

FREETHOUGHT

TODAY



Is it OK to be an atheist in politics?

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Nontheists could learn from LGBTQ movement

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'Everyone has a right to their lack of faith'

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Ed Asner visits FFRF



Television and movie icon Ed Asner stopped by Freethought Hall on Dec. 13 to record an episode of "Freethought Matters." He gamely sat for several photos with FFRF staff members. Pictured, from left: Communications Manager Lauryn Seering, Store Manager Astoria Goldsby and Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger. Look for FFRF's TV interview with Asner in February. (For more photos from Asner's visit, see Page 7.)

FFRF gets major legislative victory

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is lauding a victory toward one of its central legislative goals: increasing access to secular recovery programs.

Thanks to advocacy by FFRF on this issue on Capitol Hill, the president on Dec. 31 signed into law an appropriations bill that includes a request that federal tax dollars can be awarded to evidence-based recovery programs that support medication assisted treatment. This includes most secular mutual support recovery providers such as LifeRing and SMART Recovery.

Currently, most mutual support recovery programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narsecular recovery services in the future.

cotics Anonymous, are religious or "spiritual" in nature. Many areas of the country do not have adequate access to secular recovery programs, in large part due to lack of funding and awareness.

FFRF and its governmental affairs director, Mark Dann, based in D.C., have been working alongside a secular coalition to increase the number of recovery options for all Americans.

With this new funding, nonreligious Americans will be able to utilize recovery programs without sacrificing their right of conscience or being subjected to unwanted proselytization. FFRF will continue to fight for the expansion of funding for secular recovery services in the future.

Steinem, Atwood to headline FFRF's 2020 convention!

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to announce that legendary activist Gloria Steinem and literary titan Margaret Atwood will be appearing at its upcoming annual national convention in San Antonio in November.

The convention takes place the weekend of Nov. 13-15 at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio on the famed Riverwalk. The convention venue is limited to about 900 attendees, so please plan ahead. For more details and to register for the convention, turn to the back page.

Both will receive FFRF's "Forward" Award, which is reserved for those who are moving society forward. The award includes a statuette designed by world-renowned sculptor Zenos Frudakis.

Steinem will take part in a conversation with FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor on Friday, Nov. 13, at 3 p.m., breaking for audience questions. She will then sign copies of her newest book, The Truth Will Set You Free, But First It Will Piss You Off! from 4-4:30 p.m. at a private reception, a fundraiser for FFRF. The reception is limited to the first 50 individuals who sign up for the \$500 private event, which includes a copy of the book.

Steinem, who's been billed as "the world's most famous feminist," is a journalist who co-founded Ms. Magazine in 1972, helped found the Women's Action Alliance, the National Women's Political Caucus, the Women's Media Center, and



Gloria Steinem



Margaret Atwood

was president of Voters for Choice, a political action committee, for 25 years. She is founding president of the Ms. Foundation for Women, Take our Daughters to Work Day, and many other initiatives. Her books include the bestsellers *Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem, Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions, Moving Beyond*

See convention on back page

Another impressive year for FFRF's legal team

By Rebecca Markert

FRF's Legal Team wrapped up another big year in 2019, earning several court victories and hundreds of nonlitigation wins. After adding a few new employees, the legal department was restructured to better position itself for current and future state-church challenges. The following is a review of how the Legal Team fared in 2019.

Court victories

FFRF ended the year with a victory in Kentucky when a federal court ruled in its favor in a case challenging the denial of an FFRF member's personalized license



Rebecca Markert

plate reading "IM GOD." FFRF also successfully ended a Wisconsin Department of Justice chaplaincy program. After filing suit, the state DOJ dropped the program in favor of what the DOJ

terms an "Employee Support Team."

The litigation team also got firm legal victories in four other cases:

• FFRF finalized its victory against the Chino Valley Unified School District in California over prayer and bible readings at school board meetings, and FFRF was awarded nearly \$300,000 in fees and costs.

- The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in FFRF's favor in the *Mercer County Board of Education* case, finding that the plaintiffs have standing to challenge "Bible in the Schools" classes.
- The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal over FFRF's unanimous victory before the New Jersey Supreme Court barring public grants of tax dollars to repair churches.
- Along with Americans United, the ACLU and the ACLU of Florida, FFRF also successfully challenged discrimination against nontheists seeking to deliver solemnizing messages to start Brevard Coun-

ty Commissioners meetings.

FFRF also renewed its challenge against Texas Judge Wayne Mack's courtroom prayer practice, this time suing Mack in his personal capacity, as well as the state of Texas, after a district court dismissed its prior lawsuit against the county where the judge holds court. FFRF also carries over five other ongoing cases.

Restructuring

FFRF restructured its legal department into teams for intake (or nonlitigation advocacy), litigation, legal education and training, and in-house. The Strategic

See legal team on page 9



Brendan takes a boat on Lake Superior on the way to Isle Royale National Park.

FFRF legal fellow fights for what is right



Photo by Chris Line

Brendan Johnson

Where and when I was born: Helena, Mont., in 1987.

Education: University of Idaho (Bachelor of Music in gui-

tar performance), Southern Method-

MEET A STAFFER

ist University (Master of Music in guitar about: Curling. performance), University of Minnesota (juris doctorate). Fantastic.

Family: Father Jeff, mother Beth and stepdad Ed.

How I came to work at FFRF: Constitutional law, particularly First Amendment, was what drew me to the law in the first place. I wanted to answer the big questions and contend with the toughest arguments. I don't recall the exact moment when I read FFRF's job listing, but I now fondly imagine that I dropped my iPhone due to the passion with which I clicked "apply."

What I do here: I'm the Robert G. better be a thing.

Ingersoll Legal Fellow. I write whatever type of document the moment requires to protect the increasingly blurred line between religious practice and the state's coercive power of taxation, as implied by the U.S. Constitution and its amendments.

What I like best about it: I love fighting for what I think is right while bathing in the ire of our opponents.

What gets old about it: Everything should be on the first floor. Y'all can't seriously expect me to be walking up this many stairs.

I spend a lot of time thinking about: Whether my beliefs — and their supporting arguments — have holes in

> I spend little if any time thinking

My religious upbringing was:

My doubts about religion started: When I was fairly young. There was no animus towards religion, but neither was there was there any evidence in favor of its truth claims.

Things I like: Music, rock climbing, stand-up comedy, back-country hiking, learning I was wrong about something (and why I was wrong).

Things I smite: Poorly thought-out

In my golden years: Bionic legs had

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

IN MEMORIAM

Isaac Kramnick was eminent scholar, historian and author

Historian, author and scholar Isaac Kramnick died Dec. 21 in New York City at the age of 81.

He had spoken just two months earlier at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis., along with his writing partner, R. Laurence Moore. They co-authored Godless Citizens in a Godly Republic in 2018 and The Godless Constitution in 1996.

Kramnick was born March 6, 1938, and was adopted into an Orthodox Jewish farming family in Millis, Mass. He graduated from a public school that had only 19 students in his class. He graduated summa cum laude from Harvard in 1959, studied at Cambridge University from 1959-60 and earned his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1965. He taught at Harvard, Brandeis and Yale before ending up at Cornell.

Kramnick began teaching at Cornell in 1972, then became associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences from 1986-89; led the Department of Government from 1996-2001; and served as the university's first vice provost for undergraduate education from 2001-05. Kramnick was Cornell University's Richard J. Schwartz Professor of Government Emeritus.

"I will miss Isaac's sense of humor as well as his many other qualities," Cornell President Emeritus Hunter R. Rawlings told the press. "He made the room light up and left us feeling better than when we walked in."

Kramnick wrote a number of influential books on the history of British and American political thought from the 18th century to the present day. His



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Isaac Kramnick

Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole won the Conference of British Studies Prize for best book on British politics.

Kramnick was a fellow of Britain's Royal Historical Society and served in 1989 as president of the American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies. In 1998 he was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. At Cornell, he was a recipient of the Clark Distinguished Teaching Award and was named a Stephen H. Weiss Presidential Fellow.

Kramnick retired in 2015 after 43 years at Cornell but remained active, teaching for Cornell's Adult University.

Kramnick's speech at FFRF's convention will be printed in the March issue. Watch that speech or his appearance on "Freethought Matters" on FFRF's You-Tube channel.

Martha Lentz was nurse, professor

FFRF Life Member Martha "Marty" Lentz, 74, died Sept. 25, 2019, following a short battle with cancer. She and her husband Jon Noll were major contributors to the Freethought Hall expansion project. Jon has donated \$5,000 to FFRF in Marty's memory.

Marty was born in Onondaga, Mich. She earned a degree in nursing from Henry Ford Hospital and her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Wayne State University.

She moved to Seattle in 1970. After practicing as a clinical nurse for several years, she returned to school and earned her master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of Washington. She then joined the University of Washington School of Nursing faculty, retiring in 2008 as full professor. She was widely published, with sleep as the focus of her research career. After retirement, she remained active in academia as a consultant and as an instructor to nursing students and faculty around the country.

In 1971, Marty took a class in mountain climbing and met her future husband, Jon Noll. They spent nearly five decades together climbing mountains, running marathons, skiing, kayaking and biking. Marty was a member of Seattle Mountain Rescue Council, and one of the principal authors of Mountaineering First Aid.

The Western Institute of Nursing (WIN) said this about Marty: "The awards WIN bestowed upon Marty are a testa-



Martha Lentz

ment to her many contributions. She provided a voice of logic, vision and wisdom in all deliberations. She was committed to advancing nursing science, the Western Institute of Nursing, and the members thereof. Marty generously shared her vast knowledge of nursing research, with WIN members and students and in the deliberations of WIN committees. She had a keen sense of humor and her laugh will be greatly missed. Marty will be remembered fondly as the clever and humorous emcee of WIN's annual RIFF-RAFF celebration and for her veracious advice on writing abstracts, 'Read the instructions, believe the instructions, follow the instructions.' An incredible, generous and inspiring leader, mentor, researcher and friend, Marty will be missed profoundly by all who had the honor of knowing and working with her."

Marty is survived by her husband Jon, sister Rebecca Noble, brothers Rod and Riley Lentz, and nieces and nephews.

"Our heartfelt condolences go out to Jon," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Former Pentecostal minister pulls out the plugs

'The Matrix' helped open my eyes to the truth

Movie made me question my 50 years of being a religious fundamentalist

By Edward Kelly Jr.

artin Luther King Jr. wrote in his 1963 book Why We Can't Wait: "The truth was revealed that hate is a contagion; that it grows and spreads as a disease; that no society is so healthy that it can automatically maintain its immunity."

I was a vicious carrier of that disease, marked by the symptoms of fear, hatred and bigotry. I carried and spread it as a contagion for 25 years as a fundamentalist Pentecostal preacher. I took great



Edward Kelly Jr.

pride even referring to myself from the pulpit as a "bible bigot," as if intolerance based on scripture was morally acceptable.

A bigot! What else do you call someone who believes that only he has all the answers

— the absolute truth — and condemns everyone who does not fit into his theological box: Buddhists, Muslims, liberal preachers, humanists and homosexuals. It is ironic that I have become what I once condemned — a humanist.

Twenty years ago, while still a fundamentalist, I saw the movie "The Matrix," which made me stop and think. It was not so much the action, but rather the story that fascinated me. The theme of the movie was that the material world was not reality, but merely an illusion created by artificial intelligence machines. The real world was a ravaged wasteland and most of humanity has been captured by a race of machines. The humans were made to live out their lives in pods that collected their energy and continuously fed sensory stimuli to their brains via plugs attached to their bodies. These sensory stimuli gave them the illusion of leading ordinary lives.

This computer-driven dream world is called the Matrix. There are two main





Shutterstock image

The wool had been pulled

over my eyes for the first 50

years of my life, including

25 of those as a minister.

Edward Kelly Jr.

The movie "The Matrix" from 1999 features a dystopian world where intelligent machines use humans as a power source and control their minds.

characters: Morpheus (played by Laurence Fishburne) is the leader of the resistance and Neo (played by Keanu Reeves) is a young man who Morpheus was able to release from the Matrix. Neo asks Morpheus, "What is the Matrix?" Morpheus answers: "It is the wool that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you to the truth. Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it yourself."

In a certain sense, the wool had been pulled over my eyes for the first 50 years of my life, including 25 of those as a minister. The Matrix was my box, my set of beliefs. The Matrix plug that I have lived with since I was a child was that God was an angry old man sitting on a throne way out there, waiting to punish me when I did something wrong. This angry monster-god illusion was the root of my "fire and brimstone" preaching as a fundamentalist. This was my religious box, my Matrix.

Using "The Matrix" is not an exact analogy for my life. Neo was pulled out of the Matrix all at once, but, for me, the change was not immediate. I did not wake up one morning and say, "Well, today, I think I am going to be a liberal," or "Today, I think I am going to be kind and compassionate to gays." No, it was a slow process of removing the illusions that clouded my mind, or, to use the image from the movie, of pulling out one Matrix plug at time.

My transformation began when I began to think for myself. That's when I began to look at my belief system — my box — and question everything. But, understand, for me as for any fundamentalist to think outside the box and to question and doubt one's beliefs was a frightening experience. the bible that delivered me from reading the bible literally. The basic underlying principle of biblical criticism is that, although God is an absolute being, the bible does not have an absolute value, but is conditioned on the historical and cultural setting in which it was written.

Then I made a terrible mistake as a

The first Matrix plug I pulled out, the first illusion that I discovered and dealt with, was the teaching of the rapture, which was a source of most of my anxiety and fear in my life. It is not a simple teaching, but a very complex system, a schematic timetable of "last days" events.

But it was in my own personal life that the effects of the rapture belief were clear. I had decided that there was no time for furthering my education, no time for looking at my career, only time for getting souls into the Kingdom of God. Everything took a back seat to the ministry, including my family.

I do not remember why I began to study the rapture, but as a pastor in 1993,

I started to look at the biblical references and the history of the doctrine of the rapture. I uncovered two things. First, the bible verses that were used to prove the rapture did not match the context in which the verses were found. Secondly, I learned that the rapture was not as old as Christianity, as I had been led to believe. It only appeared in 1830. I slowly and quietly began to remove references to the rapture from my sermons and altar calls.

I also began to breathe a little easier, realizing this wrathful God was not due yet

and that the promised seven-year period of "hell on Earth" was a myth. My life became easier. I began to think about returning to school. I had discovered one of my perceptions was wrong and I removed it. My theo-

logical box was beginning to unravel.

In 2000, I went back to school and obtained a bachelor's degree in business management from Buena Vista University. In 2005, I started a Master's in theology program at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio. The first class I took was "Introduction to the Bible." It was revolutionary. It introduced me to biblical criticism. In a strange ironic way, I am thankful to that Catholic institution for introducing me to a way of studying the bible that delivered me from reading principle of biblical criticism is that, although God is an absolute being, the bible does not have an absolute value, but is conditioned on the historical and cultural setting in which it was written.

Then I made a terrible mistake as a Catholic theology student. I began reading other scholars: James Barr (Princeton and Oxford bible scholar), Hans Kung (the dissident Catholic scholar) and Paul Tillich. I discovered that education and reading outside one's theological box was a key to freedom — freedom from religious blindness, anxiety and fear. I came away with a new perspective of the bible. The bible was never meant to be a historical, economic, legal or scientific textbook. But, most importantly, it was not meant to be the defining theological textbook, the final word or the only word about God. In less than three months, I lost my fundamentalist lenses through which I had viewed the world.

Another matrix plug removed.

After this class, in 2006, I began to think: "Had I in the past, in my zeal as a fundamentalist preacher, misinterpreted the scriptures about the fundamental moral issues of our time?"

I will limit my comments to one issue that dominated most of my fundamentalist preaching: homosexuality. Almost every fundamentalist preacher focuses on this issue. You cannot tune into a Christian radio station and not hear how this "sin is destroying the foundation of our country."

The question I asked was: "Is it a sin?" My study covered the seven main bible verses that I had used to condemn homosexuality. I was shocked by my findings. It revealed my ignorance. Some of it was just simple basic grammar. I learned that no ancient text — Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic — contained the word homosexuality. The word "homosexuality" did not appear in any language until the 19th century. I discovered that none of those key verses had anything to do with today's understanding of committed same-sex relationships. I discovered that I was wrong in judging, that I was a bigot and that I had committed acts of prejudice in the name of God.

It was here that I realized that I needed to change my behavior. I took personal responsibility and stopped what I called the essence of fundamentalism: I stopped being a judging meddler in people's lives. I stopped being a spiritual vulture, going around looking for the sup-

posed sins of others and gorging myself in condemning them. I stopped being a gnat strainer, a nitpicker or fault finder. I began writing and speaking on gay rights and other social justice issues.

I realized that

by thinking and using reason, I could come to ethical decisions without God or a religion. As a matter of fact, religion and God can lead to serious immoral discriminations and atrocities. I had come to the decision that I had a right as a human being to judge a religious text when it conflicted with a human right. It was then I realized that I was moving closer to the atheist view of the world. I no longer believed in the monster-god. I had stopped praying. I could not pray to a god who judges, murders and commands "his people" to murder. I no longer believed in a bloodthirsty god who sent his only begotten son into the world to have him die on a cross as a sacrifice to save humanity.

I began living in freedom. I am no longer living with a god in my mind. I am no longer living according to the authoritarian law of God (religion), but I am living according to the reasoned dictates of my own conscience.

I discovered late in life that my arrogance, the kind of arrogance that I used to live and thrive in — the arrogance of fundamentalism, of putting God in a box and saying "He only works in my box" or "I only have the truth" — was a dangerous extreme religion. Yes, it was a malignancy that I removed little by little from my mind and heart. The final Matrix plug had been pulled.

Edward Kelly Jr., a former Pentecostal minister, is a nurse and lives in Iowa with his wife.

HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

FIRST SNOW

After the long red warning of maples it is still a surpise attack, the hordes sweeping in at night, and at dawn riding the shadows

as we lie in the shelter of blankets, in the summer blood of our loving, and feel the old terror of time freezing the land.

The outer walls are abandoned, the same every year, the flowers frozen; we dig in behind the storm windows, remembering noon in the hazy shimmer of cornfields, remembering noon with aspens and faraway bells—but each year the losses: the old ones, limping off to their dim consummation, tell us fear is a small brown mouse come in from the cold to chew at the belly nerves, and it touches us now, the truth of the whole gray assault: it is war to the ultimate cold

as we lie in the shelter of blankets, in the summer blood of our loving, and feel the old terror of time freezing the land.

(New and Selected Poems, 1956-1996)



© 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.

Other books by him, available at *shop.ffrf.org*, include *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Pudding & Pie* and *Darwin's Ark: Poems by Philip Appleman*.

Freethought Today caption contest



Norm Moyer sent us this photo of a dilapidated church on the Big Island of Hawaii. Please send us a witty or humorous comment about this scene. Email your response to *caption@ffrf.org* by Feb. 12. The winner, chosen by FFRF staff, will receive an FFRF T-shirt! We'll announce the winner and runners-up in the March issue. If you've seen or taken any photos that you think would be good for this contest, please send them to *caption@ffrf.org*.

OVERHEARD

New Zealanders are often wary of religion. The 2018 census revealed that those who said they had no religion — 49 percent of the population — had overtaken Christians, at 38 percent, for the first time.

Reporter Charlotte Graham-McLay, in her article "New Zealand is tackling hot-button liberal issues in one swoop."

The New York Times, 11-26-19

Mr. Barr has embraced wholesale the "religious liberty" rhetoric of today's Christian nationalist move-



Katherine Stewart

ment. When religious nationalists invoke "religious freedom," it is typically code for religious privilege. The freedom they have in mind is the freedom of people of certain conservative and authoritarian varieties of

religion to discriminate against those of whom they disapprove or over whom they wish to exert power. . . . The purpose of this "religious liberty" rhetoric is not just to secure a place of privilege, but also to justify public funding for the right kind of religion. **Katherine Stewart and Caroline Fred**

rickson, in their op-ed "Bill Barr thinks America is going to hell."

The New York Times, 12-29-19

As an atheist who dealt repeatedly with creationists as they attempted to force their myth into the science curriculum, I can attest that I have never viewed Genesis as "a pack of lies." Rather, I view it as ancient fiction.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a lie as "a false statement made with intent to deceive." Those who constructed the Genesis account of creation could not have known that their story was false by the scientific standards we now hold. Modern religious zealots who still promulgate scriptural creation myths as true when they know better are, however, a different matter. They, indeed, are guilty of lying.

Joseph D. McInerney, former president of the National Association of Biology Teachers, writing to The New York Times to respond to Karen Armstrong's contention that atheists view the bible as "a pack of lies."

The New York Times, 12-13-19

If the "war on Christmas" didn't exist, conservatives would have had to invent it. Which pretty much explains why they did.

Editorial, "The phony 'war on Christmas' returns."

York Dispatch, 12-9-19

FFRF adds 71 new Lifers, 5 After-Lifers, 1 Beyond

FFRF welcomes and thanks its newest Lifetime, After-Life and Beyond After-Life Members.

The newest Beyond After-Life Member is Gary York. The Beyond After-Life membership is tongue-in-cheek-named membership category of \$10,000 for those who want their donation to "live on" after them and beyond.

The five newest After-Life Members are Pete Day, Johnnie Grgurich, Mohan Rao, Saul Rosenthal and Ruth E. Stiehl. After-Life Membership is a membership category of \$5,000 for those who want their donation to "live on" after them.

FFRF's 71 newest \$1,000 Lifetime Members are: Alexandra M. Allen, Ted Andrew, Gloria Bachmann, Judith Banister, Josh Benaloh, Laurie Benaloh, Meena Bhat, Michael Brassell, Tyler Bryden, Andy Burgess, Russell Burmester, Robert Butler, Joshua A. Carter, Paul Colucci, Jr., Charles Cowin, Charles Dhyanchand, Karen Dhyanchand, Robert J. Douglas, James Dwyer, Dianne Eardley, Jonathan Eosze, John T. Fournier, Warren Geisler, Thomas M. Goetzl, Mark Goodner, Albert Gouyet, James A. Hamilton, Dr. Richard T. Ham-

ilton, Mark Humenik, Eric Jaggers, Linda Jallings, B. Jane, Nancy Jucius, Rose Ann Keating, Rainbow Koehl-Goetzl, Herb Kulman, Ryan Langford, Richard Lee, Dale Leman, Michael Lichter, Timothy C. McCowan, J.E. McDermott, Harry T. Meredith, Jeff Morrow, Kent Munzer, Forrest Neuswanger, Brian Newell, Rebecca Page, Samir Patel, Dr. Andrew J. Pegoda, Betsy Pfister, Arnold Potosky, Patrick Price, Fietje Ralston (gifted by Robert H. Ralston), Bruce Rockwell, Robert Schlorer, Anne Schneiderman, Thomas Scott, Ryan Sit, Tamara Sloan, Jonathan Smuck, Mark Sobaszko, Theodore Stinson, Charles H. Stroh, Marcia Stutzman, Karen Sulak, Mark Tamagni, Suzanne Tharpe, Philip M. Walsh, Kevin Wasserburger and Alexander Yermolovich.

States represented are Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Washington, D.C., and Wisconsin.

Yip Harburg, from his book: Rhymes for the Irreverent



Core Values

Spread your appleseeds today, For time is ever fleeting. The apple you can bite today Tomorrow ain't worth eating.

 $Written \ by \ ``Over the \ Rainbow" \ lyric ist \ Yip \ Harburg. \ Illustrated \ by \ Seymour \ Chwast, published \ by \ FFRF.$

Buy it from FFRF online — ffrf.org/shop

Legislative year in review

FFRF has success confronting political challenges head-on

By Mark Dann

t's hard to believe that I've been FFRF's director of governmental affairs for only a few months and already we've done so much together. With your help, we've been able to build relationships on Capitol Hill, win legislative victories in a divided government, expand and strengthen alliances with allied organizations to advance legislation and build the FFRF supporter base. As we begin 2020, I want to share with you some of our accomplishments from last year and let you know about some of our strategic moves planned for this year.

Building relationships

In the past, we've had solid direct relationships with members of Congress on judicial nominations and secular invocations. Now, we've greatly expanded the depth and breadth of these relationships. In 2019, we had three members of the Congressional Freethought Caucus (Reps. Jared Huffman, Jamie Raskin and Mark Pocan) appear on FFRF's TV show "Freethought Matters." They gave us an



Mark Dann

in-depth and inside look at how they are working with us, how their secular values shape their decision making, and what they are up against in Congress.

At the FFRF convention in October, Rep. Pocan made headlines

declaring that he is part of the 26 percent "of us in this country who don't follow a specific religion." (See page

Pocan's remarks were significant because the Congressional Freethought Caucus represents the breadth of the freethought community. Rep. Huffman, the caucus co-chair, does not believe in a higher power, and Rep. Pocan, who does not identify with a particular religion, has said that practicing a religion is not central to his life. This year, we hope to have more members of the caucus on "Freethought Matters." We're also working to have more members of Congress join the caucus to advance our pro-secular legislative agenda and make secularism a higher priority among members.

Legislative victories

Over the past several years, FFRF has been able to help stop the repeal of the Johnson Amendment, which would have allowed churches to become tax-deductible political money-laundering operations. FFRF's legal team even successfully sued the Trump administration on the same day he tried to sign an executive order undoing that rule.

This past year, one of our key legislative objectives was to make sure all Americans had access to a secular mutual-support recovery option, which is a constitutional right.



In August, an FFRF contingent met with U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, second from left, at Pocan's district office in Madison, Wis. Meeting with Pocan were, from left, FFRF Director of Governmental Affairs Mark Dann, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor and FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel.

Religious 12-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, are widely available and are often a default treatment option.

We are changing that. We want to expand recovery options for all Americans. Pending passage, we got an insertion into the federal budget that empowers federal agencies to work with secular mutual-support recovery providers. Getting a budget insertion may sound minor, but it is extremely difficult.

It takes a lot of shoe-leather campaigning and help from our excellent partners in the secular community, including the American Humanist Association, Center for Inquiry and the Secular Coalition for America, plus secular recovery providers like SMART Recovery and LifeRing. This year, we hope to have multiple insertions across numerous appropriation bills.

We're also working with our allies on Capitol Hill to see how we can use the appropriations process to send a strong signal that religious exemptions and a Christian Nationalist agenda will not be tolerated.

Plus, look for hearings that will shed light on the Trump administration's are now 26 percent of the adult U.S. actions to advance Christian Nationalism throughout the federal government and make religious exemptions a de facto policy of our government.

Stronger together

We can't stand up to Christian Nationalists on our own and you can't have too many friends in D.C. We've always had solid working relationships with numerous secular organizations. Continuing in that tradition, we've greatly expanded our network of allied partners through our legislative efforts, such as the Do No Harm Act, the No BAN Act and the Scientific Integrity Act.

The Do No Harm Act bans religious exemptions to laws guaranteeing fundamental civil and legal rights. We have been working with the ACLU, Interfaith Alliance, Human Rights Campaign, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and

Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Through our direct lobbying efforts, we've added 33 new co-sponsors and we hope there will be a hearing and legislative action next

To advance the No BAN Act, which bars the use of religion or nonreligion as restrictions on immigration, we've been working with the National Iranian American Council, National Immigration Law Center, and the ACLU, among others. With our collective efforts, we've added 64 new co-sponsors to the No BAN Act.

The Scientific Integrity Act helps to prevent political meddling in public scientific research. The bill has 230 bipartisan co-sponsors and has passed out of committee. We're working with the Union of Concerned Scientists to get the bill to the House floor by the end of the year.

Building our support

I enjoyed meeting so many of you at the FFRF convention in Madison, Wis., in October. FFRF has maintained about 30,000 members for the past few years. We know that the nonreligious population and there is tremendous opportunity for our membership to reflect the growing diversity of the freethought population. There are now more freethinkers than evangelical Protestants or Catholics. Can you imagine what we could do together if we had the same political clout as Catholics? One of the best things you can do to help us in D.C. is to help grow FFRF nationally.

I know the challenges facing our country and our secular values are immense. It's hard not to feel overwhelmed. Yet this year, even with the tumultuous election, we will do what so many of our freethinking trailblazers have done before: Stay focused, lead with our values, act with compassion and move forward together.

Mark Dann is FFRF's director of governmental affairs and lives in Washington, D.C.

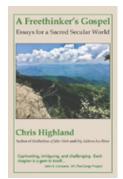
FREETHOUGHT BOOKS

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

A Freethinker's Gospel: Essays for a Sacred Secular World

By Chris Highland Pisgah Press (2018) Paperback (\$16.95)

This book is a collection of columns by Highland, first published in the Asheville Citizen-Times from 2016-17. A former Protestant



minister and prison chaplain, Highland is now a secular freethinker who muses on the natural world, on being a nonbeliever in a highly religious society, and the commonalities shared between religions.

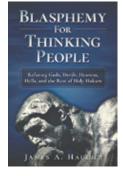
These essays offer his reflections on interfaith

work, the search for self-discovery, and the commonalities that bind us regardless of social, political, economic or religious backgrounds. His insights about the structure of our natural world and what nature can teach us, and the way our society is structured, addressing humanism, the natural world, and sensitive issues of faith, are enlightening and

Blasphemy for Thinking People

By James A. Haught Paperback (\$11.61)

Blasphemy isn't a dirty word. It just means to question supernatural claims of religion. That's almost a duty for intelligent, educated, science-



minded, modern, honest people. However, religious leaders spent centuries executing or jailing those who voiced doubts.

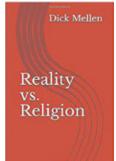
The bible says any such blasphemer "shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him." In Ancient Greece, many of the

first scientific thinkers were prosecuted for "impiety." The Inquisition burned nonconformists. Finally in this 21st century, it is safe to criticize religion in Western democracies (but not in Muslim nations). Everything in this book is blasphemy — challenging supernatural claims. Now, in the liberated West, you can read it without risking your neck.

Reality vs. Religion

By Dick Melen Paperback (\$7.99)

This book is designed for young adults but may also be helpful for adults who are seeking a reality-based alternative to religion.



Realityism is a 21st century philosophy based on reason, ethics and science, with the objective of guiding and understanding life.

The purpose of the Philosophy of Realityism is to improve society by offering a reality-based alternative to religion. Realityism is

not a threat to religion, it's an alternative to religion. Realityism acknowledges the need for some people to have religious beliefs. Realityists have no interest in changing their minds, no matter what we may think of their perception of reality.

IN THE NEWS

Supreme Court to hear state-church case

The Supreme Court agreed to hear a case that will test the right of religious schools to fire teachers despite job discrimination claims.

Two religious school teachers from California (one of whom has since died) were fired by their Catholic schools. Those schools relied on a Supreme Court precedent giving religious organizations "ministerial exceptions" from laws that apply to other employers.

But the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the teachers, prompting the schools to ask the Supreme Court to weigh in. The cases will be combined and heard in the spring.

In 2012, the court unanimously ruled that federal discrimination laws do not apply when religious organizations choose their ministers and leaders. The question is whether teachers can be considered "ministers" and therefore exempted from discrimination laws.

One of the teachers, Kristen Biel, was fired from her school after she revealed that she had breast cancer and needed medical leave to undergo chemotherapy. She sued under the Americans with Disabilities Act and has since died.

The other teacher, Agnes Morrissey-Berru, who is not Catholic, taught for 16 years, but was let go based on her performance. She claimed age discrimination.

In other state-church news, the court is scheduled in January to hear a case from Montana on whether states can be forced to help subsidize tuition at religious schools.

Report: Church of Canada may disappear by 2040

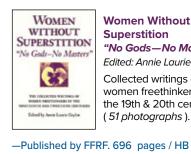
A report commissioned by the Anglican Church of Canada shows there may be no members left in the mainline Canadian denomination in 20 years, according to an article by the Religion News Service.

"Projections from our data indicate that there will be no members, attenders or givers in the Anglican Church of Canada by approximately 2040," said the Rev. Neil Elliot, an Anglican priest in Trail, British Columbia, who authored the report.

Membership in the Anglican Church fell from a high of 1.3 million in 1961 in membership to 357,123 in 2017, said Elliot.

Catholic school cuts PP from resource page

A Catholic college in Madison, Wis., removed Planned Parenthood from its list of wellness resources, following a petition that demanded the abortion provider be stripped from the school's



Women Without Superstition "No Gods-No Masters" Edited: Annie Laurie Gaylor Collected writings of 50 women freethinkers of the 19th & 20th centuries

-Published by FFRF. 696 pages / HB

Buy it from FFRF online ffrf.org/shop

And that's how it's Dunn



Photo by Chris Line

Classical pianist Jarred Dunn and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker sit at the Diane Uhl Steinway piano at Freethought Hall on Dec. 13. They recorded two episodes of "Freethought Matters" about classical composers who were nonbelievers. The shows will feature 21 composers who were freethinkers, including Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy, Copeland and Gershwin.

The petition at Edgewood College was started by TFP Student Action, an organization that seeks to "proudly affirm the positive values of tradition, family and private property." On Nov. 19, TFP Student Action announced that the school had removed the Planned Parenthood links from its page.

Pope lifts 'secrecy' rule in sex abuse cases

The pope has declared that the rule of "pontifical secrecy" no longer applies to the sexual abuse of minors, in a bid to improve transparency in such cases.

The Catholic Church had previously kept sexual abuse cases secret because it said it wanted to protect the privacy of victims and reputations of the accused.

But new papal documents on Dec. 17 lifted restrictions on those who report abuse or say they have been victims. Church leaders called for the rule's abolition at a Vatican summit in February.

The pope also changed the Vatican's definition of child pornography, increasing the age of the subject from 14 or under to 18 or under.

Woman asked to leave flight for 'Satan' shirt

American Airlines apologized after a passenger was asked to leave her flight because she was wearing a "Hail Satan" shirt, which the crew members found "offensive."

Swati Runi Goyal was set to travel from Florida to Las Vegas when she was called up to the front of the plane. The

Key West resident told BuzzFeed News she originally thought she was being upgraded to first class.

"Our crew has found your shirt to be offensive," Goyal said one of the crew members told her.

Goyal said she originally dismissed this request, but the crew continued to press her, delaying the flight and calling for a customer service agent to come on board and demand she remove the shirt. The 49-year-old said she was given an ultimatum: Change shirts or leave the flight entirely.

Teens in South encounter more religion in schools

A survey by Pew Research Center shows teens in the South are more likely than in other regions of the country to encounter religion in public schools.

Teens in the South express their religion, such as praying at lunch or before sporting events, more often than other regions. Among Southern teens, 56 percent say they "often" or "sometimes" see other students praying before a sporting event at their public school, compared with 34 percent of teens in the Midwest, 28 percent in the West and 26 percent in the Northeast, according to a Pew survey of 1,811 teens ages 13 to 17.

Nationwide, 41 percent of teens said it's appropriate for a teacher to lead a class in prayer; 55 percent of Southern teens said it was appropriate. About 82 percent of teens nationwide correctly stated that the Supreme Court had ruled against the practice of teacher-led prayer in public schools.

FFRF's **'Freethought** Matters' mug FREETHOUGHT Matters A meaningful message and the logo of FFRF's new TV show. Ivory imprint on tapered burgundy, 8 fl. oz. American-made mug. \$20 postpaid — Item#MU02 Call 800/335-4021 or order online ffrf.org/shop

Fundamentalism, brain damage link found

A new study shows that religious fundamentalism is partly the result of an impairment in the prefrontal cortex of the brain. Damage to certain areas of the prefrontal cortex indirectly promotes religious fundamentalism by diminishing cognitive flexibility and openness, which is a personality trait that involves curiosity, creativity and open-mindedness.

According to the article on RawStory. com by Bobby Azarian, religious beliefs can be thought of as "socially transmitted mental representations that consist of supernatural events and entities assumed to be real. Religious beliefs differ from empirical beliefs, which are based on how the world appears to be and are updated as new evidence accumulates or when new theories with better predictive power emerge. On the other hand, religious beliefs are not usually updated in response to new evidence or scientific explanations, and are therefore strongly associated with conservatism. They are fixed and rigid, which helps promote predictability and coherence to the rules of society among individuals within the group."

The study was published in the journal Neuropsychologia.

Evangelicals: Atheists would strip their rights

In a new survey, political scientists Ryan Burge and Paul A. Djupe found that 60 percent of white evangelical Protestants think that atheists would strip them of their rights, according to an article in the Washington Post on Dec. 23.

"Their fear comes from an inverted golden rule: Expect from others what you would do unto them," Djupe writes. "White evangelical Protestants express low levels of tolerance for atheists, which leads them to expect intolerance from atheists in return."

Similarly, 58 percent of white evangelicals believed "Democrats in Congress" would not allow them to exercise liberties, such as holding rallies, teaching, speaking freely, and running for public office.

But 65 percent of atheists and 53 percent of Democrats who listed Christian fundamentalists as their least-liked group said they would allow evangelicals to engage in those constitutionally granted liberties. That's a much higher proportion of tolerance than the sample overall.



The U.S. Post Office does not

forward third-class mail.

"In fact, when we looked at all religious groups, atheists and agnostics were the most likely to extend rights to the groups they least liked." Djupe writes.

Citzenship law fuels deadly protests in India

India Prime Minister Narendra Modi defended a contentious citizenship law that has sparked deadly protests. Modi said during a speech on Dec. 22 that he would not scrap the law, which favors every major South Asian faith other than Islam.

Critics say the law is proof that the government plans to turn India into a Hindu-centric state and marginalize the country's 200 million minority Muslims.

Hundreds of thousands of Indians took to the streets in opposition of the Citizenship Amendment Act, which the Indian Parliament approved in December. The protests drew people of all faiths, concerned that the law undermines India's foundation as a secular nation. Around two dozen people were killed in the violent police crackdown, and hundreds were arrested.

Pharmacies sued for not filling prescription

A Minnesota woman is suing two pharmacies, saying they illegally refused to fill a prescription for emergency contraception, according to KSTP News.

After a condom broke, Andrea Anderson's doctor wrote a prescription for emergency contraception. She called the only drug store in town, Thrifty White, to make sure the morning-after pill would be available. Anderson says the pharmacist refused to fill it based on his "beliefs" and "warned" against trying another nearby pharmacy. Anderson contends this was sex discrimination and violates the Minnesota Human Rights Act.

Anderson said she went to the CVS in Aitkin and was denied service again. A third pharmacy in Brainerd finally gave her the medication. Anderson later filed the lawsuit and a complaint with the Minnesota Board of Pharmacy.

Judge admonished for selective officiating

Justice of the Peace Dianne Hensley of McLennan County, Texas, is a conservative Christian and says she's done nothing wrong by officiating at weddings for straight couples while turning away same-sex couples. The Texas Commission on Judicial Conduct published a public warning against the judge on Dec. 9, saying Hensley's conduct casts doubt on her "capacity to act impartially to persons appearing before her as a judge due to the person's sexual orientation."

Hensley, a Republican elected in 2014, claims she's done her due diligence because she makes sure LGBTQ couples who come to her know of other local officiants who can perform their weddings.

Town rejects invocation prayers at meetings

McHenry Township (Ill.) board meetings won't open with prayer after trustees shot down the implementation of an invocation at the Dec. 15 meeting.

Trustee Steve Verr requested the item be brought forward, but was the only "yes" vote on the matter.

Trustees voting against the measure said they didn't want to open the door to some non-Christian groups such as Satanists, Muslims, Buddhists and atheists.

The U.S Supreme Court in 2014 ruled that legislative bodies may open public meetings in prayer, but those prayers can't be limited to Christian invocations.

Residents in the audience pointed out the legal ruling during public comment.

"If this does pass, I look forward to having Christians, Jewish people and Muslims," Wonder Lake resident Mike Tauler said. "I look forward to atheists having their invocation. I look forward to members of the Satanic Temple coming to have their invocation. Once you open it up to one, you open it up to all. Don't forget that."

Ed Asner grants FFRF his time



Photos by Chris line

Actor Ed Asner, right, sits on the "Freethought Matters" set with FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor. Asner is the most honored male performer in the history of the primetime Emmy Awards, having won seven, including five for portraying Lou Grant, both on the "Mary Tyler Moore Show" and on the spinoff show "Lou Grant." The show will air and be posted on YouTube on Feb. 16.





Left: Ed Asner sits with FFRF Legal Assistant Greta Martens in the lobby of Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis.

Above: FFRF's electronic marquee on the side of Freethought Hall shares the news of Asner's arrival.



A large contingent of FFRF staff members came down to greet Ed Asner during his visit. He was in Madison to perform as the lead role of God in the political comedy play, "God Help Us." Asner is also known famously as the voice of Carl Fredricksen in the animated movie "Up," and as Santa Claus in the comedy "Elf." Since 1957, Asner has been in more than 60 movies and 200 TV shows. He identifies as agnostic.

FFRF NEWS

Helping the homeless



Portland Family Homeless Solutions was aided by the Portland Area Chapter of FFRF, including, from left, David Jorling, Cheryl Kolbe and Cathy Whiting, along with Emma Hoyle, director of development for PFHS. David and Cathy are on the chapter board and Cheryl is the chapter president.

FFRF chapters provide charitable activism

Each year, FFRF offers each of its chapters a \$1,000 grant to be used for direct aid and charitable activism.

Here's what those chapters did in 2019 with the grant money.

Central Florida Freethought Community

During the Florida Humanist Association's biennial conference in November, the Central Florida Freethought Community supported the FHA's service project, which included purchasing supplies for distribution by Second Harvest Food Bank, a secular nonprofit serving central Florida. The event involved conference attendees sorting and packaging items for distribution.

Denver Chapter of FFRF

The Denver Chapter of FFRF purchased items for the Atheists Helping the Homeless organization in Denver. This organization distributes items in Civic Center Park to the homeless on a monthly basis and promotes the understanding that nonbelievers are just as kind and generous as religious organizations.

FFRF East Tennessee

FFRF East Tennessee has helped the homeless in Knoxville by collecting and distributing blankets and coats, providing backpacks and personal hygiene items, and offering some warm meals.

FFRF Kentucky

FFRF Kentucky purchased items for senior citizens living in Section 8 housing at American Village in Louisville in July 2019. The chapter purchased beds for residents who had been sleeping on the floor. It also donated pillows, bed linens, wash rags, towels, plates, silverware, blankets, lamps, shower curtains and hooks and personal toiletries.

FFRF Maine

FFRF Maine helped fund shelves and a utility sink for the Litchfield Food Bank. The rest of the grant money was spent on food for the needy in the Litchfield area.

FFRF Portland Area

The Portland chapter donated 50 sets of towels for use by families at Portland Family Homeless Solutions. As the families move on, Portland Family Homeless Solutions gives them the towels to take with them. The Portland chapter also purchased 15 pots, all in the color palette to reduce trauma, to be used throughout the facility to create a calm, safe, and relaxing place for the families.

Grand Rapids Atheists and Freethinkers

The Grand Rapids Atheists and Freethinkers used the funds (plus some additional donations from its members) to support the Boys and Girls Clubs of the North in Grand Rapids, Coloraine and Deer River. The donation has been used primarily to cover the \$10 annual membership fee for more than 100 children, whose families cannot afford that fee.

Greater Sacramento Chapter of FFRF

The Sacramento chapter board voted to help the local Gay and Lesbian Center. This support provided 20 HIV tests with counseling, and five "cultural competency and diversity training for any agency, workplace, or school seeking to create an affirming and compliant environment" events.

Lake Superior Freethinkers

Lake Superior Freethinkers expanded its partnership and support for the WE Health Clinic (formerly the Women's Health Center) in Duluth, Minn. WE Health Clinic is the only abortion services provider in northern Minnesota. Using matching funds, LSF supports the WE Health Clinic through volunteer work and with LSF members serving on WE Health Clinic's Board and committees. In October 2019, LSF members volunteer during one of the WE Health Clinic's annual fundraisers.

FFRF calls on IRS to probe Trump rally at megachurch

FFRF made a huge splash in national news in early January when it insisted that the IRS take action regarding a pro-Trump rally hosted by a megachurch in Miami on Jan. 3.

The leader, pastor and self-proclaimed "apostle" of the Ministerio Internacional El Rey Jesús (King Jesus Ministry), Guillermo Maldonado, had urged his congregation to attend this political rally. According to reporting by the Tampa Bay Times, Maldonado told congregants: "Don't put your race or your nationality over being a Christian. Be mature . . . If you want to come, do it for your pastor. That's a way of supporting me."

FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert wrote to Acting Director of Exempt Organizations Examinations Mary A. Epps, urging the IRS to promptly investigate King Jesus Ministry. FFRF called his actions a clear violation of IRS regulations prohibiting 501(c)(3) organizations from participating in a political campaign.

Dozens of news outlets covered the controversy, including CBS, Fox News,

Reuters, The New York Times and Newsweek.

The IRS provision, known as the Johnson Amendment, specifies that 501(c)(3) organizations, which include churches and other religious organiza-

tions, are prohibited from "participating in or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office." While leaders of churches or religious organizations may express their opinions on political matters as individuals, they are, according to this rule, precluded from making "partisan comments in official organization publications or at official functions of the organization."

At the rally, Trump was prayed over by various evangelists, including Paula White, advisor to the president's Faith and Opportunity Initiative.

Among Trump's remarks to the cheering crowd of 5,000: "I really do believe

we have God on our side. I believe that, I believe that . . . Evangelical Christians of every denomination and believers of every faith have never had a greater champion, then you have right now. We've done things that nobody thought was possible. Together we're not only defending our constitutional rights. We're also defending religion itself, which is under siege."

Trump used the occasion to announce that Attorney General William Barr will soon announce a new action to protect prayer in public schools.

"Very soon I'll be taking action to safeguard students and teachers' First Amendment rights to pray in our schools," Trump

"In urging congregants to come to a political rally, and in hosting the political rally, King Jesus Ministry appears to have inappropriately used its religious organization and 501(c)(3) status by intervening in a political campaign," Markert writes. "It violated IRS regulations by seemingly expressing its support for a candidate in the November 2020 presidential election."

Although Trump has claimed that the Presidential Executive Order Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty "got rid of" the Johnson Amendment, the order did no such thing. The Department of Justice

has twice disavowed this notion in open court, after FFRF sued to prove that an executive order cannot overturn enacted legislation. The Johnson Amendment remains in full effect, and churches may not promote political campaigns.

"It would be hard to imagine a more overt and flagrant violation of ethics and the IRS code than this planned rally," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "But perhaps it is not surprising, given the president's incessant and untrue mantra that the Johnson Amendment has been repealed."

The El Rey Jesús megachurch is now claiming that the Trump campaign rented its facilities.

'Not afraid of burning in hell'

It would be hard to imagine

violation of ethics and the IRS

code than this planned rally.

a more overt and flagrant

— FFRF Co-President

Annie Laurie Gaylor



FFRF's provocative televison ad featuring "unabashed atheist" Ron Reagan was aired twice during the Democratic debate on Jan. 14 on CNN, as well as on pre- and post-debate shows, including "Cuomo Prime Time." The ad reached about 22 million viewers. Reagan finishes the 30-second spot by saying, "Ron Reagan, lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in hell."

Legal team

Continued from page 1

Response Team is now under its own banner, headed by Andrew L. Seidel. We added another permanent staff attorney, Chris Line, who's been with FFRF as a law student intern and legal fellow for the last several years. We also welcomed two new legal fellows, Brendan Johnson and Dante Harootunian, and a new legal assistant, Greta Martens. This brings the legal department's staff to 10 attorneys and two legal assistants.

FFRF also continued its legal internship program. During 2019, we were lucky to have assistance from four dedicated law students and three undergraduate interns.

Nonlitigation advocacy

In 2019, our intake team processed 3,380 contacts about potential statechurch violations, of which 2,958 were unique complaints (i.e., not duplicates).

Our attorneys sent out 1,015 letters to government entities over religious entanglements in government. Letters of complaint were sent to all states except Rhode Island, Vermont and Wyoming. As usual, the majority of these letters involved religion in public schools. We earned 270 nonlitigation victories.

On top of those letters of complaints, FFRF sent more than 1,800 letters in "mass mailings," educating government officials about state-church violations, including the unconstitutional nature of public-school field trips to the Ark Park

The top 10 states (where FFRF sent the most letters of complaint) were:

- 1. Texas
- 2. Alabama
- 3. Kentucky
- 4. Wisconsin
- 5. Florida (tie)
- 5. California (tie)
- 7. Tennessee
- 8. Ohio
- 9. Georgia
- 10. Michigan

The top 10 issue areas were:

- 1. Schools
- 2. Government funding of religion
- 3. Social media
- 4. Government prayer
- 5. National Day of Prayer
- 6. Religious events
- 7. Prayer breakfasts (tie)
- 7. Religious displays (tie)
- 9. Crosses
- 10. Elections

Amicus briefs

FFRF's litigation team ended the year with a record eight amicus briefs submitted to courts around the country. Three of these "friend of the court" briefs were filed at the U.S. Supreme Court, including the already decided *Bladensburg* memorial cross case, and cases to be argued in 2020.

In Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue, FFRF, along with other secular groups, cogently argued that true religious



This visual aid was used to help teach the Ten Commandments to elementary school students in Mercer County Schools. The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in FFRF's favor that plaintiffs can challenge the "Bible in the Schools' program.

liberty would be imperiled if the court strikes down a provision of the Montana Constitution that prohibits official funding of religious education. FFRF signed onto a brief in June Medical Services v. Gee, a case concerning Louisiana's law requiring physicians performing abortions to have admitting privileges at local hospitals.

These briefs are crucial to adding FFRF's voice to cases involving religious liberty issues and for standing up for the rights and views of the growing number of nonreligious Americans. The legal department's restructuring allows FFRF's attorneys to continue to submit arguments in cases in which FFRF is not a party, but which need to have the freethought perspective represented.

On the road

FFRF attorneys were also sent on the road to educate the public on state-church issues. Elizabeth Cavell presented "Our Constitution, Our Rights" at the When Rights and Religion Collide conference in New York City. Sam Grover spoke about "Civil Rights in the Age of Religious Refusal" in La Crosse, Wis. Ryan Jayne educated students at the high school in Monroe, Wis., during a full day of presentations on constitutional law. Former legal fellow Colin McNamara joined a panel discussion in Louisville on religion in the public schools. Andrew L. Seidel spoke in Arizona on "Why fighting for state-church separation is so important," among other stops on his The Founding Myth book tour. I had a presentation and discussion with female inmates on their rights at Taycheedah Correctional Facility in Fond du Lac, Wis., titled, "An Introduction to FFRF and Atheism in the Correctional Systems."

Attorneys also continued educating lawyers and judges. FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott helped organize and emcee a continuing legal education class for the Wisconsin State Bar Association.

Though the landscape is changing, FFRF's legal department has never been better poised to take on the challenges secular Americans face in upholding the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

Markert is FFRF's legal director.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • 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 30,000 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.

FFRF exposes team baptism

In Alabama, a public school football team on Nov. 21 held a baptism on school property with the head coach and other staff in attendance, which is unconstitutional, asserts the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

FFRF has asked that the school district take the appropriate steps to ensure there will be no further religious rituals, including baptisms, during school-sponsored activities at Reeltown High School in Notasulga.

But U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne of Alabama, who is a candidate for the Senate seat held by Democrat Doug Jones, was clearly aghast at FFRF's complaint. He sent out this tweet:

"I'm sick of these groups trying to tell us that we aren't allowed to live out our faith. The Freedom from Religion Foundation needs to pack it up and stop forcing their ungodly, un-American views down our throats. The foundation says they want separation of church and state, but what they really want to [do] is to rip God out of our nation altogether. I'm thankful for leaders like Coach [Matt] Johnson who are doing the right thing and serving as positive role models to our young people."

FFRF contends that students will perceive the baptism as endorsed by the school, since this religious ritual took place on school property with school staff members present.

"Courts have consistently held that it is illegal for a public school to organize, sponsor, or lead religious activity at public high school athletic events, such as football practice," FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line writes to Tallapoosa County Schools Superintendent Joseph C. Windle.

Most importantly, allowing outside adults to perform religious rituals specific to one religion — in this case Christianity — at a team event, ostracizes those students and families who identify as nonreligious or practice a minority religion. The freedom of conscience of all students must be respected.

"It's an egregious overstep for public school officials to put Christian baptism in the playbook," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.



FFRF denounces White House Christian 'takeover'

self-proclaimed Christian "takeover" of the White House.

According to several social media posts by Christian musicians and worship leaders, they were invited on Dec. 6 to the White House for a briefing that degenerated into singing, praying and what one attendee claimed was a "#WorshipTakeover," asserting that the event was "inside the White House right now." Added another post, "We were invited by this administration to worship inside the White House today."

Vice President Mike Pence showed up at the event, took some photos and promoted it on social media, writing: "Wonderful stopping by a worship leaders briefing today at the @WhiteHouse! America is a proud Nation of believers and our Administration will always defend the freedom of religion of every American, of every faith!"

Megapreacher and President Trump's "spiritual counselor" Paula White could be seen sitting in the front row. FFRF has previously condemned the White House's recent hiring of White because it would blur the line separating state and church.

The event comes on the heels of Pence lying to a group of faith leaders in Mich-

FFRF has condemned a recent igan. Pence repeated the fib that Trump has destroyed the Johnson Amendment. FFRF has debunked this lie many times. FFRF sued Trump in federal court over his executive order on the Johnson Amendment, and his own Justice Department admitted — twice — to the court that Trump's order did nothing to alter that rule or its enforcement.



FFRF VICTORIES

By Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey

Arkansas

A Russellville School District teacher has been reminded of his obligation to refrain from proselytizing to students.

A district parent reported that a sixth-grade science teacher at Russellville Middle School has made several claims to his class that are based on his personal religious beliefs, not scientific fact. The complainant reported that this teacher told students that dinosaurs lived only a few thousand years ago, and that humans and dinosaurs coexisted. He also reportedly told students that Earth is only a few thousand years old and that it cannot be as old as the "atheist scientists" claim that it is.

FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Mark Gotcher urging the district to take appropriate disciplinary and corrective action regarding this unconstitutional conduct. Gotcher responded via phone and assured FFRF that he has spoken with the teacher and this should not be an issue again.

Colorado

Impermissible religious advertisements have been removed from Douglas County School District property after the district heard from FFRF.

A concerned area resident reported that Douglas County High School in Castle Rock rents space to the Front Range Church each Sunday and was allowing the church to park a large trailer with an advertisement for the church service in the parking lot throughout the week. The trailer was apparently easily visible to students or parents in the parking lot.

FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Thomas S. Tucker, asking the district to ensure that Front Range Church is only using and displaying messages on school property during times when it is actually renting the property.

The district's attorney responded via email, informing FFRF that school staff removed all signage/advertising on the trailer. "The trailer now includes no reference to Front Range Church or any church services," the attorney writes.

Florida

After numerous violations, staff in Volusia County Schools in DeLand have been reminded of their obligation to not endorse religion when acting in their official capacity as public school employees.

Multiple complainants, including a Volusia County parent, reported instances of religious promotion occurring within the district. The district's director of transportation was regularly posting religious content on his Twitter page, where his bio read: "Volusia County Schools Director of Transportation. Follower and Ambassador of Jesus Christ."

Additionally, a University High School teacher and student government association president posted an endorsement of a "See You at the Pole" gathering on Twitter. It read: "Amazing prayer circle this morning! Thank U to all who had the STRENGTH to show the COURAGE to share HIS word and RESPECT HIS KNOWLEDGE. . . . I felt HIS presence in the energy generated by our praying hearts and was humbled to hear the voices of young people living in HIS grace!"

In response to FFRF Attorney Chris Line's letter of complaint, any religious content has been removed from the director of transportation's twitter page and Superintendent Timothy Egnor has reminded the school staff "that they must remain

Celebrating the solstice, Chicago style



FFRF's Metropolitan Chicago Chapter held a Winter Solstice party at North Branch Pizza & Burger Co. in Glenview, Ill., on Dec. 14, with FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker in attendance. Back row, left ro right: Jill Berkowitz, Fred Dix, Tom Cara, Bapu Arekapudi, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Brian McCaskill, Allen Cosnow, Barb Popp, Greg Popp. Front row: Dan Barker, Terry Stapley, Mary Ann Anderson, Barbara Franjevic, Shane Stapley.

neutral toward religion and must refrain from actively participating, promoting or endorsing religious activities."

The Alachua County Public School District's attorney has reminded district employees that they may not promote religion at school meetings.

A district employee in Gainesville reported that at a working dinner involving many school personnel, Buchholz High School Principal James TenBieg asked an employee to deliver a religious blessing. The complainant felt coerced into bowing their head and participating in this religious exercise because it was at the direction of the principal and they did not want to risk potential backlash.

FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to Brian Moore, the district's attorney, to ensure that the district is no longer including prayer as part of employee meetings or events. Moore responded via email, assuring FFRF that district principals will be reminded this is inappropriate.

A church's banner has been removed from Miami-Dade Public Schools property.

A local resident reported that Lake Stevens Middle Schools in Miami had been displaying a banner for World Church International on its fence at all times. FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho, reminding the district that the school may not display religious advertisements. If the church rents the property, it may only put up the signs no earlier than when the rental time begins and must take them down when the rental time ends.

The district's attorney responded via phone call to alert FFRF that the banners had been removed. Per school policy, they must only be up when the church is renting the school.

What Is a Freethinker?

freethinker n.

1 A person who forms opinions about religion on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief. A Bay County School District teacher has removed a religious reference from his email signature as it constituted an inappropriate endorsement of religion.

A district parent reported that a music teacher at Deane Bozeman School in Panama City was sending emails from his school account with a religious message in the signature line. Every email received by the complainant included the message, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6."

FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to the district's attorney asking that the signature be removed so as not to create the impression of school endorsement of religion. The district's attorney responded to the complaint, informing FFRF that the religious reference has been removed from the teacher's district email signature.

Illinois

FFRF has secured two victories for state-church separation in the Maroa-Forsyth School District.

A concerned district parent contacted FFRF to report that a local religious ministry and New Life Pregnancy Center were teaching sex education at Maroa-Forsyth Middle School. New Life describes itself as "a Christ-centered ministry committed to upholding the sanctity of human life by demonstrating the love of Christ."

New Life's "Sexsanity" curriculum is based on encouraging abstinence largely through shame and fear, rather than providing educational information.

FFRF sent a letter to President Lind-

sey Wise, urging the district to replace this sex education curriculum with an appropriate, comprehensive and science-based alternative. The district has assured FFRF that it "will not teach that curriculum again. Period."

FFRF was later informed by the complainant of a trend of Maroa-Forsyth High School promoting religion on social media. The school's attorney has committed to addressing all state-church issues with district leadership and will ensure these violations do not recur.

Kansas

Teacher-led prayer has been stopped in North Lyon County USD 251 in Americus.

A district parent reported to FFRF that their child's music teacher recently prayed with students before a concert at North Lyon County Elementary School. The teacher reportedly told students who don't believe that they can bow their heads and close their eyes or just stare off into space. The teacher then reportedly read verses from the bible as part of the performance.

FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Mike Mathes, urging him to make certain that none of its employees were unlawfully and inappropriately indoctrinating students in religious matters.

Mathes responded to FFRF with assurances that the teacher was "instructed to stop leading prayer, encouraging students to pray, or reading the bible during the school day or as part of a school event."

• •

Humboldt USD 258 has taken action to address a complaint of coach prayer within its district.

A local resident reported to FFRF that Logan Wyrick, head coach of the Humboldt High School football team, had been leading his team in prayer after games. FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Kay Lewis, urging the district to investigate the alleged complaint and take immediate action to stop any illegal school-sponsored prayer.

In response to FFRF's letter, Lewis spoke with Wyrick about the district policies and well-established legal precedent that preclude coach-led prayer in the district. The coach agreed this would not happen again. Additionally, the district athletic director will speak with all district coaches and sponsors in regard to this violation at an upcoming in-service.

Kentucky

A coach in the Glasgow Independent School District has been advised not to lead the team in prayer, organize or otherwise advocate for students to lead team prayer.

A community member contacted FFRF to report that after every practice and game, Jeff Hughes, an assistant coach at Glasgow Middle School, led his team

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in a prayer session when he discussed his Christian faith. Hughes had described his job as teaching "young men about football and more importantly about Jesus!" Hughes is apparently also involved with the school's Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) club.

FFRF Legal Fellow Dante Harootunian wrote to Superintendent Keith Hale, urging the district to take immediate action to stop any and all prayers occurring in district athletic programs.

Hale sent a letter of response, informing FFRF that "Hughes has been advised not to lead the team in prayer, organize or otherwise advocate for students to lead team prayer."

Missouri

District administrators in Willard Public Schools have taken corrective action to ensure that inappropriate religious references will not occur in presentations in their classes.

A district parent reported that Willard High School's choir director invited a former student to talk to his class and then posted on social media about how the guest had spoken about "following God's plan."

FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to the school's attorney pointing out the constitutional issues with allowing an outside adult access to impressionable public school students to preach to about "God's plan." The attorney informs FFRF that the superintendent and the principal reviewed the issue and discussed the inappropriateness with the choir teacher. The teacher was "directed to refrain from similar presentations in the future" and he "readily agreed." The social media post has since been removed.

Oklahoma

Administration officials in Blanchard Public Schools have "taken affirmative steps" to address a serious state-church violation in one of its schools.

A district parent reported that a science teacher at Blanchard Middle School had been attempting to discredit evolution. The complainant reported that their child was supposed to learn about evolution through an educational video. Before the lesson, the teacher told students that she is Christian and would be fast forwarding through parts of the video that she found offensive as a Christian, and that she felt would be offensive to others. She then proceeded to fast forward through large portions of the video explaining evolution. The teacher showed a second video because the first was "too offensive." At one point during the second video, the narrator stated that evolution was a fact, at which point the teacher told students that was not true.

FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Jim Beckman, pointing out that the teacher's attempt to undermine what she was teaching is both unconstitutional and pedagogically deplorable. Line urged the district to take appropriate disciplinary and corrective action regarding this unconstitutional conduct.

The district's attorney responded to FFRF's letter with assurances that administration is taking action to ensure this does not happen again.

Edmond Public Schools has made changes to an annual holiday program after complaints that including religious elements violated the constitutional principle of state-church separation.

An Edmond Public Schools community member reported that each year, third-grade teachers at Chisholm Elementary had students rehearse a live nativity scene, which the students then went on to perform at the school's holiday concert in December. Students who participated apparently played various roles, including Mary, Joseph, etc.

FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to the school's attorney, pointing out that teaching students the biblical story of the birth of Jesus and having them regularly rehearse a performance of that story impermissibly entangles the school with the bible's devotional message. The school's attorney replied via email, informing FFRF that "changes were made to the program."

District leadership in Lone Grove School District No. I-32 has taken action to address a serious state-church violation.

A district parent reported that a firstgrade teacher at Lone Grove Primary School led students in prayer before a Thanksgiving meal. The complainant reported that before the meal, the teacher boasted that all of the first-grade classes lead children in prayer every day before snack time. This practice has apparently been taking place at the school for years.

FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Meri Jayne Miller, urging the district to make certain that none of its employees is unlawfully and inappropriately indoctrinating students in religious matters by leading prayer, encouraging them to pray, or setting aside time

The district's attorney responded to the letter of complaint, informing FFRF that neither the superintendent nor the school principal was aware this was taking place and that "the administration inves-

tigated and has taken affirmative steps to ensure that this does not happen again."

South Carolina

Coaches in Greenville County Schools have been reminded of their constitutional duty to remain neutral on matters of religion.

A concerned district parent reported that Woodmont High School football coaches prayed with their players on the field after a football game in October. FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote to the district's attorney Doug Webb to ensure that Greenville County Schools takes immediate action to stop any and all school-sponsored prayer.

Webb informed FFRF in his response letter that district coaches have "been instructed not to participate in any student-initiated prayer but to instead respectfully observe that prayer so that their actions do not show either endorsement or hostility toward that student expression."

Texas



A Texas public school district has addressed unconstitutional religious promotion by its basketball coaches.

A concerned community member reported to FFRF that basketball coaches at Connally High School in Pflugerville had been leading their teams in prayer. One of the coaches, Bradley Washington, had also established the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) program at the high school. In an online FCA video, Washington stated that "there was no FCA here, and I'm not gonna apologize for trying to pour it into the young kids' life. Basketball won't be a part of your life forever, but Jesus will."

FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote a letter to Pflugerville Independent School District Superintendent Douglas Killian, urging the district to take immediate steps to end these illegal practices.

The superintendent responded by

email to assure FFRF that the district is taking action to correct these violations. Killian reports he has "reached out to the athletic director and deputy superintendent to investigate and correct and shared to get some training in place with our attorney for the coaches and sponsors."

Washington

A proselytizing retired teacher is no longer volunteering with students in the East Valley School District No. 90

A district community member reported that East Valley High School was allowing a retired teacher to proselytize to students and act as an FCA representative, even though the school has no student FCA club. The complainant reported that the FCA representative organized monthly coach breakfasts and meetings with student-athletes after practice ends. The coaches at the school had apparently encouraged students to meet with the volunteer after practice.

FFRF Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent John Schieche, urging the district to ensure that outside adults are no longer being given access to students during school activities.

Schieche informed FFRF that he "met with the retired teacher last spring and informed him that the meetings with students were not permissible." The retired teacher is no longer volunteering in the school or meeting with students.

West Virginia

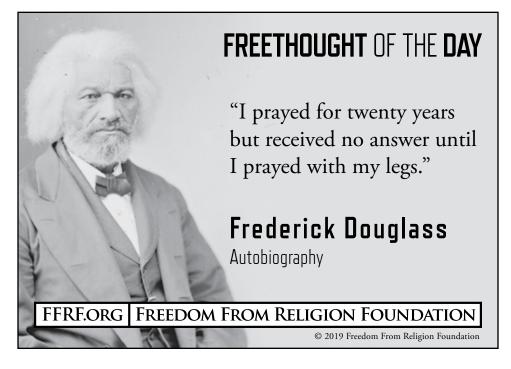
District staff members in Berkeley County Schools in Martinsburg were instructed to honor their constitutional obligation to remain neutral on religion when acting in their official capacity.

FFRF was informed that Spring Mills High School football coaches prayed with their players midfield after a football game in September. Pastor Mayor Dale Myers was reportedly brought in to lead the football prayer after the football game.

FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote to Superintendent Patrick K. Murphy urging the district to stop any and all school-sponsored prayers occurring in any district programs.

The district responded via e-mail, alerting FFRF of the actions it took to investigate the claims and has addressed the legal issues relevant to this situation at its Athletic Council Meeting. "Athletic directors and principals were instructed on what law requires of district employees who are acting in their official capacity when it comes to prayer at athletic events."

View daily entries and quotes at ffrf.org/day





'Holy Hierarchy' now on Amazon Prime



Photo by Ingrid Laas Jeremiah Camara

Amazon Prime Video is now streaming Jeremiah Camara's mov-"Holy Hierarchy: The Religious Roots of Racism In America."

Camara is the director and producer. The movie was previously shown at FFRF's convention in Madison, Wis., in October.

"Holy Hierarchy" explains how the notions of a supreme being in colonial Virginia led to beliefs of supreme human beings and how these beliefs morphed their way into the legal system; ultimately creating racism and turning racism into an institution.

Nothing Fails Like Prayer Award

Is it OK to be an atheist in politics?

This is an edited version of the speech given by Hemant Mehta at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 18. He was given the 2019 Nothing Fails Like Prayer Award. Hemant was introduced by FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel:

On May 5, 2014, the Supreme Court ruled that it's totally fine for local governments to have prayers, even if they are overwhelmingly Christian. One of the reasons that the Supreme Court said it was fine was because "the town at no point excluded or denied an opportunity to a would-be prayer giver." A minister or lay person of any persuasion, including an atheist, could give an invocation. Since we couldn't challenge this in court anymore, we figured we'll take them at their word. And since nothing fails like prayer, FFRF inaugurated its "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" contest. Every year, we award this to someone who has gone to their local government body that is already praying and delivered a strong secular invocation. The award comes with a plaque and a \$500 honorarium.

This year's winner is Hemant Mehta, who is a writer and editor, and runs the hugely popular "Friendly Atheist" site, which I visit 19 or 100 times a day. He edited the 2017 book, *Queer Disbelief: Why LGBTQ Equality is an Atheist Issue.* He wrote the *Young Atheists' Survival Guide*, and, in a slightly devilish transaction, he sold his soul on eBay and wrote a very fun book about that.

He's a brilliant mind and a huge asset to the secular movement. He's unafraid of critiquing us to make us better as much as he is unafraid of criticizing government officials who use their public offices to promote their personal religion. So, Hemant, come on up and accept your award.

By Hemant Mehta

i, everybody. Thank you for having me here. I'm going to talk about something that's not directly connected to that invocation, but something I feel very strongly about.

Wouldn't it be nice if there were more atheists in public office? Of course, it would. But I don't want them there so they can advocate for atheists. That's not their job. I don't need them to do the stuff that FFRF does. I want them there because having more atheists in politics has some serious symbolic value. Because it matters when my House representative is a black woman. It matters when you have a person in Congress who is a Muslim, or someone with a physical disability or someone who is LGBTQ.

We all know there's a stigma attached to being an atheist. How many of you have gotten to know somebody, and you tell them at some point that you are an atheist. The response you get back is, "Oh, but I thought you were a good person."

To watch Hemant Mehta's convention speech, go to ffrf.us/mehta

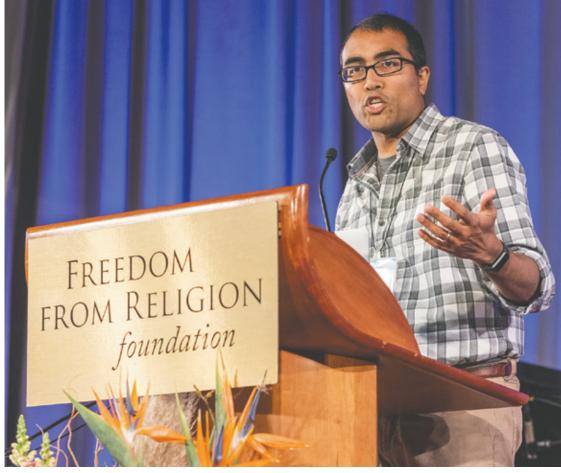


Photo by Ingrid Laas

FFRF Member Hemant Mehta, who runs the "Friendly Atheist" website, speaks during the FFRF convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 18, 2019.

(If you are an atheist in

politics and you're good at

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against religion. You're

- Hemant Mehta

We've all had some sort of variation on that conversation. Let me ask you a slightly different question. When you think about the most famous atheists, who is the most famous atheist you can think of?

There's probably a couple names that come to my mind. Maybe you're thinking of an author or Richard Daw-

kins, Sam Harris or somebody like that. If you are a famous atheist author, why are you a famous atheist author? It's because you wrote a book or two where your whole point is to have readers say, "OK, I don't believe

in this stuff anymore." Your goal in writing the book was to get people to stop being religious. Maybe you were thinking of a comedian such as Bill Maher. When does Bill Maher talk about religion? He brings it up in his act because he wants to make you laugh and I'm glad he does. It's funny. But his point in doing that is to get you to laugh at religion.

This is why it would be such a big deal to have atheists in government. And, for the public, think about what that means. This may be their best chance to see an atheist in public life, to see (hopefully) a respectable atheist, where their job is not to denigrate religion. And I think that would go so far in changing the public perception of what it means to be an atheist.

If you are an atheist in politics and you're good at it, you're not doing battle against religion. You're trying to help everybody. That is a big deal. Yet, trying to get into politics has been this huge hurdle for atheists everywhere.

[Hemant shows image of The New Republic magazine] The cover of this magazine says, "The last taboo." And underneath there's a subheading that says, "Politicians keep saying we should inject more religion into our public life. But what we really need is a healthy dose

of atheism." Cool. The author is Wendy Kaminer, who is a fantastic writer and activist. But she wrote this in 1996. Really? The last taboo? I mean, we hadn't had an African-American president, we hadn't had a woman at the top of the ticket. Is atheism the last taboo? No.

In this article, she writes, "Atheists generate about as much sympathy as

pedophiles." Her point was that it's really hard to be an open atheist in politics. She was right. In 1996, there were no open atheists in the U.S. Congress.

But when you say you're religious and you're trying to run

for office, people know what that means. It means you're a good person. It means you can be trusted. And that's what people want when they're voting for somebody. Is it still toxic to be an atheist in politics? I'd say, "kind of," but that's changing and it's changing quickly and in ways you may not even be aware of.

Getting an edge

I'll give you a couple examples here. Let me take you back to 2008 in North Carolina. There was a U.S. Senate race where neither candidate was an incumbent. One was Kay Hagan, a state law-maker running on the Democratic side. She was up against Elizabeth Dole, the wife of the former Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole. This was a close race and everyone knew it. There was a lot of money being funneled into North Carolina. So, you're looking for any way to get an edge.

Kay Hagan had a fundraiser that was held at the home of someone who was known to be an atheist activist. She went to his home, not because she's an atheist, but because he was hosting a fundraiser. And with that information alone, I'll tell you about the commercial the Dole campaign ran afterwards.

It's shots of atheists appearing in the

news and saying, "Let's take God off the currency." "Let's take God off the dollar bills." "Kay Hagan appeared at an atheist home." There's dark music in the background. And, when the screen fades to black, you hear a voice saying, "There is no God." I'm not joking. That's really in the ad.

So, what did Hagen promise in return? I have no idea. She promised us nothing. And yet, that was the ad Dole's campaign ran because just the link to an atheist was enough to be an attack ad. That's how bad it is. The good news is that it didn't hurt her enough. Kay Hagan ended up winning that race in 2008, though she lost her re-election bid in 2014 to Thom Tillis.

Let me give you another name. Do you know Pete Stark, the Democratic representative from California? He made news across the country in 2007 when he announced he was an openly nonreligious member of Congress. He was the first one we knew about. He was openly saying "I don't believe in a higher power." He called himself a Unitarian, but said, "Yeah, I don't believe in a higher

power and I'm OK with the Secular Coalition for America broadcasting that." And he said later on that he was surprised the reception was overwhelmingly positive. He thought it was gonna be really bad and it wasn't. He got so many positive messages from people.

But here's something that was shocking. Pete Stark ran some successful re-election campaigns even after being out as an atheist. He won again in 2008 and 2010. But, in 2012, he was up for re-election but did not win because another Democrat, Eric Swalwell, beat him in the primaries.

I like Eric Swalwell; he's really good on TV and I agree with most of his politics. But when he was running in that primary, he was looking for any edge to beat a longtime incumbent. It turned out in 2011 that the House held a symbolic vote on whether the United States should keep "In God We Trust" as the national motto. And, this is one of those things where, of course, they're all going to say "yes" and almost 400 of them did vote that way. But nine members of the House said no. Pete Stark was one



Hemant Mehta wants more atheists to run for public office.

of those nine and Eric Swalwell used that fact in his primary press release. "Do we trust Pete Stark to represent our views? The 15th Congressional District deserves a member of Congress who is in touch with its people, can work well with others and can honor our national

Kyrsten Sinema from Arizona was also elected to the House in 2012. I remember hearing during the primary that there's this bisexual atheist running for the House in a fairly conservative area, but had a good chance of winning. When she won the primary and had a chance of winning the seat, all of the sudden she stopped referring to herself as an atheist. And when she won, there were headlines saying a bisexual atheist just got elected to Congress. Her campaign was then like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Not an atheist."

I wrote to her campaign and asked what label she was using. This is what the campaign staff wrote back: "She believes the terms 'nontheist,' 'atheist' or 'nonbeliever' are not befitting of her life's work or personal character." They could have just said, "No, we're busy and we're not going to answer it." Instead, they gave me that statement, basically throwing atheists under the bus. But I will give her this: When she was sworn into office, she took her oath on the Constitution. And again in 2018, when she ran for U.S. Senate and won, she took an oath of office on a copy of the Constitution with Mike Pence holding it. Very cool.

Survey says...

Every two years, the Pew Research Center releases a survey of the newly elected members of Congress and they ask for religious affiliation. There's one section that says "unaffiliated" and there's just one name: Kyrsten Sinema.

And, let me also take you to 2012. Every four years, Gallup does a survey during the presidential campaign which asks voters, "Would you vote for someone in your political party if that person ." If that person were black, 96 percent of people said yes. Why would that be a problem? A woman? Yes. Most people are like, "That would be fine if I agreed with their politics."

And where is "atheist" on this list in 2012? It's way at the bottom. But, this was actually cause for celebration in 2012 because it was above 50 percent for the first time. Fifty-four percent basically said, "Yeah, it's not the worst thing ever."

A couple of years ago, Jared Huffman, another Democrat from California, said, "OK, fine, I will come out as nonreligious." He used the word "humanist." After he came out, I was very excited to see the Pew Research survey listing the Congress members and their

the word "atheist" or "humanist" on that list. So, I scroll down and I'm looking for the word "atheist" or "humanist" and the closest I see is "unaffiliated." But it shows just one, which we already know is Kyrsten Sinema. Jared, where are you? In its report, Pew said it gets the data from this political survey and Rep. Huffman didn't return the survey. But, a couple of months ago, he updated that survey and it does say "humanist" now. In this case, the "H" word makes a difference.

Reps. Huffman and Jamie Raskin and Mark Pocan helped begin the Freethought Caucus, which has 12 members. Literally, Jared Huffman is the only openly nonreligious one on that list. But that is still cool. Those are people who are saying "atheist" isn't really a dirty word for us. We'll fight for church-state separation. We'll fight for reason-based policymaking, which is still a thing. And maybe it will come back one day. I can't

But I want to tell you what's really making me excited here. In 2016, Gallup

(I hope any of you can

run for something. There

offices in America. It's OK.

You can run for something.

are like 500,000 elected

You can be an atheist.

- Hemant Mehta

did that poll asking if you would vote for a _ _. And if you scroll down to the bottom, wait a minute, that's not us anymore. A socialist is now the worst thing you can be. Atheists are at 58 percent. And, by the way, if you break this down by

age and ask people under age 30 if they would vote for an atheist, the number is about 75 percent. It's getting to the point where even the youngest people like atheists.

In 2018, when they had the midterm elections, with the help of the Center for Freethought Equality, which is an arm of the American Humanist Association, I started keeping track of everyone running not just for Congress (because Huffman is the only one who's openly nonreligious), but at the state level. People running for state Houses or state Senates and how many of them were openly nonreligious. The only caveat was that I didn't care what word they used. "Atheist"? Great. "Nonreligious?" All right. Any of it. I'll take it all.

Freethinkers database

[Hemant shows database on screen] I kept a spreadsheet. On this database, I have purple representing people who ran for state House or state Senate and lost. I used green to represent people who won their races, some of whom were incumbents. Let me scroll through this spreadsheet for you. Look at all the greens in all of the states. I religion because I was so excited to see know, there's a lot of purple, too. Don't

worry about that. That's expected. But look at all the greens.

How many greens are on that list? How many openly nonreligious elected officials are there? There are 50 around the country. That is incredible. That is way more than I thought existed anywhere because I literally would have told you maybe five or six before I started keeping track. And then I realized there are so many more than that.

And, by the way, that was 2018. Can you imagine what that number is going to be during the 2020 election when we expect that progressives will come out in droves?

I remember seeing a piece of proscience legislation in New Hampshire and seeing the sponsor of the bill and I thought that name sounded familiar. Oh, right. She's one of the greens on my list. She's an openly nonreligious state representative who filed this proscience bill. Isn't that awesome? Then I looked at her co-sponsors and it's like she hit everybody in the state who is

nonreligious.

I said as much on my website and I get a message from that state representative in my inbox and she wrote, "How do you think I found co-sponsors?" She saw the list and thought, "Oh, my God, I have allies I didn't even know

about. I'm gonna go to them and do that." I had another state representative contact me on Twitter and she said, "How come I'm not on your spreadsheet?" I responded, "Who are you?" I had to look at her bio and saw she's a state representative. I asked if she's openly nonreligious. She said, "Look at my Twitter feed. Every other tweet I'm swearing I have no problem with you calling me an atheist." So, I added her right away.

So, how do we get this list upgraded? How do we get more people on that list?

Pop that balloon

I also have a story about Megan Hunt. She ran for office in Nebraska. Nebraska's the state that doesn't have a bicameral legislature. It's just one unicameral body. Everybody's a senator. She ran for one of those seats. She had never run for any elected office before, so it was her against one other woman. And I remember looking at her website saying, "OK, value-wise, I pretty much agree with her." So, that's great. If I lived there, I would totally vote for her. And then I saw there was an article in the local paper about the candidates. They had a sidebar where it just had some biographical details about Megan Hunt. And I remember seeing this: "Faith — Atheist" and I was thinking, "Oh, no, she's going to lose now. You said it out loud. You're not supposed to do that. What are you doing? It's toxic."

But then she won her race. She is one of six openly nonreligious state senators and maybe one of only six who uses the word "atheist." I asked her, "How did you end up winning this race? How did this not hurt you? How were you able to get over that?" She told me that she took the air out of the balloon before the other side could pop it. She put it right out front. She wasn't ashamed of it. She just said it. And then she talked about the issues that actually matter to voters: roads, health care, infrastructure, all those other things that people actually care about.

She just let it out and then what were they going to say? "Oh, hey, did you know you're an atheist?" So, now she just says, "Yes, I am, and here's what really matters to me," and then talks about other things. This is the key. It may not be that big of a deal and it's becoming less of a deal as the years go on.

I hope any of you can run for something. There are like 500,000 elected offices in America. They're not all Congress. It's OK. You can run for something. You can be an atheist. But if you're running for public office, you don't have to dwell on that. But you don't have to be ashamed of it, either, and it may not even hurt you.

Thank you.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel, right, introduced Hemant Mehta at the convention and gave him FFRF's Nothing Fails Like Prayer Award.

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER CONTEST 2020

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 individual who gives the best secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF's annual convention in 2020, receiving an expensespaid trip to San Antonio, Nov. 13-15, 2020, along with a plaque and an honorarium of \$500. Deadline: August 1, 2020.

MORE INFO AT:

ffrf.org/nothing-fails-like-prayer

Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award

Nontheists could learn from LGBTQ movement

This is an edited version of the speech Rachel Laser gave at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 18, 2019. The award was introduced by Henry Zumach, and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor introduced Rachel.

Henry Zumach: Over the centuries and continuing into today, the greatest harm to societies has been imposed by those who hold the irrational beliefs of fundamentalist religious teachings. Those few individuals who have had the courage to confront these beliefs have been punished and persecuted. I believe that those few who speak out and take action deserve our greatest respect and admiration.

Because of this, I started the annual Henry H. Zumach Award for Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism. After giving this award to the Freedom From Religion Foundation in 2016, we worked out the details for FFRF to permanently administer the award going forward. I contributed \$100,000 to the fund, and will contribute another \$100,000, and my hope is that the amount of the annual \$10,000 award will gradually increase in the future.

Now, here is Annie Laurie Gaylor to introduce this year's winner.

Annie Laurie Gaylor: Thank you so much, Hank. It's my pleasure to introduce Rachel Laser. She's the new president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. It's the first time they've had a woman and the first time they've had a non-Christian as president. She is a lawyer and advocate, a strategist who's dedicated her career to making our nation more inclusive. As a member of a religious minority group, raised as a Reform Jew, she understands personally how important it is for our nation to have equal protection under the law. She previously served as deputy director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism. Previous to that, she directed the Culture Program at Third Way, a progressive think tank in D.C., where she launched Come Let Us Reason Together. It's an initiative to mobilize evangelical Christians and liberals to work together on critical issues, such as women's reproductive freedom and LGBTO equality. She drafted the first common-ground abortion bill to be introduced jointly by the anti-abortion and prochoice members of Congress. She served as senior counsel at the National Women's Law Center, where she founded the Pharmacy Refusal Project to challenge pharmacists who refuse to fill women's birth control prescriptions. She is a graduate of Harvard and the University of Chicago Law School and she serves on the national board of Pro-Choice America.

Thank you so much, Rachel, for lending your talents to separation of state and church and joining us today.

By Rachel Laser

n behalf of Americans United, our dedicated and talented staff back in Washington, D.C., our board of trustees, our volunteer leaders and our 300,000 supporters across the country, thank you so much for this award. It's an honor for AU to receive the Henry H. Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award, and especially meaningful after getting to know Hank Zumach and Betty Hammond last night over dinner. It's also an honor for me to be here with you as the first non-Christian and female



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Rachel Laser is president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. She spoke at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 18, 2019.

To watch Rachel Laser's convention speech, go to ffrf.us/laser

leader of Americans United in our 73-year existence. I'm also thrilled to have the opportunity to share some thoughts with you about how to protect and defend our cherished principle of separation of religion and government during these precarious times.

I thought I'd start by sharing a little bit more about myself. I'm Jewish, and grew up not so far away in Chicago, attending the oldest synagogue in the Midwest — KAM Isaiah Israel. I went to KAM's "Sunday school" because my best friend started going and I asked my parents if I could go too. Even though we lived on the North Side of Chicago, my parents joined this Reform Jewish synagogue on the South Side because they loved the intellectual and progressive Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, and they liked the idea of being part of the near-by University of Chicago community.

Over the years, my parents made many friends at KAM, and by the time I graduated from law school, the temple offered my dad the role of temple president. He accepted.

Wanting to honor my dad and uncertain how, I bought him two things that he didn't already have: a mezuzah to hang outside of his front door and a crocheted kippah to wear when he had to sit up on the bimah during services. My dad would have none of either. He asked me to please return them both to the temple gift shop. I did.

My dad is one of many Jewish atheists I know. And he is also one of the most principled, moral people I know. But that's certainly not how the majority of the country see atheists.

Atheists discredited

I know I don't have to tell you that atheists are, shall we say, out of favor in America. Just the other day one of our donors called to tell me that he was bequeathing us a very large gift. I asked him how he connects to our cause. He explained that he's from the South, and

when his dad died, he was the one his dad had designated as executor of the estate. His brothers and sisters didn't like that, and they used his atheism to discredit him on the stand in court.

Recently, the attorney general of the United States of America blamed our country's violence, mental illness, ongoing drug epidemic and "wreckage of the family" problems on "the growing ascendancy of secularism."

You all might already know that Americans are less willing to elect an atheist for president than any other category of candidate. A poll conducted this summer by PRRI, a nonpartisan public opinion research firm, shows that nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of Americans say small businesses should be allowed to refuse to serve atheists if doing so is against their religious beliefs. This support has climbed nearly 10 percentage points since 2014 (15 percent) — just four years ago. Hmmm ... I wonder what's been going on these past four years?

Here is an oversimplified three-part

answer. First, starting in 2014, white Christians ceased being the majority in America. Add to that the first black president, the rapid movement toward LGBTQ equality, the #MeToo movement, the fast rise of the religiously unaffiliated or the "Nones" and the fact that America will be majority black and brown by 2046. This all has engendered great fear among white Christians particularly vested in traditional power structures.

Second, President Trump, playing off of that fear, promised his white Christian voting base that he would "make America great again," meaning he would restore its perceived loss of power.

And third, given Trump's promise and follow-through, Trump's base has never felt more emboldened to say or do anything and everything to preserve its power, which includes squashing especially those who are challenging it the most. And that's why atheists get such special treatment.

What else is this kowtowing president and fearful group of Americans doing to preserve their power? Unapologetically doubling down on keeping American symbols, rituals and rhetoric religious and Christian.

We witnessed the trifecta of Attorney General William Barr saying what he did about secularists, Trump declaring that Americans will "forever and always" believe in "the eternal glory of God" and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo bragging about how his Christianity informs his decision-making and then posting his "Being a Christian Leader" speech on the official State Department website.

Supreme Court misguided

But this crusade has reached far beyond the Trump-Pence administration.

I'm sure that everyone here is familiar with the Supreme Court's misguided decision earlier this year allowing the 40-foot towering Bladensburg cross to remain on public land in Maryland. I'm guessing you, too, agree with Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's statement: "When a cross is displayed on public property, the government may be presumed to en-



Photo by Chris Line

Rachel Laser talks with some FFRF members during the Freethought Hall open house event prior to the start of the convention on Oct. 18, 2019.

dorse its religious content." The court, however, ruled — seven justices to two - that the government may prominently display and endorse this Christian symbol because it's a historical custom. In other words, it's OK to violate the constitutional right to religious freedom for all Americans if we've always done it that way.

We have seen recent losses in lower federal courts, as well. In August, a federal appeals court ruled against our clients in Pennsylvania, allowing the state House of Representatives to bar atheists from giving invocations before the legislature. Citing Bladensburg, the court appealed to history, saying that legislative prayer invoking God is an American tradition.

And in Congress, we are seeing the same type of religious "traditions" remain intact. Rep. Jared Huffman, the only openly atheist member of our 535 members of Congress, recently lost his battle to make the "so help me God" part of the oath optional for witnesses testifying before his committee. All it took was Rep. Liz Cheney declaring that Democrats "really have become the party of Karl Marx" to make the Democrats back down and leave the rule in place. How absurd is it that any scientist testifying before the Committee on Natural Resources would be required to swear to God or be disqualified?

Back to the 1950s?

It's as though we're gearing up for another full-fledged 1950s moment the decade when fear of communism led the government to infuse our culture with an unprecedented level of religiosity (including our national motto and Pledge of Allegiance). Or perhaps you think we're already there.

Some people say it's hopeless to chal-**CC**We will not achieve our lenge social norms around religion country's promise of true right now. They tell religious freedom until us not to devote nontheists, the nonreligious time to cases like and religious minorities are Bladensburg as accepted as Christians. cross and to stick to the more winnable Rachel Laser and substantive bat-

religious refusals in the realm of health care and employment.

tles, like preventing

Yes, those fights are critical and we certainly are engaging in them, but we cannot and must not give up on fighting for an inclusive baseline. The reason is simple: We will not achieve our country's promise of true religious freedom until nontheists, the nonreligious and religious minorities are as accepted as Christians.

Our founders understood this profoundly, even back in the late 1700s. When Thomas Jefferson wrote the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, widely seen as the foundation for the religion clauses in the First Amendment of our Constitution, he said that its aim was to protect "the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the Mahometan, the Hindoo," and note, he included, "the infidel of every denomination."

We know we cannot give up on the fight to change the baseline around religion to make it inclusive for all. The question is, how are we going to get there? Here's what I know for sure: It's not going to be easy. It's not a five- or 10-year project. And it's a hard question to answer.

Inspiration and lessons

But I would like to suggest that the marriage equality movement, which changed deeply embedded social



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Rachel Laser, left, is presented with the Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award by benefactor Henry Zumach and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. Zumach also holds up the check for \$10,000, given to Laser on behalf of Americans United.

norms around the institution of marriage in just one generation, offers us not just inspiration, but some excellent strategic lessons.

In 1988, when the General Social Survey first asked, only 11.6 percent of respondents said that they thought same-sex couples should have the right to marry. But by 2018, just 30 years later, the number of Americans who said same-sex couples should have the right to marry was at 68 percent. Social scientists say that it's rare for public opinion to change this much, and this quickly, but it did.

How? Having worked on this issue as a straight ally throughout some of

this critical period, three key strategies come to mind.

One is to have those who are not "the norm" come out. Public opinion research solidly demonstrates that knowing someone who is openly LGBTQ changes

hearts and minds more than anything else. The LGBTQ equality movement did a phenomenal job of not only encouraging people to come out, but also creating a better climate in which to do so.

TV shows like "Will and Grace" and "Grey's Anatomy" included LGBTQ characters, and celebrities from Ellen DeGeneres to George Michael to Melissa Etheridge started coming out (or being outed) right and left. Still, it in ways that were took a huge number of brave LGBTO people who were willing to put their relationships, family, livelihood, safety and even lives on the line to create this change.

Our equivalent is to keep encouraging non-Christians and the nonreligious, but particularly nontheists, to speak up about their religious identities (or nonreligious identities). We also need to ensure that celebrities are doing the same and popular culture is casting people in the role of loveable atheists and developing characters who don't affiliate with any religious tradition.

FFRF continues to do excellent work with its "Out of the Closet" campaign, but we need to make a lot more noise. I challenge everyone here to share your own belief system with someone. But don't just do so with like-minded people. The strategy

here is to also tell your friends, family and communities who may have different beliefs.

The more buzz we create about the existence of nontheists and the nonreligious — and with the growing numbers of this segment of the population, more buzz should be doable - the more welcoming the environment is for others to come out, too. I want to acknowledge, however, that like with outing yourself as LGBTO, it can be extremely difficult and even life-threatening to out yourself as a nontheist in certain parts of the country. For this reason, sadly, many of Americans United's plaintiffs must still remain anonymous to stay safe. It takes courage and it takes risk.

A second key strategy of the marriage equality movement was to normalize not just being LGBTQ, but having romantic same-sex relationships. This is what I'll nickname the "go

for the jugular" strategy, because it went directly to one of the vulnerable spots for straight people — losing the privilege that attaches our opposite-sex relationships. Popular movies like "Brokeback Mountain" "Call Me By Your Name" portrayed gay relationships relatable and relatably sensual for straight people. TV shows began to include not Rachel Laser just LGBTO peo-

ple, but gay and lesbian relationships. I would argue that our "go for the jugular" equivalent is to go to where there is enormous privilege for religious people — the realm of moral superiority. Our efforts must engage popular culture, not just in having nontheist and nonreligious characters, but in conveying that nontheists and nonreligious people are as moral and principled as religious people are.

Some may be tempted to portray nontheists and the nonreligious as having better morals and principles than religious people. But, even if you think that's true, the marriage equality

success teaches it's a bad idea.

A critical third strategy of the marriage equality movement was to speak to and enlist those considered the "norm" — so, in that case, opposite-sex married people. The way to opposite-sex married people's hearts was not to tell them that samesex marriages were better than their marriages, even if some thought they were. It was to tell them same-sex couples wanted to join their institution.

What did join mean to opposite-sex married people? Public opinion research revealed that opposite-sex married people associated marriage most with commitment, and hence a campaign was born around conveying that same-sex marriage was about commitment, too. Moreover, opposite-sex married couples — often parents or grandparents of LGBTQ people — were important spokespeople for moving the country toward full acceptance of marriage equality.

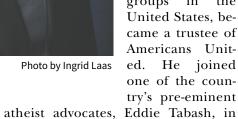
The equivalent for us is speaking to and enlisting religious leaders, but particularly Christians, who are still 65 percent of the country, in advocating for the right to be religious or nonreligious — without assigning moral superiority to either. We must speak to people of faith in a shared language and appeal to their commitment to religious freedom and the Constitution.

Uniting communities

This third strategy is where Americans United is uniquely positioned to help. The truth is, there aren't many places where the secular and faith communities intentionally come together. But since our founding, AU has been uniting these two communities around the shared goal of church-state separation. In fact, since I joined AU, I've noticed that our two most passionate groups of supporters are people who have a strong tie to a faith community and strong nontheists, because both groups deeply val-

ue their religious identities and understand how important separating religion and government is to them.

I was particularly happy when Jim Winkler, the president of the National Council of Churches, ecumenical partnership 38 Christian faith groups in the United States, became a trustee of Americans United. He joined one of the country's pre-eminent



serving on our board. Friends, let's not lose hope. Some-

day we're all going to have "clean" money in our pockets (you all know what I mean by that, right?), because the Constitution is on our side, because the demographics around religion in our country are changing, and because we are smart and strategic, committed and brave.

Again, it's an honor to accept this award on behalf of Americans United. We are so happy to have FFRF as partners in today's unreal struggle for freedom and democracy.

Thank you.



U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan comes out as one 'of us'

'Everyone has a right to their lack of faith'

This is an edited version of the speech given by U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan (Wis.) at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 19, 2019. He was introduced by Dan Barker, FFRF's co-president:

It isn't every day that your own U.S. representative invites you to open Congress with an invocation. But that's exactly what Mark Pocan did. It isn't every day that the guest chaplain of the House of Representatives bars you from it. And it's not every day that the representative signs onto an amicus brief challenging the chaplain for preventing it. Rep. Mark Pocan is a member of the newly formed Congressional Freethought Caucus. He has represented the Wisconsin 2nd Congressional District since 2013, which followed 14 years in the Wisconsin Assembly. He's a small-business owner. He's a union member and a lifelong advocate for progressive causes in the 116th Congress. Rep. Pocan serves on the House Appropriations Committee. He is also the co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, the largest values-based caucus in the Democratic Party. It's a great honor for me to be able to introduce to you Rep. Mark Pocan and to hand him this award, truly deserved for being a champion of the First Amendment.

By U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan

hank you very much for this recognition of our First Amendment rights at all levels of government. We need to recognize the separation of church and state, perhaps now more than ever. And let me just start by thanking the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the staff, its leadership, and all of you, their supporters. We are lucky to have an organization speaking on behalf of our democracy and our constitutional principle of separation of church and state. I really appreciate all the work you do in Washington D.C., and across the country.

No room in this country at this moment knows better what document the following line comes from: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." That's what the United States Constitution says in its First Amendment. It's the highest legal document in the country, and all too often the words of that amendment have been shoved aside for convenience, manipulation and outright advocacy for any one person's interpretation of a specific religious belief over the actual rule of law.

I have fought my entire career to uphold that First Amendment, to keep a real separation between church and state, to not have a theocracy rather than a democracy. Yet the encroachment is as aggressive today as ever. Attorney General William Barr used religion as a rallying call for so-called morality, a morality he mixed heavily with certain brands of political beliefs.

Blurring of lines

We witness this blurring of the lines of the law all too often. We see it when funds are diverted from our public schools to religious schools via vouchers. Unfortunately, Wisconsin was at the forefront of these efforts, initially giving money to pri-

To watch Mark Pocan's convention speech, go to ffrf.us/pocan



Photo by Chris Line

U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan accepts the "Champion of the First Amendment" award from FFRF Co-President Dan Barker at FFRF's national convention on Oct. 19, 2019.

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vate schools, whose founders used school funds to buy Cadillacs, and, in one case, by a founder who said he could read a book by simply placing his hand on it. Look, if he can do that, there's a marquee in Las Vegas waiting for him.

But, worse yet, these schools fail at alarming rates. I had the pleasure of questioning Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. I asked her about the one-in-four failure rates of voucher schools, with no accountability for taxpayer dollars lost in the process. Of course, there's no real response, as the truth ran counter to her beliefs. Or what about the selectivity of these schools, which all too often don't take kids with disabilities, or who act up or who are gay or lesbian or transgender, as they might cost their programs more or be exclud-

ed because of their beliefs? They leave those kids to the public schools, all while taking funds away from those public entities that need to provide public education for everyone. I will

never forget when those private voucher schools tried to deny kids who are differently abled in Wisconsin.

But that's exactly what happens when you give public tax dollars to religious and other voucher schools. You lose accountability and you hurt our kids.

The encroachment occurs when we do not allow nonreligious individuals to provide an invocation to government bodies. And you just heard our story with Dan Barker. Rest assured, that that isn't the last you've heard of us about trying to change that practice. Rep. Jared Huffman and I have renewed a request in this Congress for a humanist to address the body and I look forward to sharing with you how that proceeds.

Yet, we face that same invocation discrimination all too often at state and local levels of government. So, if you want to support the Constitution, you have to support the whole of it.

But I think it's also important to point out that, while in local government, I've seen another side of some faith communities worth sharing, such as fighting for human rights through Madison's sister cities in Colombia and El Salvador. My contacts in those countries were Catholic priests and nuns. I respected their application of their faith in a nonreligious way that actually lived up to their ideals to the well-being of the average person and not the enrichment of the church as an institution in state government.

At the federal level, I have worked with Lutheran and Jewish social services and helped relocate refugees from across the globe without regard to their religious beliefs. But what's the moral to those stories? That you don't have to force religion onto people to live the values of a religious faith and also to respect the laws of our land.

Protect the Constitution

When I was asked to speak about my strong belief in the First Amendment, I do it from a vantage point of knowing my job

lies in protecting the Constitution, which is what it should be. When I got elected to Congress, I was asked by a reporter my religious affiliation and I remember it being listed as "unspecified."

Here's what happened: I got the call as my husband and I were in Key West, Fla., for a little vacation prior to getting sworn in. All I remember was thinking, "Why are they asking me that question? What does that have to do with being in Congress?" And my long pause was taken as an answer to that question as "unspecified" as they tried to move on from that awkward silence. Sometimes it gets reported as "refused" or "none given."

I was one of the lonely few members of Congress who swore their oath of office on the Constitution instead of a bible because, after all, wasn't that the document that mattered the most to my job? I'm proud to be a part of the Freethought Caucus in Congress that works toward the very efforts that you all do to protect the Constitution.

I don't feel an unspecified belief matters any differently today than the day it did when I was asked by the reporter. What matters is that I uphold my sworn oath to the Constitution and my job as an elected official. If I don't do that, then I should pay a price from the voters. But I do know that most of the time, when we mix religion and state, we get some pretty awful combinations.

Just look at the theocracies around the globe. Look at the wars, the mistreatment of religious minorities, the famine of the citizens that are all too often the byproducts of these theocracies.

We also have to look here in the United States, where some try to twist their religious interpretations to breed discrimination—discrimination against people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or questioning. Discrimination against women and trans people who choose to make their own health decisions about their own bodies. Discrimination against those who believe in a different god or a different approach toward the same god or no god at all.

Face it, all too often how we as a nation approach religion is pretty screwed up. Think of the hypocrisy of a three-times-married private-part-grabbing, money-loving, foul-mouthed, if-his-lips-are-moving-he's-lying commander in chief, who cites 2 Corinthians, despite his obvious charlatanism. Many so-called religious leaders flock to his defense as long as he says what they want to hear in a few key areas that apply to their reading of faith. They'll just turn the other cheek when it comes to all the other blasphemy.

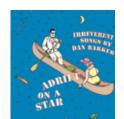
I certainly have had enough of the all-too-many money-worshipping charlatans in religion who use their faith as an ATM. Their one true religion is money and there's plenty of hypocrisy in that. But, I also don't profess to have all the answers. I certainly wasn't elected to decide which form or sect of religion is right and which is wrong, but I do know that everyone has a right to their religious faith. And by our laws, everyone has a right to their lack of religious faith.

But if you work for the government, you have an obligation to follow our laws. Period. And those laws say there is a separation between church and state. It's really that easy. But it's also very important for the 24 percent of us in this country who don't follow a specific religion to have our values recognized.

We are strongest when we adhere to the values put forth by our Constitution. It doesn't make us a religious nation. Just the opposite. It said, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." It's in the best interest of this great democracy to respect each and every law-abiding person and respect that we are a nation of laws. That starts with the U.S. Constitution and the First Amendment.

So, that's my belief system, and as an elected official, that's the oath I swore to. And I thank you for recognizing that with this award. I appreciate your efforts and I look forward to working with you for a more just, more lawful country that treats everyone with respect. We can do that. After all, our Constitution requires it. Thank you very much.





Irreverent selections by Dan Barker, Yip Harburg, Charles Strouse, Cole Porter, Gershwin and others.

Buy it from FFRF online ffrf.org/shop

FFRF's Winter Solstice Party 2019!



Champagne cools on ice in preparation for Mimosas to be served at the party.



FFRF's Andrew L. Seidel, left, has a laugh with FFRF attorney and pianist Ryan Jayne before the start of FFRF's annual Winter Solstice program.

Photos by Chris Line



Decorations made by FFRF staff members adorned the Charlie Brooks Auditorium for the Winter Solstice event.



Former FFRF Communications Assistant Molly Hanson, left, visits with FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor



FFRF Director of Governmental Affairs Mark Dann chats with some members before the program begins.



FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert, left, converses with member Tiffany Green, a humanist celebrant.



Party guests help themselves to the spread of cheeses, cookies and other snacks.



FFRF Attorney Sam Grover shows off his Solstice spirit!



Vocalist Darcie Johnston entertains the audience as Dan Barker accompanies on piano.



Extra chairs had to be brought out to accommodate the larger-than-expected number of guests on Dec. 20. The event took place in the Charlie Brooks Auditorium, Freethought Hall, Madison, Wis. FFRF collected food and other charitable donations for Second Harvest.



Whistleblower: LDS Church misled members on \$100B tax-exempt fund

The Washington Post reported in December that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has amassed about \$100 billion that is supposed to be used for charitable purposes. A former investment manager for the church made the allegations in a whistleblower complaint to the Internal Revenue Service in November.

The confidential document accuses church leaders of misleading members and possibly breaching federal tax rules by hoarding donations instead of using them for charitable works. The Post reports that the complaint was filed by David Nielsen, a Mormon who worked until recently as a senior portfolio manager at the church's investment division, Ensign Peak Advisors, which is based near the church's head-quarters in Salt Lake City.

Nonprofit organizations, including religious groups and FFRF, are exempted in the United States from paying taxes on their income. Ensign is registered as a supporting organization of the LDS Church, which permits it to operate as a nonprofit.

Nielsen urged the IRS to remove the

church's tax-exempt status and alleges that Ensign could owe billions in taxes. (Rewards to whistleblowers are offered from the IRS if it recoups any money.)

According to the Post story, the Mormon church collects about \$7 billion annually in contributions from members. About \$6 billion of that is used to cover operating costs and the remaining \$1 billion is transferred to Ensign, which invests it to generate returns.

The complaint estimates the portfolio has grown from \$12 billion in 1997 to about \$100 billion.

Ensign has not directly funded any religious, educational or charitable activities in 22 years, the complaint also stated.

"If you have a charity that simply amasses a war chest year after year and does not spend any money for charity purposes, that does not meet the requirements of tax law," said Philip Hackney, a former IRS official who teaches tax law at the University of Pittsburgh and was hired by the Post to analyze the whistleblower documents.



This mural on public land in Effingham, Ill., features a Latin cross.

Mural cross in FFRF's crosshairs

FFRF has caused a bit of a stir in Effingham, Ill., after requesting the city to remove from city property a mural that features a cross.

The mural is on a city-owned overpass and city officials said they didn't know a cross would be included on the painted design.

On Jan. 4, about 20 people gathered outside the city hall to protest FFRF's request.

"This [cross] is really not about religion, honestly, but it's about the crosswalks of America. It's what Effingham is known for," Paul Banett told the Effingham Daily News, referring to a huge 198-foot-tall white cross (on private property) at the intersection of Interstates 70 and 57.

On Jan. 7, during the open forum portion of the City Council meeting, several residents spoke in favor of keeping the cross mural, but the city did not take any action.

FFRF stated in its letter to Effingham Mayor Mike Schutzbach: "A mural that depicts nothing except a Latin cross alongside the American flag sends a clear message: that patriotism and religiosity are interrelated."

Congress needs to eliminate religious exemption loophole

By Andrew L. Seidel

This article was first published on Religion Dispatches on Dec. 22.

he Mormon church's recently unearthed \$100 billion stash should tell Congress it's time to close the absurd loophole that allows churches to misuse and abuse their tax exemption. American taxpayers should demand as much and

Congress should find the political courage to act.

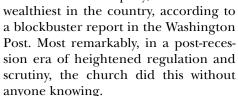
With some apparently shady maneuvering, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints created a \$100 billion company, one of the

CC There is no reason to

treat churches and church-

related entities differently

than other charities.



The Post story focuses on the un-

lawful hoarding of this wealth because charitable donations are supposed to go to charitable work, not sit around earning interest. If true, the fraud is shocking. But the abuse

Andrew Seidel

was fostered by a foolish and unnecessary loophole in the rules governing charitable organizations. The government and taxpayers knew little about this absurdly wealthy company because churches and religious charities, unlike every other charity in America, file no financial disclosures with the IRS.

Here's how it works, according to the Post story: Mormons tithe about \$7 billion to the LDS church each year. The church spends most of that money (about \$6 billion). What's left, about \$1 billion, goes into the church's investment firm, called Ensign Peak Advisors. In just over 20 years, Ensign amassed \$100 billion. That's because the company only distributed funds twice, both times to for-profit entities, while continuing to invest the funds and acquire tithes from Mormons who donate 10 percent of their income in order "to gain access to the sacred spaces and saving rituals of a Mormon temple."

But mostly, this meteoric growth is because the IRS views Ensign as an arm of the LDS church, ostensibly run for religious purposes and, therefore, as tax-exempt. Not just tax-exempt, but exempt from all financial disclosure requirements as well. In short, we knew nothing about this shady arrangement because Congress has refused to ask.

Churches are financial and informational black holes. They file no financial information with the government. Nothing. The same is true for many church auxiliary organizations, like Ensign. Other charities, those that are not church-affiliated, file annual disclosures (a Form 990) with the IRS that track every penny in and out of the organization.

Congress insists on financial disclosures for charities because tax exemption is a significant public trust and public trust requires transparency. Transparency both ensures and proves the charities are honoring that trust,

not abusing or exploiting it. There is no reason to treat churches and church-related entities differently than other charities; no reason to allow the abuse of this public trust to continue.

Congress could and should insist that all tax-exempt organizations, religious or not, file financial information with the IRS every year.

There have been calls for such legislation in the past, including from churches themselves. Seeking to be better citizens, some churches already voluntarily file or publish a Form 990. The financial obscurity in which American churches operate leads to copious fraud and abuse. Experts believe that the lack of transparency makes religious charities "among the most vulnerable entities." This void victimizes the faithful — those who willingly give up a portion of their income — more than anyone else.

There is no legal or constitutional roadblock to demanding transparency from all the nation's churches and no viable claim that it violates religious freedom. Tax exemption is a privilege,

> not a right. Congress can attach strings to that privilege, including financial transparency. Nothing in the Constitution requires that we even exempt churches from taxes, let

alone exempt them from basic transparency requirements.

Even the most extreme understanding of religious freedom could not stop Congress from legislating transparency because accountability to the taxpayers does not "prohibit" or even hinder the free exercise of religion. For instance, Ensign claims that "the amassed funds would be used in the event of the second coming of Christ." But filing financial information with the IRS would not prohibit the church from hoarding this wealth (though other provisions of the tax code do). Transparency would simply require the church to disclose the details of their cache.

Sunlight does not burden religious liberty, it cures fraud and abuse.

Asking for transparency from every nonprofit is perfectly legal, but Congress has not acted. In an era of congressional gridlock and where civil rights laws demanding equality are maligned as anti-religious liberty, this inaction is unsurprising. But it's also true that this loophole hurts everyone, the devout most of all. If Congress actually cared about protecting religious people and churches, rather than fearing being called anti-religious by Fox News, it would get to work.

Ensuring equal transparency across all nonprofits, religious or not, would have protected American taxpayers from the Mormon church's alleged abuse of the tax exemption privilege without a whistleblower. We would have seen the LDS church transfer a billion dollars every year to Ensign and seen Ensign spend nothing on charitable endeavors.

It's time for Congress to step in and protect the American taxpayer. It's time for Congress to demand that all non-profits, religious or not, disclose their financials to the IRS.

Andrew L. Seidel is an attorney and FFRF's director of strategic response.

From the Pew: 10 facts about atheists

On Dec. 6, the Pew Research Center published the article "10 facts about atheists," written by Michael Lipka.

"Measuring atheism is complicated," Lipka writes. "Some people who describe themselves as atheists also say they believe in some kind of higher power or spiritual force. At the same time, some of those who identify with a religion say they do not believe in God. One thing is for sure: Along with the rise of religiously unaffiliated Americans — many of whom believe in God — there has been a corresponding increase in the number of atheists."

Here is the edited list of the 10 facts about atheism:

- 1 The share of Americans who identify as atheists has increased modestly but significantly in the past decade. Four percent of American adults say they are atheists when asked about their religious identity, up from 2 percent in 2009.
- **2** The literal definition of "atheist" is "a person who does not believe in the existence of a god or any gods," according to Merriam-Webster.
- **3** Atheists make up a larger share of the population in many European countries than they do in the United States
- **4** In the United States, atheists are mostly men and are relatively young, according to the 2014 Religious Landscape Study. The median age for atheists is 34, compared with 46 for all U.S. adults and men make up 68 percent of U.S. atheists. Atheists also are more likely to be white and highly educated.



FFRF file photo

Atheists flocked to the Reason Rally in Washington, D.C., in 2012.

- **5** The vast majority of U.S. atheists say religion is not too or not at all important in their lives (93 percent) and that they seldom or never pray (97 percent).
- **6** Where do atheists find meaning in life? Like a majority of Americans, most atheists mentioned "family" as

a source of meaning. But atheists were far more likely than Christians to describe hobbies as meaningful or satisfying. Atheists also were more likely than Americans overall to describe finances and money, creative pursuits, travel, and leisure activities as meaningful.

7 In many cases, being an atheist isn't just about personally rejecting religious labels and beliefs — most atheists also express negative views when asked about the role of religion in society. A majority of atheists (70 percent) also say churches and other religious organizations do more harm than good in society.

8 Atheists may not believe religious teachings, but they are quite informed about religion. In Pew Research Center's 2019 religious knowledge survey, atheists were among the best-performing groups, answering an average of about 18 out of 32 fact-based questions correctly, while adults overall got an average of 14 questions right.

9 Most Americans (56 percent) say it is not necessary to believe in God to be moral, according to a 2017 survey..

10 Americans feel less warmly toward atheists than they do toward members of most major religious groups. A 2019 Pew Research Center survey asked Americans to rate groups on a "feeling thermometer" from 0 (as cold and negative as possible) to 100 (the warmest, most positive possible rating). U.S. adults gave atheists an average rating of 49, identical to the rating they gave Muslims (49) and colder than the average given to Jews (63), Catholics (60) and evangelical Christians (56).

THEY SAID WHAT?

Faith and practice can't persevere through our generation without attendance, and neither can the hope they tend to bring. And while that may not seem like a problem now, it will soon. We still want relationships and transcendence, to be part of something bigger than ourselves. Our drive for those things isn't likely to wane.

Columnist Christine Emba, in her op-ed column, "Why millennials are skipping church and not going back." Emba implied that organized religion is needed in society.

Washington Post, 10-28-19

I believe that there is the invisible hand of God in this case. Otherwise, this wouldn't have surfaced after 18 years. Renji Thomas, sister-in-law of accused

family serial killer Jolly Joseph in India.

The Washington Post, 11-3-19

This bible is very important to us. Our strength is God. Power is God.

Jeanine Áñez, Bolivia's interim president, from the balcony of the Presidential Palace in La Paz in her first public appearance.

Cruxnow.com, 11-20-19



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Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900 info@ffrf.org

Freedom depends on freethinkers



....have a Radical Left nonbeliever, who wants to take your religion & your guns, than Donald Trump as your President. No President has done more for the Evangelical community, and it's not even close. You'll not get anything from those Dems on stage. I won't be reading ET again!

6:12 AM · Dec 20, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

I'm a big believer that the God of our universe is still very active in the details of the day-to-day lives of government. You know, Barack Obama doesn't get to be the president of the United States without being ordained by God. Neither did Donald Trump. Energy Secretary Rick Perry in an interview.

Fox News, 11-24-19

We are fulfilling our duties as Christians. . .We consider it a great honor to be considered and to have received a wonderful letter from the Freedom From Religion organization. Proud to have a sheriff that won't bow to political pressure or the devices of the enemy!

TJ Armstrong, public information

officer for Walker County, Ala., after FFRF sent a letter to Sheriff Nick Smith to stop posting prayers on social media after a tragedy occurs. The sheriff said he will not comply with FFRF's request.

CBN News, 12-10-19

Take the example of Europe. When its nations accepted contraception and abortion, they stopped replacing their population. Christianity began to die out. And, with Europeans having no children, immigrant Muslims came in to replace them, and now the culture of Europe is changing. . . . We're on the same track as Europe. The church and family are in crisis.

Kathleen Eaton Bravo, CEO of Obria,

an anti-choice and anti-contraception organization that recently has been awarded millions of dollars in grants by the Trump administration, during an interview in 2015 with the Catholic World Report.

The Guardian, 12-11-19

I am not crazy. I am just a religious

Robert L. Dear Jr., the Christian terrorist accused of killing three people at a Colorado Planned Parenthood clinic in 2015, speaking to a federal magistrate judge. Dear was indicted by a federal grand jury on 68 counts.

Denver 7, 12-9-19

I am often asked by parents, "How do I talk to my child about death if I don't believe in God or heaven?" My answer is always the same: "Lie." The idea that you simply die and turn to dust may work for some adults, but it doesn't help children. Belief in heaven helps them grapple with this tremendous and incomprehensible loss.

Psychoanalyst Erica Komisar, in an oped "Don't Believe in God? Lie to Your Children."

Wall Street Journal, 12-5-19

As a believer in Jesus Christ, I don't want to have a Muslim, atheist, Buddhist or anyone else get up and do an invocation for one of our meetings.

McHenry Township (Ill.) Trustee Mike Rakestraw, after the board voted down the implementation of an pre-meeting invocation.

 $Northwest\ Herald,\ 12\text{-}15\text{-}19$

Lee said he prays that Tennessee does not experience a school shooting, that the state's opioid epidemic will diminish and that Tennessee's educational outcomes improve. If thousands of people offer similar prayers, he believes God will impart his favor on Tennessee.

News report from a luncheon at the Southern Baptist Convention's Nashville headquarters where Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee was speaking.

wate.com, 12-4-19

Just Pretend: A Book For Young Freethinkers



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by Kati Treu
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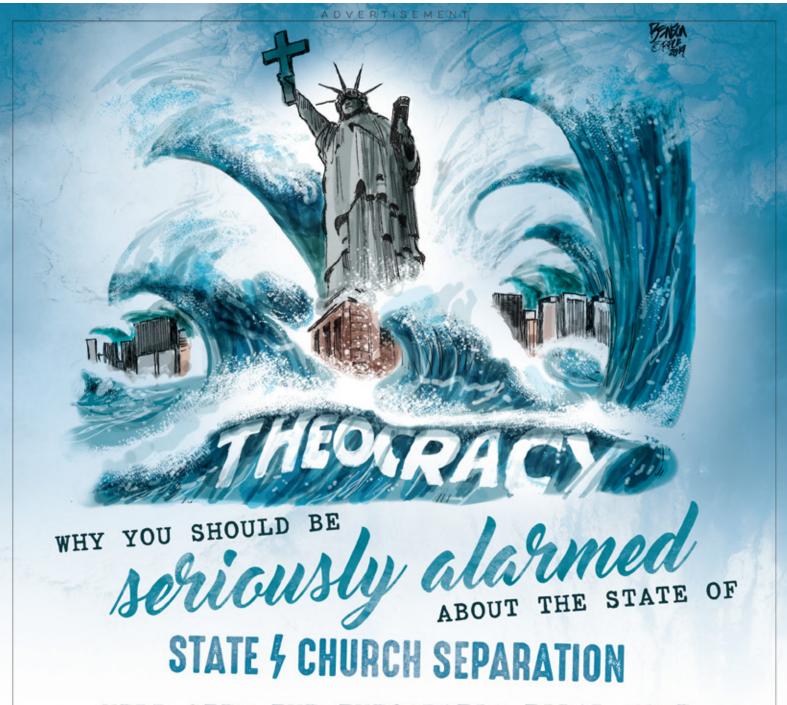
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Please send us only names of likely supporters

Freedom depends upon freethinkers

This ad ran in The New York Times on Dec. 5, 2019, thanks to kind donations for FFRF advertising.



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The constitutional separation between state and religion has never been under greater assault.

- ★ Our U.S. Attorney General vilifies "militant secularists" while lauding "Judeo-Christian standards."
- ★ Our Secretary of State officially billed himself as a "Christian leader" on the State Department website.
- ★ Our outgoing Secretary of Energy claims the President was "chosen" by God.
- ★ Our Secretary of Education seeks to raid public school coffers to fund religious schools.
- ★ Our prayerful Secretary of Housing & Urban Development refuses to provide records related to the White House Bible Study, which is why FFRF is suing him.
- ★ Our President routinely calls America "a nation of believers," thereby disenfranchising the 26 percent of nonreligious U.S. citizens who choose *reason*, not blind faith.

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a national state/church watchdog, in our work so that reason & our secular Constitution will prevail.

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*** RATING

The Freedom From Religion
Foundation is the nation's largest
association of freethinkers (atheists,
agnostics) working to keep religion
out of government. FFRF is a 501(c)(3)
educational nonprofit founded in 1978
with over 30,000 members and a team
of attorneys. Charity Navigator just
awarded FFRF a perfect score, and a
four-star rating 10 years in a row.

FFRF.org | Freedom From Religion Foundation

Former churches with better missions



FFRF Member Chris Renz sent us this image of the Walnut Lodge Yoga and Movement Center in Sharon, Pa. It had been the First Church of Christ Scientist when it was built in 1905.



FFRF Member Joan Lawson sent us this photo of the former First Methodist Protestant Church of Seattle, built in 1906, which was added to the National Register in 1993. In 1991, due to declining membership and increasing costs of building upkeep, the church moved out of the building. In 2004, it was renovated to an office building and is currently owned and occupied by Catalysis Corporation, a Seattle-based digital marketing agency.



The Dance Palace in Point Reyes, Calif., was the former site of the Sacred Heart Church. In 1989, the Dance Palace moved out of its downtown location and into the church building. The church had decided to sell its property and use the funds to upgrade its property in Olema, Calif. The Dance Palace move was made possible through the financial and volunteer contributions of more than 350 community residents, with over \$750,000 raised.



FFRF Member Eric Krebs (shown) sent us this from the Argos Animal Hospital in Boiceville, N.Y., which looks to be a former church, although no background information could be found.



FFRF Member Richard Arnold of Iowa sent us this photo of the former Harrison Gospel Chapel in Davenport, Iowa, which is now the site of an escape room. Richard writes, "A possible caption could be: 'All are welcome, but only the smart will leave.'"



This former Baptist church was renovated in 1995 into the Clarkston Union Bar and Kitchen in Clarkston, Mich. FFRF Member Larry Libbrecht, who sent us the photo, wrote, "It has great food and there are still some pews in the restaurant eating area."



Joan Lawson also sent us this photo of the former First Church of Christ, Scientist in Seattle, built in 1906. In the mid-2000s, the congregation moved and the building was converted into townhouses.

If you see or know of any former churches that now serve a secular purpose, please send us a photo (preferably with you in it!) and a brief description of the property. Send it to editor@ffrf.org.

LETTERBOX

I'm happy to become a Lifetime Member

It is with great pleasure that I send \$1,000 for a Lifetime Membership.

I am so proud of the work that you do. I was gratified to see the FFRF ad on "60 Minutes" on Nov. 10. Thank you so much for your work in defense of the Constitution and the separation of church and state.

Thomas Johnson California

Gift to myself is my membership renewal

I just wanted to say thank you I know you guys work hard every day and probably read a lot of insane email. My Christmas present to myself this year is renewal of my membership. What you do is so very important. Thank you.

William Tumbrink Missouri

How I stopped unwanted mail: I donated to FFRF

Some time ago, I found myself on the mailing list for Hillsdale College, a conservative Christian school in Michigan. Among the items sent were numerous fundraising appeals, often featuring Sean Hannity. I wrote them twice explaining that I would never be sending them money and that their mailings all went unread into the recycling. But that didn't work. Then, my daughter gave me the answer. I sent a \$50 check in the school's name to FFRF, and also let them know that every time I got mail from them, I would send another \$50 so they could continue to help the foundation with its important work. I have not heard from them since.

Thanks for helping. Keep up the great work.

Rex Gunderson Nevada

Justices were derelict in Bladensburg case

Letter-writer Douglas Hawes (from November issue) is right to be disturbed by the Supreme Court's decision in the Bladensburg cross case.

A Latin cross is the primary symbol of Christianity, first, last and always. The court's majority was just making excuses when it let this one stay on public land by finding that it's a "war memorial" and "historical."

Nowhere does the U.S. Constitution privilege sentiment or history of principles. By making such excuses, the majority is derelict in its duty to apply constitutional principles to legal issues. Those justices need to be impeached and removed.

Lee Helms Michigan

Anne Gaylor's visionary work lives on at FFRF

I am so proud of all of you at FFRF for your steadfast work and commitment.

We are gaining and we are growing in number. The dedicated legal team is doing an excellent job, and due to FFRF's ongoing outreach to the youth, these students receive encouragement to fol-





Like John Fisher at the gym, I enjoy reading my Freethought Today in public places. I usually fly once per month and save them to read on the airplane. I am always hoping a headline might inspire new freethinkers from the captive audience!

Thanks again for everything FFRF does! **Cheryl McCutcheon** Wisconsin

low their convictions, which takes courage. Their intelligence and energy give us much-needed hope for the future.

I often think about Anne Gaylor, who was a true hero and visionary with her timeless quest to free us humans (especially women) from the oppression of religious control. It was an honor for me to have met her. She was strong, wise and gracious. And now you continue the work, which some days must seem overwhelming. But because of FFRF's staff and volunteers, we will overcome and win the battle of reason.

Thank you for all you do. Joanie Barker Nichols Nebraska

I bovcott Amazon because it harms nonprofit groups

When I saw the letter from one of our members praising the partnership with Amazon Smile, I had to write. Of course, not every FFRF member will boycott, as do I, Amazon and Facebook and Apple and Nestlé and Nike and so many others, but I urge other readers to do the tiniest bit of research about Amazon. It actually harms nonprofits, while making "monkeys" of them. We are skeptics, aren't we? It's borderline immoral to abet Amazon's evil crusade.

The gentleman who wrote that letter manifested exactly the mindset that Amazon is using for its own ends — that "feel good" thing that people have when they "donate," even if what they donate is merely the nickel and penny found beneath the couch cushions, and even if that donation comes from an oh-socagey corporation that is destroying

habitat, honest work, ethical businesses, prudent consumerism, corporate transparency, and the best efforts toward conservation. FFRF members should realize they are not really giving "anything" except more billions to Jeff Bezos, whose corporation pays not a dime in federal income taxes - and no, Bezos has not signed the billionaire pledge.

Please publish data about exactly how much Amazon has given to FFRF, I want

Anyway, the other member wrote so I decided I could, too.

I am so proud of what FFRF does. **Lane Browning** Oregon

Editor's note: Since AmazonSmile began this program, it has donated a total of \$124,764.16 to FFRF.

FFRF's ad in New York Times was perfect

I loved your New York Times full-page ad (see page 20). The stormy artwork was perfect and arresting. I hope you receive a fortune in donations as a result.

I think there's a fast-moving freight train heading for the United States and the world. The load it is carrying patriarchal, evangelical Christian theocracy. Your ad dramatically warns of theocracy and I'm so glad you published it.

Donna White Georgia

Using facts got me banned from some sites

After having faithfully contributed to a number of right-wing and religiously infested web sites for years, I am now banned from them all! Forever! All I did was introduce some facts, some logic, some common sense and reasonable understanding of current affairs. However, what had me ostracized, I believe, was my response to someone who thanked God for President Trump, to which I wrote that it was very appropriate to blame a made-up fantasy figure that only lurks around in superstitious people's alleged minds. Some gratitude, I'd say! However, I have to admit I take it as a badge of honor to be banned from sites like those, amusing as it sounds.

Jorg Aadahl California

Regard hotel room bible as an inoffensive brick

I remember someone telling me, during my childhood, that a closed book is as helpful (or harmful) to one's mind as a brick. Thus, it baffles me that some of my fellow atheists voice antipathy towards the Gideon bibles they find in their hotel rooms.

As for myself, I'm glad to have read the bible several times because its stories of violence, injustices and disgusting "holy" men provide effective ammunition whenever I need to bolster my claim that the "good book" has nothing to do with goodness.



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Los Angeles	KCOP-MY	(Ch. 13)	8:30 a.m.
Madison, Wis.	WISC-TV	(Ch. 3)	11:00 p.m.
Minneapolis	KSTC-IND	(Ch. 45)	9:30 a.m.
New York City	WPIX-IND	(Ch. 11)	8:30 a.m.
Phoenix	KASW-CW (Ch. 61 or 6	(Ch. 61) or 1006 for HD)	8:30 a.m.
Portland, Ore.	KRCW-CW (703 on Con	(Ch. 32) ncast for HD or C	9:00 a.m. h. 3)
Sacramento	KQCA-MY	(Ch. 58)	8:30 a.m.
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8:00 a.m.

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Washington, D.C. WDCW-CW (Ch. 50)

Go to: ffrf.org/freethought-matters for more information

To those who object to finding a bible in their hotel room, why not just regard it as an inoffensive brick? I promise you, it won't bite you in the middle of the night. **David Quintero** Monrovia

Freedom from religion part of freedom of religion

When reading Crankmail in the November issue, one entry caught my attention. It was the second time I had heard or read of someone splitting hairs on the First Amendment, saying that it means "freedom OF religion," not "freedom FROM religion."

The first time I heard it was during a policy meeting at our condo club, presided over by a retired law professor. A woman at the meeting made the same comment. I didn't think fast enough to tell her about Thomas Jefferson's quote: "It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are 20 gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

In other words, like in a multiple-choice quiz, one can pick A, B, C or D — none of the above, which is the most likely choice of the readers of Freethought Today.

John Oman Florida

Student essayists give us hope for the future

When I look at the future of secular humanism or atheism, I have "faith" when I read the essays from the high school and college students. They have courage and guts! We will survive the showdowns of the future.

Gregory Baskin Minnesota

I now give to groups that oppose church dogma

Cartoonist Steve Benson once listed the benefits of leaving the Mormon church as "an extra holiday every week and a 10 percent pay raise." I have been absent from church some The painted lady



I painted a version of FFRF's Bill of Rights "nativity" for the door of my apartment. I am 78 and an artist. It has the potential of 150-plus viewers (residents, friends, delivery people, health aides, etc.) here in Westminster, Md. Yes, the ACLU won settlement of a legislator's prayer case here, so county commissioners cannot conduct personal prayers before meetings.

When I moved to Sunnybrook in 2005, I was unaware it was a virtual nest of fundamentalists. Since I was the founder of the local Unitarian Universalist congregation in 1983, when proselytizing ensued, I asked, "What does God actually do?" Thereafter, I encountered threats. "You're an atheist and are gonna burn in hell." I had to use Maryland Legal Aid two times to educate residents and management.

I recently wrote a letter to the editor of the Carroll County Times objecting to the portrayal of atheists in a previous letter and thanked the writer for mentioning FFRF and the Ron Reagan "Not afraid of burning in hell" ad.

When people say "Merry Christmas," I kindly announce, "I am one of your neighborhood atheists. I just want to wish you a harmonious Winter Solstice because it is the genuine reason for the season. I hope you agree it's human deeds, not creeds, that promote kindness."

Nan Nelson Maryland

50 years now and have enjoyed alternate activities (bike rides, matinees at the opera, ballet and theater) on those guilt-free Sundays. However, no excess monetary benefits have accrued to me. Funds that I once gave to religion I now give to organiza-

tions which actively oppose regressive church dogma, conflict and violence, such as Planned Parenthood, Southern Poverty Law Center, Americans United, and, of course, FFRF.

Howard Bostock Texas

FFRF made a nonbeliever out of her and her dad

This holiday season was my first as an atheist! Thank you so much for getting your message and truth out into the world. Dan Barker, you opened my eyes and made me rethink things I did not know I could question. I shared your books and the FFRF YouTube channel with my dad and he has also made his way out of Christianity, although he cannot currently be as open/public about it yet.

I absolutely love FFRF and the You-Tube channel. Thanks to everyone at FFRF for your hard work and for fighting the good fight to keep church and state separate.

Lindsay Benton Idaho

FFRF's work is essential and pays huge dividends

I just want to let the entire FFRF team know just how much I appreciate everything you do for us freethinkers across the country and around the world. We've never had more difficult challenges in my lifetime and your continued work is absolutely essential. A million thanks, everyone. Your hard work pays huge dividends.

Dick Jordan Idaho

We need FFRF to fight against Gilead society

Keep up the great work! We need it. I do not want to live in a Gilead society, but seems we are heading down that path. Kris Walderbach

Arkansas

Members should leave behind copies of paper

Just a thought: In addition to referring new subscriber friends, you might want to recommend that after members have read Freethought Today, they leave their copy at their dentist's or doctor's office or car dealership, or anywhere that magazines are available for the public to read.

Lynn Hagedorn

Florida

CRANKMAIL

Yikes! Some of the mail we received in the past month or so was especially heinous. Caution: Some of these missives are not for the weak of heart (or minor children). Printed as received.

Who you are!: You all represent a cancerous tumor on the fabric of U.S. society. You all need chemotherapy and radiation! What do you FEAR from religion? Are you employees of Satan? — Doc Haberstein

Not Being Allowed to End Doomsday: Hello FFRF, I don't know who can help. My name is Jon Abel, and I am an atheist and a traveling scholar. I have did the math, and wrote a design for a plasma-based force-field & Linear Induction Motor System (meant for a Warp Drive). It is meant for an exit from the planet. However, I have been through 18 states, and cannot find a college that will help. All 0the Physics & Engineering Professors appear to be Christian, and are using the excuse of Jesus's return - to not help finish building it. I have also contact the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (BOAS) with the Plasma Warp Drive design (including the Chair of BOAS, former Governor of California Jerry Brown). This email includes my design, so please get it to however wants to save themselves from the looming Doomsday Clock -

end of ffrf.org: I will go out of my way to get rid of you and you organization ... you freethinkers upset me too much and on facebook too much if when I can... note get rid of the ffrf.org I will be working as well because I am a human being and you all are very dangerously wronging people... here in Canada psychiatrists are someor KNOWN openly to be athiets this mandates behavioral and attitudinal prioritize ing of no relion ever like ever I

do not spell check I am unfortunate enough to have been posted by flunkies of those whoms value less for me and less for all people it is my right to facebook it is my right to take you out of the facebook because if I can I will and this may be a resourcefulness of course and perhaps you are really doing wrong because you are — Gail Baxter

Hey retards: Just wanted to make a suggestion. I'm all about that freedom. So here's the deal. Why aren't you about that freedom and freedom of thought? Why are you trying to be fascists and trying to tell other people that they're not allowed to like religion?I'm not religious but I don't see no religious people getting all up in my business. If the fucken police station wants to have a God damn in God we trust thing who gives a f***. Within your puny little f****** piece of trash brain just think that God is Satan or something who gives a f***. You give a f*** because you're a Nazi piece of trash along with everyone of your f***** psychotic followers. Your little atheist movement is a extremist domestic terrorist movement. If you don't like something just ignore it. Because guess what? That's why we have the 2nd amendment so we can neutralize fascists when they encroach. leff Masonrich

Missouri: Don't you people have anything better to do then bother kids for saying a prey after a football game. You should go to another country and tell them to stop preying and see how you make out. A investigation? REALLY! -Peter McGarry

Jesus blood: Jesus she'd his precious blood for everyone's sins. Historians not religious historians tell us this man lived did miracles and died on a Roman cross . He died for your sins and mine. Do not fight against him anymore if you do that blood will become a curse against all of you. Your families first and your personal finances second and you're organization lastly. It's time to repent. Before you make a hasty decision I would suggest you google dying words of infidels — Michael Calkins

you: you can take your cock out and fuck your daughters in their asses until they bleed from their ears! Then you can suck the cancer out of my dead grandmothers ass, and then I hope your wives get breast cancer, and have both their tits cut off so I can super glue them to my garage ceiling to be used as punching bags! LOL!!!!!!!!!!! may God fuck you so badly, you get prostate cancer!!! Florida and Brevard county! "IN GOD THEY TUST" Sonny Blackmon

Your mission: Why do you only criticize Christianity? If your going to be "that guy" Than at least have some consistency. I feel sorry for you! You must have very sad lives — Arthur Santorum

Get out of Texas: You may remove yourself from any further litigation in Texas, or I might just decide to sue you in small claims court and encourage every other christian to do the same. You are not welcome in my State, your not welcome in my country, you are scum, you are welcome to leave to Europe where your views are wanted. Do not make me repeat myself you fucking cunts. — Phillip Causey

Honesty: Your assignment: Study original documents in David Bartons books such as "Original Intent" and get back to me. If the Bible is true, you are in deep trouble. If it is false, I still want have anything to worry about. If you want to change the Constitution, then get it amended. Just dont lie about history. — Dan Cummings

Your weekly antidote to the Religious Right



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FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Cornelius Tilton, 65, New Orleans: Abusive sexual contact. Tilton, pastor of Irish Channel Christian Fellowship and president of the Christian Bible College of Louisiana, is accused of assaulting a male student in November on a flight from Israel to Newark, NJ. It's alleged he fondled a 19-year-old male student's genitals in the seat next to him and then placed the student's hand on Tilton's erect penis. He allegedly resumed the fondling after the student went to the bathroom and returned.

The charge has a maximum sentence of 2 years in prison or a fine of up to \$250,000 or both. Source: justice.gov, 12-2-19

Scott Christner, 44, Goshen, IN: Felony child molesting. Christner is a volunteer youth ministry leader at First Baptist Church. A boy younger than age 14 alleged to police he was touched inappropriately under his clothing by Christner on 3 occasions, once at a movie theater and twice at Christner's home last July.

An affidavit said Christner described to police a touching incident at his home but said it only lasted for "maybe a minute," and that since the boy didn't push him away he thought it was something he didn't mind. Source: Goshen News, 11-26-19

Steven Arey, 48, city unavailable, and Kevin Sandoval, 56, Rancho Cordova, CA: 15 counts and 5 counts of child molesting, respectively. Arey is a California Department of Corrections officer and Sandoval is a retired officer. They are accused of multiple assaults in the mid-1990s at Valley Bible Church in Visalia, where Arey was a youth pastor and Sandoval was his "associate" at the church, police said.

The alleged victim told officers about being molested between the ages of 8 and 9. Other alleged victims have since come forward. *Source: Times-Delta, 11-26-19*

Logan Wesley III, 56, Texarkana, AR: Continuous sexual abuse of a child. Wesley, pastor of an unidentified Texarkana church, allegedly started molesting a girl when she was 12 and continued for several years on a regular basis.

"Since these allegations came to light earlier this month, we have received word that others are now ready to come forward with their own stories about how they were also molested by Wesley," police said in a statement. Source: Banner-Press, 11-25-19

Charmarie Colon, 33, Allentown, PA: Theft by unlawful taking, receiving stolen property and credit card fraud. Colon, treasurer at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, is charged with making unauthorized cash withdrawals and retail purchases between July 2016 and February 2019 that totaled over \$100,000. Source: Morning Call, 11-25-19

Patrick J. Kuffner, 72, Middlesex, NY: 3 counts of sexual assault of a minor between the ages of 13 and 16. He is accused of assaulting 3 teens in the early 1980s in Massachusetts before he was ordained a Catholic priest.

The Diocese of Metuchen dismissed him as pastor of Our Lady of Mount Virgin in Middlesex in February 2018. Source: Asbury Park Press, 11-22-19

Joe Floyd Steverson, Pearl, MS: Rape. Steverson, who founded Metro Grace Community Church in 2014, was indicted for forcible intercourse with a woman in August 2018. Ed Rainer, his attorney, said the incident was consensual sex involving a previous relationship and claimed the woman tried to entice Steverson to come back to her by sending him nude photos. She denied the incident was consensual. Source: Clarion-Ledger, 11-21-19

Robert Lopez Jr., 44, Poteet, TX: Terroristic threats causing fear of imminent bodily injury and 2 counts of deadly conduct, all misdemeanor counts. Lopez, pastor at Community Christian Church, was arrested after the Atascosa County Sheriff's Office received a call about a man with a gun.

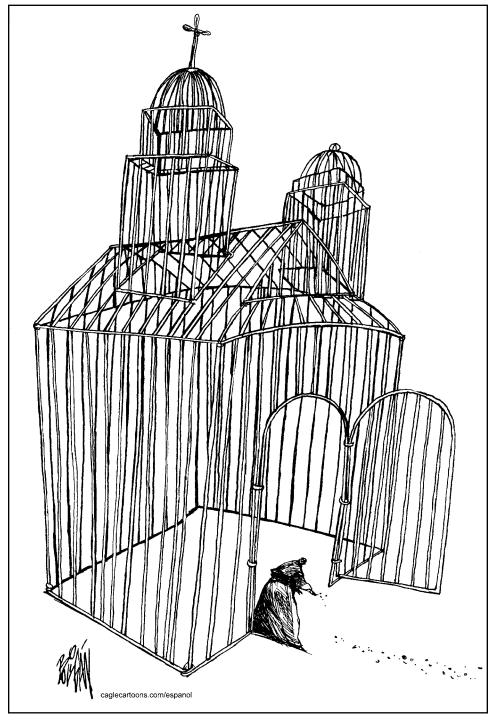
Lopez claimed he was the victim. "I was going to help a neighbor. I went out there to check some hog traps and I was attacked" by the property owner's grandson-in-law, who yelled racial slurs at him, Lopez alleged. Source: KSAT, 11-19-19

Randy D. Brooks, 46, West Plains, MO: 1st-degree sodomy or attempt, incest, 1st-degree endangering the welfare of a child creating a substantial risk/sexual and 2 counts each of 1st-degree statutory rape or attempt involving a child younger than 14 and 1st-degree child molestation. Brooks, pastor at 6th Street Church of God, was arrested after a child contacted police Nov. 9 to allege that an adult family member was trying to have sex with her at their home.

When interviewed by police Cpl. Brandon Stephens, Brooks allegedly admitted he had been touching the girl sexually for about 2 years and that she had been enticing him by walking around the house in her underwear when they were home alone. Source: Daily Quill, 11-14-19

Amal Samy, 37, Mount Vernon, AL: Sexual abuse. Samy, parochial administrator at St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church in Chastang, is accused in an alleged Aug. 21 incident on the Carnival Cruise ship Fantasy, based in Mobile.

Samy "attempted to touch a masseuse sever-



al times, exposed himself by removing the sheet and asked her to touch his genitals while touching himself," an affidavit said. He denies the allegation. Source: WKRG, 11-11-19

Sean Ortiz, 51, Jurupa Valley, CA: 2 counts of felony sexual battery. Ortiz, lead pastor at New Beginnings Community Church and a married father of 3, is accused of assaulting a minor female parishioner on at least 2 occasions at the church. *Source: KABC, 11-10-19*

David J. Perrett, 82, New South Wales, Australia: 139 sexual abuse counts related to alleged child sexual assault when he was a Catholic priest in 8 parishes between the 1960s and mid-1990s. Three complainants are women and 37 are men. Offenses are alleged when they were between age 3 and their mid-teens. *Source: abc.net/au*, 11-1-19

David J. Marcotte, 32, Indianapolis: Child solic-

CC Complaint: Fr.

Oelrich exposed himself

and tota her she meeded

something for her hands.'

itation, vicarious sexual gratification and dissemination of matter harmful to a minor. Marcotte, most recently a chaplain at Roncalli Catholic High School and the University of Indianapolis, was suspended from priestly duties last February after an abuse complaint was lodged

An affidavit alleged he worked at St. Malachy Church and School and St. Martin of Tours Parish when he abused a boy, now 17, in 2017 and 2018, including exposing himself during video chats on Facetime, Instagram and

Snapchat. Source: Indianapolis Star, 10-29-19

Pleaded / Convicted

Cameron S. Giovanelli, 42, Florida: Pleaded guilty to 4th-degree sex offense and 2nd-degree assault for incidents between January and August 2007 when he was pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Dundalk, MD. A plea agreement calls for other charges to be dismissed and for Giovanelli to serve 90 days in jail and 5 years' probation.

Prosecutors said he coerced a 17-year-old girl at the church school into a sexual relationship by using his position of authority. *Source: Baltimore Sun. 12-3-19*

Acton Bowen, 39, Gadsden, AL: Pleaded guilty to 28 counts related to alleged criminal sexual conduct perpetrated on 6 boys between ages 12 and 16. The youth evangelist is the founder of

Acton Bowen Outreach Ministries and has served several churches. Offenses alleged include genital touching, oral and anal sex and plying victims with alcohol

A 15-year-old youth group member at Whorton Bend Baptist Church alleged Bowen offered him "\$200 for 10 minutes" and said he wouldn't have to do anything but lay there. Source: Gadsden Times, 12-2-19

Anthony Oelrich, 53, St. Cloud, MN: Pleaded guilty to 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct for crimes alleged when he was rector of Cathedral Catholic Church of St. Mary. Prosecutors said Oelrich had a sexual relationship with a woman who went to him for counseling and had disclosed her past sexual abuse.

Oelrich exposed himself and told the woman she "needed something for her hands," the com-

plaint said. She told police that intercourse occurred multiple times between January and April 2014. He was sent later that year to St. Luke Institute, a treatment center for abusive priests. Source: St. Cloud Times, 11-25-19

Brian Stanley, 57, Coloma, MI: Pleaded guilty to attempted false

imprisonment. "Stanley is accused of secreting away a teenage boy and holding him against his will in the janitor's room of St. Margaret's Church in 2013," said a news release from state Attorney General Dana Nessel.

Stanley, pastor at the Otsego church, then allegedly immobilized the boy by wrapping him tightly in plastic wrap and covering his mouth and eyes with masking tape for over an hour before letting him go.

The incident was reported to the Catholic Diocese of Kalamazoo in 2013 and Stanley was put on leave but was reinstated after law enforcement didn't file criminal charges. A similar allegation was made in 2017 to the diocese about Stanley's activities at St. Charles Parish in Coldwater.

The alleged victim said it first happened while making "mummy mannequins" for the church's haunted house, but on later occasions became more disturbing with Stanley adding more and more layers. According to Nessel's office, while there may not have been sexual touching, "this type of conduct is a sexually motivated crime." Source:

Fox 17, 11-20-19

Kevin Lonergan, 31, Pottsville, PA: Pleaded guilty to misdemeanor indecent assault just before a jury was to be seated for his trial. A Catholic priest, he admitted grabbing the buttocks of a 17-year-old girl in a St. Francis of Assisi Church hallway after a confirmation service in 2018 and sending her nude photos on Snapchat. *Source: Morning Call, 11-18-19*

Gary J. Ray, 57, Camano Island, WA: Pleaded guilty to 3 counts of 1st-degree theft with aggravating circumstances a week before his trial was to start. Theft allegations were raised in 2017 while he was pastor at Restoration Church, where \$6,000 intended for new carpeting was missing.

At Oso Community Chapel, where Ray was pastor during the 2014 mudslide that killed 43 people, he was accused of stealing \$40,000 in donations for the chapel and affected families. He was also accused of stealing over \$40,000 from City Church in an unidentified California city.

The plea agreement said Ray must pay \$152,000 in restitution by the end of January. Source: Stanwood Camano News, 11-14-19

Gerald R. Hechenberger, 55, Mascoutah, IL: Pleaded guilty to possession of methamphetamine and 3 counts of possessing pornographic photos of children. He was arrested at Holy Childhood Catholic Church in January 2018 after police got a tip from the group Internet Crimes Against Children. He was stripped of his associate pastor duties the same day.

He used an email address with the prefix "subpigboy4u" to exchange images. One message stated: "Hello u gorgeous hot stud! Here are some pix u will enjoy i hope ... oink!" *Source: AP, 11-13-19*

Hugh Lang, 88, Munhall, PA: Guilty in a bench trial of felony unlawful contact with a minor, 3 misdemeanor counts of indecent assault and misdemeanor counts of indecent exposure and corruption of minors. Lang was pastor at St. Therese Catholic Parish in June 2001, when the crimes are alleged to have occurred.

The victim, now 30, returned from Southeast Asia to testify that Lang took him to the church basement when he was 11, forced him to strip naked and took a Polaroid photo before molesting him.

Prosecutor Greg Stein said the victim first told a friend of the assault when he was 14 and has been consistent since coming forward in 2018, adding that Lang threatened to show others the naked photo if he talked. Lang took the stand to deny all charges. Source: WTAE, 11-8-19

Sentenced

Daniel Greer, 79, New Haven, CT: 20 years in prison on convictions for sexual assaults on a student at Yeshiva of New Haven, where Greer was founding rabbi. Eliyahu Mirlis, 31, accused Greer of molesting him hundreds of times from 2001-05.

Judge Jon Alander ordered him to begin serving his sentence immediately instead of remaining free on bond during the appeals process, saying he is a substantial flight risk due to his age.

A federal jury in a 2017 civil suit ordered Greer and the yeshiva to pay Mirlis \$15 million in compensatory damages and \$5 million in punitive damages. *Source: JTA, 12-3-19*

An Argentine court sentenced **2 Catholic priests** and the gardener of a church-run school for deaf students to prison on 28 counts of sexual abuse and corruption of minors. The priests — **Nicola Corradi**, 83, and **Horacio Corbacho**, 59 — were sentenced to 42 and 45 years, respectively, while the gardener, **Armando Gomez**, got 18 years.

They worked at the Antonio Provolo Institute for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Children in Mendoza province between 2004 and 2016. The victims are 10 former students.

A prosecutor has also called for the arrest of Bishop **Gustavo Zanchetta** on allegations of sexual abuse. Zanchetta has been living in Vatican City while working in a church financial department. *Source: Reuters, 11-25-19*

Urbano Vazquez, 47, Washington, DC: 15 years in prison. He was found guilty of child sexual abuse of 13- and 9-year-old girls between 2015 and 2017 while he was an assistant pastor at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart. He was convicted of groping the 13-year-old and kissing and groping the 9-year-old.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Matt Williams told the judge that Vazquez's affability was his most effective weapon and that he was a "wolf in priest's clothing." A woman also testified that Vazquez kissed her when she was a teen. He still faces charges in that case. *Source: WTOP, 11-21-19*

Patrick Casey, 55, Detroit: 45 days in jail and 1 year of probation after pleading guilty to aggravated assault in a plea bargain in which a felony charge of criminal sexual conduct was dropped. He was originally accused of performing oral sex on a man during confession in 2013 while he was pastor at St. Theodore of Canterbury Catholic Parish in Westland. A jury was unable to render a verdict at his October trial.

Prosecutors alleged the man had attempted suicide just weeks before seeing Casey for the first time and that Casey told him after performing oral

sex that he could "have a gay relationship but still go to heaven." The archdiocese removed Casey after a complaint was made in 2015.

Defense attorney Stephen Rabaut argued the sex was consensual. "The evidence shows that as the sexual conduct was taking place, it was [the victim] who kept pushing it to the next level." Source: Fox 2 Detroit, 11-20-19

Jason Pittman, 26, Jackson, MS: 15 years in prison with 10 years suspended after pleading guilty to 2 counts of sexual battery. He was charged in November 2018 while working as a music minister at an unidentified church in Terry. The victim was a 15-year-old he met at the church. Source: Clarion-Ledger, 11-7-19

Steven Murdock, 55, Salt Lake City: 1 year probation, 48 hours' community service, forfeit cellphone, pay court costs, undergo counseling and stay away from his victim and the Opry Mills Mall in Nashville, TN. Murdock, high councilor at the Mormon stake in Holladay, UT, pleaded guilty to unlawfully taking a photo of a woman inside a dressing room in an H&M clothing store where he was shopping with his wife in August.

Prosecutors said as the victim approached the dressing rooms, Murdock guided her to an empty one. While inside she noticed a phone on the upper edge of the stall. After she dressed and left the room, she saw Murdock coming from the adjoining one with the phone and called police.

When police arrived, an affidavit said, she told an officer that Murdock's wife had "approached her and asked her to settle this peacefully without getting police involved." Source: The Tennessean, 11-5-19

Charles Sweet, 85, Austin, TX: 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of indecency with a child by sexual contact. He must serve 5 years before he is eligible for parole. He was a deacon at Hays Hills Baptist Church in Buda and with his wife tutored young church members off

Sweet was charged with inappropriately touching his granddaughter and another girl from the church on multiple occasions in the late 1990s and early 2000s. "You damaged me and forced me to grow up so fast," his granddaughter, now 22, told Sweet in court.

He admitted to his family in 2012 he had molested her when she was 8 but charges were never filed. Police reopened the investigation in January 2019 when they learned of other potential victims. One alleged Sweet repeatedly touched her genitals when she was between 4 and 6 years old while she attended youth ministries or visited his home, where she would go after church. The abuse occurred more than 100 times, she said. Source: American-Statesman, 11-4-19

Jeriah Mast, 38, Millersburg, OH: 9 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of gross sexual imposition for molesting 2 underage males between 1999 and 2008. A plea agreement dismissed 12 counts involving several other victims. Mast has admitted to molesting 30 to 31 boys in Haiti and Ohio.

Mast worked for Christian Aid Ministries of Berlin, OH, a missionary group supported by Anabaptist sects like the Amish and Mennonites. A Haitian court is seeking his return.

He would fondle the boys' penises and put his own between their legs and masturbate, according to his confession, but claimed he did not penetrate them.

Judge Robert Rinfret quoted from a statement Mast made in the presentencing investigation: "I didn't force them. It was consensual on their part." Rinfret asked incredulously, "How can an 11-yearold consent to sex?"

Mast's wife said she was "devastated," adding he had taken responsibility and she had witnessed a "radical change" in his life. Mast's pastor, Dwayne Stoltzfus of Shining Light Christian Fellowship, agreed: "I have witnessed a change in his life." Source: Post-Gazette, 11-5-19

Christopher Cox, 41, Traverse City, MI: 10 to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct, which involves penetration and the offender having "reason to know that the victim is mentally incapable, mentally incapacitated or physically helpless." In a plea bargain, 8 counts of 1st-degree criminal sexual conduct, extortion, delivering/manufacturing meth and possession of child pornography were dropped.

The investigation started in March 2019 when a 19-year-old man told police Cox had drugged him before sexually assaulting him in March and October 2019 while Cox was pastor at Long Lake Church and worked at Traverse City Christian School. Source: Record-Eagle, 11-5-19

Charles N. Pelkey, 50, Avon, MN: 2 days in jail (already served) and 2 years' probation after pleading guilty to 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct. Pelkey, Avon Community Church pastor, was accused of engaging in a sexual relationship with a woman who had gone to him for marriage counseling in November 2017, which is illegal in Minnesota. Consent is not a defense. Another parishioner reported the alleged relationship to police. Source: KSTP 11-1-19

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Catholic dioceses in Harrisburg, PA, and Newark, NJ, are being sued by 2 sisters who allege the dioceses failed to protect them as children from predator priest Augustine Giella, who died at age 72 while awaiting trial in 1993.

Patty Fortney-Julius and Lara Fortney-McKeever, the plaintiffs, and 3 of their sisters as young as age 2 were subjected to sexual abuse while Giella was pastor at St. John the Evangelist Church in Enhaut, PA, after being transferred from New Jersey in the 1980s, the suit asserts, "We want to know how a known predator priest like Giella landed on our Pennsylvania doorstep from New Jersey," Lara said.

He soon became a close friend of the family of

do Blade, 11-14-19

The Archdiocese of New York, the Augustinian Order, the former Augustinian Academy and St. Sylvester's Catholic Parish on Staten Island are defendants in a suit filed by "ARK63 DOE" alleging molestation by Thomas Burke, who died in 1984 at age 72.

"From approximately 1966 to 1969, when Plaintiff was approximately 11 to 14 years old, Fr. Burke engaged in unpermitted sexual contact with Plaintiff," the filing alleges. Source: Staten Island Advance, 11-11-19

clergy, with the church appealing for donations to foot the bill. The 120 bishops didn't decide on the fund's size or how payments will be made but voted to allocate \$5.5 million to an independent commission examining church sex abuse and to support prevention efforts.

Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, archbishop of Reims, said in a statement that payments will recognize "the silence, negligence, indifference, lack of reaction or bad decisions or dysfunction within the Church." Source: AP, 11-11-19

Legal Developments

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf signed bills to give victims of child sexual abuse more time to sue and to end time limits to file criminal charges. A landmark state grand jury report in 2018 found 300 Catholic clergy sexually abused children over 7 decades.

Wolf also signed a bill to invalidate secrecy agreements that prevent child sexual abuse victims from talking to investigators and to increase and clarify penalties for people who are required to report suspected abuse but don't. Source: AP/ KDKA, 11-26-19

Jacop Hazlett, 29, N. Charleston, SC, rejected a plea deal calling for 50 years in prison on multiple counts of child sexual assault. Hazlett, a NewSpring Church volunteer, was arrested after November 2018 surveillance video showed him taking a 3-year-old from the classroom to a bathroom. Hazlett looked around, then performed oral sex on the child as he sat on the toilet.

Church officials said when they reviewed security footage, they discovered repeated abuses and reported them. "It's a shame Mr. Hazlett is prolonging the inevitable," said Josh Slavin, an attorney representing 8 of the 15 alleged victims. Source: WCIV, 11-8-19

Allegations

Colorado Catholic priests sexually abused at least 166 children since 1950, according to a 263page report by an independent investigator who found the church expunged files and covered up abuse for decades.

It took nearly 20 years on average for the church to stop an abusive priest after receiving an allegation. The report said there were 100 instances in which the church could have reported abuse to police but did so fewer than 10 times.

Before the 1990s, the Colorado dioceses "often intentionally did not document child sex abuse allegations or referred to them in such euphemistic terms that they were completely obscured," investigators wrote. An anal rape of a 12-year-old boy was documented as a "boundary violation."

Assaults by a priest straight out of the seminary were documented as "boy troubles." One serial abuser was said to suffer from "nervousness." Source: Colorado Sun, 10-23-19

Removed / Resigned

Richard J. Malone, 73, resigned as bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo due to longstanding complaints he covered up abusive priests. One leaked recording showed he was reluctant to remove a parish priest whom he called a "sick puppy."

Parishioners who had called for the resignation started calling their priests to see if Malone really had resigned, said Paul Dillon Seil, pastor of St. Bernadette Parish Church in Orchard Park. "People are elated, finally, that something is going to happen," Seil said. "This didn't start with Malone, and won't end with his departure," he added.

Ironically, the prelate sent to investigate allegations against Malone was later accused of sexual abuse. Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of the Diocese of Brooklyn is a defendant in a New Jersey suit alleging he molested a student multiple times in 1974-75 as a Jersey City parish priest.

Mark Matzek, 56, alleges DiMarzio and deceased priest Albert Mark assaulted him repeatedwnen ne was an altar boy at St. Nic Church. Source: NY Times, 12-4-19

Wesley L. Feltner. 41. Burnsville. MN. resigned as pastor at Berean Baptist Church following allegations he had inappropriate relationships with 2 teens when he was 23 and served as their youth pastor at a Southern Baptist Church in Evansville, IN.

Megan Frey alleges a "sexual relationship" started in 2002 when she was 18 in high school and sought counseling from Feltner. "The counseling soon transformed into him having a bubble bath waiting for me in his upstairs bathroom 'so I could relax' after coming from work and school."

Feltner led the group through an abstinence ceremony one night in which he handed each student, including Frey, a rose to symbolize the promise of chastity, alleges Frey, who soon learned he was also romantically pursuing Jo-Anna Hendrickson, another 18-year-old from the group. Both are blogging about their experiences at broughttothelight.org.

He told Hendrickson he felt "God leading him to pursue" her while he was trying to end another relationship.

Feltner has also been suspended as an adjunct professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Source: Star Tribune/Baptist Press. 11-26-19

CC A search of Fr. Giella's

photos of naked children.

underwear, vials of urine and

home turned up girls'

11, even taking the girls to his New Jersey vacation home. In his home, police later found girls' underwear, vials of urine and photos of naked children, including of Carolyn, the youngest sister.

Patty recalls Giella telling her to trim her pubic hair and set it on the sink so he could check her "development." The girls remember him walking around wearing only white underwear with a blue band.

Patricia Fortney, the girls' mother, alleges she told Msgr. Hugh Overbaugh of the Diocese of Harrisburg what Giella had done. According to a news story, she recalls him saying, "I wondered why you would let your girls go to the rectory." Source: pennlive.com, 12-3-19

The Catholic Archdiocese of New York, Mount St. Michael Academy, the Society of African Missions and the Marist Brothers are defendants in a suit brought by "MR," who alleges Bernard J. Lynch sexually assaulted him while he was a student at the Bronx academy in 1978-79 when he was 16.

Lynch, a gay Catholic priest renowned for his

work among New York's AIDS patients in the 1980s, was tried and acquitted in 1989 of abusing a different student from the high school. He then left New York.

Lynch "performed oral intercourse on plaintiff and digitally penetrated plaintiff after Christian Club meetings," the

complaint alleges. Lynch, now 72, was born in County Clare, Ireland. He was never laicized and remains a Catholic priest living with his husband in London. Source: NY Daily News, 11-20-19

The Pittsburgh Catholic Diocese, Bishop David Zubik and St. Alphonsus Catholic Church in McDonald, PA, are being sued by 2 men who allege sexual abuse in 1981 by Francis Pucci, pastor at St. Alphonsus. At the time they were 11 and 13 years old and were altar boys.

Criminal charges against Pucci in 1988 were dropped due to the statute of limitations. He died in 2002. The suit claims the diocese covered up the abuse by moving Pucci to 13 different locations over 30 years. Source: KDKA, 11-20-19

Jesuits USA Central and its Southern Province deny allegations in 2 suits claiming sexual abuse by 3 Jesuit priests who served at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Albuquerque, NM. One plaintiff contends he was molested 8 years ago at the church.

In the other suit, a woman alleges she was molested by 2 priests, now deceased, as a first-grader beginning in 1968. Source: AP, 11-18-19

The Archdiocese of Detroit. Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Parish in Temperance, MI, and Don LaCuesta are being sued by Linda and Jeff Hullibarger for Fr. LaCuesta's remarks during his funeral sermon for their son Maison, 18, who committed suicide in December.

The Hullibargers claim they met with LaCuesta to plan the funeral and asked him to deliver a positive message celebrating Maison's life but didn't mention how he died. Instead, he turned the homily into a message about suicide, questioning whether Maison would be admitted to heaven, it's alleged.

Jeff Hullibarger, frustrated with the homily, went to the pulpit asking the priest to stop. Source: Tole-

Rabbinical College Bobover Yeshiva Bnei Zion, Brooklyn, NY, Congregation Shaarei Zion in Brooklyn and Camp Shalva in South Fallsburg are being sued by Yonah Koh. 37, who alleges he was raped as a child by 2 Hasidic rabbis, now de-

It's alleged that in the early 1990s when Kohn was 10, Rabbi Berel Weiss began grooming him and eventually forced him into oral sex. After he reported Weiss' actions to Rabbi Shlomo Dov Pfefferkorn, Kohn alleges Pfefferkorn started molesting him and anally raped him at a mikvah, a ritual bath. Source: NY Post. 11-9-19

The Catholic Diocese of Joliet, IL, Bishop Daniel Conlon and Richard Jacklin are being sued in connection with Jacklin's alleged sexual assault of a 39-year-old man with a disability at a Kankakee development center while ministering there.

Jacklin, 67, was criminally charged in 2017 after a nurse reported walking in on him performing a sex act on the man. He is paralyzed and has an intellectual disability.

Charges of criminal sexual assault by force and

sexual misconduct on a person with a disability remain pending. Source: Chicago Tribune, 10-31-19

Joseph Gutierrez, the Brothers of the Christian Schools and De La Salle High School in Concord, CA, are defendants in a suit filed by Jay Hoey, now 65, who

alleges sexual abuse in 1969-70 by Gutierrez, a theology teacher and counselor at the school.

Gutierrez is currently listed as "credibly accused" by the Diocese of Oakland. Hoey alleges the religious order running the school knew of Gutierrez's sexual misconduct as early as 1966. A 1968 letter stated: "[W]e changed Brother Joseph from Berkeley to Concord two years ago because he became emotionally involved with some students. This involvement had sexual overtones

The suit alleges he took Hoey and other boys to a sex club in San Francisco, gave them Quaaludes on the way and that Hoey was touched sexually "in places I had never been touched before."

The order settled a 2003 suit filed by another high school student accusing Gutierrez years before for \$4 million. Source: East Bay Times, 10-23-19

Finances

The Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh can't use an \$8 million-plus fund for needy children to pay compensation to victims of clergy sexual abuse, ruled Judge Lawrence J. O'Toole in denying the diocese's petition. The century-old Toner Institute Trust Fund was set up to fund an industrial school for boys and later to provide for "the care, education, training, maintenance and treatment of neglected, emotionally disabled and needy children in order to assist them to make an adjustment to life and work in accordance with their abilities."

The diocese is facing claims from 367 individuals alleging abuse by more than 90 priests over the past 70 years. Chancellor Fllen Mady said the diocese is reviewing its options in light of O'Toole's ruling. Source: Post-Gazette, 11-18-19

French Catholic bishops approved plans to financially compensate people abused sexually by

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

Celebrating the Winter Solstice Season 2019

he Freedom From Religion Foundation's annual Winter Solstice and Bill of Rights exhibits were displayed in December all across the country.

The signs, cutouts, banners and billboards were placed in at least 12 states during the holiday season, from California to New Hampshire.

The Winter Solstice sign features FFRF's traditional message by its principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor. It was created as an equal-time challenge to combat religious dogmatism at the heart of state government and reads:

At this season of the Winter Solstice, may reason prevail. There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell. There is only our natural world. Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds.

The Winter Solstice, which occurred on Dec. 21, is the shortest, darkest day of the year, signaling the rebirth of the sun and the natural new year. It's been celebrated for millennia with festivals of light, feasts, gift exchanges and the display of evergreens, which symbolize enduring life, and, FFRF maintains, is the true "reason for the season."

FFRF's whimsical Bill of Rights "nativity" is an irreverent cutout by artist Jacob Fortin that depicts founders Benjamin Franklin,

Thomas Jefferson and George Washington gazing in adoration at a "baby" Bill of Rights, while the Statue of Liberty looks on.

A sign beside the wry nativity scene reads: "At this season of the Winter Solstice, join us in honoring the Bill of Rights, adopted on Dec. 15, 1791, which reminds us there can be no religious freedom without the freedom to dissent. Keep religion and government separate!"

Here's a roundup of those displays by state:

California

Sacramento: The Bill of Rights display was put up by the Greater Sacramento chapter of FFRF outside the state Capitol.

San Diego: Two of FFRF's Solstice displays were put up to counter the religious messages placed on public property in Balboa Park. A large red Winter Solstice banner was placed next to FFRF's Bill of Rights nativity display.

Connecticut

Shelton: FFRF's Winter Solstice banner was put up by Jerry Bloom in Huntington Park.

Illinois

Arlington Heights: The Bill of Rights scene was displayed at North School Park, its seventh year there, thanks to FFRF's Metropolitan Chicago chapter.

Chicago: A colorful banner invoking the Founding Fathers has again been unfurled in Daley Plaza by the Metropolitan Chicago chapter. Sitting atop the banner stand is a large lighted Richard Dawkins-inspired "A" (for atheism) sign. This is the seventh year of the display, intended to counter a life-size Christian creche and a massive Jewish menorah placed at the location by private organizations since the 1980s.

Glenview: The Metropolitan Chicago chapter also placed a Bill of Rights nativity display at the Village Hall for the first time.

Libertyville: The Metropolitan Chicago chapter put up the Bill of Rights cutout at Cook Memorial Park, the first year that a freethought exhibit has been displayed at this site. A life-size Christian creche and an 8-foot tall menorah have been placed in the park for several years.

Morris: The Bill of Rights display and Winter Solstice sign were placed on the ground of the Grundy County Courthouse by FFRF Member Will Meyer.

Springfield: The Winter Solstice sign was dis-year. (A photo appeared in the December issue.)



FFRF Member Steve Mershon and several other New Jersey residents helped install FFRF's Bill of Rights display in Maplewood's Ricalton Square.

played at the Illinois state Capitol building for the 11th straight year. It was installed by FFRF member Kathryn Koldehoff.

Iowa

Des Moines: The Bill of Rights cutout was put up in the state Capitol for the third straight year.

Michigan

Warren: The Reason Station, staffed and organized by FFRF activist Douglas Marshall, was up for the fifth straight year at City Hall. The centerpiece was a "May Reason Prevail" sign.

Also in Warren, Scott Elliott and other members put up a "Keep Saturn in Saturnalia" sign on Dec. 1 on the Mound Road median. Unfortunatley, within a couple days, it was stolen (poles and all) by vandals. Nevertheless, by getting the permit to place the sign on the right-of-way median, Elliott was able to keep the nativity creche from being placed there.

New Hampshire

Concord: FFRF Member Jack Shields put up FFRF's Bill of Rights nativity cutout display outside New Hampshire's Capitol building for the second year. (A photo appeared in the December issue.)

New Jersey

Maplewood: The Bill of Rights nativity display was put up in the business district of the city.

New York

Hastings-on-Hudson: The Free-thinkers of Hastings-on-Hudson put up FFRF's "Reason's Greetings" banner in VFW Park. Next to it, the group has also displayed its own sign depicting Rodin's "The Thinker" in contemplation of the village's water tower. It is the fifth year in a row the local organization has created a public exhibition.

Ohio

Cleveland: The Northern Ohio Freethought Society, the local chapter of FFRF, obtained a spot at the Cleveland Public Square for the Bill of Right exhibit for the third year

Oregon

Eugene: A large banner that spans 30 feet by 4 feet and stretches across 8th Street contains the message: "Celebrate the Solstice. Tis the Season of Reason." FFRF thanks Member Charles Jones for his activism in getting this banner up.

Washington

Olympia: FFRF's "Let Reason Prevail" banner was erected on the grounds of the state Capitol by Darrell Barker and others from the "Unfettered Freethinkers of South Sound," a chapter of FFRF. The sign was vandalized days after being put up, but Barker and others returned it to its original state.

Wisconsin

Madison: For the 24th consecutive year, FFRF was able to place its solstice sign at the Wisconsin Capitol in Madison. It also displayed its Bill of Rights cutout.

North Hudson: Ken Wolter was able to put up FFRF's Bill of Rights display outside the North Hudson Village Hall.



From left, John Lucas, Mike Kirkland and Kathy Johnson of the Greater Sacramento Chapter of FFRF place guard ropes around the Bill of Rights display on the California state Capitol building grounds in Sacramento. Not pictured are Judy Saint, Barri Babow, Karrie Lucas and Erin Louis. Thanks to Janet Thew for obtaining the permit and site.



In San Diego's Balboa Park, FFRF's Winter Solstice banner and Bill of Rights cutout are on display for the second year.



Kathi Wise proudly stands next to the Bill of Rights display at North School Park in Arlington Heights, Ill.



The Metropolitan Chicago Chapter of FFRF, headed by Tom Cara, erected the Winter Solstice banner and light-up "A" sign at Daley Plaza in Chicago, Ill.



FFRF's Winter Solstice sign makes its 11th straight appearance at the Illinois Capitol building in Springfield, Ill., thanks to Kathryn Koldehoff.



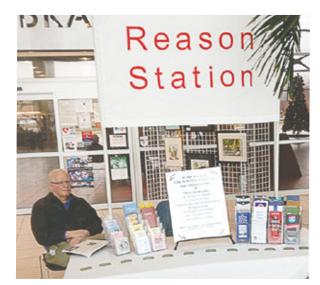
FFRF's Bill of Rights nativity display and "Happy Winter Solstice" sign have been installed by FFRF Member Will Meyer next to a Christian nativity scene at the Grundy County Courthouse in Illinois.



FFRF's Bill of Rights display can be seen at the Glenview, Ill., Village Hall, for the first time.



FFRF Member and State Representative Paul Novak put up Bill of Rights exhibit in the Iowa state Capitol.



The Reason Station, organized by FFRF activist Douglas Marshall, was again put up to celebrate the Winter Solstice in the Warren, Mich., City Hall for the fifth straight year.



Local FFRF members (organized by Scott Elliott) placed a tongue-incheek banner proclaiming "Keep Saturn in Saturnalia" in Warren, Mich. Unfortunately, the sign was stolen by vandals shortly after it was put up.



The Northern Ohio Freethought Society, the local chapter of FFRF, put up the Bill of Rights display in the Cleveland Public Square.

FFRF convention, Nov. 13-15

San Antonio awaits! But don't wait to sign up

Yes, it's still very early in the year, but it's not too soon to make plans and to register for FFRF's fabulous 2020 national convention — taking place the weekend of Nov. 13-15, 2020, at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio on the famed Riverwalk.

Make your room reservations directly at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio, 123 Losoya, by phoning 210-451-6200. Rates are: \$205 (single/double occupancy), \$215 (triple/quad occupancy), not including state and local taxes. Indicate you're with the "Freedom From Religion Foundation" bloc or reserve online at ffrf.us/hotel.

The convention opens at 1 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 13, and continues through Saturday, Nov. 14, with membership and State Representative meetings Sunday morning. Plan to come early or stay late if you want to sightsee in this exotic locale. The hotel is less than five minutes from the Alamo and many other attractions.

With two luminaries opening the conference — Gloria Steinem and Margaret Atwood (see story on Page 1) — FFRF expects the convention to be a sell-out. The venue will hold about 900 participants. So, we encourage you to register with FFRF and book your hotel rooms as soon as possible to avoid disappointment.

"A Conversation with Gloria Steinem," the feminist icon, activist and bestselling



Gloria Steinem

author, will take place Friday at 3 p.m. For those purchasing a \$500 ticket (part of an FFRF fundraiser) to the 4 p.m. private reception to meet Steinem, she will autograph copies of her charming new book, The Truth

Will Set You Free, But First It Will Piss You Off! Thoughts on Life, Love, and Rebellion. (A copy of the book is included with the ticket; there will be no other book-signing



Margaret Atwood

opportunity.) A legal Q&A with FFRF attorneys will take place concurrently for those who don't attend the Steinem event.

Evening with Margaret Atwood," the bestsellnovel, The Handmaid's Tale, has become a modern secular parable, will start at 7:30 p.m. Friday. Atwood will do a 45-minute book signing, to be followed by a private reception (also a \$500 per person fundraiser for FFRF). The ticket to the reception will include Atwood's Booker Prize-winning Handmaid's Tale sequel, The Testaments.

Already confirmed to join that illustrious line-up are:

• Journalist and author Katherine Stewart. In addition to conducting the on-stage interview with Margaret At-



Katherine Stewart

wood, Stewart will about her new forthcoming book, The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism. She is also the author of The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on

America's Children. In 2014, she was named Person of the Year by Americans United for her coverage of religion, politics, policy and state/church conflicts.

• Black Skeptics Los Angeles founder, novelist and activist Sikivu Hutchinson, Ph.D, will be receiving FFRF's Freethought Heroine Award. Hutchinson is



Sikivu Hutchinson

an educator, auplaywright and director. Her books include Moral Combat: Black Atheists, Gender Politics, and the Values Wars (2011), Godless Americana: Race and Religious Rebels (2013) and the novel White Nights,

Black Paradise (2015) on the Peoples Temple and the 1978 Jonestown massacre. She also wrote, directed and produced a short film of "White Nights, Black Paradise."

Future issues of Freethought Today will update the list of speakers and honorees.

FFRF registration is only \$60 per FFRF member, \$65 companion accompanying member, \$115 nonmember (or save money by joining for \$40). Children 12 and under are free and the student rate is \$10.

So, register early for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see Steinem, Atwood and many others in San Antonio! Go to ing novelist whose ffrf.org/convention2020.

Convention

Continued from page 1

Words, Marilyn: Norma Jean and My Life on the Road.

A life-long reproductive rights activist, Steinem has said: "Do not hang out any place where they won't let you laugh, including churches and temples."

"An Evening with Margaret Atwood" will take place Friday night, to include a conversation with journalist Katherine Stewart, who will be speaking herself on Saturday. Atwood has agreed to sign books after her talk. The book signing will be followed by a private reception. Those signing up, also a \$500 fundraiser for FFRF, will receive a copy of Atwood's new and much-lauded The Testaments, which won the 2019 Booker Prize and is a sequel to The Handmaid's Tale.

Atwood is the author of more than 50 volumes of fiction, poetry, children's literature and nonfiction. Her best-known novels include The Edible Woman, The Robber Bride, The Blind Assassin, Oryx and Crake, which is being adapted into an HBO TV series by filmmaker Darren Aronofsky. A serialized adaptation of The Handmaid's Tale has received 13 Emmy nominations and eight awards including for Best Drama.

"Every totalitarian government on the planet has always taken a very great interest in women's reproductive rights," says Atwood. Both women have previously been named Humanists of the Year.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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Or register online: ffrf.org/convention2020

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