, which does lead to moments of depression," says Kevin.

"I have opened up to only a couple friends and somewhat to my wife to provide some outlet," he says, "but having to avoid or hide from certain topics often weighs heavy on my mind. I would not say that I have a feeling of worthlessness, but definitely can get a feeling of hopelessness."

Raised in an independent Baptist church, which he considers fundamentalist in nature,

Kevin has yet to fully leave and embrace all aspects of his new identity.

"From a private perspective, I no longer identify as a Christian. From a public perspective, I have let others draw their own conclusions," he tells me. He's not in church or affiliated with a faith organization of any kind, but it gets complicated with family.

"I believe that it is family relationships that prevent me from leaving fully. I am concerned that disclosing that I have left Christianity to my parents and my wife's parents will lead to greater everyday strife for both me and my wife. I am constantly weighing this decision in my mind to see if, and when, I am ready to take on this challenge."

Not just Christians

A similar struggle in that middle place of identity can also be found for Muslims who have considered leaving Islam.

May's research "matches my experience, both personal and professional," says Sarah Haider, co-founder of Ex-Muslims of North America (EXMNA), an organization that "advocates for acceptance of religious dissent, promotes secular values, and aims to reduce discrimination faced by those who leave Islam." [Haider will be speaking at FFRF's convention in San Francisco in November.]

As with Kevin in Christianity, ex-Muslims may never disaffiliate from Islam completely.

"I would say a majority of those who join our communities, and no longer believe in the faith, continue to be affiliated with the religion publicly and do not 'come out' due to fear of persecution," explains Haider. "They routinely express frustration with the life they are living and the choices denied to them."

This struggle with authenticity, she says, is a source of distress. "It doesn't seem natural or easy to force yourself into living a lifestyle you don't believe in." This, she adds, brings in "elements of isolation, nega-

tive self-views, a sense of hopelessness, and even suicidal thoughts. They may feel as if they have surrendered their future, as their choice to stay often has far-reaching consequences."

Being caught between two worlds, she says, means individuals are culturally expected to marry someone who does not share their perspective on the world. Parents may be frustrated with expectations on how they will raise their children, or even — should those parents choose to leave Islam later — find themselves ostracized by their children.

May says that the act of leaving enables a person to embrace a new identity and to "alleviate this distress." But what is really considered "leaving?" As with Kevin's situation, or in the case of former Muslims, considering dropping out of a faith, or even the very notion of having left, falls along a spectrum.

Still, for those who manage to find their path out entirely, this acceptance of a new identity can mean an entirely new life.

"My faith background growing up was mostly non-denominational," says 26-year-old Jordan Harper from Albuquerque, N.M., and "that most closely aligned with Reformed Baptists."

Reformed Baptists are "very conservative," Harper adds, meaning there are "no women in leadership, no women teaching except for young (usually middle school age and below) children. This meant no drinking, and no dancing when we lived in the Midwest, but the rules were more lax on those points on the East Coast and the Rocky Mountain region when I was older."

Homeschooled, Harper eventually left that world and went to college at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

"I joined the Lutheran church as I searched for something I could better tolerate. I started in the Missouri Synod, which is extremely conservative, and the last church I attended before I finally left Christianity was an extremely liberal . . . ELCA church [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America]."

That all ended in 2017, when Harper left religion entirely.

No longer a Christian, Harper now identifies as spiritual and settled on "eclectic paganism, with a dash of Chaos Magick thrown in."

How to transition

So how should one go from being a "stayer" to a "leaver?"

Secular Therapy Project's Lack sees these transitions out of a faith, which for his group frequently involves secularity, as a journey one should never take alone.

"I would recommend finding someone nonjudgmental and supportive to discuss this with," he says. "That could be a friend or a family member, or it could be a mental health professional, such as those in the Secular Therapy Project."

EXMNA's Haider urges careful forethought in leaving.

"Some of these negative feelings can be alleviated by leaving religion," she says. "However, the chances of success appear to be higher the earlier one gathers the courage to be open and honest about themselves."

She adds that getting an education and a good job can provide the independence one needs to be free to be themselves. "Distance and independence can do wonders for [one's] psychological well-being," she says, particularly, "for those who feel as if they are being coerced into a faith they have doubts about."

In the end, stayers and leavers want to be understood and respected for being true to themselves.

"Others should know that, at least in my case, dropping out of my religion is not a decision made lightly," says Kevin, adding that "it is not the result of some tragedy, nor a momentary lapse of reason," rather, "one cannot simply believe something one no longer believes."

But this, he insists, should be a chance for openness, not boxing someone into a religion.

"I would want for others to have open, true dialogue with me about my positions. I would want for others to be willing to accept individuals regardless if they share the same beliefs or not."

*Brandon Withrow is a freelance journalist and the author of nine books, including his latest (co-authored with Menachem Wecker): **Consider No Evil: Two Faith Traditions and the Problem of Academic Freedom in Religious Higher Education.***

Using a chrysalis instead of a crucifix

Teaching children is different than indoctrinating them

This article first appeared April 30 on the “Just a Couple of Atheists” blog at coupleofatheists.com and is reprinted with permission.

By Allison Hess

The other day I snapped a picture of my 3-year-old daughter Arabella sitting in our office. It has been a joke between me and my husband that his little collection of Freethought Today newspapers makes it look like our office is actually an FFRF waiting room. Well, I tweeted out the picture and the description, and one comment I received really stood out to me. “Hmmm. Something the religious might do; expose their children to only one way of thinking & the literature supporting that. Sounds like indoctrination to me.”

I was surprised to see this response because I felt that it was clear my post was meant as a joke. Then I started thinking about the idea that simply exposing Arabella to nonreligious texts would be the same as indoctrination through daily teachings from a holy book. Even if Arabella was able to fully understand the content, I hardly think “FFRF defeats Gov. Abbott over Capitol nativity display” compares to “I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other Gods before me.”



Allison Hess

If anything, the FFRF text would be beneficial, as it provided insight into the legal system and the Constitution of the United States. Even taking Arabella to an FFRF convention or making her a member of FFRF wouldn't compare to the relationship between a church and its followers.

Clearly the comment was nonsense and yet the concept is something nonbelievers are often confronted with when the topic of secular parenting comes up.

Our society assumes that since many people were/are raised with religion, that a lack of religion leaves a void to be filled. I simply don't see it this way. People have asked me many times how I will raise Arabella in an atheist family and I find the question to be ridiculous. I just don't



Arabella Hess sits next to a stack of Freethought Today's at the Hess household in Pittsburgh.

believe that someone is taught to be an atheist, but more that they are taught to follow God. People are not born with knowledge of a higher power so there isn't anything to undo. Just like a Christian family would grow up skipping over all of history and traditions of Muslims, our secular family functions each day just like everyone else, except no restrictions from God.

Instead of nightly prayers, we have nightly books.



The Hess family has a range of children's books to read and share, including the four pictured.

Right now, we read and discuss bugs, planets, maps and dinosaurs. Instead of a crucifix, she is learning about a chrysalis . . . and guess what, she sleeps soundly through the night.

As the earlier Twitter comment shows, it was suggested that as atheists we could be exposing our daughter to just one way of thinking, but that isn't the case in our household. Rich and I have a huge library of books covering nearly every perspective you could want.

Though she may be years away from comparing the *The Purpose Driven Life* and *Life Driven Purpose* (by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker), we also have a range of children's books. Right there on her bedroom bookshelf sit *I Found a Dead Bird*, *The Book of Myths* and *The Golden Book of God* and I am happy to read all of them to her.

See, unlike children raised in religious families, Arabella will have the chance to openly explore what various belief systems exist and why people find them to be true. We can hope that, by teaching her critical thinking skills, she will be able to understand the flaws that come with organized religions.

At the same time, I will not ever fault her for exploring and will gladly help her research any topic she finds interesting. I have no doubt that if she has a bunch of Christian friends, she will eventually ask if she can go to a youth group meeting. The answer will be yes, as I do not believe in sheltering children from religion. I would simply use it as a chance to discuss the logic behind why we do not believe in God so that she can approach it knowing it is based on theory and not fact.

One of my favorite things about living a secular life is there are no limitations on what interests I can hold and what activities I can enjoy. I am thankful to be able to speak for myself, to treat people as I wish to be treated and to learn the natural consequence of life choices. As Arabella gets older, I look forward to watching her enjoy this freedom as well.

I believe that secular parenting has an extra level of responsibility because, unlike believers who can write everything off as “God's word” or “God's will,” you are the one who is providing the knowledge and the skills to use it. Having the opportunity to teach my child kindness, love, dignity and respect without adding in God's piece of the pie is a true honor for this mom.

FFRF Members Allison and Richard Hess live in Pittsburgh with their daughter.

The problem with teaching the bible in public schools

By James A. Haught

Around America, fundamentalist politicians often try to breach the separation of church and state by requiring public schools to teach about the bible. Such an attempt was made in my state of West Virginia this year, but it stalled in a legislative committee.



James A. Haught

The fundamentalists don't quite grasp what they're doing. They don't realize that classroom warfare might erupt over some of the bible's hideous commandments. For example:

Exodus 31:15 decrees: “Whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.” Exodus 35:2 is almost identical.

Would teachers apply this mandate to police, firefighters, doctors, nurses, hospital aides, paramedics, snowplow drivers, power repair crews, bus drivers, airline crews, radio and television staffs, store clerks and others who must work on Sundays?

The 22nd chapter of Deuteronomy commands that brides who aren't



virgins must be taken to their fathers' doorsteps and stoned to death. With millions of unwed American couples living together, will that decree apply to females among them?

Several verses instruct how to buy and sell slaves. Leviticus 25:44 says: “Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids.”

Which neighbor nations will be deemed appropriate sources of slaves?

Exodus 21:7 gives rules when “a man

sells his daughter to be a maidservant.”

Leviticus 20:13 says gay males “shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.” (But lesbians aren't mentioned.) Now that America approves same-sex marriage, what's the effect of this commandment?

In 1 Samuel 15, God commands Hebrew soldiers to attack a neighbor tribe “and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”

Numbers 31 orders a similar massacre, with this exception: “But all the

women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.”

Would these decrees apply to U.S. soldiers today?

1 Kings 11 says Solomon “had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines.” What would teachers tell pupils about such biblical family values?

In the Great Commission (Mark 16), Jesus tells the apostles that “these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents.” Some mountain worshipers obey this command by picking up rattlesnakes. What would schools teach?

Actually, the bible — written in brutal, ignorant times — contains literally hundreds of grotesque verses decreeing cruel punishments for trivial offenses. It mandates death for many sexual encounters — and for doubting the bible's version of religion.

As you can see, teaching the bible in public schools could open a floodgate for classroom arguments over these horrors. And it could open people's eyes to the savagery in the “Good Book.”

James A. Haught is editor emeritus of West Virginia's largest newspaper, *The Charleston Gazette-Mail*.

‘Nones’ could shake up American politics

This article originally appeared in the Deseret News of Salt Lake City on March 6, and is reprinted with permission.

By Kelsey Dallas

In 2016, religiously unaffiliated Americans, or “Nones,” represented 21 percent of registered voters, one percentage point more than white evangelical Christians. However, they only accounted for 15 percent of actual voters, according to Pew Research Center and national exit polls.

Secular activists see the gap between these two figures as a call to action for 2018 and beyond. They plan to improve voter turnout and shape the Nones into a dominant political force.

“We want to be seen as a powerhouse constituency,” said Sarah Levin, director of grassroots and community programs at the Secular Coalition for America.

If that happens, the Nones could help drive faith groups from the public square, reducing religious exemptions meant to protect people with more conservative beliefs, said John Green, a professor of political science at the University of Akron. But that’s a big “if,” he added.

“Many of the markers you’d use to target people are not available with this group,” he said, noting that religiously unaffiliated adults don’t meet with one another on Sunday mornings or follow the same set of leaders.

Secular activists will never unify all Americans who’ve dropped out of organized religion, said David Campbell, chair of the political science department at the University of Notre Dame. However, even mobilizing just those Nones who actively identify as atheist, agnostic or secular will boost the political influence of the nonreligious community in dramatic ways.

“There is a clear historical parallel between the secular population today and evangelical Christians in 1978 and 1979,” he said. “This is a voting bloc emerging right before our eyes.”

Forming a bloc

Political scientists often define voting blocs in terms of the attention they receive from candidates. Established blocs inspire targeted campaign speeches and campaign stops at their gathering places.

For example, politicians court evangelical Christians by appearing at houses of worship. They promise new limitations on abortion rights or the appointment of conservative judges.

“We see candidates, a large number of candidates, actively seeking the support of these voters,” Green said.

Although around one in five registered voters is a None, this community has yet to receive this kind of targeted attention from politicians, Campbell said. Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders spoke about being not very religious, but not as a direct pitch to nonreligious voters.

“I can’t point to a single national politician who has truly made it a point to speak directly to the secular population to bring them to the polls,” Campbell said.

Secular activists want to change that, so they’re working to be more visible in their communities and more visible to



FFRF’s “I’m an Atheist and I Vote” campaign includes full-size billboards.

candidates. In the lead-up to the 2018 midterm elections, they plan to host voter registration drives and attend political rallies.

“We’re having teams of activists across the country going to town halls and asking questions or going to campaign events and asking questions,” Levin said.

They’re hoping to increase voter turnout and strengthen connections between religious Nones, said Nick Fish, national program director for American Atheists.

“What we’re trying to do is look at things churches do well, things like getting their members registered to vote, to turn out (on Election Day) and be visible as members of their community,” he said.

Through this process, the Secular Coalition for America, American Atheists, [Freedom From Religion Foundation] and other secular groups will work to raise their national profile, gaining more members and building relationships with politicians. Better organiza-

cult for secular activists to build a cohesive voting bloc out of the Nones is that they’re so internally diverse,” he said.

Few religiously unaffiliated Americans see voting as a way to express their secular identity. Many don’t even claim a secular identity, said Michael Wear, who led faith outreach during President Obama’s 2012 re-election campaign.

Religious disaffiliation is “not a key identifier for them,” he said. “They’re coming to politics as a member of a political party or a person who cares about the environment or health care. Very few come with the identity of a religious None.”

Groups like the Secular Coalition for America hope to change that by increasing community outreach. They want to meet the Nones where they are, after they determine exactly where that is.

“We would love to figure out where the unaffiliated are on Sundays,” Levin said.

Some Nones actually are in church-like settings on Sunday mornings. Members of Sunday Assembly Salt Lake City, an organization for atheists, agnostics and other secular folks in Utah, gather once a month to discuss interesting research and sing popular songs.

Brian O’Saurus, the group’s vice chairman, plans to do his part to boost political engagement in his community. He already helped arrange a visit from an expert on immigration policy and is considering a how-to event on political lobbying.

“As the elections draw near, we’ll encourage people to vote. We may offer rides to the polls for people who need one,” he said.

To find the Nones who aren’t part of groups like Sunday Assembly, Levin’s urged her team of community leaders to set up voter registration drives at highly trafficked events, like state fairs and music festivals. She also wants them to think outside the box.

“I was talking to someone in Texas, asking him where he thought he could do voter registration. He said, ‘On Sunday, everyone is at the IHOP,’” Levin said.

These outreach events will work toward solving the community’s leadership problem, drawing more Nones into politically active groups with trained spokesmen. They will also create oppor-

tunities to discover shared values, helping groups like the Secular Coalition craft a political agenda that appeals to most, or at least many, religiously unaffiliated adults.

“We want to have a conversation about what our values are and what we’re looking for in our candidates across political spectrum,” Levin said.

Similar efforts have succeeded in other countries, drawing Nones into community groups and encouraging political engagement, Wear said. Humanists UK has brought enough people together that its leaders have true political clout.

They “can speak for tens of thousands of people and carry legitimacy in public conversations,” he said.

However, secular activists in America are still a long way from that result, and they need to target their outreach better if they hope to get there, Campbell said. He estimates that only around one-third of the religiously unaffiliated are “actively secular” and able to be drawn into a recognizable voting bloc.

“We speak of the religious Nones or the unaffiliated population as though they’re one large group,” he said. “But there is a very clear divide within that population.”

Actively secular Americans search for truth in philosophy or science, finding meaning in mostly nonreligious sources. Passively secular adults, on the other hand, aren’t very concerned with life’s big questions and may still cite the bible as a source of inspiration, he added.

Two-thirds of unaffiliated Americans still believe in God and around one in five say this belief is a necessary part of being a moral person, according to Public Religion Research Institute.

Campbell’s demarcation deals a blow to the claim that a voting bloc of Nones could capture up to a quarter of Americans. But a smaller population of organized, nonreligious voters could still have a big impact, he said.

“Actively secular Nones represent something like 8 to 10 percent of the population. That’s more than the number of Southern Baptists and five times as many as Mormons. It’s a group that’s growing,” said Campbell, who is currently studying the Nones for a book about the future of religion and politics.

Political goals

For religious folks, the rise of religious Nones has created a host of challenges. Houses of worship are closing due to low membership, and religiously affiliated charities are struggling to keep up with demand for their services as disengagement from religion leads to fewer donations.

If actively secular Americans form a strong voting bloc, faith groups could face additional problems. Democratic politicians are already more willing to battle with faith groups today than they were in the past, Wear said.

“You see politicians being able to say, ‘Stop with your thoughts and prayers and focus on policies.’ You wouldn’t have been able to say that 15 to 20 years ago,” he said.

But secular activists assert that they’re not on a warpath against religion. They want to raise the profile of the Nones,



FFRF’s “I’m Secular and I Vote” ad campaign includes outreach to voters across the nation through FFRF chapters, media ads and efforts to mobilize students on college campuses.

tion is key to being recognized as a voting bloc, Green said.

“The question is, can we point to one or a small number of organizations that speak for this group (of voters) and have a fairly large membership?” he said.

Seeking identity

As the nickname “None” implies, religiously unaffiliated Americans are linked together by their lack of a religious identity, not their participation in something new. Two people who left their childhood faith may not have much in common beyond that departure, Green said.

“One of the reasons it’s been diffi-

Ireland overwhelmingly votes to end abortion ban

Ireland voted decisively to repeal its restrictive abortion ban that had been in place since 1983. The vote is considered a strong rebuke to the Roman Catholic Church.

“This is devastating for the Roman Catholic hierarchy,” said Gail McElroy, professor of politics at Trinity College Dublin. “It is the final nail in the coffin for them. They’re no longer the pillar of society, and their hopes of re-establishing themselves are gone.”

The measure passed with more than two-thirds of the vote.

The vote repeals the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. “It was the latest, and harshest, in a string of rejections of the church’s authority in recent years,” writes Kimiko de Freitas-Tamura in The New York Times.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin said just 12 percent of voters cited religion as a factor in their decision, leading him to wonder, “What is the place of religion in Irish society and what is the place of the church in Irish society? We have to be ruthless in looking at the reality.”

Court: Arkansas abortion restrictions to stand

The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear a challenge to an Arkansas law that could force two of the state’s three abortion clinics to close.

The law concerns medication abortions, which use pills to induce abortions in the first nine weeks of pregnancy.

The law requires providers of the procedure to have contracts with doctors who have admitting privileges at a hospital in the state. Abortion clinics in Arkansas said they were unable to find any doctors willing to sign such contracts.

Planned Parenthood said it would for now stop providing medication



Dawn Laguens

abortions in the state.

“Arkansas is now shamefully responsible for being the first state to ban medication abortion,” Dawn Laguens, Planned Parenthood’s executive vice president, told the New York Times. “This dangerous law immediately ends access to safe, legal abortion at all but one health center in the state.”

No reason was given for turning away the appeal. The case will continue in the lower courts.

Iowa bans most abortions after about 6 weeks



Gov. Kim Reynolds

On May 4, Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed one of the country’s most restrictive abortion bills into law.

The so-called “heartbeat” legislation bans abortions once a fetal heartbeat has been detected, at about six weeks of pregnancy. Exceptions are made in cases of rape, incest or medical emergency.

The legislation drew strong Republican support, but no Democrats voted for the bill.

“This unconstitutional bill is nothing but a thinly veiled attack on Iowa women’s most basic rights and freedoms — every woman deserves the fundamental right to make decisions about her own body with her doctor,” Democratic National Committee Women’s Media Director Elizabeth Renda said in a written statement.

THEY SAID WHAT?



Janice Bowling

When our Constitution was written, it was clearly evident that there was the belief in an Almighty God, that there was a belief in a Creator God, that there was a belief in Jehovah God. It was not included in there because it was common knowledge and commonly accepted.

Tennessee state Sen. Janice Bowling, during discussion over amending the state Constitution to say that “liberties do not come from government, but from Almighty God.”

Nashville Public Radio, 4-24-18

Our rights are from God, not from government, not from Washington, frankly not even from the Constitution. If we lose that belief that the rights come from a higher power than Washington, then we are no longer a free society.

Former Spartanburg County (S.C.) Republican Party Chair Josh Kimbrell, also at the candidate forum in Greenville.

USA Today, 5-2-18

Our country needs to get back to biblical principles. We have gone so far from the bible. We don’t even teach it in schools — we ban prayer in schools.

South Carolina state Sen. William Timmons, at that same candidate forum.

USA Today, 5-2-18

We take this step because we know that, in solving the many, many problems and our great challenges, faith is more powerful than government, and nothing is more powerful than God.

President Trump, in announcing his Executive Order on the Establishment of a White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative.

WhiteHouse.gov, 5-3-18

Council can ask members to stand for prayer, refer specifically to God/Jesus, and do not have to make any special effort to provide opportunities for persons of other faiths to offer invocations.

Canal Winchester (Ohio) City Law Director Gene Hollins.

Friendly Atheist, 5-7-18

Faith in America is rising again because President Trump and our entire administration have been advancing the very principles that you learned here in the halls of Hillsdale College. The principles that have always been the source of America’s greatness and strength.

Facts are facts. Faith is rising across America.

Vice President Mike Pence in his commencement address to Hillsdale College, a conservative Christian institution, making erroneous statements about faith in America.

New Civil Rights Movement, 5-12-18



Lee Bright

You’re either a man or a woman — and if you’re confused, you’ve got an issue with mental illness. If we don’t get right, God is going to judge us, and let me tell you, it is going to be painful.

Former South Carolina state Sen. Lee Bright, during a forum in Greenville that featured a dozen candidates seeking to replace U.S. Rep. Trey Gowdy.

USA Today, 5-2-18

The access has been phenomenal. I’m very appreciative to God for allowing it.

David Brody, chief political correspondent for Christian Broadcasting Network, about unprecedented White House access for CBN News.

New York Times, 5-14-18

‘Nones’

Continued from page 13

not attack other religious demographics.

“We want to normalize atheism” for everyday people, as well as politicians, Fish said. Like faithful Americans, secular people value religious freedom, Levin said, noting that it includes the freedom to believe in nothing at all.

“Our view of a secular America includes people of all faiths and no faiths living out their faith or lack of faith without imposing on their neighbors,” she said.

However, this vision for America still holds consequences for faith groups, Green said.

Secular activists’ commitment to the strict separation of church and state means that religious communities could have a harder time passing or protecting policies they favor.

“If the affirmative concerns of secular people become more prominent in politics, there will be a diminution of the influence of religious groups,” he said.

For example, tax-exempt status may one day be based on the types of services offered to the community, rather than on religious commitments, Green added.

Moving forward, American politics will increasingly be shaped by battles over how far religious teachings should shape public life, Campbell said.

“It won’t be as much about a pro-religion camp versus an anti-religion camp, but, rather, an ongoing debate about to what degree the government should be entangled with religion,” he said.

Learning from past

In 2018, a Nones voting bloc feels a long way off. Secular groups are still honing their outreach efforts, and faith groups continue to receive far more attention from candidates than the nonreligious community.

However, many political scientists are convinced that change is coming. They look at religiously unaffiliated Americans today and draw comparisons to evangelical Christians in the 1970s, a community of believers that, over the last four decades, has become the country’s most notable religion-related voting bloc.

Low voter turnout plagued evangelicals for half of the 20th century, and, in the mid-1970s, few members of the community saw voting as a way to express their religious concerns, according to Randall Balmer, chairman of Dartmouth College’s religion department.

“From about 1925 to 1975, evangelicals weren’t organized politically,” he said. They regarded the political world as “both corrupt and corrupting.”

That started to change in 1976 during Jimmy Carter’s presidential campaign. Carter, who self-identified as a born-again Christian, was an exciting candidate for committed Christians.

“There was a novelty to being able to vote for one of your own,” Balmer said.

Political activists saw this renewed interest in the election and sprang into action.

They turned pastors into political operatives, training them to help their con-

gregations approach voting in new ways.

At the time, these efforts seemed almost laughable, Green said. Evangelical Christians in different denominations shared little more in common than religious texts. However, it was clear they could be mobilized around certain issues.

“They didn’t read the bible the same way or practice the same customs, but they agreed that abortion was bad,” he said.

Secular activists will have to do the same type of work among nonreligious Americans, identifying the issues that get them to the polls.

They may benefit from religiously unaffiliated Americans’ distaste for President Trump, just as evangelical activists benefitted from an appreciation for Carter.

Only 1 in 4 religiously unaffiliated Americans (25 percent) approve of how Trump is handling his job, according to an October survey from Pew.

It may take years before candidates routinely meet with secular groups and politicians craft legislation meant to please the Nones.

But secular groups are ready to put in the work, Fish said.

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

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

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

House’s Freethought Caucus ‘pretty historic’

This article first appeared in Pacific Standard magazine on May 10. It is reprinted with permission.

By Francie Diep

The nearly 500 registered caucuses in the House of Representatives cover seemingly every issue. They represent social problems (Homeless-



Francie Diep

ness Caucus, Military Sexual Assault Prevention Caucus); industries (Coal Caucus, Steel Caucus); diseases (Caucus on Parkinson’s Disease, Childhood Cancer Caucus); and foreign relations (Friends of Switzerland Caucus, U.S.-China Working Group). They are liberal (Progressive Caucus), conservative (Freedom Caucus), and bipartisan (Bipartisan Congressional Task Force to Combat Identity Theft and Fraud). They can be made up of only a single member, or dozens.

Despite this diversity, historians Pacific Standard consulted have never heard of anything like the new caucus announced last week by four Democratic congressmen: the Freethought Caucus. Formed in consultation with groups that advocate for nontheist world views, the Freethought Caucus has four goals, according to its press release:

1) to promote public policy formed on the basis of reason, science, and moral values; 2) to protect the secular character of our government by adhering to the strict Constitutional principle of the separation of church and state; 3) to oppose discrimination against atheists, agnostics, humanists, seekers, religious and nonreligious persons ... and 4) to provide a forum for members of Congress to discuss their moral frameworks, ethical values and personal religious journeys.

“It harks back to Enlightenment ideas from when this country was started,” says Ray Smock, who was the House of Representatives historian from 1983 to 1995. “Aside from that thought, I’ve never heard of anything quite like it.”

Stephen Weldon, a historian of science and religion at the University of Oklahoma, pointed to polls showing what a political liability it is for a candidate to be atheist. “So to have a Congressional Freethought Caucus is pretty historic, I would say,” he writes in an email exchange.

Moment is right

That said, it might just be the right moment for something like this. The



U.S. Department of Labor/Flickr

U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman, a founder of the Freethought Caucus, identifies as a humanist. He will be speaking at FFRF’s convention in San Francisco.

timing doesn’t surprise Matt Glassman, a researcher who once wrote about caucuses for the Congressional Research Service. “I think there’s a fair number of groups in politics who are concerned about the role religion’s playing in public policy,” he says. “That’s not new, but it does seem to be a growing sentiment among some factions, particularly on the liberal side of things.”

The caucus’ founding members are Reps. Dan Kildee (D-Mich.), Jamie Raskin (D-Md.), Jerry McNerney (D-Calif.), and Jared Huffman (D-Calif.). Huffman is the second member of Congress ever to openly profess to having an ethical system that’s not based on God. Rep. Pramila Jayapal, a Democrat from Washington state’s liberal Seattle area, has tweeted that she’s a member of the caucus as well. The offices of co-chairs Huffman and Raskin didn’t respond to interview requests.

In an interview, Ron Millar, who is the coordinator of the Freethought Equality Fund Political Action Committee and helped plan the caucus, mentioned more specific aims that the PAC wants to see: action against climate change; access to contraception and abortion; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights; and maintaining the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits tax-exempt nonprofits, including religious organizations, from endorsing political candidates.

In a speech last year, President

Trump promised he would “get rid of and totally destroy” the amendment, but he then signed an executive order that made little substantive change to the law, which remains in effect.

“Church-state separation has been under attack now for quite a while, and we just want to make sure policies are promoted with evidence and rational thought behind them,” Millar says.

Personal and policy

At first glance, it seems strange to package discussions of personal religious journeys and the rest of these policy goals into one cohesive platform. After all, you don’t have to be an atheist to support science-based policy, and there seems to be no natural connection between climate action and separation of church and state. But the Freethought Caucus is a reaction against how some conservatives have blended faith and policy over the past few decades, Millar says: “The connection is that we wouldn’t be

talking about these things without the Religious Right.” Conservative evangelical Christians first became associated with climate deregulation during the George W. Bush administration. In a recent textbook about religion and environmentalism, historians Myrna Perez Sheldon and Naomi Oreskes describe the steps that they argue led evangelical Christians to become climate deniers: Christian fundamentalists began to develop an

ethos of interpreting the bible plainly and rejecting Darwinian evolution in the 1920s. It was not until the 1980s, however, that evangelicals really began to participate in politics, when then-presidential candidate Ronald Reagan courted them and evangelical leaders, such as Jerry Falwell, touted the Republican Party as the surest route to goals such as curtailing abortion access and gay rights.

During that decade, evangelicals pushed to get public schools to teach creationism and evolution equally — but courts struck them down, ruling that creationism is religion, not science, and therefore can’t be taught in taxpayer-funded programs. In response, creationists argued that they too had science on their side, but that mainstream researchers refused to acknowledge the supposed evidence undermining evolution. It was no surprise, then, when creationists began to doubt scientific consensus when it came to climate change too.

Thus, denying evolution set the stage for denying climate change among certain religious folks. It doesn’t have to be this way: There are evangelical environmentalists who support climate action as either a way of being good stewards of God’s creation, or of protecting the world’s poor, who are most vulnerable to global warming. But those aren’t the people who show up most visibly in politics.

“People have really diverse views on what they think God is, and so I think we need to allow people to have that and explore it,” says Millar, who is an atheist but grew up in a fundamentalist church. So now there’s a caucus ostensibly for religion in all its forms outside of the usual conservative platform. The Freethought Caucus is not an “atheist club,” Millar says, and is “open to everyone who believes in church-state separation and nondiscrimination.”

Whether the caucus will be able to garner enough support to be effective remains to be seen. Former House historian Smock thinks the group needs to attract at least a couple dozen members before it can have much clout. Right now, “this caucus is so small it could meet in a phone booth,” he says. “It’s not big enough to affect policy, but I’m certainly glad to see the ideas. There’s room for a larger caucus to discuss public policy and moral values, that’s for sure.”

Francie Diep is a science journalist and staff writer at Pacific Standard. She formerly wrote for Popular Science and was a freelancer for Scientific American, Smithsonian and others.

CRANKMAIL

Here is our latest compilation of anti-FFRF letters and email sent to our heathen headquarters (or commented on our YouTube videos), printed as received.

You’re frauds!: What is it like knowing you’re going to burn in hell for eternity, with no recompense? You’re a fraud, your organization is a disgrace, and your interpretation of the US Constitution is an abomination. The founding fathers would have both you and your handlers hanged and we both know that. — Emerson Smith

Joke: You people are a joke, really take a cross down in Guernsey county. I hope karma hits ya full force. — Angela Rose

accept jesus: these people are ignorant of the bible and i wish i was close by i would answer them, in fact listen to the gentleman say jesus never existed, common there is more evidence in history about jesus of nazareth from even secular historians such as tactitus, josphus and even the jews that reject jesus says on the eve of the passover they hang yeshua of nazareth, yeshua is jesus hebrew name, you sceptics can sit there and criticize my saviour the problem

is if you do McLawrence

Help for you: There’s a man named Todd White that has many amazing videos on YouTube. He explains how he found God in such a way, that you can literally feel the Holy Spirit touching you. Look him up when you have time... you have nothing to lose, and eternal life to gain! — Cathy Gomez

FRFF: I continue to pray for your utter failure & institutional demise. May all of you experience the light of Freedom OF Religion, a value that so many have died protecting. — Bob Washington

LIARS!: NO WAY THESE PEOPLE ARE ATHEISTS, THEIR LYING , THEY ARE FUCKING APOLOGIST THE WORST ENEMY TO FREEDOM FROM RELIGION THEIR HAS EVER BEEN. I DON`T BELIEVE FOR ONE MOMENT THESE PEOPLE ARE ATHEISTS — Ossie Dunstan

Jesus is real: The evidence for Jesus is so overwhelming that NO RESPECTED classicist, ancient Historian, Biblical scholars, theologian in the world would deny that Jesus existed. That’s why people

who deny that Jesus existed are like Flat Earthers. Flat Earthers are more rational though! — Joel Rodriguez

DON’T WORSHIP SATAN: THE CHRISTIAN GOD JESUS IS SATAN THE DEVIL AN HE IS NOT COMING BACK...CHRISTIANS WORSHIP SATAN WITH A HUMAN SACRIFICE OF JESUS TO SATAN...YOUVE BEEN DECIVED...REPENT, ACCEPT JAHOVAH AN DO GOOD WORKS. — Charles Dorr

Listen: Jesus said to Thomas, “blessed are those who believe without evidence,” i rather listen and believe Jesus then be in Thomas’ shoe — Malaks Peters

Nonsense: I’m really embarrassed for Mr. Barker: all of the answers to these “Top 5 Contradictions” are easily obtained through a simple Google search... The nonsense about Old Testament and New Testament? Oy, vey... Besides being clueless, do you meatballs think that anything you do is of any value to anyone other than your tiny clan - outside of reducing the costs of some church projects?? The irony is this: if the only value of atheism is some “intellectual

edification”, wouldn’t it be nice if the 3 of you had a clue? Like i said, your lack of ability to discern the difference between small and large issues is amusing, and the fact your entire movement has no value to anyone is just painful to watch. And your sin analysis is another joke... please, don’t think anyone that knows OT and NT theology is even offended - you’re not worth the ink on this video... — Dan Myers

Free!: get inspired by the free word of Jesus Christ BITCH — Usher Lovell

Leave us alone: You people need to butt out of other people business . So suck it up buttercup. You people took praying out of school. Now look at our school system good job dumass. Your trying to take down the ten Commandments from our court houses and crime is going up. Everything you people do to take GOD our crountry things get worse every Dan time look at the schools the kids in them. So keep on destroying our country. Then in 5 or 20 years down the road when everything is going to HELL I’ll texted back and say GREAT JOB. O ya ever mind there all ready there great job dumass!!! — Gary Bone

Strong Backbone Student Activist Award

Getting bullied for my nonbelief

Devin Estes, 10, received a \$1,000 Strong Backbone Student Activist Award endowed by a kind octogenarian FFRF member from New York, who prefers to remain anonymous and donates the scholarship fund annually to celebrate his birthday.

This essay was written with help from Devin's father.

By Devin Estes

Every morning, my elementary school has a teacher-led, religious program called “Upper Room.” During Upper Room, teachers lead the students in prayer and in singing religious songs. Students who don’t want to attend must go to the lunch room. I was one of only two students who didn’t attend Upper Room. However, I know of at least two others who also didn’t want to go, but they didn’t want everybody to know that they didn’t want to attend. They wanted to fit in and didn’t want to be treated the way I was being treated.

For example, one of my teachers said during class that she would debate any atheist, because, according to her, God would send bears to maul and eat atheists and those atheists would pray when they were being eaten. While she said all of this, I sat

there in class and cried. This wasn’t the only time that this particular teacher bullied me in front of the entire class.

This teacher didn’t just say hateful things about me when I was present, however. She also enjoyed criticizing me for my atheism when I wasn’t in class. She enjoyed enlisting my fellow students into her brand of bullying. One of my classmates shoved a table into me, and told me that she did it because she heard that I didn’t believe in God. As you might expect, my school did absolutely nothing to prevent my teachers from criticizing me, or to discipline any of the students who bullied me.

My school was an interesting place. I say “was” because I am now home-schooled. And I say “interesting” because I’m being charitable. My teacher enjoyed playing gospel music during class, and teaching about the personal histories of those gospel singers.

Another example of just how “interesting” my school was is its annual “Bring Your Bible to School Day.” As



Devin Estes

my father pointed out, they never had a day to bring your Quran or your Kitab’I’Aqdas or any other religious book to school. This was not an exercise to teach about religion, but rather was merely the school’s attempt to indoctrinate students into Christianity.

The attempts to indoctrinate didn’t end there, however. On one occasion, we had a mandatory school-wide program during which participants performed feats of strength, and then told us that God had made them

strong. The whole thing was just one more God-fest. Students weren’t told ahead of time, and we weren’t given the option of not attending. Did I mention that this is a public school?

One day, when my mother was dropping me off at school, I showed her what was actually going on in the Upper Room morning program. She saw the teachers leading the students in religious songs. She saw them projecting the words to those songs on the gymnasium wall so that the kids could sing along. She was appalled. I’d told her about Upper Room, but as an attorney, she had trouble believing that something so wildly unconstitutional was still happening in this day and age. As they say, however, “Seeing is believing.”

As soon as my mother saw what was going on, she posted it on Facebook. Some of my mother’s friends on Facebook forwarded her video to newspapers and television stations here in Kentucky. When reporters contacted my mother, she asked me if I wanted to remain anonymous or if I wanted

to tell the world about what was going on at my elementary school. I chose to talk. The broadcast media didn’t ask to interview me on the air, which is just as well, because my parents wouldn’t have allowed that. I’m only 10 years old, after all.

I did, however, talk to newspaper reporters from the Louisville Courier-Journal and the Lexington Herald-Leader. As soon as my story was broadcast on television, the city in which I live showed just how “Christian” they really are. Oddly enough, the medium used most to express their particular brand of Christian hatred was Facebook. Although both newspapers ran stories about me, and about the Upper Room religious program at my elementary school, most of the hatred expressed by my neighbors was focused on the very short broadcast stories. Go figure.

Unfortunately, the hatred being heaped upon me at my school by two teachers and many students has forced me to withdraw and to be home-schooled, for now. My family is hoping to move to a nearby city before the next school year begins.

In my absence, Upper Room is still continuing at that elementary school. At first, when the news stories were broadcast and printed, they moved Upper Room to the county courthouse, which is only about a block from the school. Yes, that’s right, I said “county courthouse” — the same place where court is held, and that is paid for with taxpayer money. Perhaps my entire city is “interesting.” After a while, though, it got moved back to the school. But now, I’m told, they simply play pop music. One of the songs that my sister tells me they play is Miley Cyrus’ “Party in the U.S.A.” So, I suppose that’s progress. Small steps, right?

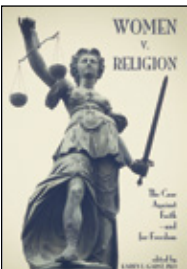
My mom worries about me and the bullying. I tell her not to worry and that it is important to always speak up for equality, whether it is about religion, race, gender, nationality, etc. I may only have one voice, but that is all that anyone has. We all have a responsibility to speak up against inequality whenever we can. I’m not saying that we will achieve equality in my lifetime, but maybe future generations will make progress to further the lives of the human race. I am a bit disappointed that the human race still treats people differently because of religion, race, gender, nationally, or anything else, but I still have hope.

FREETHOUGHT BOOKS

The following books are by FFRF members on the topics of religion or freethinking. FFRF does not do traditional book reviews.

Women v. Religion: The Case Against Faith — And For Freedom

Edited by Karen L. Garst
\$16.95 (paperback)
Pitchstone Publishing, 2018



Throughout history, religion has been used as a tool of female subjugation. As this volume explores, it would be hard to find a bigger culprit than religion when identifying the last cultural barriers to full gender equality. With topics ranging from the subjugation of women in the bible to the shame and guilt felt by women due to religious teaching, this volume makes clear that only by rejecting the very system that limits their autonomy will women be fully liberated from its malignant influences, not just in codified law but also in cultural practice.

Time is Irreverent

By Marty Essen
\$14.70 (paperback)
Encante Press, 2018



What if you could change history to eliminate religion, World War II, global warming, and an egomaniacal nuclear-bomb-dropping president? What if that change also made 5 billion people poof from existence? Would you do it? Time Is Irreverent explores those questions, as benevolent aliens send Marty Mann to AD 31 to correct an error in history.

The Party Line

By Dennis D. Gagnon
\$26.75 (hardcover),
\$17.99 (paperback)
ArchwayPublishing, 2018



Discovering a realm of unconscious, extrasensory communication revealing a world filled with gods, a 17-year-old explores an ethereal realm inhabited by a monster, a ghost, dragons, a phoenix, and perhaps a goddess or two.

Through sustained meditations on the logic of scientific proof, including examination of fundamental evidence for quantum theory, the youth becomes convinced that all is consciousness and no material world exists. But he soon realizes that just as there are laws of the physical world, there are also inexorable forces in the conscious domain.

What Is a Freethinker?

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

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER CONTEST

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

The person who gives the best secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF’s annual convention in 2018, receiving an all-expenses-paid trip to San Francisco Nov. 2-4, along with a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

MORE INFO AT:

ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer

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Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Award State/church separation fight has been stressful

Daniel Roe (not his real name) received FFRF's \$2,000 Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Award, endowed by a generous couple in the Northwest who prefer anonymity.

By Daniel Roe

There comes a moment in every person's life when they have to make the choice to stand up for what they believe in — that moment when a thought turns into action. If we don't align our actions with our thoughts, then our actions are empty and our thoughts are worthless.

Standing up and standing out for what I believed in seemed like a distant, unreachable goal. I have always been passionate and opinionated, but the thought of being alone in my actions was reason enough to justify remaining silent at the time. That fear of loneliness kept me from opening up about myself and speaking out against all of the injustice I saw. However, as I grew in age, I also grew in knowledge and courage. I started to fully accept the idea that I didn't believe in God after years of religious conflict and pretending to believe for the sake of my loved ones. Over the course of the summer before my sophomore year in high school, I researched a lot and realized the importance of upholding my rights as an atheist and protecting the Constitution. Reading story after story about people's hard experiences fighting for state/church separation made me realize that freedom doesn't come easy. That would be one of many discoveries throughout the year being involved in a conflict that I never imagined being a part of.

At the beginning of the year, I paid more attention to my school environment than I had previously. Despite the large crowds and my tight schedule, I noticed a large number of historical documents collectively framed together in one of our main hallways. As I looked at the displays, I saw a Ten Commandments plaque in the middle of it. At first, I felt surprised by its presence and eventually grew upset with the fact that my public school was promoting a religious display. My school was illegally promoting Christianity by displaying such a plaque on the wall and I knew that I had to do something. So, after much discussion with friends, I contacted my principal. I received a response that showed me that this was an issue going on throughout most schools in my district. I knew I could only do so much by myself and that's why I contacted FFRF. After many email exchanges with the legal team, FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott sent a nice letter of complaint to the school board's attorney for the board to address. This led to several months of painful waiting, public backlash and personal conflict.

The reaction on social media was largely negative. People were calling FFRF and atheists evil, stupid, oversensitive, overly offended, and the used the bible to defend the plaques. Numerous citizens at board meetings justified the plaques by referring to the importance of Christian morals in schools. In one case, a friend, who I told about my complaint, betrayed me and told dozens of



Daniel Roe

people about it after she got mad at me. This led to several people making rude comments, cutting me off from them, and one girl yelling, for everyone to hear, about how bad a person I was. Additionally, I received pushback from my family. My parents got nervous with the whole situation and said they didn't want me involved in this controversy anymore. They told me that we were living in the Bible Belt and that messing with religion was the worst thing I could do.

The situation caused me to feel lonely and like I had no one to turn to for support. Even worse, on my birthday, hundreds of local citizens rallied at the board meeting for the board's deciding the fate of the plaques. After endless public comments and unnecessary drama, the Cumberland County Board of Education voted 6-3 to keep the plaques up in the schools. I felt like a lone outsider in a community that was supposed to be for everyone.

In the aftermath of the decision, I turned to support of the local atheists and secularists around me. They understood my feelings, encouraged me to keep the issue ongoing, and inspired me to fight even harder for separation of church and state. Thankfully, I took their advice and continued to address issues as I observed them in my area.

The issue of the Ten Commandments in the local schools is still an ongoing issue that I want to further pursue. Besides that, I resolved an issue involving a teacher preaching in her class after a letter of complaint by FFRF was sent out. I have also complained about issues involving my representative promoting religion, religious displays in our school library, school endorsements of baccalaureate services, and other violations as they come up.

All of this proves time and time again why the separation of church and state should be valued. It prevents the government from having a religious preference and makes the government take a neutral position. Ultimately, this governmental neutrality upholds our country's long history of religious freedom for all people. Therefore, it is so important for everyone to start speaking out and turning our thoughts into actions so everyone can be equal and free."

Daniel, 17, from Tennessee, enjoys music, history, reading and the outdoors. He would like to work in human services and help defend civil liberties.

OVERHEARD

I can stand on a beach at sunrise with the most devout of religious people . . . and I can weep with awe at this beautiful planet we live on. . . . I don't use "God" and I don't use "spirituality." Those aren't my particular terms. But "awe" is a good word that I do feel. **Swimmer Diana Nyad, an atheist, when asked if she feels more connected to her spirituality when she's swimming in the ocean.**

Sacramento News and Review, 3-8-18

It's crazy for the government to hire a member of the clergy to lead Congress in prayer, unless somebody repealed the First Amendment while I was distracted.

Gail Collins, New York Times columnist, after Speaker of the House Paul Ryan dismissed House Chaplain Pat Conroy (and later reinstated him).

New York Times, 5-1-18

I used to think that the left was a little strident in demanding strict separation of church and state. But my views have changed as I've watched the Republican Party constantly try to inject Christianity into everyday political life. . . . Anyway, we don't need a House chaplain so that Paul Ryan can fire him on his own way out the door.

Bret Stephens, New York Times columnist.

New York Times, 5-1-18

The state's highest court has reached the only logical decision it could. The church/state line is not one that should be crossed or easily compromised. It's a principle, indeed, that is as old as the nation or this state.

Editorial in response to FFRF's victory in the Morris County, N.J., decision that the county had violated the Constitution in awarding grants to churches for preservation.

Glen Rock (N.J.) Gazette, 5-4-18



E.J. Dionne

"No wonder there's an exodus from religion."

Washington Post, 5-6-18

Only 10 percent of Americans claim to be full-blown atheists. They deserve respect. To believe with seriousness that no hidden order or purpose whatsoever lies beyond the material world is to shoulder a weighty challenge in finding meaning in life.

Columnist D.J. Tice, in his column "Belief in God means what in America?"

Minneapolis Star Tribune, 5-6-18

One wants to be free to choose his death when death is at the appropriate time. I am very appreciative of the hospitality of the Swiss Federation and the ability that one has here to come to an end gracefully. [I would like to be remembered] as an instrument of freeing the elderly from the need to pursue their life irrespective. **Australian botanist David Goodall, 104, a nonbeliever, who gave himself a fatal dose of barbiturate on May 10, in Switzerland. He flew to Switzerland because Australian law did not permit**

him aid to take his own life.

New York Times, 5-10-18

If the irreligious ever get serious about flexing their muscles politically, a lot could change in this country, particularly on church-state separation issues.

Ed Kilgore, in the article, "Americans with no religion greatly outnumber white evangelicals."

New York magazine, 5-11-18

With hope for a two-state solution nearly dead, current trends suggest



Michelle Goldberg

that a Jewish minority will come to rule over a largely disenfranchised Muslim majority in all the land under Israel's control. A rising generation of Americans may see an apartheid state with a Trump Square in its capital and wonder why it's supposed to be our friend.

New York Times columnist Michelle Goldberg, in her column, "A grotesque spectacle in Jerusalem," reacting to the opening of the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem while 59 Palestinians were killed and thousands injured at the fence separating Gaza from Israel.

New York Times, 5-14-18

Removing religious liberty protections in the name of religious freedom taints the cause. Honoring freedom for faith-based providers, while taking it away from people receiving services, is wrong.

Melissa Rogers, in her op-ed column, "President Trump just unveiled a new White House 'faith' office. It actually weakens religious freedom."

Washington Post, 5-14-18

I'm exactly the opposite of religious, I'm anti-religious. I find religious people hideous. I hate the religious lies. It's all a big lie. . . . I have such a huge dislike. It's not a neurotic thing, but the miserable record of religion. I don't even want to talk about it, it's not interesting to talk about the sheep referred to as believers. When I write, I'm alone. It's filled with fear and loneliness and anxiety, and I never needed religion to save me.

Acclaimed author Philip Roth, who died May 22, in an interview in 2005 with The Guardian's Martin Krasnik.

The Guardian, 12-14-05

We have a strong protection of religious rights in this country, and it's supposed to be a shield. But they are using it as a sword. The government is enabling people to force their religious beliefs on others as a condition to maintain their relationships with their children.

Human rights attorney Julie F. Kay, commenting on judicial decisions placing ultra-Orthodox Jewish law above secular law in New York.

New York Times, 5-27-18

Evolution will remain part of the education curriculum.

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, after hearing that Arizona Superintendent of Public Schools Diane Douglas was working to weaken the state's science standards by casting doubt on the theory of evolution.

Arizona Central, 5-29-18

LETTERBOX

I became a U.S. citizen without invoking God

In April, I became a United States citizen without God’s help.

In the application form for naturalization, I mentioned I was not willing to take the full Oath of Allegiance to the United States, and explained that the oath was fine, except for the last four words (“so help me God”).

During the naturalization interview, I was asked why, and answered that I am an atheist and do not believe in God. The person said it was OK and that I would simply be able to skip those words during the actual oath ceremony.

It felt great not to invoke God’s help to become a U.S. citizen!

Pierre Willard
California

Grover’s presentation showed FFRF’s value

We recently attended our local Unitarian Universalist Secular Humanists meeting, where the presenter was FFRF’s Associate Counsel Sam Grover. It was one of the best presentations we’ve attended. Sam’s strategy of describing past and current FFRF legal cases, and then using each case to illustrate particular facets of the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses of the First Amendment, was both informative and effective.

Afterwards, we (my husband and I) talked about the importance, especially in today’s political climate, of understanding how constitutional law supports Jefferson’s wall of separation.

We’ve been FFRF members for a long time, but we decided that one concrete way we could support the maintenance of church-state separation would be for both of us to become Life Members.

Many thanks to Sam for a great presentation and to everyone at FFRF. We are grateful for the work you do.

Susan and Lee Eberly
Iowa

Good arguments can come from disgraced people

While I deplore the private life of Lawrence Krauss, his public pronouncements — which include his YouTube videos, books, essays and articles — are excellent exhibitions of secular humanist thought. I hope it’s OK to continue to use his public works, and to quote them, even if he is disgraced for his private life.

Obviously, anti-humanists will, in ad hominem style, denounce any arguments of his because of his private life. But a good argument is a good argument, no matter who says it. We freethinkers should, at least among ourselves, continue to use his public works; his private life doesn’t affect it.

Andrew Orrin Lutes
Kentucky

Anniversary special section is a keeper

The 40th anniversary insert in the April issue with the timeline and Annie Laurie Gaylor’s article is wonderful. It’s a keeper! Thank you!

Chuck Berry
Pennsylvania

And so it is writ. . .

FFRF Member Thomas Drolsum sent us this photo of him wearing the “Out of the Closet Atheist” cap he won as one of FFRF’s weekly virtual billboard winners. If you’d like a chance to win FFRF merch, join either our “Out of the Closet Atheist” or “Unabashed Atheist” campaign and create your own virtual billboard. It’s free! Just go to billboards.ffrf.org/out-of-the-closet or billboards.ffrf.org/unabashed.



‘Imagine’ would be a great anthem for FFRF

Freethought Today and the work accomplished by FFRF staff are first-rate and much needed in our “fairytale” society. Keep up the great work!

I also have a suggestion. If FFRF ever decides to adopt an anthem, may I suggest John Lennon’s beautiful “Imagine.” (The only change would be to the line, “a brotherhood of man.” I’m sure there must be an FFRF member that could come up with a substitute line that encompasses women and children, too.) Overall, however, the lyrics embrace the values, sentiments and beliefs of freethinkers.

Caren Campbell
Illinois

Editor’s note: FFRF has used the lyrics from “Imagine” in various ways over the years, including “Imagine no religion” on billboards, on FFRF merchandise and as opening music for Freethought Radio.

Hoping for replacement for lost membership pin

Dear FFRF stalwarts, enclosed is a check for you to continue to carry the critical struggle for state-church separation.

My Life Membership in FFRF has been a source of considerable pride for me and I have worn the badge celebrating that membership very often.

I don’t wear it anymore, though, because it came off in a D.C. taxi. I hope the badge was found and is now a tasteful accessory to the cabbie’s

wardrobe.

My hope is that my donation might be enough to prompt you to send me another Life Membership pin to replace the one I lost.

More importantly, though, I hope the check helps keep your spirits up in these difficult times for the sentient. Like many people, I have trouble accepting the Trump administration because it is a threat to individual rights of almost every description.

John Reiser
Texas

Editor’s note: The pin is on its way!

Keep up your sense of humor despite vilification

The April issue of Freethought Today with coverage on Zenos Frudakis and Maryam Namazie was especially wonderful.

To help advance FFRF’s cause, I’ve included a check to be used for advertising. I believe this is a good strategy. It’s good to hear more and more citizens are coming around to the understanding the reality of religion in terms of social and political control.

It’s always gratifying to hear folks at FFRF maintain a sense of humor despite the grotesque and desperate attempts of ostracism, demonization and vilification, and to do so with such self-confident style!

Keep up the wonderful work ever so mindful of the Socratic suggestion, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Alan Maximuk
Iowa

FFRF deserves accolades for its legal successes

I am absolutely thrilled at the *FFRF v. Morris County* decision issued by the New Jersey Supreme Court. As a New Jersey resident and a Lifetime Member, I am especially proud of FFRF’s success in this matter.

On so many levels do FFRF and plaintiff David Steketee deserve congratulations!

When I first learned about FFRF by serendipitously finding your broadcast on Air America, I was impressed by your no-nonsense legal approach to defending the Establishment Clause. Your attorneys know the law and articulate it exceedingly well in court filings. You choose superior counsel. You foster and manage supportive relationships with member plaintiffs.

I am proud to be a Lifetime Member of FFRF. I know you will keep up the excellent work.

Eugene P. Provost
New Jersey

Black Collar Crime section draws me in

At 87, as I use up my remaining years on Earth, I write hundreds of letters about my causes and passions. I also browse the National Catholic Reporter and the National Catholic Register to see what the institutional church is doing to its members.

I am a member of FFRF and just finished reading your latest issue of Freethought Today. I don’t know why, but I am drawn to the Black Collar Crime section, probably because I have been a strident critic of the Catholic Church for decades.

I also bought Anne Laurie Gaylor’s book, *Woe to the Women*. It was a dazzling compilation of the nastiness of the bible, and I applaud her work, and that of FFRF in general.

John Minck
California

Yes, you can be both a patriot and an atheist

I am a veteran and an atheist. For years, I have made regular modest donations to the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I am not a member of the VFW, but consider its work to support veterans and their families to be worthwhile.

From time to time, the VFW sends out pre-printed cards to be signed and returned, and those will be given to hospitalized vets as a gesture of appreciation.

The most recent one I received had the phrase “God bless you and God bless the United States.” I mailed this one back, unsigned, to the VFW headquarters with a letter stating that, as a nonreligious person, I could not sign it. I also offered that if the VFW did not care to receive donations from atheists, they should let me know. I have received no response. However, the organization continues to regard me as a “distinguished member of the VFW’s Patriot’s Circle.” Apparently, it is OK with taking money from a nonbeliever.

If anyone asks, yes, you can be a patriot and an atheist.

David M. Shea
Maryland

‘Badly-written bible’ column was wonderful

I’d like to give a special note of appreciation for Valerie Tarico’s article in the April issue, “Why is the bible so badly written?” Most of the Free-thought Today articles are eye-opening and informative, but this one really struck a special note.

Raised evangelical, my brain was programmed to need to believe that the bible was a guidebook from God. As a physics student, it quickly became clear that there were huge flaws in the “Word.” Why did the all-knowing God neglect to tell his chosen people that the world is round? He knew that the Earth rotated around the sun but refused to tell us?

And then there are all of those rules about what to not eat. Why didn’t God just tell us about bacteria and viruses. The “For God so loved the world . . .” thing fell apart when I realized that the “all-knowing God” wrote us this huge human-life user’s manual, complete with a recent (2,000 years ago) revision, using hundreds of pages of begats, and didn’t care enough to tell us about atoms and supernova and all the other wonders that he supposedly created.

I learn so much by reading Free-thought Today. Thank you for your fair and balanced tabloid.

Philip Lentz
Arizona

We, too, can fight small state-church battles

At an intake booth at the Barnes-Jewish West County Hospital in St. Louis, I was greeted by a wizened lady, possibly as old as me. Her name tag said “Dixie.”

As she asked the usual questions and keyed in my answers, my gaze was drawn to a sign on the small counter that separated us. It looked like a rubber eraser, only bigger, and it bore the message, “Jesus erases all of our mistakes.”

I pointed to the sign and said to Dixie, “I’m sorry, is this a Christian hospital?”

“Yes, BJC is Barnes-Jewish CHRISTIAN.”

“Is it ONLY a Christian hospital?” I asked.

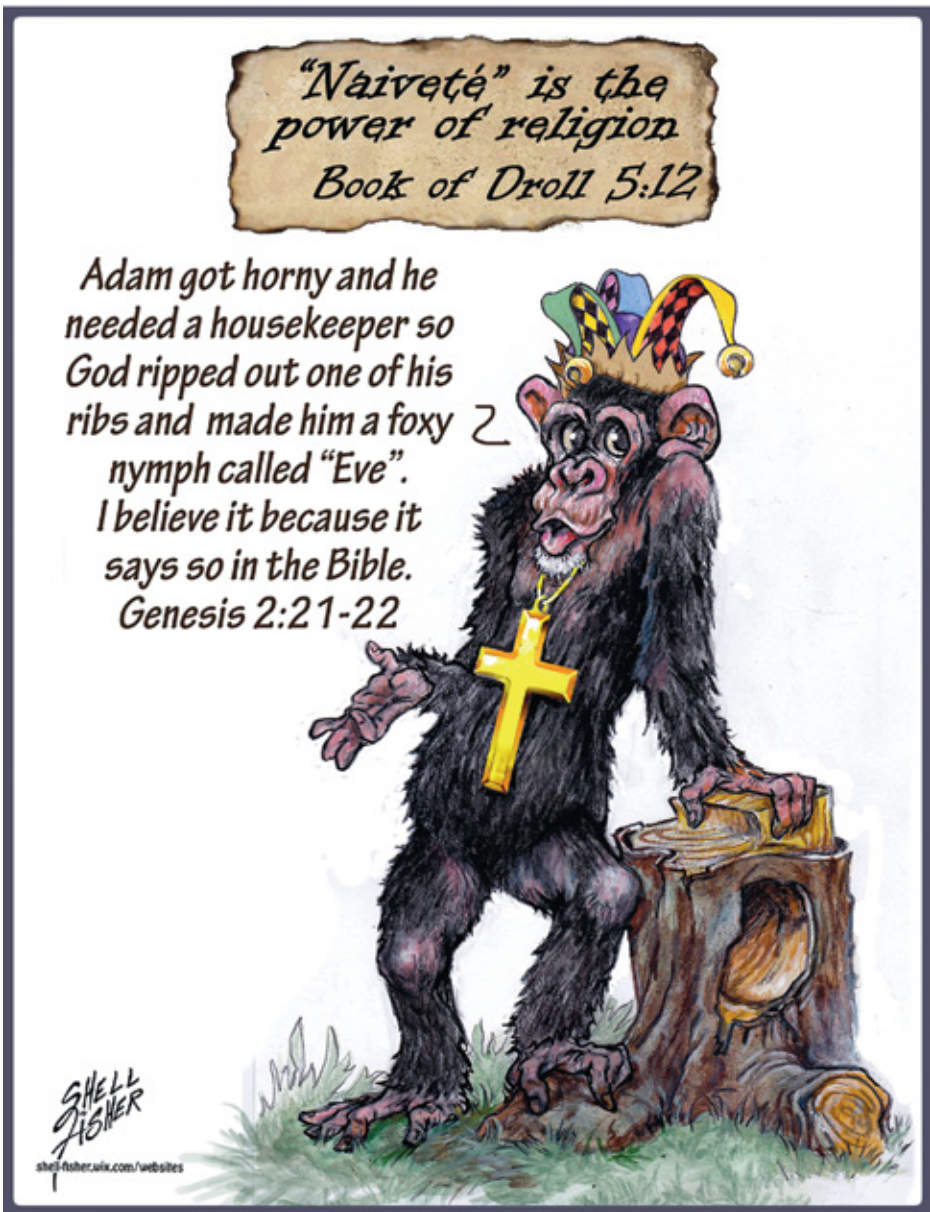
“No, sir. Someone gave this to me as a gift, because of my faith.”

Dixie had further questions, and she asked them with an edge of crisp politeness. As she did, I jotted down her name and the offending message. Then I shifted gears.

“You know, if somebody gave this to you as a personal message, maybe it would be better to turn it so it faces you. Otherwise, it looks like it’s something the hospital is telling us, and that would be offensive to a lot of people.”

She finished her data entry, then turned to me and smiled. “Thank you.

Holy Smoke



Thank you for putting it so kindly,” she said, reaching over to shake my hand. “I appreciate that.”

Later, as I passed by her booth on the way out, I was tempted to look, but decided that would send the wrong message.

Robert Gordon
Missouri

My one-act play was my own ‘clergy project’

I loved John Compere’s article in the May issue about his involvement in The Clergy Project and his experience as a doubting minister. Although I’ve never been a minister, I have a “clergy project” of my own.

One of the first Freethought Today’s I read (in 1993) contained an article called “From Fear to Freedom,” by Professor Robert Arends, in which he wrote about being pressured by his father to become a minister (which had been the father’s own dream, but which he couldn’t achieve — so he’d make one of his sons achieve it for him!).

Being an actor and playwright, I wrote a fictionalized one-act dramatization of Arends’ story and called it “I’m on My Journey Home.”

The script sat in my dresser drawer

until 2013, when I impulsively decided to enter it into the Community Theatre Association of Michigan’s (CTAM) Playwriting Award competition. Much to my surprise, it won! As part of the award, community theatres across Michigan were allowed to present the play, royalty-free, for the next two years. None did, but the play is now in CTAM’s script library.

It’s just too bad that, while I was writing the play, Arends died. I’d have loved to send him a copy. And it’s also too bad he didn’t live to see The Clergy Project — he would have felt right at home, I’m sure.

Andrew C. Jones
Michigan

Lack of divine mercy prompted this poem

My wife and I are Life Members of FFRF.

Over the years, I’ve written several poems that mock the absurdity of religion and supernatural claims.

My words are aimed at readers of all educational levels.

Our loving little dog died a horrible death in the vet ICU after being torn apart by coyotes. The blatantly obvious absence of divine mercy in this world was the inspiration for this poem.

Don’t You Ever Tell Me

You say your Lord sees everything,
from oh so high above
And fills this world with never-ending mercy, grace, and love
But where was he last Tuesday night
when my precious little dog Jody
Was torn apart and left to die by a pack of wild coyotes

You can pray if you want, you can pray if you please
But don’t you ever tell me
To believe that childish fairy tale
And get down upon my knees

In war after war the faithful kneeled
and prayed to their loving god Jesus
But the bombs still fell and the shells
still burst and blew them all to pieces
They swear that he will heal you, if
you just pray in his name
Tell that to the millions who prayed,
and are still blind, deaf or lame

You can pray if you want, you can pray if you please
But don’t you ever tell me
To believe that childish fairy tale
And get down upon my knees

They say that he will hear you, if you just pray in his name
Your problems will all go away, this ain’t no silly con game
Tell that to the children who suffer
and scream, as they die of growing cancers
They cry and beg and pray to Jesus,
but never get any answers

You can pray if you want, you can pray if you please
But don’t you ever tell me
To believe that childish fairy tale
And get down upon my knees

Bruce Flamm
Maryland

Trump gives forgettable Memorial Day message

Memorial Day is a solemn and sacred national day of remembrance and reverence for the brave American military men and women who sacrificed their lives for this country.


President Trump tweeted a moronic and meaningless 45-word message to the nation, containing the insensitive terms “happy” and “nice,” 38 words of self-promotion, and only nine words mentioning our Memorial Day observance or fallen heroes and she-roes.

Trump, who dodged the Vietnam War because of bone spurs, needs to be enlightened that Memorial Day is not about him and not a “happy” or “nice” memorial. It is a sad and serious one about deceased patriots. He obviously does not comprehend its meaning or does not care. His tepid tweet was inconsiderate and insulting to all American families who lost loved ones to the tragedy of war and all American veterans who lost comrades.

Appropriate and respectful Memorial Day proclamations from patriotic past presidents can be easily checked on the internet and compared to Trump’s inappropriate and disrespectful tweet. “Make Me Great Again” Trump needs to spend less time promoting himself and more time demonstrating American presidential dignity.
John Compere
Brigadier General, US Army (Retired)
Disabled American Veteran (Vietnam)
Texas

Yip Harburg,
from his book:

Rhymes for the Irreverent

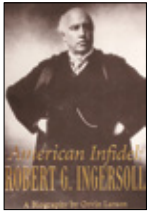


Less Majeste

No matter how high or great the throne,
What sits on it is the same as your own.

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation
Buy it from FFRF online - shop.ffrf.org

American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll



By Orvin Larsen
Prof. Larsen writes with affection and respect of this illustrious 19th century freethinker.

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

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Joseph Marshall, Pensacola, FL: Battery on a law enforcement officer. Marshall, pastor at St. John Divine Missionary Baptist Church, is charged with failure to leave an area near the church on Easter Sunday after a woman and her 2 children were hit by a car.

The police report alleges that Marshall screamed and cursed at officers and had to be restrained by parishioners. The officer stated he “came at her as if he was going to attack” before he was pulled away and taken inside the church. *Source: WEAR, 4-19-18*


Andrew Dickson, 30, University City, MO: Child molestation and statutory sodomy. Dickson, youth pastor at Central Presbyterian Church in Clayton, is charged with fondling and engaging in oral sex with a minor from March 1 to April 1 at Dickson’s home. *Source: Post-Dispatch, 4-16-18*

Eduardo E. Cornejo, 34, Lexington, SC: Criminal sexual conduct. Cornejo is charged with assaulting a woman while he was an associate pastor at Columbia First Seventh-Day Adventist Church in 2017, where he was later terminated. Other alleged victims have since come forward. *Source: WIS-TV, 4-16-18*

Jon C. McKinney, 59, Terre Haute, IN: 1 felony and 2 misdemeanor counts of resisting law enforcement. McKinney, lead pastor at N. Terre Haute Christian Church, was allegedly “verbally aggressive and confrontational” with an officer he approached in a parking lot and was then followed home, where the situation escalated and he was tased, a Vigo County deputy said. *Source: WTHI, 4-13-18*

Melquisedec Chan, 52, Mission, TX: Aggravated sexual assault and practicing medicine without a license. Chan, co-pastor with his wife of Iglesia Vida Abundante, is accused of molesting an unconscious parishioner after injecting her with benzodiazepines. Chan calls himself a “professional surgeon” on his website but isn’t licensed in the U.S., according to the Texas Medical Board. He’s been visiting the woman at her home “to follow up with her, after a surgery she got done in Mexico in which he was present,” the complaint states.

The woman’s brother told her he saw Chan placing his genitals in her mouth April 9 “while she was sedated,” the complaint states. *Source: McAllen Mon-*



Suzanne Owen is charged with seducing a male student.

itor, 4-13-18

Suzanne L. Owen, 35, N. Fort Myers, FL: Custodial sexual battery. Owen, a married high school teacher at Evangelical Christian School, is charged with having sex off-campus with a male student in early April after texting for several weeks.

An online photo showed Owen wearing a T-shirt that says “I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.” A 2005 graduate of Free Will Baptist Bible College in Nashville, TN, she was a recent finalist for the Golden Halo award, given for excellence in the classroom. *Source: News-Press, 4-12-18*

Rosendo F. Dacal, 73, McCandless, PA: Solicitation of child pornography, unlawful contact with a minor and criminal use of a communications facility. Dacal, a permanent deacon at All Saints Catholic Parish and a county jail chaplain, allegedly sent and solicited obscene images from an undercover officer posing as a 14-year-old boy in December. *Source: Post-Gazette, 4-11-18*

Terry Wells, 42, Trenton, NJ: Insurance fraud. Wells, founder of My Brother’s Keeper Ministries, is charged with making false or misleading statements to Allstate Insurance about a car accident in January 2017. He pleaded guilty last September to theft by deception for bilking a deceased congregant’s estate out of \$12,000. *Source: The Trentonian, 4-10-18*

Acton Bowen, 37, Southside, AL: 2 counts each of 2nd-degree sodomy and enticing a child for immoral purposes and 3 counts of sexual abuse. He’s accused of assaults on boys between the ages of 12 and 17 over a period of several years. He founded Ac-

ton Bowen Outreach Ministries and is a regular contributor on Fox News on religion. His wife has filed for divorce and was granted a restraining order. *Source: Hoover Patch, 4-10-18*

Johannes Vermeer, 58, Chilliwack, BC: 2 counts each of possession of child pornography and accessing child pornography. Vermeer was executive pastor of Main Street Church since 2009 before being fired recently.

“We actually reported this to police when we heard there was this activity on the computer system,” senior pastor Shawn Vandop said. Vermeer was also an executive committee member of the B.C. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches but is no longer listed on its website. *Source: North Delta Reporter, 4-9-18*

Prabhu, aka Balaganesh, 28, Chennai, India: Murder. Prabhu, a Hindu priest at Vadapalani Sivan Temple, allegedly confessed to killing his wife of 8 years with a hammer because the couple couldn’t have children. He and another priest, **Manoj Kumar**, are accused of staging a crime scene to make it look like robbery. *Source: Times of India, 4-9-18*

Carlo A. Capella, Vatican City: Suspicion of possessing and distributing child pornography online. Capella, a Vatican diplomat, was recalled from the Washington Embassy in September 2017 after authorities told the Vatican about a possible violation of child pornography laws.

Police in Windsor, Ontario, alleged Capella uploaded child porn from a social networking site during the 2016 Christmas holiday from Dec. 24-27. He’s in custody while Vatican prosecutors prepare the case. *Source: USA Today, 4-7-18*

Benjamin R. Roberts, 24, Abilene, TX: Indecency with a child and possession of child pornography. Roberts was an employee at Wylie Baptist Church’s Child Development Center and child care programs at 2 other Abilene churches. It’s alleged he downloaded child porn from July 19 through Sept. 26, 2017.

Police Sgt. Lynn Beard said Roberts admitted inappropriately touching a child under 12 last year and said police seized several electronic devices and a pair of child’s underwear during a search. There are 21 allegations of abuse, with 8 “confirmed” cases, the affidavit said. *Source: KTXS, 4-6-18*

David Holmes, 80, Council Bluffs, IA: Sexual assault of a child. Holmes, a Methodist pastor who retired in 2002, is accused of engaging in consensual oral sex in February 2017 in the Clarkson Hospital parking garage in Omaha with a 14-year-old boy he met on the dating app Grindr.

Holmes allegedly told police he then introduced the boy to **Robert Recoy**, 64, who was later found dead from an overdose in his kitchen. “It is believed Recoy took his own life due to this investigation,” an affidavit said. *Source: KETV, 4-3-18*

Robert Ross, 70, Mesquite, TX: Knowingly failing to make a required child abuse report. Ross, lead pastor at Open Door Baptist Church, allegedly ignored repeated sexual encounters between staff and a minor. **Steven Winn**, 33, a volunteer youth leader, is charged with 3 counts of sexual assault of a child. His father, **Larry Winn**, 65, Open Door’s bus minister, faces the same charge. *Source: Fox 4, 4-3-18*

Russell Davis, 65, Seabrook, NH: Rape, rape of a child with force and indecent assault and battery on a person 14 or over. Charges involve the same alleged victim and incidents in April 2004 in Massachusetts when Davis was a licensed (not ordained) United Methodist minister. A church spokesperson said his license was revoked in 2015 for reasons not related to sexual misconduct. *Source: WMUR, 4-2-18*

Noel Anderson, 22, McKinney, TX: Aggravated sexual assault of a child and 2 counts of indecency with a child/sexual contact. Anderson, a primary grade assistant at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is accused of molesting 4 children between the ages of 2 and 6 during the past 7 years. *Source: NBC-DFW, 4-2-18*

Jeffrey D. Rolen, 66, Wise, VA: 10 counts of indecent liberties with a child. Rolen, pastor of Highlands Fellowship, is charged with sexual involvement with an underage female in the 1980s when he was director of Camp Bethel Ministries. *Source: Times News, 3-30-18*

Matthew D. Patterson, 45, Pittsburgh: 8 counts of aggravated sexual battery. Patterson, pastor until resigning last September of Nolensville Road Baptist Church in Nashville, TN, is accused of molesting multiple victims, mostly boys, from 1998 to 2017.

Children alleged he asked them to sit on his face and stomach, sometimes in their underwear. Patterson was a vocal opponent of 2003 anti-discrimination bills to protect jobs and housing for lesbians, gays and bisexuals. *Source: The Tennessean, 3-30-18*

William W. Williamson, 38, Dothan, AL: 3 counts of sexual abuse of a child less than 12 years old. Williamson, Mt. Gilead Baptist Church children’s pastor, allegedly assaulted 2 children at a church camp event. He’s married with 7 children. *Source: WTVY, 3-30-18*

Kirbyjon H. Caldwell, 64, Houston: 13 counts of wire fraud, money laundering and conspiracy to allegedly bilk millions of dollars from elderly and vulnerable investors. **Gregory A. Smith**, 55, Shreveport, LA, is also charged.

It’s alleged Caldwell used his influence as pastor of Windsor Village United Methodist Church and Smith used his influence as operator of Smith Financial Group LLC to lure investors to pay more than \$1 million for Chinese bonds that aren’t recognized by China’s current government and have no investment value. The indictment said Caldwell “used religious references to give investors hope they would soon be repaid.” *Source: CBS, 3-30-18*

Melva Washington, 60, Duluth, GA: 2 counts of first-degree forgery, 4 counts of false statements or writings and 3 counts of unauthorized practice of law. Washington, head pastor at Anointed Vision Church, is accused of claiming she could help people apply for “Dreamer” immigration status, charging them between \$500 and \$1,000 but never delivering the help she promised and forging documents. There are more than 1,000 alleged victims, said detective Nermin Cultarevic. *Source: WMAZ, 3-30-18*

The unidentified treasurer at St. David’s Episcopal Church, W. Seneca, NY, has been fired for allegedly stealing at least \$55,000 from the parish, said a letter from rector Claudia Scheda. The name and pronouns identifying gender were blacked out in the letter given to media. Police have been notified. *Source: WGRZ, 3-27-18*

Hubon Sandridge, 67, Memphis, TN: Stalking. Sandridge, pastor at Thomas Missionary Baptist Church, is charged with sending sexually explicit messages on Facebook to a woman in February and March and continuing to do so after being warned by police to stop. *Source: WREG, 3-25-18*

Menachem A. Weiss, 46, Los Angeles: 2 counts of aggravated sexual assault. Weiss is accused of assaulting an underage male in 1999 when he was serving as a rabbi in Woodcliff Lake, NJ. *Source: nj.com, 3-22-18*

Chad A. White Sr., 44, Dayton, OH: Suspicion of rape and gross sexual imposition. White, pastor of Mt. Carmel Missionary Baptist Church, is accused of touching the breasts and other private areas of a 51-year-old woman in March and attempting “to have sexual conduct without her consent.” *Source: Daily News, 3-23-18*

Pleaded / Convicted

Anthony Morris, 50, Toledo, OH: Pleaded no contest to misdemeanor assault. He’s pastor at St. Paul’s AME Zion Church. His wife, **Zelda Morris**, 46, pleaded no contest to criminal endangering. Their daughter, **Kamali Morris**, 18, pleaded no contest to disorderly conduct.

Nickema Turner, a Sunday school teacher, told police she was assaulted by the Morrises and that Zelda Morris dumped out her purse and took some items. The pastor, she alleged, pulled a gun and pointed it at her. *Source: Toledo Blade, 4-19-18*

John Calnan, 79, Cork, Ireland: Pleaded guilty to

sexual assaults on 3 girls in the mid-1970s while he was a Catholic priest. Calnan has 3 previous sexual assault convictions. For the latest, in March, he received a suspended sentence because the judge said it’s pointless to jail him at this point in his life.

In that case, he admitted penetrating a girl’s vagina in the school kitchenette while she made her First Confession. *Source: Southern Star, 4-16-18*

Alvin N. McNeil, 56, Prichard, AL: Guilty by jury of rape and sex abuse of a child under 12. McNeil was pastor of Open Door True Worship Apostolic Church when arrested in 2016 for raping and impregnating a 16-year-old girl. The girl’s mother alleged he also sexually touched the girl’s sister, age 11. *Source: WKRG, 4-10-18*

Stephen M. Arellano, 30, Las Cruces, NM: Pleaded guilty to traveling in interstate commerce to engage in sex with a minor. When arrested in October, he was pastor of Apostolic Assembly Church and was the church’s District of New Mexico youth president.

Arellano admitted traveling to El Paso, TX, to have sex with a girl. She was 15 when they exchanged nude photos by phone and when he helped make a video for her Sweet 16 birthday party. *Source: justice.gov, 4-9-18*

William T. Coontz, 51, Fort Lauderdale, FL: Guilty by jury of 3 counts of failure to pay taxes and 4 counts of aiding and assisting in the filing of false tax returns. Coontz was pastor of Rock Wealth International Ministries in Charlotte, NC, from 2010-14 and wrote books on faith and finances such as “Please Don’t Repo My Car” and “Breaking the Spirit of Debt.” He allegedly boosted his income by overbilling churches for travel expenses and by concealing money he made from speeches, books and other products. *Source: WYFF, 4-4-18*

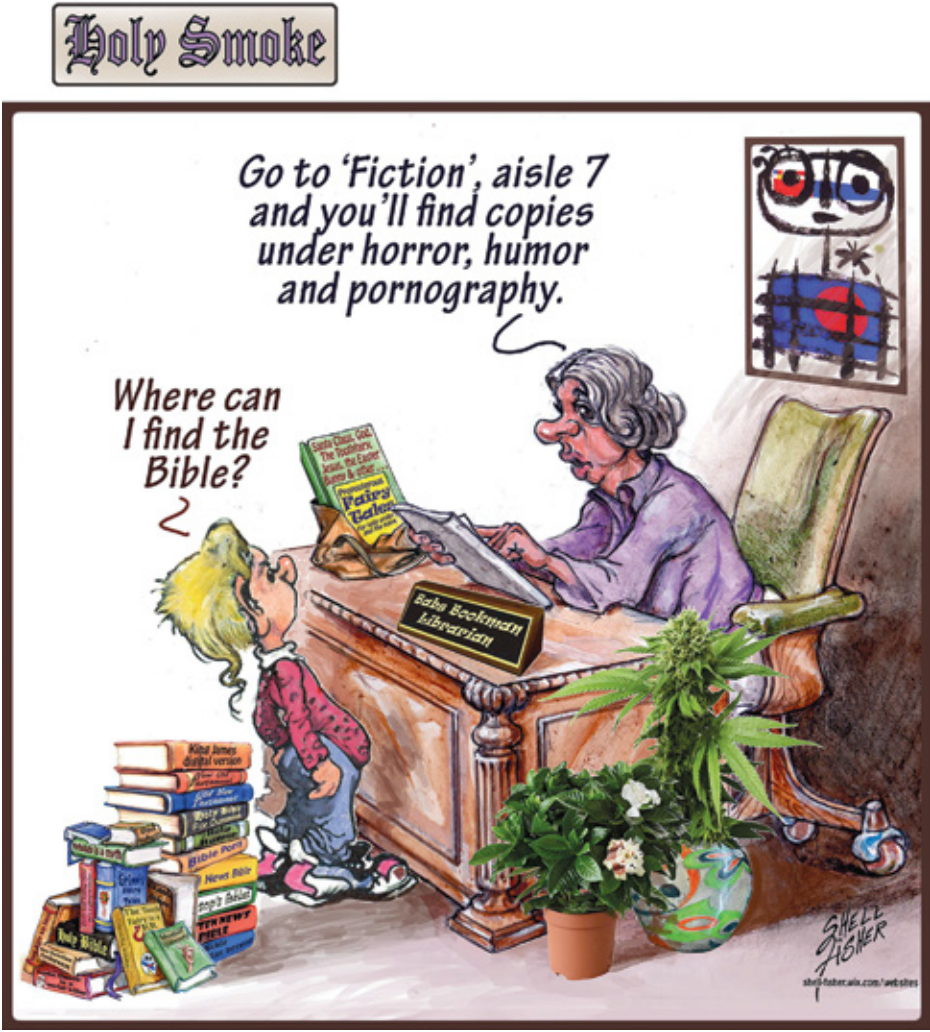
Elozer Porges, 44, and **Joel Lowy**, 29, Brooklyn, NY: Pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud. The men, who worked at Central United Talmudic Academy, admitted scamming the federal government out of \$3.2 million in funds intended to feed needy students from 2013-15. The funds were issued through the state Department of Health as reimbursement for meals that were reported but never served. *Source: NY Daily News, 3-30-18*

Janet Farquhar, 70, Port Seton, Scotland: Pleaded guilty to embezzling just over \$100,000 between 2008-16 from Chalmers Memorial Church, a Church of Scotland parish where she was treasurer since 1999. *Source: London Times, 3-30-18*

Klint Bitter, 34, Omaha, NE: Pleaded guilty to attempted 1st-degree sexual assault. Bitter, youth pastor at Christ Community Church, arranged to meet a 15-year-old girl in 2017 through **DeArch Stubblefield**, then 18, via Craigslist. Stubblefield is serving consecutive 10- to 20-year terms for human trafficking and attempted aiding and abetting of sexual assault of a minor. *Source: World-Herald, 3-27-18*

Jonathan Foster, 35, and **Grace Foster**, 34, Upper Tulpehocken Township, PA: Guilty by jury of involuntary manslaughter and endangering the welfare of a child for the 2016 death of their daughter, Ella Grace Foster, 2, from untreated pneumonia. The Fosters, who belong to Faith Tabernacle Congregation, rely on faith healing and called their daughter’s death “God’s will.”

They’ve given up custody of 6 other children. The girl’s grandfather, who is church pastor, was charged



with failure to report suspected abuse but the charge was dismissed. *Source: Reading Eagle, 3-22-18*

Sentenced

Victor Taxgomez, aka Ever Oliveros-Cano, 50, Menlo Park, CA: 8 years in prison after pleading no contest to child molestation and 2 counts of sexual battery. Taxgomez, pastor at Senor Justicia Nuestr, was convicted of assaults on 2 sisters and their friend, ages 13, 15 and 17, from 2011-15 while praying with and “cleansing” them. *Source: Daily Journal, 4-16-18*

Philip J. Murphy, 53, Sunshine, Australia: 12 months in jail, suspended, after pleading guilty to transmitting child pornography. Murphy, vicar at Holy Apostles Anglican Church, was charged with having numerous online and Skype conversations with men about pedophilia in 2016-17. His username was “Pervert.”

In one chat he said he wanted to molest children as young as 2, prosecutor Jessica Mackay told the court. In another chat with a man who said he had sons aged 2 and 4, Murphy replied “I’m in a very pedo mood.”

“I accept that there was no sexual activity with children, nor were there any photos or videos involved in these communications,” said Judge Phillip Coish, who ordered Murphy to undergo sex offender treatment. *Source: news.com/au, 4-21-18*

Paul Moore, 82, Largs, Scotland: 9 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of molesting 3 underage boys and a seminarian between 1977-96 while he was a Catholic priest. The church never reported allegations and he was sent for treatment in Canada before reassignment. The youngest victim was 5 when Moore assaulted him at his primary school. *Source: BBC, 4-11-18*

Robert J. Dando, 53: 9 years, 4 months in prison after pleading guilty to 13 counts of sexual abuse of boys aged 10 to 15 between 1985-2007 when he served Baptist churches in the UK. Dando was arrested last August after being deported from the U.S. after completing an 8-year sentence in Virginia. He had pleaded guilty to 4 counts of molesting the sons of family friends while on visits to their home over a period of several years. *Source: BBC, 4-10-18*

Matthew J. Tague, 44, Carlsbad, CA: 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of lewd act on a child. Tague, pastor at North Coast Calvary Chapel, was charged with molesting a girl in 2016-17 when she was 12 and 13. Tague’s wife, who is the girl’s legal guardian, caught him in the act in May 2017 and reported him to authorities.

The child was born with fetal alcohol syndrome, which made her more vulnerable to abuse and less likely to tell anyone, prosecutor Patricia Lavernicocca said. *Source: Union-Tribune, 4-10-18*

Brian P. Werth, 34, Rockville, MD: 3 years in prison for convictions of sexual offense and sexual abuse of a minor. Werth, a youth minister at St. Elizabeth Catholic Church, was charged with molesting a 16-year-old girl. They began texting in 2014, and on or about May 20, 2016, Werth kissed her and had other inappropriate contact with her during a youth event at the church, prosecutors said. *Source: Rockville Patch, 4-5-18*

Fernando D. Maldonado, 37, Martinez, CA: 34 years in prison for convictions on 23 counts of child molestation. Maldonado, pastor at Morello Avenue Baptist Church, fled to Mexico in December during his trial and was later captured in Cancun and extradited. He was accused of assaulting a parishioner for more than 2 years, starting when she was 13. *Source: East Bay Times, 4-13-18*

Chad A. Coe, 36, Elgin, IL: 7 years in prison after pleading guilty to aggravated criminal sexual abuse. Coe, a youth leader at First Congregational Church, was accused of grooming the victim when she was 14 and assaulting her at age 15 in the church basement. Coe can have his sentence cut in half for good behavior. The victim and her family have sued Coe, the parish and the United Church of Christ Illinois Conference. *Source: Daily Herald, 4-2-18*

Wiley G. Leverett, 58, Centerville, GA: 35 days in jail, 11 months’ probation and \$1,000 fine after a jury found him guilty of sexual battery of a child under 16 for touching a 9-year-old girl’s thigh while he drove a bus in 2012 for Solid Rock Community Church, where he was pastor. He was found not guilty of child molestation. He was originally indicted for touching 4 girls from age 8 to 16. *Source: WMAZ, 3-29-18*

Wilmer R. Cruz, 38, Lilburn, GA: Obstruction of law enforcement, aggravated assault against law enforcement, obstruction of a 911 call and related charges for a March confrontation with police officers looking for a 16-year-old girl reported missing. Cruz is pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Evangelica. His wife, Cristina Cruz, 37, and 2 teen sons also face charges.

As the family swarmed the officers trying to get the girl out of the Cruzes’ car, Cristina Cruz grabbed his Taser and pointed it at him, Sgt. Ryan Long testified. “I grabbed Mrs. Cruz by the arm and told her she was under arrest for grabbing my Taser,” Long said. “She refused and would only say ‘Jesus love me.’”

The girl is believed to be pregnant by the Cruzes’ 17-year-old son. *Source: Daily Post, 3-28-18*

Aracely Meza, 52, Balch Springs, TX: 99 years in prison and \$10,000 in fines after a jury found her guilty of felony injury to a child causing serious bodily injury. Meza, co-founder with her husband of Iglesia Internacional Jesus es el Rey, was charged with



During the Latin American Freethought Conference in Arequipa Peru in May (see page 3), in light of the recent news of Chilean bishops who resigned over the pedophilia scandal the week before, FFRF Co-President Dan Barker asked Ernesto Elizalde, a skeptic and graphic artist from Mexico who also spoke at the conference, if he could illustrate the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:14: “Let the little children come to me.” [Ernesto produced this scary drawing in less than five minutes.]

starving 2-year-old Benjamin Aparicio to death over 25 days in 2015.

Meza claimed the boy was possessed by demons and that God told her to starve them out. A video shows her “rising ceremony” to resurrect him the day he died. Charges are pending against the boy’s parents, Zenon and Liliana Aparicio, who are followers of Meza. *Source: Washington Post, 3-24-18*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Gregory M. Altermatt and the **Catholic Archdiocese of Hartford**, CT, are defendants in a suit filed by Matthew Cornell, who alleges Altermatt molested him in the 1970s and 1980s he was 7 to 15 years old. Altermatt, now on senior status as a priest and living in New Haven, hasn’t been criminally charged.

Cornell alleges after his mother died in 1979, the priest offered to help his father with child care because he also had a daughter who was developmentally disabled, then molested him at the rectory, the Cornell home, a movie theater and at Altermatt’s mother’s Florida condominium. *Source: Hartford Courant, 4-18-18*

The First Assembly of God Church, Olney, TX, and the **North Texas District Council Assemblies of God** are being sued for \$1 million by the mother of an alleged sexual abuse victim of youth minister **Ryan A. Winner**, who was sentenced to 60 years in 2016 for producing child pornography.

The boy participated in the church’s Royal Rangers youth program when he was about 6 to 8 years old “at the behest of First AOG of Olney and ... Winner,” the suit states. *Source: Times Record News, 4-14-18*

William Sheals, 71, and **Hopewell Missionary Baptist**, Norcross, GA, are being sued by Yvonne Byrd, who alleges Sheals pushed her so hard while blessing her at an altar call that she fell backward and suffered traumatic brain injury when her head hit the floor. *Source: Journal-Constitution, 4-14-18*

The **Catholic Order of St. Augustine** and **Providence High School** in New Lenox, IL, are defendants in a suit filed by Robert Krankvich, 38, who alleges he was “repeatedly orally and anally raped” in the mid-1990s by **Richard McGrath**, a priest and former principal at the school.

McGrath abruptly retired in December during a probe of “potentially inappropriate material on his mobile device.” That investigation was closed after McGrath refused to turn over his cellphone but the case is being reviewed, said state’s attorney spokesman Chuck Pelkie. *Source: Sun-Times, 4-12-18*

Adrian Cristobal, the former Catholic Archdiocese of Agana chancellor assigned to the Diocese of Phoenix, AZ, was called back to Guam after he was sued by plaintiff “J.L.C.” for allegedly molesting him as an altar boy from 1995-97. *Source: Pacific Daily News, 4-11-18*

Joseph L. Bishop, 85, and the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** have been sued by McKenna Denson, 55, who alleges Bishop raped her in 1984 when he was president of the LDS Missionary Training Center in Provo, UT.

Inside a “secret room” at the center, Bishop tore open her blouse and the seam of her skirt before penetrating her, Denson alleges. Earlier, she secretly recorded and shared with media a recent conversation with Bishop in which he admitted having a sexu-

al addiction. *Source: Salt Lake Tribune, 4-4-18*

Jonathan Wehrle, pastor of St. Martha Catholic Parish in Okemos, MI, is being sued by the Princeton Excess and Surplus Lines Insurance Corp. Wehrle is charged with embezzling \$5 million from the parish. His 6-bedroom, 12-bathroom home is in receivership.

The insurance company says it’s paid out about \$2.5 million to the Diocese of Lansing so far to cover losses from the embezzlement. “While this suit is

pending, nobody wants to see the property go to waste or be damaged before the property can be forfeited,” said company spokesman Randy Marmor. *Source: State Journal, 3-30-18*

Legal Developments

Kevin Wallin, 66, a Connecticut Catholic priest dubbed “Monsignor Meth” for his 2013 convictions for selling methamphetamine, will not be sent back to prison despite failing 6 required drug tests while on probation.

At a hearing, Judge Alfred Covello ruled against incarceration recommendations of the probation officer and U.S. attorney. Wallin told the court he was working on his addiction and is getting needed support from the community. *Source: AP, 4-19-18*

Major L. Hillman, 24, Lynchburg, VA, who’s serving a 6-year sentence for indecent liberties with a child in 2015, had his appeal denied by the Virginia Court of Appeals. While admitting to using Snapchat to exchange sexually explicit photos and videos while he was a youth pastor at Thomas Terrace Baptist Church, he argued that the judge erred in allowing evidence showing that he knew or should have known the girl was under 15 and that he had exposed his erect penis to her.

The court rejected the claim that exposure requires a person to be in the physical presence of a victim and ruled that her age was documented in church records. *Source: AP, 4-8-18*

Richard C. Mick, 56, Sandusky, OH, sentenced to life in 2016 for raping a 5-year-old girl in 1999 and fondling an 8-year-old boy’s genitals in 2003 while he was pastor at Lighthouse Baptist Church, had his convictions overturned by an appeals court due to ineffective counsel. A new trial was ordered.

After the trial started, Mick’s attorney, K. Ronald Bailey, declined to participate further because the judge refused to delay it. He was held in contempt and served 30 days in jail. The state argued on appeal this was a ploy to get a mistrial declared.

Two more alleged victims testified during the trial, including Mick’s daughter, who testified he raped her twice, when she was 13 and 14 or 15. He still faces gross sexual imposition charges in another county. *Source: Sandusky Register, 3-17-18*

Allegations

Les Hughey, 64, senior pastor at Highlands Church in Scottsdale, AZ, coerced her in the 1970s into giving up her virginity and having sex with him when she was age 17-19, alleges Tracy Epler. At the time, Hughey was married and led her youth group at First Baptist Church in Modesto, CA.

“I was a good little girl and he was a powerful youth pastor,” said Epler, now 59. “I always cried after. I cried afterwards in the bathroom because I’m cleaning myself and I don’t know what it is.” She said church leaders told her to “bury the secret.”

At least 6 other women who were members of Scottsdale Baptist Church, where Hughey was youth pastor after being removed from the Modesto church, have since alleged he touched their genitals while giving “full-body” massages. He’s been placed on leave at Highlands Church.

“I sinned and harmed the most important relationships in my life,” Hughey said in an April statement to media. It called his infidelity “consensual relations with fellow college-aged staff.” *Source: Modesto Bee, 4-21-18*

Removed / Resigned

Joseph McLoone, 55, resigned as pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Downingtown, PA, in the wake of allegations of financial irregularity and inappropriate relationships with adults. It’s among the largest parishes, with 4,700 families, in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, said spokesman Ken Gavin.

McLoone allegedly set up an off-the-books bank account in the parish’s name that only he could access. At least \$50,000 worth of expenses and ATM withdrawals need to be explained, Gavin said. About \$1,500 of “personal expenses of an inappropriate nature ... were related to relationships with adults” who weren’t parish members, Gavin said. *Source: philly.com, 4-15-18*

William “Bill” Hybels, 66, resigned as pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in S. Barrington, IL. The church hosts about 25,000 worshippers each weekend at its main campus and 7 satellite sites. At least 7 women have accused Hybels of improper conduct and abuse of power.

Vonda Dyer, a former leader of the church’s vocal ministry, alleged Hybels kissed and caressed her stomach in an overseas hotel 20 years ago, and said she didn’t go public until now because she thought the encounter and others like it were isolated incidents. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 4-10-18*

Yousry “Yost” Zakhary, Woodway, TX, was removed as an elder at First Baptist Church after he resigned as Woodway city manager. Sandra Bickel, a 17-year city employee, alleged in a civil suit that Zakhary has “permeated” city offices with “ongoing lewd, inappropriate and sexualized comments often directed at specific female employees” and “engaged in sexualized, unwanted touching of multiple female employees and/or former employees.”

The suit alleges Zakhary ridiculed employees about their weight and breast size, took unauthorized photos of a woman and showed them to others. *Source: Waco Tribune, 4-9-18*

John Ferone, Cincinnati, was removed from the faculty at St. Xavier High School, a Jesuit school. Hamilton County prosecutor Joe Deters said Ferone was accused of soliciting sex from a student via a text message.

Deters declined to discuss the message’s contents other than that it appeared to have been sent inadvertently. “Based on what we know now, there are not going to be any criminal charges,” Deters said. “If we need to follow up, we will.” *Source: cincinnati.com, 4-9-18*

Loften C. Thornton, a U.S. Navy chaplain since 1992, was removed as chaplain for the Marine Forces Reserve based in New Orleans. Two Department of Defense officials confirmed that authorities were examining video allegedly showing Capt. Thornton having sex with a woman at the Crown & Anchor Pub.

Pub owner Neil Timms said the incident took place in front of the pub near some picnic tables. Thornton presided over the memorial service in 2000 of 17 sailors killed in the USS Cole bombing in Aden, Yemen. *Source: USA Today, 4-4-18*

Frank M. Lenz was placed on administrative leave by the Catholic Diocese of Marquette, MI, due to a credible allegation of misconduct with a minor in the 1970s, which Lenz denies. He was ordained in 1969 and retired to senior priest status in 2007. *Source: WLUC, 4-2-18*

Frank Page, 65, resigned as CEO and president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s executive committee and from active ministry, a decision “precipitated by a morally inappropriate relationship in the recent past,” according to a statement. He’d also been serving since February as interim lead pastor at Hebron Baptist Church in Dacula, GA.

With 15 million members, the convention is the largest U.S. Protestant denomination. *Source: The Week, 3-28-18*

Other

James Csaszar, 44, a Catholic priest on leave as pastor of Church of the Resurrection in New Albany, OH, jumped to his death from the 82-story Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel in Chicago, Ohio investigators said. Two suicide notes were found.

The Diocese of Columbus had suspended Csaszar due to “questionable text and telephone communications” with a 16-year-old boy and “potential misuse of church funds” while he was serving at St. Rose of Lima Parish in New Lexington. *Source: AP, 4-15-18*

Eight Hindu men are charged with the rape and murder of an 8-year-old Muslim girl in northern India in January. She belonged to a mostly Muslim nomadic community in an area populated by a Hindu majority and was abducted while grazing horses. It’s alleged she was taken to a Hindu temple, where she was drugged and raped for 5 days before being strangled and dumped in a forest. *Source: CNN, 4-13-18*

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FFRF ON THE ROAD



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, center, stands among a group of students and staff at Marshall University in Huntington, W. Va., who came to hear him discuss his book, *God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*, on April 20. The event was part of the “Ask an Atheist Day,” hosted by the Marshall University Secular Student Alliance.



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker spoke to a group of Secular Student Alliance members at Morehead State University in Morehead, Ky. Shown in this photo are, back row from left, advisor Glen Colburn, Vice President D’Angelo Baker, Jacob Tackett, and front row from left, Barker, Secretary Kimberly Obermayer, Member KJ Doyle and President/Founder Kayla Bowen.



FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel spoke at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside in Kenosha to a group of 75, including students and retired professors. Seidel talked about the Religious Right’s attempt to redefine “religious freedom” for 25 minutes followed by an hour of Q&A. The talk was organized by retired professor Wayne Johnson, pictured here with Seidel.



FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel speaks during a Secular Coalition for America panel event on the topic of “The Sword vs. the Shield: A Discussion on Religious Freedom” on April 25 at the Capitol Skyline Hotel in Washington, D.C. Also on the panel were, from left, Maggie Garret of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Sarah Warbelow of the Human Rights Commission and Claire Kim of the Center for Reproductive Rights.



Dan Barker, left, met with James Haught, former longtime editor of the Charleston Gazette, when Barker was in West Virginia for a talk. (Read one of Haught’s columns on Page 12.)



FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover spoke in Dallas on May 10. The Dallas Bar Association hosted a debate between FFRF and First Liberty Institute on the meaning of “religious liberty.” He also spoke to the Unitarian Universalist Secular Humanists in Iowa City, Iowa, on April 17.



FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert, left, spoke at the University of Minnesota Foundations Forum in February on the topic, “How should religious, agnostic and atheistic views be expressed in American civil dialogue, law, voting and policy?” She was joined by, center, Michael Wear, founder of Public Square Strategies and former director of faith outreach for Obama’s 2012 re-election campaign, and, right, Muhammad Khalifa of the University of Minnesota, who moderated the discussion.



FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert spoke at the Michigan Atheists 30th annual convention in Farmington Hills on April 7. About 50 attendees heard Markert discuss state/church separation.

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IN MEMORIAM



Tom Nicol sits with his sister Anne Nicol Gaylor, who was an FFRF co-founder.

Tom Nicol, brother of FFRF founder, dies at 94

Tom Nicol, 94, of Baudette, Minn., a member of FFRF since 1979, died on April 16 at Lakewood Care Center in Baudette after a sudden decline.

Tom was the last remaining sibling of Anne Nicol Gaylor, the principal founder of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Born at home on a farm in rural Tomah, Wis., on March 15, 1924, to Jason Theodore Nicol and Lucy Sowle Nicol, Tom was an outdoorsman who became a pilot and pilot instructor, living for a time in Alaska.

He held a variety of jobs, including working in construction, fixing houses, and buying damaged cars from insurance companies to fix up and resell. Tom opened a shop, Tom's Tackle, in Baudette in 1959, selling the store, which is still operating, after a few years in pursuit of new experiences. He officially "retired" in 1970, while keeping a hand in construction and "fix-up" work.

He was married to Alice (nee Brunson) for 71 years, who preceded him in death in December 2016. They have one son, Gary, who lives in Baudette.

"My dad stayed busy, and was fortunate that he enjoyed a lot of years of retirement, doing what he liked to do," Gary told Freethought Today.

His three siblings preceded him: Ja-



Tom Nicol and his wife Alice on their wedding day in 1945.

son Nicol, 45, died in Chicago in 1965; brother Robert Nicol, 90, died in New Auburn, Wis., in 2010, and sister Anne, 88, died in Madison, Wis., in 2015.

"I barely saw my uncle in person — it was very exciting the few times he popped in briefly to Madison — but he took a long-distance interest in FFRF. My mother spoke to him once a week, and he was sympathetic toward all her causes," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. Tom and Alice were both major contributors to FFRF's original Freethought Hall, purchased in 1990.

Peet Heuberger loved cars, sailing, opera

FFRF Life Member Peet Hans Heuberger died on April 28 at his home in Colorado Springs. Born on Nov. 23, 1933, in Bern, Switzerland, Peet lived in Switzerland until 1956, when he immigrated to the United States. He made his way across the United States, landing in Denver. He started work at Mountain States Volkswagen where he met his eventual wife, Carolyn. They eloped in 1957 and were married for 60 years.

Gary King of FFRF's Colorado Springs chapter writes: "He was also instrumental in the forming of FFRF's oldest extant chapter, as well as a willingness to pull out his checkbook whenever we needed funding. Pete would stay out of the spotlight and he and I would meet, usually at a little German place, for a pastry and his encouragement. He, along with John Murphy, Jeff Lucas and Jackie Marques, tried to keep this FFRF chapter stable, and Pete always insisted this chapter remain legit and avoid promoting individuals' businesses and control."

As a young man, Peet loved cars and racing in Europe. His racing career gave him a knowledge of cars and repairs that led to his success in the automotive industry. He worked for his father-in-law, Will McConnell, until 1970, when he was able to open his own Volkswagen dealership in Colorado Springs. He opened the Subaru



Peet Heuberger

franchise in 1975, and from there he built a family dealership, which continues to this day as a family business. He was always proud of his employees and valued all the customers he served.

Peet was an accomplished sailor. He loved to sail and spent as much time as he could taking his friends sailing. He sailed his whole life and loved the adventure of it. Peet also loved the opera and, as a boy, went to the theater with his parents and enjoyed listening to opera as often as he could.

Peet was a generous and kind man, always willing to work hard and give to others. He and Carolyn were philanthropic to their causes in life. He was naturalized in 1990 and was proud to be an American citizen. He was always speaking up on politics and religion. One could debate with him for hours on any number of subjects.

He was preceded in death by his wife.

Atheist activist Marie Alena Castle dies at 91

FFRF Member Marie Alena Castle, 91, of Minneapolis, died May 25.

She was born Dec. 20, 1926. Marie was communications director for Atheists for Human Rights and also served as president of Minnesota Atheists for 10 years.

For her obituary in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, she wrote, "I have enjoyed being one of the luckiest people on Earth. Fate gave me a 91-year break from otherwise endless oblivion and a life filled with political skulduggery and social activism for the rights of workers, women, gays, and anti-war efforts. I built a dome home, raised five good kids,



Marie Alena Castle

built atheist and political organizations, worked as a journalist, and wrote *Divided We Fall: The Secular vs. the Sacred*. None of this uphill climbing has been especially pleasant, but it has been interesting."

Pleaman Shaver leaves legacy of serving humanity

FFRF Member Pleaman Shaver of Torrington, Wyo., died April 16.

An obituary written by his family began, "The speck of stardust known to the world as Pleaman F. Shaver died in the arms of his wife of more than 49 years with his children close by. The world was brighter because of him and dimmed substantially with his death."

Shaver served 26 years in the U.S. Navy, 13 years each in active duty and reserve. He also had a long career in the civil service, serving on both coasts, Germany, and Hawaii. He chose to continue to serve humanity by insisting that



Pleaman Shaver

his body be donated to science.

Besides his wife, Marci, Shaver is survived by his daughter Misti Simms and her husband Warner of Tucson, Ariz., his son Pleaman A. Shaver of Torrington, two grandchildren, three siblings and numerous nieces and nephews.

He requested memorials be sent to FFRF or the ACLU or autism research.

Take a short survey about FFRF's videos

Did you know that the FFRF offers video programs?

We currently produce three shows (**Freethought Matters**, **Ask an Atheist** and **News Bites**) that run on Facebook Live, YouTube and some broadcast TV stations. Help us to better target these programs to your needs by filling out this short five-question survey.

Go to: surveymonkey.com/r/FFRF_Media. Thank you!



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • [FFRF.org](https://ffrf.org)

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. FFRF has more than 33,000 members. FFRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible for income tax purposes.

FFRF's email address is info@ffrf.org. Please include your name and physical mailing address with all email correspondence.

FFRF members wishing to receive online news releases, "action alerts" and "Freethought of the Day" should contact info@ffrf.org.

Huffman to speak at FFRF’s convention

Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., one of the founders of the recently announced Congressional Freethought Caucus, has agreed to speak at FFRF’s convention in San Francisco in early November.



Rep. Jared Huffman

Huffman will be accepting FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award, which is given to public figures who take on the fabled role of the little child in the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale and “tell it like it is” about religion.

Huffman joins a strong lineup of guest speakers for FFRF’s 41st annual the convention, which will be held at the Hyatt Regency, 5 Embarcadero Center, in downtown San Francisco on the week-end of Nov. 2-4.

Other speakers are:

• **Cecile Richards**, the former long-time president of Planned Parenthood, is



Cecile Richards

a national leader for women’s rights and social and economic justice, and the author of New York Times bestseller, *Make Trouble*. As president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America and Planned Parenthood Action Fund for more than a decade, Richards worked to increase affordable access to reproductive health care and to build a healthier and safer world for women and young people. She served as deputy chief of staff to House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi. In 2011 and 2012, Richards was named among Time magazine’s 100 Most Influential People in the World. She’s receiving FFRF’s Forward Award.

• **Salman Rushdie**, one of the most celebrated authors of our time, will be



Salman Rushdie

receiving the Emperor Has No Clothes Award Friday afternoon. He has written several classic novels, influenced a generation of writers, and received the Queen’s Knighthood for his “services to literature.” His novels include *The Satanic Verses*, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and 2008’s *The Enchantress of Florence*. His masterwork of magic realism, *Midnight’s Children*, won the prestigious Booker Prize.

• **Adam Savage** is co-host of “Myth Busters,” on the Discovery Channel and is master of many trades. Savage has acted, designed, sculpted, anchored TV shows, and has been an educator. Savage’s special effects have been on view in a dozen feature films, including the “Matrix” sequels and “Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace.” He’ll be receiving The Emperor Has No Clothes Award on Saturday night.

• **John de Lancie**, an actor, director, producer, writer, singer, musician, and voice artist, will be receiving FFRF’s first “Clarence” award — a statuette version of FFRF’s 7-foot statue of Clarence Darrow on display in front of the site of the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tenn. De Lancie

spoke at the dedication. He is well-known for portraying “Q” in the TV series “Star Trek: The Next Generation.”

• **Ensaf Haidar** is the activist wife of a Saudi freethinker whose persecution has caused global outrage. For the supposed crime of “apostasy,” Saudi blogger Raif Badawi was shockingly sentenced in 2013 to 600 lashes and seven years in prison, which was unbelievably increased to 1,000 lashes and 10 years in prison the following year (along with a hefty accompanying fine). Haidar has become a secular activist in her own right, establishing the Raif Badawi Foundation for Freedom to spread progressive values in the Middle East and working tirelessly for Badawi’s release. Haidar will be receiving the third annual Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award of \$10,000.

• **Sarah Haider** is a co-founder of Ex-Muslims of North America. She



Sarah Haider

directs EXMNA’s Normalizing Dissent tour, and travels the United States and Canada to cover a range of issues related to apostasy in Islam. She is currently a columnist for Free Inquiry magazine. She will receive a Freethought Heroine Award.

• **Bailey Harris**, 12, a sixth-grade student at Salt Lake City’s Open Classroom, will be receiving the \$5,000 Beverly and Richard Hermesen Student Activist Award. She was inspired by an episode of “Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey” and wrote, along with her father Doug Harris, the picture book *My Name is Stardust*.

• **Leighann Lord**, a veteran stand-up comedian, will do stand-up routine at the



Leighann Lord

convention. Lord has been seen on Lifetime, VH-1, Comedy Central, HBO and “The View.” She is a contributor to the Huffington Post and the author of *Dict Jokes: Alternate Definitions for Words You’ve Probably Never Heard of But Will Definitely Never Forget* and *Real Women Do It Standing Up: Stories From the Career of a Very Funny Lady*.

• **Debra Deanne Olson**, who, with Dr. Craig West Wilkinson, just authored a book about her atheist grandfather, *The Honorable Culbert Levy Olson: Governor of California 1939-1943*. She is a political, environmental and peace activist and held volunteer positions on both of Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaigns.

• **Julia Sweeney**, one of FFRF’s honorary directors, will perform a new stand-



Julia Sweeney

up routine called “Julia Sweeney: Older and Wider” for the FFRF audience on Friday night. She is a “Saturday Night Live” alum who created and portrayed the androgynous character “Pat.” She also created and performed several award-winning one-woman shows, including “God Said, Ha!”, “In the Family Way” and “Letting Go of God.”

Convention info

Convention registration is only \$60 per member, \$65 per companion, \$110 non-member, and free for students and children. Sign up for the discounted package that includes the two group meals on Saturday and save \$20.

The convention is being held at the downtown Hyatt Regency in San Francisco. The convention opens at noon on Friday, Nov. 2, with the program beginning at 1 p.m., continuing all day Saturday. It closes with a Sunday morning membership and state

representative meeting ending by noon. See more details at ffrf.org/convention2018.

Rooms can be reserved for Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights at \$235 plus tax. Phone directly to make your reservations: 1-888-421-1442 and use the code “Freedom From Religion Foundation.” Or go online at ffrf.org/convention2018 for full convention information or reserve rooms directly at bit.ly/FFRF2018. Don’t delay as rooms are going fast!

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION NATIONAL CONVENTION

SAN FRANCISCO | NOVEMBER 2-4, 2018

2018 CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: ffrf.org/convention2018

DISCOUNTED REGISTRATION & MEALS PACKAGE

Get a \$20 discount when you bundle two meals and registration. Includes Saturday breakfast and dinner.

	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___	\$190 \$ ___
Spouse or Companion <i>(Non-member accompanying member)</i>	___	\$195 \$ ___
Non-member	___	\$240 \$ ___
Child / Student with ID (Meals Only)	___	\$130 \$ ___

Please indicate number of meals

Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast

___# Regular ___# Vegetarian ___# Vegan ___# Gluten Free

Saturday Banquet Dinner

___# Regular ___# Vegetarian ___# Vegan ___# Gluten Free

REGISTRATION - NO PACKAGE

Member	___	\$60 \$ ___
Spouse or Companion <i>(Non-member accompanying member)</i>	___	\$65 \$ ___
Non-member <i>Or join for \$40 and save \$10</i>	___	\$110 \$ ___
Child / Student with ID	___	Free \$ ___

SELECT MEALS À LA CARTE

Please indicate number of meals

Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast

___# Regular ___# Vegetarian ___# Vegan ___# Gluten Free

Saturday Banquet Dinner

___# Regular ___# Vegetarian ___# Vegan ___# Gluten Free

► **Total \$**___

☐ I am enclosing a donation to sponsor student convention travel costs. \$___

(Make checks payable to FFRF) Return with payment to:

FFRF, Attn: Convention | P.O. Box 750 | Madison, WI 53701

Names of all registrants (attach extra sheet as necessary)

Address

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Expiration Date / Security Code

Signature

*Contact information for in-house use only.

☐ Please tell us about any concerns over accessibility or accommodations in order to fully participate in this convention: