

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**Nonbelief Relief:
Family escapes
Syria; now safe**

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**Coverage of
Roe v. Wade
court memo**

PAGES 10-13



**Data prove
nonreligious
are more moral**

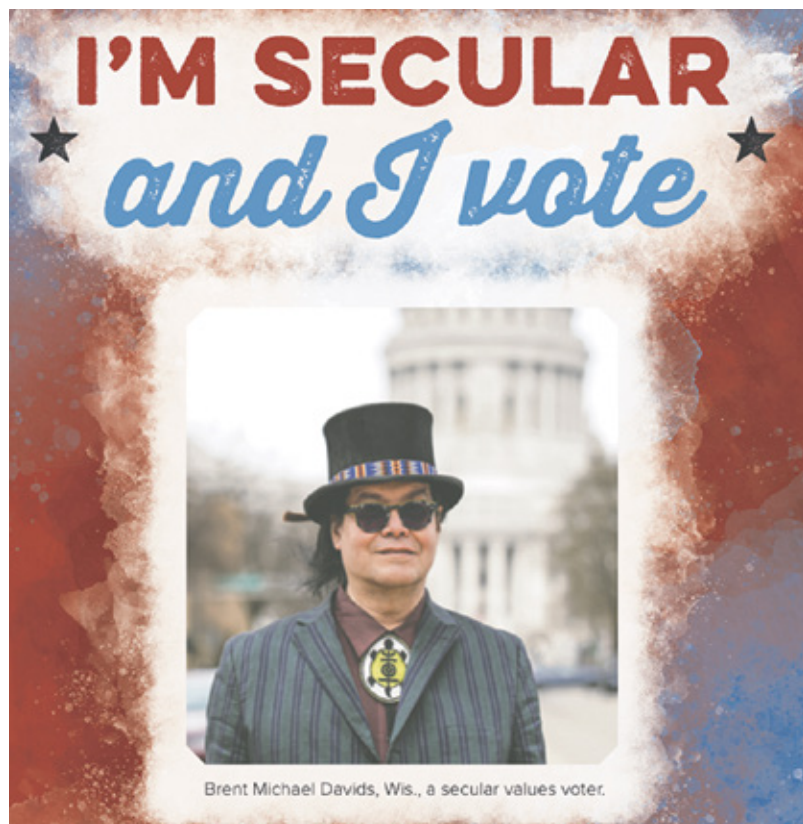
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Vol. 39 No. 5

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Spreading the word



FFRF is in the midst of its nationwide “I’m secular and I vote” campaign. Each state will be represented by an FFRF member (or couple), who will be included in full-page ads in the newspapers of their respective capital cities or major metropolitan areas. The first ads will appear in papers on July 3-4 and the second round of ads will appear on or near Constitution Day, Sept. 15. Some of these participants will also be featured on billboards in their respective cities. See pages 14-16 for photos of some of the FFRF members who agreed to be part of this campaign.

FFRF earns two court victories in West Virginia

The Freedom From Religion Foundation got a double dose of good news during the week of May 16 when it won two different court cases in West Virginia.

On May 16, U.S. District Judge David Faber dismissed a lawsuit after Mercer County Schools agreed to a settlement with FFRF over the teaching of “Bible in the Schools” classes to elementary school students. (See sidebar story on this page for more on this case.)

Then, a day later, on May 17, FFRF and two of its members won a federal court challenge against a West Virginia city that, according to the ruling, “wrapped itself in a single faith” by opening with the Lord’s Prayer.

U.S. District Judge John T. Copenhaver Jr. issued a 30-page decision in FFRF’s favor. He permanently enjoins the city of Parkersburg from continuing its practice of reciting the Lord’s Prayer at each city council meeting. The decision declares the practice unconstitutional, awards each plaintiff nominal damages, and allows the plaintiffs to seek attorneys fees.

“The City Council’s prayer practice most clearly runs afoul of the Fourth Circuit’s concern with identifying the government with a single preferred religious sect,” writes Copenhaver.

The 4th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, which has jurisdiction over West Virginia, had previously struck down Christian prayers recited by county commissioners. The opinion by Copenhaver concludes under that analysis: “[T]he City Council

School settles with FFRF over classes

A long-running FFRF lawsuit against a West Virginia school district has finally been settled.

FFRF filed the federal case in 2017 on behalf of Elizabeth Deal and her daughter to stop Mercer County Schools from continuing to teach “Bible in the Schools” classes to elementary school students. The bible classes had been ongoing for more than 75 years despite Supreme Court precedent banning public schools from undertaking religious instruction.

“We are pleased that this violation involving the illegal proselytizing of youngsters has come to a mutual resolution,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. “But it should not take a

See Bible classes on page 7

See West Virginia on page 7

High school coach prayer case

Students’ religious liberty is at risk in case

*Fox News requested that FFRF write an op-ed on the **Kennedy v. Bremerton School District** case now before the Supreme Court. This column appeared on **FoxNews.com** on May 1.*

By Patrick Elliott

The Supreme Court may be about to fumble a major case involving a former high school football coach who sought to impose prayer on his players.

The court has taken up the case of former high school football coach Joe Kennedy and his allegations that the Bremerton School District in Washington State violated his free speech and free exercise rights. But the religious liberty that is actually at stake belongs to student athletes who are at the mercy of their coach. Public school coaches cannot be allowed to abuse their position of authority to impose religion on students.

Kennedy’s attorneys have sought to wave a magic wand and distort the facts of the case in order to secure a victory before the court and the court of public opinion. At various times, they have claimed that Kennedy’s post-game



Photo by Chris Line
Patrick Elliott

prayers on the 50-yard line were “private,” “silent” and “personal.”

None of those descriptors is accurate. An appellate judge even called Kennedy’s attorneys’ version of events a “deceitful narrative.”

For years, Kennedy imposed his religion on football players by reciting team prayers not only on the field at the 50-yard line after games but, tellingly, also in the locker room. He bragged about his 50-yard line prayers on Fox News Radio in October 2015, saying that the “entire team” joined him. It was apparent at the time that he wanted to continue to involve students in the prayers.

Now, the former coach wants to spin the case and claim the school system is somehow stifling his right to engage in private prayer. In reality, the school district tried valiantly to accommodate him.

See Bremerton on page 22



Outside the Supreme Court on April 25, U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin (second from left) met with Debbie Allen, executive director of the Secular Coalition for America; Jennifer Hawks, associate general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee; Nicole Carr, deputy director of American Humanist Association; and Mark Dann, director of governmental affairs for FFRF. The court that day heard the oral arguments in the **Kennedy v. Bremerton School District** case.

Getting the word out



Photo by Carl Ledendecker

FFRF’s East Tennessee Chapter placed this billboard in April along the heavily traveled I-40/I-75 near downtown Knoxville. Members of the East Tennessee chapter in the photo are, from left to right, David Hughes, Angel Jones, Joe Mitchell, Alistair Elliot, Gregg Deneweth, Terry Ray, Shannon VanBreda, Real VanBreda (holding Bailey the dog), chapter president Aleta Ledendecker and Eliot Specht. The same design will be used in Dayton, Tenn., the site of the famous *Scopes* “monkey” trial (immortalized in “Inherit the Wind”), for three months this summer in time for a scheduled trial re-enactment.

Note to members

For those of you who get the PDF version of *Freethought Today*, there have been a few changes to the content you can see.

Because of privacy concerns — the PDF can be easily forwarded to non-members — FFRF has stopped including in the PDF version the Black Collar Crime report, names of new Lifetime members, and the names of the Letterbox contributors.

The online version at freethoughttoday.com also follows this protocol. Only the actual print newspaper contains all of these items.

If you would like to continue reading Black

Collar Crime, see the names of FFRF’s newest Lifetime members, or see the names of those who contributed to our Letterbox, you will need to change your preferences in how you receive *Freethought Today*.

In order to do that, follow these simple steps:

Log into your FFRF.org account.

Click on “Update your contact information.”

Go down to “Deliver *Freethought Today* by” and click on either “Newspaper by mail” or “Both PDF and paper copy.”

Click “Submit.”

Your weekly antidote to the Religious Right

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— Hosted by Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor —
Slightly irreverent views, news, music & interviews

FFRF.ORG **FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION**

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TODAY

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

IN MEMORIAM

Sidney Bertisch was activist, musician

FFRF Member Sidney L. Bertisch of Florida died April 17 after a brief illness. Sidney was born in the Bronx, N.Y., on June 26, 1941, to Max Bertisch and Kate (Lieber) Bertisch. He graduated from Theodore Roosevelt High School, then worked for several years at resorts in the Catskills as a lighting operator for nightclub acts including Milton Berle, Gregory



Sidney Bertisch

Hines, Eydie Gormé and Steve Lawrence, and Jackie Mason. Sidney’s Borscht Belt sense of humor originated there.

In 1967, Sidney headed to Gainesville to visit a friend and basically never left. Other than a few years living in Colorado, he lived in Gainesville the rest of his life. He earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Florida, then launched a successful career as a local piano player and singer at regular gigs and private events. He also worked for the University of Florida from the early 1980s to the late 1990s.

Sidney’s hobbies included contra dancing, bicycling, acting and social activism. He participated in many demonstrations, including the 1963 March on Washington and protests against the death penalty in Florida. His compassion for all humans and for other species was unlimited. He joined FFRF in 1997.

Judi Jacobs was vet tech, medical coder

FFRF Member Judi Jacobs, an FFRF volunteer, died at the University of Wisconsin Hospital on April 9, with her daughters, Jenni and Rachel, by her side.

She was born Aug. 1, 1950, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa., the only child of Al and Lillian (Brazda) Kopecky. One of her fondest childhood memories was doing a community theatre production of “My Fair Lady” with her parents. Throughout her childhood, she participated in multiple community theatre productions.



Judi Jacobs

She attended and graduated from Iowa State University. It was during this time that she met her future husband Tom Jacobs. They married on Aug. 18, 1973. After marriage, they moved to Des Moines, Iowa, and then Madison, Wis.

After planning to study Russian at UW-Madison, Tom and Judi were “surprised” in 1978 by the arrival of twin daughters, Jennifer and Rachel. While raising their daughters, Judi took on several extra roles: seamstress for her children and dolls, Cat Mom, Girl Scout

Cookie Mom and Ballet Mom.

As her daughters got older, Judi went back to school to become a veterinary technician and worked at Waunakee Vet Clinic. Then she went back again to become a medical coder at UW Hospital for many years until her retirement.

In her retirement, she was happy beading, collecting dolls, reading, spending time with her cats and visiting with her grandchildren, Anya and Arun. She also went on a twice-in-a-lifetime trip to Russia.

Carli Stevens was longtime resident of Santa Cruz



FFRF member Carli Ann (Lewis) Stevens, a resident of Santa Cruz County, Calif., for 60 years, died at her home on Dec. 24, 2021, at the age of 82.

Carli was born in Long Beach, Calif., on July 7, 1939, to Harriett Hariman and Harold Lewis.

Carli was lovingly cared for by her family, and her daughter sat up all night comforting her until Carli decided it was time to stop all the poking and prodding that was necessary to keep herself alive. Years before, she had made it known that she didn’t want to have any extraordinary effort made to keep her alive.

She was preceded in death by her

parents, her brother Christopher “Kit” Lewis, her stepbrother Gary Lewis, and her son Alexander Lewis Stevens. Surviving her are her husband, Stanley D. Stevens, a son and a daughter.

The Not So Good Book: What Does the ‘Holy Bible’ Really Teach?

By Brian Bolton
Foreword by Dan Barker
Illustrated by Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Steve Benson

A sourcebook for all Americans who consider fundamentalist Christian zealots to be a threat to religious freedom.

—Published by FFRF. 368 pages / PB \$15 Item #FB147

Buy it from FFRF online
ffrf.org/shop

‘DO mess with Texas’

Register now for San Antonio convention!

You are cordially invited to the 45th annual Freedom From Religion Foundation convention on Friday, Oct. 28, and Sat., Oct. 29, at the Hyatt Regency on the Riverwalk in San Antonio. The conference begins with an optional “early bird” registration and reception late Thursday afternoon, Oct. 27, and concludes after the Sunday morning meetings of the membership and FFRF State Representatives, ending by noon.

The theme is “DO Mess with Texas,” a state which has become ground zero for theocratic policymaking.

Room reservations should be made soon, and no later than Oct. 7 at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio, 210-451-6200, ffrf.us/hotel, site of the convention, with overflow options at the Hilton Garden Inn or Menger Hotel. (See full details on hotels, menus, etc., at ffrf.org/convo-2022.)

Headliners include **John Irving**, the bestselling award-winning novelist of 14 books, including *The World According to Garp* and *The Cider House Rules*, who will be receiving FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award. He will give the keynote Saturday night.

Iconic Texan commentator and writer **Jim Hightower**, “America’s most popular populist,” will help open the conference. Another speaker who is an expert at “messing with Texas” will be **Val Benavidez**, director of the Texas Freedom Network.

Abortion rights advocate **Amy Hagstrom Miller**, principal plaintiff in the lawsuit against Texas’s draconian abortion ban, SB 8, and CEO of Whole Woman’s Health, a series of abortion clinics, will be named FFRF’s 2022 “Forward Award” honoree.

Nebraska state Sen. Megan Hunt, who publicly identifies as an atheist, is a stalwart against Christian religious



extremists in her home state, and will receive FFRF’s “Champion of the First Amendment” award.

Daniel Mach, director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, will accept on behalf of the ACLU FFRF’s Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award.

The Richard & Beverly Hermen \$5,000 Student Activist Award will go to **Max Nibert**, the brave 18-year-old Huntington (W.Va.) High School student who helped organize a walkout after the school held Christian-themed assemblies in the public school. He is now principal student plaintiff in FFRF’s ongoing federal lawsuit. Also appearing will be 17-year-old activist **Will Larkins**, a nonreligious student who became a national figurehead in testifying against Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill and leading a walkout at his high school.

As a special musical treat, “Godless Gospel” — a collaboration between artistic producer **Andre Forbes** and FFRF Co-President **Dan Barker** — will debut. The distinguished singers include **Candace R.M. Gorham**, author of *The Ebony*

Exodus Project, **Tahira Clayton**, a New York City jazz vocalist who also belts out gospel, **Rogiers Fibby**, president of Black Nonbelievers of DC, **Cynthia McDonald**, an activist with Freedmen of Chicago, **DeAngela Morant**, of Florida, and **Mandisa Thomas**, president of Black Nonbelievers. They will also participate in a panel discussion on African-American nonbelievers.

Actress and founder of Dare to Doubt, **Alice Greczyn**, will be receiving FFRF’s “Freethought Heroine” Award. Other speakers include the author of *Alpha God*, **Hector A. Garcia**, of San Antonio. He’s given a Ted Talk and has also written *Sex, Power and Partisanship*.

The youngest honoree will be 11-year-old **Elle Harris**, receiving the debut “Out of God’s Closet,” a \$5,000 student scholarship endowed by the late Diane Uhl, as the author of *Elle the Humanist*.

Concurring optional workshops Friday at noon will include one on what people can do to help stop the religious war against reproductive rights, conducted by FFRF’s contributing writer **Barbara Alvarez**, and another, “On Death, Dying and Disbelief,” led by Candace R.M. Gorham, based on her book of the same name.

Included will be reporting on FFRF’s achievements over the year by FFRF Co-Presidents **Dan Barker** and **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, the report on legal activism and achievements by FFRF attorneys, headed by Legal Director **Rebecca Markert**, and a reprise of last year’s popular workshop, “Ask an Attorney.” The convention will feature book and product sales tables, the popular “NonPrayer Breakfast,” and a drawing for “clean,” pre-“In God We Trust” currency.

Register online at ffrf.org/convo-2022 or send in the registration form on the back page.

See you in October!

OVERHEARD

There is insufficient evidence that the God of my Catholic upbringing exists. If that God does exist, the features ascribed to God need to be revisited in light of how much preventable evil there is in the world. I suspect, on balance, there is reason to believe God is no more alive than your garden gnome. **Eusebius McKaiser, in his column, “I was taught God exists. That is a lie — Here’s why.”** *South Africa’s HeraldLive.com, 4-15-22*

If he were mortal, the God of Jews, Christians and Muslims would be dragged to The Hague. And yet we praise him. We

emulate him. We implore our children to be like him. Perhaps now, as missiles rain down and the dead are discovered in mass graves, is a good time to stop emulating this hateful God. Perhaps we can stop extolling his brutality. Perhaps now is a good time to teach our children to pass over God — to be as unlike him as possible. **Shalom Auslander, in his column, “In this time of war, I propose we give up God.”** *The New York Times, 4-15-22*

Christian nationalist rhetoric is heavily cloaked in threat narratives. For example, among Christian nationalists, opposition to marriage equality is justified by framing same-sex marriage as a threat to the traditional family, and threat perceptions help explain links between Christian nationalism and support for conservative policies, such as opposition to immigration. **Patricia Y. Sanchez, in her article, “New study indicates social identity threat can boost support for Christian nationalist ideologies.”** *PsyPost.org, 4-15-22*

One must acknowledge that the GOP is not a political party anymore. It is a movement dedicated to imposing white Christian nationalism. . . . Our political problems are significant, but they are minor compared with the moral confusion that is afflicting the millions of white Christian Americans who consider themselves victims. **Jennifer Rubin, in her column, “The GOP**

is no longer a party. It’s a movement to impose white Christian nationalism.” *Washington Post, 4-27-22*



Katherine Stewart Christian nationalism is making significant inroads among some Latino communities, for example, and there the argument is not that a preferred racial group is being replaced but that a preferred religious and cultural value system (with supposed economic implications) is under threat. **Katherine Stewart, as quoted in the Thomas Edsall column, “The MAGA formula is getting darker and darker.”** *The New York Times, 5-18-22*

If Justice Alito wants you to be governed by the laws of the 17th century, you should take a close look at that century. Is that when you want to live? **Margaret Atwood, author of The Handmaid’s Tale, in her column, “I invented Gilad. The Supreme Court is making it real.”** *The Atlantic, 5-13-22*

No atheist, no secularists or materialists could inflict nearly as much damage to the Christian faith as these leaders within the Christian Church have done. **Peter Wehner, in his column, “No athe-**

ism has done this much damage to the Christian faith,” responding to the news of the clergy abuse within the Southern Baptist Church. *The Atlantic, 5-24-22*

Christianity, let’s just say it, is not on a good run. And it can’t really be blamed on the godless, or video games, or the political party you hate, or the things any of us normally blame for anything. You can’t stand in pulpits and pews and point to all the trouble outside the stained glass windows. The church can’t blame it on somebody else. Because the devil ain’t just in the details anymore, it’s in the robes and vestments and power ties. **John Archibald, in his column, “When churches are the biggest threat to religion.”** *AL.com, 5-24-22*

We can see how the “great replacement theory” overlaps with Christian nationalism. Both view some specific population as “real” Americans, whether that is defined explicitly as white Christians or in the more vague and coded language of “real” or “native born” or “legacy” Americans. And both frame demographic change as threats to both that population and to the country’s essential character. **Ruth Braunstein, professor of sociology at the University of Connecticut and the author of the 2021 paper “The ‘Right’ History: Religion, Race, and Nostalgic Stories of Christian America.”** *The New York Times, 5-18-22*

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Freethought Today Cryptogram

BTRVNVAH KIHVEOTE JITEPVAHVHN ZHY

BTCZBYE NIRRVXVRVPW. LZVPO VE HAP Z

LIHMPVAH AL EPIKVYVPW XIP Z LBTJITHP

MZIET AL VP. — CTHYW FZDVHTB

This puzzle is from *Freethinking Cryptograms* by FFRF member Brooks Rimes, available on Amazon.com for \$8.95. See bottom of page for description and hint for this puzzle. Answer is on page 25.

Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12
13						14				15			
16						17				18			
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57	58	59	60					61				62	63
64						65	66			67			68
69						70				71			
72						73				74			

Answers on page 25

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

Across

1. Secret clique

6. Electric guitar hookup

9. Expunge

13. Dauntless

14. Flapper’s neckwear

15. Prophetess of Greek legends

16. Luxurious sheet fabric

17. Local Area Network

18. Shadow

19. *Evolutionist Charles Darwin’s ship

21. *Freethinking “Out of Africa” author

23. Greatest possible degree

24. Sodium hydroxide

25. Indian restaurant staple

28. Lack of clarity

30. Newborn’s parents’ responsibility

35. Knight’s breastplate

37. Kind of dairy cream

39. Potato or sweet potato

40. Harris to Biden

41. Resize a dress, e.g.

43. Dried-up

44. Homer’s epic

46. Part of opera

47. Pacific Islands ceremonial drink

48. “____ ‘er ____!”

50. *Freethinker Tolstoy’s famous character

52. New York pro

53. Bride screen

55. TV tube in days of yore

57. *”Slaves, be subject to your ____,” 1 Peter 2:18

61. *Reproductive freedom, aka “Pro-____”

64. Book of maps

65. Captain’s turf

67. Render harmless

69. Take over, in a way

70. Crematorium jar

71. *Freethinking author Isabel Allende’s “Portrait in ____”

72. D’Artagnan’s sword

73. Word between dogs

74. Alleviated

Down

1. The Eye Network

2. United ____ Emirates

3. Restrain

4. Like bird flu

5. “Go to great ____” or make a great effort.

6. Willing partner

7. New Zealand’s bygone bird

8. Mostly vegetarian bear

9. FDR coin

10. What outgoing tide does

11. Greek muse’s strings

12. Distinctive elegance

15. Broad-brimmed beachwear

20. ____ Apso

22. Charged particle

24. Neither right nor left

25. *Bible character

26. Like a good athlete

27. Permissible

29. *Freethinking author of “Nana” and “Germinal”

31. *Entrepreneur Elon

32. Letter-shaped girder

33. Courage to go on

34. *Robert G. Ingersoll a.k.a. “The ____ Agnostic”

36. Singe, as in ahi tuna

38. Seabiscuit control

42. Dressing choice

45. Take things away

49. p in mph

51. Excite

54. *May’s “Freethought Today,” e.g.

56. Fungal skin infection

57. Debilitating spray

58. At the apex

59. Like gin in fiz

60. VHS, e.g.

61. Quitter’s word

62. Big letters

63. Canal in a song

66. Paleozoic or mesozoic

68. Cuckoo

‘Strong Backbone’

South Dakota

student earns \$1,000

FFRF activist award

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is pleased to bestow a South Dakota high school student with its \$1,000 student activist award for her objections to her school board starting its meetings with Christian prayer.

Shaye Beardsley, a senior at Stevens High School, has been granted the “Strong Backbone Student Activist Award” after she spoke up at the April 5 meeting of the Rapid City Area Schools board against its recent practice of inviting clergy to pray at meetings.

FFRF received a complaint about the school board opening with an invocation in October of last year and sent a letter. After no reply, FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heineman followed up with an open records request in January. She again received no response. In the meantime, a few adults in the community had voiced displeasure about the prayers in comments during the meeting.

At the April meeting, Beardsley spoke up on behalf of herself, as well as several other students, including a Christian student who said it was not only unconstitutional but unkind to force the religion on those who don’t practice Christianity. Beardsley’s testimony included a recitation of the Supreme Court decision against official school prayer. With a flourish, she ended her short testimony by adding, “Almost all of these people can vote in the next election.”

She explained the reasons for her intervention to FFRF.

“The issue that I addressed in that specific meeting was about the invocation that is recited at the beginning of every meeting,” she said. “Every time the prayer is said, it is always a Christian prayer invoked by a Christian minister. Not only does this prayer alienate students who don’t believe in Christianity, it also creates an environment that makes some people feel unsafe and/or unwelcome. This results in less communication between viewpoints as a specific group is being alienated from the place that it is supposed to go to feel seen and heard.”

Demonstrating the problem, Pastor James Moore from Journey Church was formally introduced at the board meeting on April 5 and intoned, “Lord, all authority is given by you and you’ve placed anyone in authority in their position . . . to make godly decisions for our children in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Beardsley’s interests include activism, reading, music and playing softball.

“I plan to take a gap year on the West Coast and get in-state tuition for college,” she tells FFRF. “My major is still undecided but will most likely be something along the lines of journalism or international relations.”

FFRF is impressed with the spirit of

Shaye Beardsley

student outspokenness that Beardsley represents — and will persist in its work to ensure that such activism is supported.

“FFRF will continue to educate the school board on the inappropriateness of mixing prayer and public school business, especially given the fact that students are present,” remarks Heineman.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor says, “We’re proud of Shaye. She’s the one teaching the school board what they should already know. It’s the height of ego to invite clergy who assert these particular school board members were placed on the school board by God to make ‘godly decisions’ for children ‘in Jesus’s name’! No, they were placed there by taxpayers to run an entirely secular school district, whose purpose is to educate, not indoctrinate.”

The \$1,000 annual scholarship is financed by an octogenarian FFRF member who gives the scholarship on his birthday to encourage and reward activism by freethinking students.

A note to FFRF Members

Don’t miss a single issue of Freethought Today & Private Line!

If the expiration date of your FFRF membership on your address label says August 2022 or earlier . . .

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Cryptogram hint

A cryptogram is a substitution puzzle in which one letter stands for another. If U equals T, it will equal T throughout the puzzle.

Example:
UOG RLQTM HYVBF DVP SLACN VWGY UOG KJEZ XVI.
THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG.
This month’s clue: N => G .

IN THE NEWS

Report: Southern Baptist leaders covered up abuse

Southern Baptist Convention leaders on May 22 released a major third-party investigation that found that sex abuse survivors were often ignored, minimized and “even vilified” by top clergy in the nation’s largest Protestant denomination, according to a report in the Washington Post.

The findings of nearly 300 pages include details about specific abuse cases and shine a light on how denominational leaders for decades actively resisted calls for abuse prevention and reform. Evidence in the report suggests leaders also lied to Southern Baptists over whether they could maintain a database of offenders to prevent more abuse when top leaders were secretly keeping a private list for years.

The 13 million-member denomination, along with other religious institutions in the United States, has struggled with declining membership for the past 15 years. Its leaders have long resisted comparisons between its sexual abuse crisis and that of the Catholic Church, saying the total number of abuse cases among Southern Baptists was small.

The report was compiled by Guidepost Solutions at the request of Southern Baptists. It states that abuse survivors’ calls and emails were “only to be met, time and time again, with resistance, stonewalling, and even outright hostility” by leaders who were concerned more with protecting the institution from liability than from protecting parishioners from further abuse.

OK gov signs nation’s strictest abortion ban

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt on May 25 signed into law the nation’s strictest abortion ban, making the state the first in the nation to effectively end availability of the procedure, the Associated Press reported.

State lawmakers approved the ban enforced by civil lawsuits rather than criminal prosecution, similar to a Texas law that was passed last year. The law takes effect immediately and prohibits all abortions with few exceptions. Abortion providers have said they will stop performing the procedure as soon as the bill is signed.

The only exceptions in the Oklahoma law are to save the life of a pregnant woman or if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest that has been reported to law enforcement.

Survey: Nones are most supportive of abortion

Religious “Nones” — U.S. adults who describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or religiously “nothing in particular” — are the most supportive of legal abortion, according to a new poll by the Pew Research Center.

Among the Nones, 85 percent say abortion should be legal in all cases with no exceptions (34 percent) or that it should be legal in most cases (51 percent). Self-described atheists are more absolutist in their opinions about abortion than any other “religious” group analyzed in the survey, with 53 percent saying abortion should be legal in all cases, with no exceptions.

Relatives charged in exorcism death of girl



Photo courtesy of New York Post

Arely Hernandez was killed during an exorcism by family members.

A 3-year-old girl was allegedly tortured and killed by her family in a 12-hour exorcism in her granddad’s California church — with her mom later posting a smiling video saying dismissively, “It is what it is.”

The mother, an uncle and her grandfather have been charged in the death.

Arely Hernandez was found dead on the floor of a small house-based church in San Jose last September with “multiple injuries around her eyes, face, neck and chest,” according to court documents. They said she had been given nothing except about six ounces of water in the 20 hours leading up to her death.

She’d been there with her mom, uncle and grandfather who “believed

the child was possessed by a demon and were at the church praying for her,” Deputy District Attorney Rebekah Wise wrote in court documents. The medical examiner’s office concluded the cause of death was asphyxia due to suffocation.

The victim’s mother, Claudia Hernandez, was arrested in January on felony child abuse charges and remains in custody without bail. The victim’s uncle, Rene Aaron Hernandez-Santos, and grandfather Rene Trigueros Hernandez were also charged in May.

According to the family’s statement to police, the three family members held the girl down for seven hours, repeatedly forcing her to throw up in an attempt to, they say, rid her body of the evil spirit.

White evangelical Protestants are most opposed to abortion. Nearly three-quarters say that abortion should be against the law in all cases without exception (21 percent) or that it should be illegal in most cases (53 percent).

After School Satan Club request denied by district

A school district in Pennsylvania denied a resident’s request to form an After School Satan Club in Northern Elementary School.

All but one board member opposed the formation of the club. Hundreds of community members attended the two-hour meeting to discuss the age of the children the club would target, cultural and biblical issues attached to the possible formation of such a club and the content on the Satanic Temple’s website for the program.

Supportive parents mentioned how the formation of the club was a constitutional right.

The club was initially proposed by district mother Samantha Groome as an alternative to the Joy El Christian club that provided students with off-campus, faith-based activities during the school day.

Groome, who is not religious, said she did not want her children to miss out on extracurricular activities like Joy El, but there were no secular alternatives.

Study: Nonbelievers sleep better than Christians

Americans who don’t believe in God are more likely to get the recommended amount of sleep each night than those who do, a new study has found. While contradicting the claim religious faith is good for mental well-being, the causes of the sleep difference are unclear.

Baylor University student Kyla Ferguson and co-authors surveyed 1,501 participants in the Baylor Religion Survey on how many hours they slept each night and how easy they found it to go to sleep.

Directly contrary to expectations, they found 73 percent of atheists and agnostics (grouped together) usually got the recommended sleep quotient. By contrast, only 65 percent of people who considered themselves religious got the same. For Baptists, the figure was just 55 percent.

Atheist petitions to ban bible in Florida schools

With more than 200 books being banned in various school districts in Florida, political activist and atheist Chaz Stevens of Florida has petitioned eight school districts to ban the bible from classrooms and libraries, citing its inclusion of inappropriate topics.

“If they’re gonna ban books, then the whole library should be in play. My

hope — and it’s a longshot — is that they will apply their own standards to themselves and ban the bible,” Stevens told the New Times.

When the state went so far as banning math books, Stevens says, he was inspired to use the same bureaucracy to strike back against the conservative wave with an operation he calls “Eff Off Jesus.”

Conspiracy theorists tend to be more religious

A large study published in the journal Political Psychology suggests that the link between conspiracy belief and religiosity is rooted in cognitive similarities between the two beliefs. The overall findings suggest that people with higher conspiracy belief also tend to be more religious, and this is likely driven by overlapping ideological and political worldviews.

Some researchers have suggested that the two beliefs fulfill similar psychological needs, such as morality, belonging and sense of control. Others suggest that the beliefs share cognitive styles, with both alluding to invisible forces at play and offering “anomalies as explanatory starting points.”

Wisconsin gets hundreds of clergy abuse reports

A year after Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul announced a formal investigation into abuse by members of the clergy in the state, more than 200 reports have been made to the Department of Justice.

Those include more than 150 individuals accused of abuse, and 51 people were reporting an instance of abuse to law enforcement for the first time, according to an April 17 press release.

Individuals are able to make a report to the department either by phone or by submitting a form online, according to a news release. In total, more than 1,000 calls have been made to the hotline since its launch last year.

Archbishop bans Pelosi from receiving communion

U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi will no longer be allowed to receive communion in her San Francisco diocese due to her support for abortion.

In a letter to Pelosi on May 20, San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone wrote, “A Catholic legislator who supports procured abortion, after knowing the teaching of the Church, commits a manifestly grave sin which is a cause of most serious scandal to others. Therefore, universal Church law provides that such persons ‘are not to be admitted to Holy Communion’ (Code of Canon Law, can. 915).”

Pelosi then called out the archbishop’s apparent hypocrisy.

“I wonder about death penalty, which I am opposed to,” she said in an interview on MSNBC. “So is the church, but they take no action against people who may not share their view. . . Now our archbishop has been vehemently against LGBTQ rights, too, in fact, he led the way in some of the initiatives on — an initiative on the ballot in California. So, this decision taking us to privacy and precedent is very dangerous in the lives of so many of the American people.”

FFRF NEWS

Florida book ban law If your school bans books, make sure it bans the bible

A new Florida law gives easily offended parents a way to ban books from their childrens’ public school libraries. There have been more than 200 book bans across Florida in the past year, according to a report by the advocacy group PEN America. In order to combat these reprehensible bans, FFRF is encouraging parents to ensure that any book bans include the bible, which contains far more objectionable material than other books that have drawn the ire of parents lately.

To be clear, FFRF strongly opposes book bans. Public school libraries are a crucial resource for many students, and librarians should be trusted to provide students with a diversity of perspectives on many topics. FFRF advocates, above all, for freedom of thought. We are deeply familiar with the haunting history of censorship — from the Catholic Church’s Index Librorum Prohibitorum, to the Comstock laws, to the Nazi book burnings, the attacks on authors such as Charles Darwin and Salman Rushdie, and the murders of Bangladeshi bloggers such as Avijit Roy. Heinrich Heine famously observed, “Where they burn books, they will end in burning human beings.” History never looks kindly on book censors and burners.

The best solution is to leave a diversity of viewpoints in school libraries, and allow students to explore disparate views themselves. However, if school districts, at the behest of outraged parents, are intent on banning books, we suggest that, if they truly care about protecting children, they are looking at the wrong books.

If parents and lawmakers are looking to

ban books with “inappropriate” content, perhaps they should investigate books that can be found in almost every school library. In one, rape is not only described, but the victims are forced to marry their rapists. (Deuteronomy 22:28–29.) Another tells the story of a prostitute who “lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses,” who “longed for the lewdness of your youth, when . . . [her]

bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.” (Ezekiel 23:20–21.) This same book speaks about sex toys: you “took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them.” (Ezekiel 16:17.)

These and many more unpalatable and sexually explicit stories are found in the various books of the bible. Our educational association has published a brochure, “An X-Rated Book: Sex & Obscenity In the Bible,” which exposes nearly 150 bible verses displaying a “pornographic view of sex and women, lewdness, depravity and sexual violence often ordered or countenanced by the biblical deity.”

The bible is the single most weaponized piece of writing on the planet, responsible for unjust wars, genocide, anti-Semitism, violent extremism, subjugation of women and pervasive racism.

If Florida lawmakers are going to declare a war on writings that parents find dangerous to young minds or potentially harmful to society, then they must reckon with the full legacy of the bible: its primitive teachings, inhumanity, violence and sexual immorality.



FFRF runs full-page ad in NY Times

The Freedom From Religion Foundation placed a full-page ad in the main news section of The New York Times on May 12, showing the Statue of Liberty enshrouded in “Handmaid’s Tale” garb, with the word “Liberty” crossed out.

That illustration, by Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Steve Benson, is accompanied by text noting, “The battle to turn back the clock and recriminalize abortion is a religious crusade fueled by the zealous beliefs of a minority. . . . The Supreme Court’s expected ruling to abandon reproductive rights to state legislative whim will sow even more chaos and suffering, and is anathema to America’s Bill of Rights. Fundamental rights should not depend on one’s ZIP Code.”

Warning that other constitutional rights are imperiled, FFRF notes that the foundational principle of separation between state and church “is jeopardized by a court consistently privileging religion over civil rights.”

The ad also notes that Donald Trump, in pandering to his Christian nationalist base, vowed to nominate justices who would overturn *Roe v. Wade*. “And his three appointees, joined by other extremists, are delivering.”

The appeal ends, “We cannot allow



theocrats and minority rule to destroy human freedom and dignity, and eviscerate our godless Constitution. Secular voices must be heard if our republic is to survive. Join FFRF in defending the endangered constitutional principle of separation between religion and government, and in our urgent call for court reform.”

FFRF thanks its members for making possible such advertising. To help with more public relations campaigns, please designate “Advertising” on the donation dropdown.

All-women legal podcast debuts



Co-hosts of “We Dissent” are, from left, Elizabeth Cavell, Alison Gill, Monica Miller and Rebecca S. Markert.

On May 18, four attorneys from three major secular organizations launched the only legal affairs show for atheists, agnostics and humanists hosted completely by women lawyers.

On the podcast “We Dissent,” the attorneys discuss religious liberty in federal and state courts and the work they do to keep religion and government separate. The co-hosts are Rebecca S. Markert, legal director at the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Elizabeth Cavell, associate counsel at FFRF, Alison Gill, vice president for legal and policy at American Atheists, and Monica Miller, legal director and senior counsel at the American Humanist Association.

After an initial run of a new episode every week for several weeks, the podcast will air new shows once a month beginning in June.

The podcast will explore religious liberty cases currently before the U.S. Supreme Court and at other federal courts across the country. The attorney hosts will also discuss other advocacy work undertaken to

help atheists and other nonreligious people outside the courtroom.

Markert is elated that she’s played a key role in putting together such a distinctive podcast.

“I’m really excited how this all came together. We wanted to highlight the fact that there are so many powerful secular women doing a lot of the work to keep religion out of government,” says Markert. “Women lawyers have prominent roles in our national organizations and their voices deserve to be heard.”

The co-hosts thank FFRF staff members James Phetteplace and Greta Martens for their production support and work in helping get “We Dissent” off the ground.

“We Dissent” is available wherever you get your podcasts. The podcast’s website is we-dissent.org. You can also keep up to date with “We Dissent” on Facebook or follow us on Twitter @we_dissent.

Tune in for an incisive podcast that offers a fresh legal critique from a particular perspective.

FFRF mails stickers to Kansas town

FFRF has mailed decals boasting America’s original motto, “E Pluribus Unum,” to the city of Haven, Kan., to counter “In God We Trust” stickers on police cars there.

FFRF, in a letter to Mayor Adam Wright, notes that the City Council on May 2 did the right thing by asking the local police department to remove “In God We Trust” decals from vehicles. It also voted to stop using its official Facebook page to promote Christianity.

Unfortunately, the council immediately caved to a backlash, and reversed course, allowing the godly decals to remain on the vehicles — with the condition that similar messages supporting other beliefs would also be allowed.



Thus, FFRF mailed its decal featuring the original secular motto, “E Pluribus Unum” (“out of many, [come] one”), which celebrates diversity and pluralism, not religious orthodoxy.

FFRF notes that placing a godly motto on police cars also amounts to an unconstitutional religious test for police officers, some of whom are likely not religious.

“Let us know if you need more,” FFRF cheekily invites.

FFRF'S

Ask an Atheist

Wednesdays
at Noon (Central)*

On Facebook Live

Send in your comments & questions via Facebook or AskAnAtheist@ffrf.org

*Except the last Wednesday of the month

Court ruling on Boston flag is concerning

FFRF, while considering unfortunate the ruling May 2 involving a Christian flag at Boston City Hall, is cautioning that the decision does not mean governments in the future must fly religious flags. However, FFRF believes the concurring opinions by the court are chilling foreboding of coming decisions.

In a unanimous judgment, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the city of Boston violated the free speech clause when it declined to fly a Christian flag. The decision narrowly focuses on Boston's practice of allowing private flags to be flown in conjunction with events held at City Hall near the flagpole. All justices agreed that the speech is private, not governmental, but several justices issued concurring opinions with different reasoning.

FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert points out, "While this decision doesn't technically change the legal landscape, there is reason to be concerned given the rest of the high court's docket with cases impacting religious liberty. The concurring opinions from Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh demonstrate that the separation between church and state remains in jeopardy."

In reviewing whether the flags flown at Boston City Hall were government messages or private speech, Justice Stephen Breyer, who wrote the majority



Photo courtesy the city of Boston

Three flags fly outside the Boston City Hall. The Supreme Court ruled that the city of Boston violated the free speech clause when it declined to fly a Christian flag.

decision, joined by five other justices, conducted what he termed "a holistic inquiry." He noted, "Our review is not mechanical; it is driven by a case's context rather than the rote application of rigid factors."

Breyer observed that other cities do not permit their flagpoles to be used in a similar manner, exemplified by the policy of the city of San Jose, Calif. San Jose limits flags to those approved by the city and declares such flags to be "an expression of the city's official sentiments." Breyer concludes that the flags in question are private speech, but nothing prevents the city from changing its policy to close the flagpole as a public forum.

While the majority opinion was narrow, a concurrence by Gorsuch reveals open hostility to the constitutional principle of separation between government and religion. He blasted decades of

Supreme Court precedent that has upheld such separation. Joined by Justice Clarence Thomas, Gorsuch criticized the court's *Lemon* test, which he derided as a byproduct of a "bygone era" and as an "anomaly" and a "mistake." Gorsuch described the *Lemon* test, which codifies decades of court precedent on the Establishment Clause, as "a kind of children's game" in which justices pick their own "reasonable observer" avatar. Gorsuch added, somewhat incoherently, "Don't ask him whether the proposed display actually amounts to an establishment of religion. Just ask him if he feels it 'endorsed religion.' If so, game over."

In Kavanaugh's brief concurring opinion, he discusses the "mistaken understanding of the Establishment Clause." He emphasized, "Under the Constitution, a government may not treat religious persons, religious organizations or religious speech as second class."

FFRF strongly disagrees with such language.

"It's simply laughable, particularly in today's judicial environment, to propose that religious individuals or groups have been treated as second-class citizens," comments Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "The extremists on the court clearly have no problem with the endorsement of religion being conveyed when a U.S. city flies a Christian flag."

West Virginia

Continued from page 1

wrapped itself in a single faith."

As the ruling explains: "That is exemplified by the unduly heightened risk of coercion by the state by virtue of the governmental identity of the prayer-givers acting in unison, the invariable nature of the sectarian prayer that is associated with and endorses Christianity, and the implicit and sometimes express invitation to the public in attendance to join in, all in the relative intimacy of a local government setting. It is the combination of these factors — the totality of the circumstances — that renders the prayer prac-

tice of the City Council impermissible."

In 2018, FFRF and two of its local members had sued the city of Parkersburg, W.Va., in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia, to challenge the city council's formal recitation of the Christian "Lord's Prayer," which had officially opened every meeting for more than a decade. Council members led the prayer and were joined by city residents at each meeting in reciting it.

In April 2020, FFRF filed a motion for summary judgment asking the court to rule the practice unconstitutional, noting the practice defies well-established law barring legislators from reciting prayers from exclusively one faith in local government meetings. "Through

its commitment to this practice and tradition, Parkersburg has essentially adopted the Lord's Prayer as the official prayer of the city," FFRF charged.

The plaintiffs include Daryl Cobranchi, who in the past had frequently attended meetings and been directed to stand for the Lord's Prayer, a practice, he notes, that has made him conspicuous by his nonparticipation and which "assigns to second-class status anyone who is not Christian." Likewise, Eric Engle, a Parkersburg resident, follows city matters and has felt uncomfortable and pressured to participate in the Christian prayer during public meetings.

Engle comments: "In a country currently plagued by Christian nationalism,

this decision is an affirmation of our secular constitutional order and a badly needed patch in the wall of separation between church and state!"

At least one prior member of the City Council has been openly hostile to non-participants. Councilman Eric Barber glared at attendees who sat during the prayer at a meeting. At the end of that prayer, Barber positioned himself near his microphone, pressed the button, and shouted, "Amen." FFRF later called for an investigation into Barber's participation in the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Legal representation was provided by outside counsel Marcus B. Schneider, local counsel Kristina Thomas Whiteaker, and by FFRF Attorneys Patrick C. Elliott and Christopher Line.

Bible classes

Continued from page 1

lawsuit and years of effort to stop blatantly unconstitutional school programs."

Pursuant to a settlement, U.S. District Judge David Faber dismissed the lawsuit on May 16. The Mercer County Board of Education, through its insurance coverage, agreed to pay \$225,000 to cover the costs and attorneys fees of the plaintiffs. Those payments will reimburse two private law firms and FFRF for hundreds of hours of time spent by attorneys litigating the case.

FFRF itself is awarding the student in the case with the Richard & Beverly Hermesen Student Activist Award and a \$5,000 scholarship. The eighth-grade student, who uses a pseudonym in the lawsuit, had been targeted by other kids when she opted out of bible classes. She now attends school in a neighboring school system

The tumultuous case has ended, but it leaves a legacy in Mercer County and for future legal challenges

In 2018, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously ruled in favor

of Deal and held that she could pursue an injunction against the bible classes and remanded the case for further proceedings

Following the appeals decision, the school board voted to permanently end the "Bible in the Schools" program. Judge Faber ruled in 2020 that Deal had lost the ability to pursue an injunction against the program because it had ended, but she could continue to pursue a claim for nominal damages for past harm.

The school system had defended the curriculum by claiming the lessons taught history and literature. However, much of the program was fundamentalist Christian instruction. For example, a lesson on Adam and Eve featured the pair with a dinosaur in the background. It asked students: "So picture Adam being able to crawl up on the back of a dinosaur! He and Eve could have their own personal water slide! Wouldn't that be so wild!"

A lesson titled "Jesus in the Wilderness" told of Jesus resisting temptations from the devil and responding with affirmations of faith in God. These statements were written out for the students on a visual aid used in class.

FFRF thanks Elizabeth Deal and her daughter, who bravely took the case. FFRF also thanks the attorneys who handled the case, including Marc Schneider with the Pittsburgh-based

firm Steele Schneider, FFRF Attorneys Patrick Elliott and Chris Line, and Kristina Whiteaker, with the Grubb Law Group, PLLC in Charleston, W.Va.



This is an image that was used in the "Bible in the Schools" classes, showing Adam and Eve with a dinosaur in the background.

Texas school shooting

Religious politicians blame atheism

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is condemning a recent barrage of troubling comments by politicians callously blaming the Texas school shooting on atheism, irreligiosity or lack of faith.

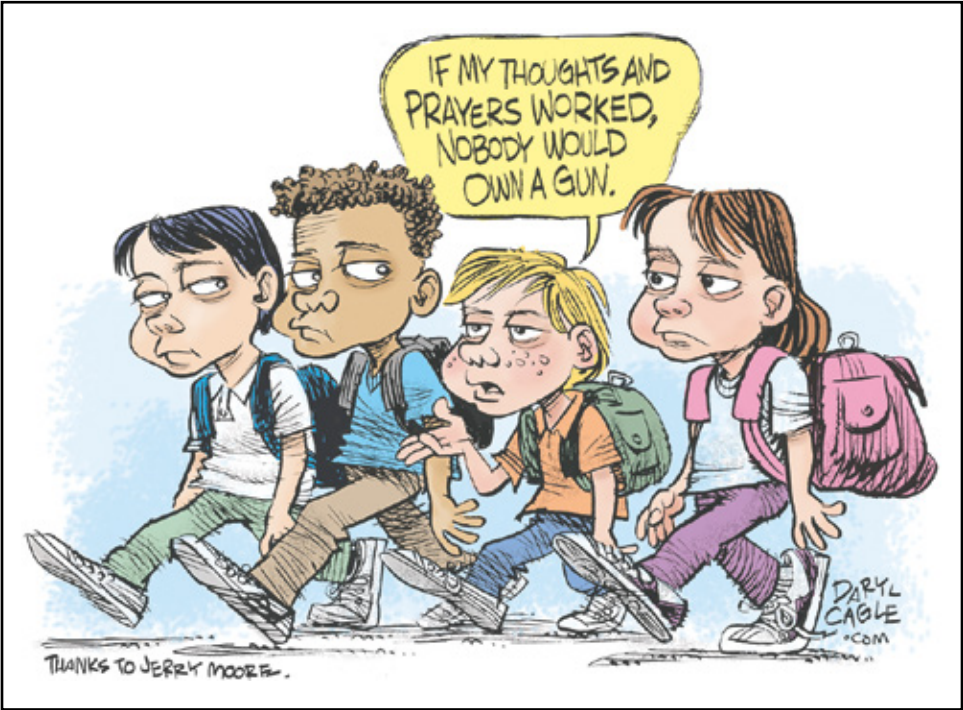
FFRF has sent letters to four different high-ranking public officials who have recently made outrageous remarks about religion and mass shootings. Arizona state Sen. Rick Gray provides the vilest example in a speech he gave on the state Senate floor:

“The real core issue — and I’ll be honest, this may be my bias, but this is how I see it — for decades, for decades, we’ve been teaching our children in school there is no God. You can’t pray. You can’t even pray on the field! There is no God. There are no absolutes. We live in a post-modern world, so whatever you think is right is right, and if somebody else has a different view, you’re still right. There are no absolutes.

“That we’re animals. And we’re just animals. It’s survival of the fittest. But then we’re shocked when they act that out! But we say, ‘Don’t act that way!’ These kids — and it’s usually been kids that are shooting kids in school — what have they been taught? Friends, we have a state religion in the United States of America, even though there’s supposed to be separation of church and state, there is a state religion. It’s Human Secularism aka Atheism.”

Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick remarked in an interview on Fox News:

“We are in a sick society where we are at each other’s throats all the time. ...



Everywhere you look, whether it’s on the internet, whether it’s any walk of life, people are just at each other every day and we have to ask ourselves who we are, and I believe we’re a nation of godly people, and godly people need to pray.”

And Sen. Ron Johnson, who represents FFRF’s home state of Wisconsin in the U.S. Senate, in an interview with the radio show “Conservative Circus” blamed the “secularization of society” and “loss of faith” for the Texas mass shooting. He also claimed: “The solution is renewed faith.”

A similar letter was also sent to Virginia Lt. Gov. Winsome Sear for her re-

marks blaming godlessness for school shootings and suggesting more school prayer is the solution.

As FFRF has pointed out to innumerable public officials, these assertions scapegoat secularism and dodge a very real problem by claiming prayer or religion is the panacea for gun violence. Pious politicians often highlight the 1962 Supreme Court decision *Engel v. Vitale*, which ruled that school-sponsored prayers in public schools violate the First Amendment, as the point where we “removed God from schools,” blaming this for school shootings ever since. In reality, there were

school shootings before that case, and there was no spike in school shootings immediately following the ruling.

School shootings are a real-world problem that requires a real-world solution, not a plea for nonexistent supernatural intervention. Scientific studies show that societies and states with less religion have less violence.

Professor Phil Zuckerman writes in a 2019 article in *Sociology Compass* that murder rates are lower in more secular nations and higher in more religious nations where belief in God is deep and widespread. And within America, the states with the highest murder rates tend to be highly religious, such as Louisiana and Alabama, but the states with the lowest murder rates tend to be among the least religious in the country, such as Vermont and Oregon. Furthermore, although there are some notable exceptions, rates of most violent crimes tend to be lower in the less religious states and higher in the most religious states. Finally, of the top 50 safest cities in the world, nearly all are in relatively nonreligious countries, and of the eight cities within the United States that make the safest-city list, nearly all are located in the least religious regions of the country.

Young Americans are less religious than ever, with atheism doubling among Generation Z, and they are demanding real action to stop the school shooting epidemic. Rather than advocating for more prayer, FFRF says that the answer is to: “Get off your knees and get to work!”

FFRF VICTORIES

By Casandra Zimmerman

School removes pic of students, coach praying

FFRF was alerted by a concerned Coulee Hartline School District resident in Washington that the high school had displayed a photo of coaches praying with students at a football game on one of its walls.

FFRF wrote to Superintendent James Evans advising the district to remove the religious endorsement from its property and ensure that its coaches are not leading or participating in prayers with students.

“It is illegal for public school athletic coaches to lead their teams in prayer,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line in a letter to the school district. “The Supreme Court has continually struck down school-sponsored prayer in public schools.”

In a response from the school district, FFRF was informed that the photos had been removed and the district spoke with the staff.

Colorado school ends Christian concerts

A Colorado school district will not include religious songs in its concerts after a Thompson Valley High School parent reported that their child had participated in an event that contained overwhelmingly Christian language.

One song, performed on March 23, was “Worthy to Be Praised,” and is very

clearly a Christian worship song:

*Holy holy holy.
Praise our God, Almighty.
Worthy and holy.
Lord eternally.
Praise the Lord in the highest, praise His holy name.
Let all things that haveth the breath, just praise the Lord.
I believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.*

Performing Christian worship songs at public schools is wholly inappropriate, FFRF insisted. FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote a letter to the superintendent of Thompson School District, reminding him that “Teaching students Christian worship music in a public school violates the First Amendment. It is well settled that public schools may not advance or endorse religion.”

The district responded to inform FFRF that religious music will no longer be a part of the concert.

Coach won’t say prayer at awards dinner

A concerned parent in the Victor Valley Union High School District in California contacted FFRF to report that the head coach of the Silverado High School football team opened its awards dinner with a Christian prayer. The event was held at the school to honor members of the football team, and the prayer was delivered “in Jesus’ name.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line sent a letter to Ron Williams, superintendent of Victor Valley Union High



School District, reminding him that it is illegal for athletic coaches to lead their teams in prayer.

“Coach Jones’ conduct at this event was unconstitutional because he endorsed and promoted his religion while acting in his official capacity as a school district employee,” Line insisted. “Certainly, he represents the school and the team when he acts in his official role as head coach of the Silverado High School football team. Therefore, he cannot lead prayer at school events, lead his team in prayer, or advocate for students to lead team prayer either.”

Assistant Superintendent Ramiro Rubalcaba responded to FFRF’s letter assuring that it was a mistake and would not happen again. “Having

educated the coach concerning this issue, he has agreed that, moving forward, he will ensure that neither he nor any members of his staff will conduct prayer during any school activities or even engage in religiously related discussions at work so as to avoid any perceived endorsement of religious issues.”

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.

Family escapes Syria, safely relocates

The Freedom From Religion Foundation’s Nonbelief Relief campaign has contributed \$5,000 toward the resettlement to Canada of a nonreligious Syrian family that ran a “Western” music school in war-torn Syria, and had to flee as “infidels” to Lebanon.

A group in Canada, Roots Immigration Law, which runs the TalentLift Canada program, coordinated the family’s resettlement fund. In addition to FFRF’s fund, the Center for Inquiry’s Secular Rescue has also provided \$4,000.

Syrian native and atheist Adnan Alhamdan, his wife Ranim and their 7-year-old son Sam are finally living the dream, safe in their new Canadian home, thanks to TalentLift Canada and donors like FFRF’s NonBelief Relief.

But it was a long and arduous journey to get there. There were years of facing prison or possible execution in Syria, years of hiding out in Lebanon, years of wondering if they would ever be safe.

It all started back in 2011, shortly after Adnan founded the Solo Music Institute, which attracted students of varying ages from all over the country, and was the first of its kind in the city to teach “Western” music.

Months later, everything changed for Adnan once the Syrian war began. He tried to maintain political neutrality and did not support the regime or the opposition. But the Syrian regime issued a decree



Adnan Alhamdan is a rock musician and music teacher in Canada who lived for three years in exile in Lebanon after fleeing Syria.



Adnan, his wife Ranim and their son Sam prepare to board a plane at the Beirut airport to head to their new home in Canada.

requiring every man capable of bearing arms be conscripted into the army, which meant likely death because new conscripts were sent straight to the front lines without much training.

On the other side, various militias were trying to recruit men to fight alongside them, and anyone who refused would be considered going against the word of God. The opposition consisted of different militias, including the Free Syrian Army, Al-Nusra and Daish (ISIS), all of which were radical Islamist militias.

At first, Adnan was able to avoid getting conscripted into the regime’s army, but it became challenging to avoid checkpoints and home raids, especially when the Russian army got involved with helping the Syrian regime find new recruits.

Then, in 2014, a car exploded in town, killing some of Adnan’s students. This event made Adnan and Ranim more determined to keep teaching music and making concerts for the Syrian children. The couple were teaching Palestinian refugees, as well as holding numerous charity concerts to help children and families who were in need because of the war.

In September 2018, rockets were fired on the area where the institute was located. Adnan went to check on the building and found that it was hit, but he was not able to get near enough to it because the local militia was on site, and he could be detained. Ranim was able to get to the institute’s ruins, but she did not find anything — it was either destroyed or looted.



A little more than a year after that incident, they kept teaching students privately as many of them wanted to continue with their music lessons.

But the radical militias had websites where photos of “regime agents, collaborators and sympathizers” were posted, and Adnan’s image was included. The caption read, “Wanted: Collaborator.” Collaborators are considered to be infidels and, according to Islamic law, they can be executed without a trial.

Adnan found himself wanted by all sides of the fighting factions because he refused to take sides. When he saw that his face was on the internet as a wanted infidel, he tried to see if there was anything he could do to protect himself. People told him that he needed to join the Syrian Army of the regime, otherwise he would be considered a traitor and could be jailed or executed. During that time, Adnan had started an ambitious musical project in collaboration with 140 artists around the world from 42 countries. It was a rock music project consisting of 30 songs. Unfortunately, the Syrian regime took notice of that and concluded that Adnan was a spy for the West. They knew from the wife of a well-connected person who was close to the regime that Adnan’s name was sent to all border-control officers. They were subsequently advised to flee from Syria but to not go through legal borders because the officers were under orders to detain Adnan.

So, Adnan asked around and was

directed to a smuggler who agreed to sneak him into Lebanon for a hefty fee of \$1,000. In Syria, \$1,000 is 10 times that of a high-ranking officer’s wage. Adnan had to sell everything he owned except his old laptop and guitar. The trip was one of the scariest ordeals he had to endure, as he was blindfolded during most of the road trip and didn’t know if he would be caught. He safely made it to Lebanon, where he was able to share a small room with a Syrian friend who was legal in Lebanon.

Adnan’s wife and son followed him a few months later and entered Lebanon legally on a 15-day visa. They all lived in that shared room. Just a few months after they reached Lebanon, the Lebanese civil movement uprising against the government began, followed by the country’s economic collapse, which made their lives even harder.

Because of the deteriorating situation in Lebanon, Adnan and Ranim ate only a couple of times a week, while they tried to feed their very young son every day.


Their lives finally got some good news when they were put in touch with TalentLift Canada.

“As artists and entrepreneurs, Adnan and Ranim had a visa pathway to Canada,” writes Dana Wagner in her article, “Rock musician entrepreneurs arrive from refugee circumstances to open their new music school in Canada,” which was posted on the TalentLift web site on May 9. “Canada courts world-class artistic and athletic talent through the federal Self-Employed Persons Program. TalentLift’s Legal Director Veronica Wilson connected the dots, realizing they were model applicants.”

It was the break they had been waiting for.

“Adnan and Ranim dreamed of reopening their music school in Canada,” Wagner writes. “Unlike traditional applicants to an entrepreneurship visa, Adnan and Ranim had no savings to demonstrate start-up capital for their business in Canada. But they had everything else, and donations in lieu of savings. They laid out their business plan for the new Solo Music School in Parry Sound as a hub for kids and young adults to learn music and express themselves — it would be an inclusive space, teaching vocals and instruments, celebrating the diverse sounds of everyone.”

Adnan’s dream has now been realized, which is to “live in peace, and free without fear from anything. Like any normal person,” Wagner writes.



Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

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

IT’S EASY TO DO!

For related information (or to receive a bequest brochure), please contact:

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

Freedom depends on freethinkers

THEY SAID WHAT?

When atheists challenge religion, they pick on monotheism. . . . The idea that there must be some single reality underlying the wild diversity of gods hasn’t been challenged by atheists. Why don’t atheists pick on polytheists as well?

Bruce Lerro, in his article, “Polytheism vs. monotheism: Building bridges between polytheism and atheism.”
LAProgressive.com, 4-25-22

God calls us to pick up the sword and fight, and Christ will reign in the state of Idaho.

Idaho Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin, who lost in her bid for governor in a May primary.
Right Wing Watch, 5-9-22

God is good. He uses people like you and me to change history.

Doug Mastriano, after winning the GOP nomination for governor in Pennsylvania. Mastriano basically said he would use the power of the governor’s office to nullify future election losses by Republicans.
Washington Post, 5-19-22

The Constitution prevents the government from imposing on the church. It doesn’t say anything about religion imposing itself on the state.

Rick Crump, a Christian branding expert and community organizer, speaking at a rally for gubernatorial candidate state Sen. Doug Mastriano.
Washington Post, 5-16-22

The word “religion” in the First Amendment dealt with Christianity, and that’s not an opinion. It would be strange if our institutions didn’t presuppose Christianity.

Pete Begley, a candidate to be a Pennsylvania county GOP chairman.
Washington Post, 5-16-22

We’re gonna do a political rally and we’re gonna honor Jesus. They’re not gonna tell us “separation of church and state.” We are the church! We run this state!

Kandiss Taylor, who lost in her bid to become Georgia’s governor, while standing in front of her campaign bus, which has her “Jesus, Guns, Babies” slogan painted on the side.
Yahoo News, 5-22-22

Take action now!

5 acts of resistance to help fight for Roe

In light of the leaked draft of an expected Supreme Court decision that appears to overrule *Roe v. Wade*, and the widespread panic it has sparked, the Freedom From Religion Foundation urges five constructive acts of resistance.

The first: Demand that the U.S. Senate finally pass the Women’s Health Protection Act, which would codify and protect the rights in *Roe v. Wade* no matter what the high court does.

The second: Vote and collectively mobilize the secular vote.

The third: Demonstrate in the streets (peacefully), via social media and otherwise make the biggest, loudest fuss so that the courts, candidates and public officials know we won’t tolerate this fundamental right being revoked. We cannot tolerate American women (and teenagers) being forced to undergo compulsory pregnancy in our supposedly free nation.

The fourth: Support critically needed abortion funds, as FFRF itself does, such as the all-volunteer Wisconsin Women’s Medical Fund.

The fifth: Demand court reform, as our extremist-captured Supreme Court has lost its legitimacy.

Justice Samuel Alito, according to the leaked opinion, claims abortion isn’t among the enumerated rights in the U.S. Constitution, therefore it’s not a right at all — it’s to be left to the whim of whatever legislature happens to run your state (and two-thirds of those legislators, by the way, are men voting on women’s rights). Alito argues paternalistically that the right to abortion must be returned to the “elected officials” at the state level. The idea of putting reproductive rights, or any civil right or individual liberty, up for a vote is anathema to America’s founding principles. A right as basic as deciding when or whether to continue a pregnancy and become a parent cannot and should not be dependent on your ZIP code. Such reproductive tyranny is suitable for a totalitarian state — or a theocracy.

But we mustn’t take Alito at his word when he claims that the Constitution does not encompass reproductive liberty. Seven justices who voted for *Roe v. Wade* back in 1973 noted that the Constitution grants a right to privacy via the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment. Sadly, the authors of *Roe v. Wade* ignored the Establishment Clause and its protection of freedom of conscience — an unfortunate oversight. The only organized opposition to abortion rights is religious in nature. Clearly, individuals who believe their god imbues a conceptus with a soul should not, in a free and secular country, have the right to force their dogma or reproductive servitude upon other individuals who do not believe such an article of faith.

And speaking of faith, Alito is one of six justices on the nine-member high court who are Roman Catholic. Five of them typically vote in lockstep, with only Justice Sonia Sotomayor deviating. Apparently in this instance, Justice John Roberts, who typically votes with his four ultraconservative Catholic peers, seems to be striving for a more moderate pace to outlaw abortion rights. That still makes a 5–4 arch-Roman Catholic majority apparently signing onto the leaked brief to overrule *Roe*. Religion, as always, is at the heart of this attack against a fundamental right.

With precedent and the broad rights of our Constitution meaning nothing to the extremist Supreme Court majority, many other constitutional rights will be



FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor stand in front of the Forward statue outside the Wisconsin Capitol on May 7 as part of the protest against the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

“With precedent and the broad rights of our Constitution meaning nothing to the extremist Supreme Court majority, many other constitutional rights will be up for grabs.”

up for grabs, including the right to contraception, marriage equality and LGBTQ rights, the Civil Rights Act and, of course, what’s left of the eviscerated Voting Rights Act. Needless to say, the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, which Justice Brett Kavanaugh called a “mistaken understanding of the Establishment Clause” in the decision on the Boston Christian flag, is also going to be found, along with abortion rights, not to be in the Constitution.

FFRF has been forthright in demanding court reform in light of Donald Trump’s takeover as president of the federal judiciary — he appointed a third of it, including the same proportion of the U.S. Supreme Court. FFRF has supported various congressional measures, such as the first bill calling for court reform, introduced by Rep. Mondaire Jones. We pointed out that the commission to investigate court reform that President Biden appointed released a meaningless, anodyne report. Where are other organizations and progressive members of Congress on this issue and why are they sitting on their hands? FFRF knew abortion rights could

not survive the Trump-captured high court, and now we have the proof.

At least one extremist occupies a stolen seat on the high court, thanks to then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s refusal to hold a hearing for President Obama’s nominee. The man who sits on that stolen seat, Neil Gorsuch, has joined Alito’s 5–4 majority opinion in the leaked decision. That stolen seat is stealing reproductive rights in front of our eyes.

Even this catastrophic decision, presuming the leak is as legitimate as it appears, is not the end of it. Abortion rights will continue to be battled at the local level, with more and more drac-

nian bans being implemented in many states. Current Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell is quashing the Women’s Health Protection Act, with sponsor Sen. Tammy Baldwin noting that the answer is to eliminate the filibuster. Meanwhile, anti-abortionists are already gleefully drafting a national law to outlaw almost all abortion care. While state bans being enacted right now exempt women from prosecution, we know that prosecution of abortion patients is next. We need only look at the pre-*Roe* days, when women could be arrested and imprisoned for undergoing abortions. Women bled to death or died of sepsis, fearing being turned in if they sought medical care. Cases of fetal abnormalities, rape, incest and maternal illness will not be met with compassion. Even women who tragically endure stillbirths will not be safe from these cruel and punitive laws, as we already see occurring under the current anti-abortion hysteria.

The clock is being turned back in front of our eyes to the bad old days. And it isn’t just reproductive rights at stake. It’s no coincidence that the second wave of feminism corresponded with Supreme Court decisions legalizing contraception and abortion care. If you cannot control and determine if and when you become a parent, you cannot control any other major aspect of your life, including education and work. As always, women with means and knowledge will be able to end unwanted pregnancies, although criminal laws will still create fear, shame and unnecessary hardship and travel. The young, low-income, those without connections or health care, especially in rural areas and, disproportionately, women of color, will suffer the most.

Our nation will suffer from a massive judicial betrayal if *Roe* is indeed overturned. As Sotomayor asked in decrying the court’s refusal to overturn the Texas abortion ban (SB 8): “Will this institution survive the stench that this creates in the public perception that the Constitution and its reading are just political acts? I don’t see how it is possible.”

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor urges, “We who care about the welfare of women, families, our country and liberty — and the integrity of the judicial branch — must vote, organize, lobby and persevere by resisting as publicly as we can. Our country is being pummeled because religion is calling the shots, instead of reason, science and our secular Constitution.”



The intrusion of religion into secular life

By Wren Knippling

I grew up in a fundamentalist Catholic community, which was determinedly strict about concepts and opinions regarding gender roles and identities. If you were born with a male body, you had a specific role to provide for the household — fight, project strength and cast aside emotions. If you were born with a female body, your role was to raise the children, maintain the home, cook for the husband and family, and serve your husband.

My parents believed in this to the extent that they constantly pushed this narrative onto their kids. My sisters all had to wrestle with the feeling that they would not feel fulfilment in their lives unless they had a husband and bore his children. The idea of bearing children was their most important responsibility in life, and the idea that there could ever be a circumstance in which they would have to terminate a pregnancy was unfathomable. These ideas were grounded in my parents’ so-called “deeply held beliefs” and an aggrandized use of the word “faith.”

Across the country right now, conservative governments are cracking down on rights and individual liberties. These attacks are especially prevalent against women, people of color, the LGBTQ+ community and those living in poverty. The people attacking these communities share a common theme in that they constantly attack from the position of “family values” or “traditional views.” This is shorthand for religion, or, more specifically, the Christian religion.

But which version of the Christian religion? Funnily enough, it doesn’t seem to matter to the Christians themselves. It doesn’t seem to click with most people that there isn’t a specific denomination holding a majority opinion in this country. Christianity here has long hidden its cruel intentions behind the lie that, somehow, multiple denominations all disagreeing about minor particulars in the ancient texts compromising the bible equals a non-consensus in the views of how to run the country and where to apply certain rules over people. These separate denominations have long been in lockstep toward the obvious goal of dismantling democracy and installing a theocracy where anyone claiming religious piety can hold power and authority.

In the United States, there is supposed to be a wall of separation between the church and state. The Founding Fathers established this in our Constitution. The reason that the U.S. Constitution begins with the words, “We the people,” and makes no mention of religion or God within its text



A woman dressed as a handmaid from *The Handmaid's Tale* confronts an anti-abortion protester during a rally in Washington, D.C., on Sept 27, 2020.

is because independence wasn’t the idea of a god, nor was it the alleged God itself which fought to gain independence from Great Britain. It was people from all walks of life, levels of wealth, religious beliefs and ethnicities fighting for a secular cause. Men and women together. They were seeking freedom from the tyranny of religious beliefs which state that kings were appointed

by God to rule, that their every word was to be obeyed as though spoken through the mouth of God itself. I used to hear that Christianity was chipping away at the wall of separation between church and state. This was never the truth in my lifetime, however. Christianity has long since destroyed that wall, and is actively dismantling the state, all while hiding behind the idea of this separation to keep the state from defending itself or fighting back.

At the time of this writing, the nation is reeling from a leaked decision from the Supreme Court which will dismantle national abortion protections. It’s highly unlikely that this position will change before the actual release of the decision, even with rampant activism and a majority of citizens in the country holding the opinion that abortion is necessary healthcare and a right for all.

These religious fundamentalists have latched onto the idea that abortion is simply murder. The religious institutions themselves have convinced their followers that this is a crusade to protect vulnerable and innocent children. They refuse to empathize with the pains and struggles of anyone who may need abortions. They have decided upon a completely dogmatic and rigid view that makes no exceptions for concepts like rape, ectopic pregnan-

cies or other conditions that would make the pregnancy dangerous for the pregnant person. They believe it is a sacred duty for a woman to carry a pregnancy to term. For many Christians, it is not enough to simply condemn the practice; they must prevent others from having an abortion, even those who do not follow their religious beliefs or customs. They are campaigning against a human right to bodily autonomy because they have become convinced by their leaders that they may be tortured for eternity for not doing so.

Many women will be forced into pregnancies that will hurt them, or worse. There will be thousands of women brought in front of judges to defend miscarriages. Many of these women likely will still be convicted of murder. These poor people will quickly learn that, in the eyes of the law and their religion, a rapist’s right to force a pregnancy on anyone is more protected and sacred than their right to choose who they become pregnant with, when they do, and under what conditions they keep the pregnancy. These opinions are coming from the same communities and institutions that hide child-abusing clergy from the eyes of the public and from justice, institutions that have been found time and again to be operating grooming operations, institutions that have covered up death-by-neglect casualties in the hundreds, if not thousands, in places like Ireland and Canada. These zealots have the unimaginable audacity to declare themselves the judges of morality.

At no point in the bible does God condemn the idea of abortion. More than once, God either commits genocidal levels of abortion (how many pregnant women died in the great flood?) or commands his

people (Moses and his tribe are a prominent example) to commit them both in war and in conquest of territory. Instead, they use vague wording such as Jesus saying, “Blessed are the children” in order to justify their current positions while actively ignoring the dozens of times that the exact opposite sentiment is directly ordered by the character of God.

Let’s also be practical and honest about when and for what reason abortion became “abhorrent” in the eyes of these religious zealots. For years, the idea of abortion was commonplace simply because low birth rates and sacrifice were a part of life. We didn’t have the means to guarantee safe births. Many people lived in conditions such that when they were pregnant, they would not be able to make it to a care facility in order to give birth safely (if one even existed close to them). In older times, if a child was going to be born in the winter and there wasn’t enough food to sustain it, a miscarriage or abortion was a common part of life. Things like ectopic pregnancies or rape were, of course, occurring and added misery to these experiences.

Then came modern medicine and science. With modern advances —including sterile facilities, pain medications, rapid response times with ambulances, etc. — birth rates skyrocketed. It wasn’t God who began saving the fetuses, it was doctors and scientists.

As time went on, we started experiencing major population booms and people became complacent in the idea that a pregnancy would likely reach term safely. The Christian religions realized that they needed to commandeer this fortunate outcome and make it about God.

The Catholics were the first to start condemning the idea of abortion, saying that there was no such thing as a necessary abortion and that God would punish those who receive one or even those who condoned the idea. It wasn’t long before the rest of Christianity caught onto the polarizing effect the anti-abortion movement seemed to have. Soon it was common practice in most denominations to demonize abortions.

Let’s make something perfectly clear: This has nothing to do with the welfare of fetuses or the sanctity of life. It’s about the subjugation of women into the role they are said to play, according to a 3,000-year-old fable written by anonymous men. All of this is hidden behind the idea that the religious institutions believe the secular state has no right to interfere in their conduct of themselves running the secular state.

Religion is an unchecked authority that is seemingly free to use its vast wealth indiscriminately to subjugate people who do not even belong to their communities, including those who actively seek to remain apart from them. Religions cannot continue to be allowed to operate indiscriminately of established law simply because they are the proprietors of deeply held beliefs, especially when it is through those beliefs that they justify their tyranny.

It is a deeply held belief of many that abortion is a right. The religious have trampled that idea and, in doing so, have shown that they completely lack respect for the communities that they share space with. As such, they have foregone their own right to respect, privacy and impunity. They cannot be allowed to continue to exert such strong influence over our lives and government unchallenged. We must fight back before it is too late to do so.

FFRF Member Wren Knippling is a godless transgender woman living in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota.

Freethought Matters to return this September

A photograph of three people sitting on a stage. On the left, a man in a dark suit and light blue shirt. In the center, a woman in a red top and black pants. On the right, a man in a dark jacket and light-colored pants. They are sitting on a blue stage with a backdrop that says "FREETHOUGHT Matters".
Photo by Chris Line

Visit FFRF's YouTube Channel to watch our past shows.

YouTube

After a summer hiatus, Freethought Matters resumes production in Sept.

American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll

By Orvin Larson

Prof. Larson writes with affection and respect of this illustrious 19th century freethinker.

—Published by FFRF. 316 pages / PB

A black and white portrait of Robert G. Ingersoll, a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a suit and tie. The text "American Infidel: ROBERT G. INGERSOLL" is visible on the cover.
A Biography by Orvin Larson

Buy it from FFRF online @ ffrf.org/shop

What they’re saying about the *Roe v. Wade* news

The leaked draft of the Supreme Court’s take on *Roe v. Wade* has ignited passions around the country as it seems imminent that the right to a legal abortion in the United States will be taken away. Here’s a look at comments from politicians, columnists, professors and others on the topic.

Alito’s draft recognizes the rights of an hour-old zygote, but not of a 12-year-old impregnated by a rapist. More precisely: Alito would authorize any state legislature to criminalize the abortion of an hour-old zygote by a 12-year-old rape victim.

David Von Drehle, in his column, “Alito’s draft opinion would imperil far more than abortion rights.”
Washington Post

I do not know where this retraction of civil rights will end, but I do know it will go down as a milestone in a decades-long conservative campaign to force a country of 330 million people to abide by a bigoted set of ideologies. This movement seeks to rule by hollow theocracy, despite our constitutional separation of church and state. The people behind this campaign do not represent the majority of this country, and they know it, so they consistently try to undermine the democratic process.

Roxane Gay, in her column, “It’s time to rage.”
The New York Times

We say, how dare they? How dare they tell a woman what she can do and cannot do with her own body? When we look at the big picture, those who attack *Roe* have been clear, they want to ban abortion in every state. They want to bully anyone who seeks or provides reproductive health care. . . . When the right to privacy is attacked, anyone in our country may face a future where the government can interfere with their personal decision. Not just women. Anyone. And it has never been more clear.

Vice President Kamala Harris
Associated Press

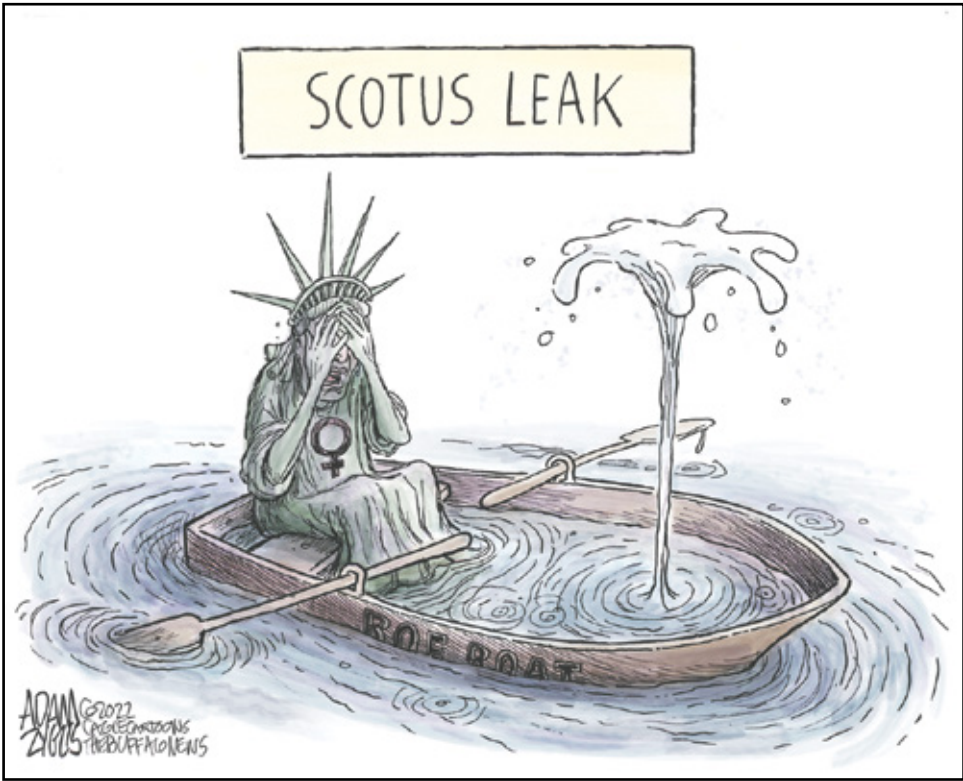
There was nothing up for grabs about *Roe v. Wade*. The decision is almost 50 years old. It has summoned strong plurality support in the country since it was decided and now, in fact, has majority support. Countless people have structured their lives around it. While undercutting it to some extent, the Supreme Court itself reaffirmed it in 1992, in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. All this leaked draft opinion is, then, a naked power grab.

Barry Friedman, Dahlia Lithwick and Stephen I. Vladeck in their column, “Supreme Court leak signals the triumph of politics over the law.”
Washington Post

The sanctity of human life is all-important right up to the point when that flesh-and-bone child enters a world where programs designed to support women, the poor or households teetering toward economic ruin are being scaled back by a party that claims to be about family values.

Michelle Norris, in her column, “The GOP roars about abortion. Then they abandon the children.”
Washington Post

Freedom of religion also means



freedom from religion. Your faith and opinions should not oppress the lives of others. But Alito is the same man who agreed that Hobby Lobby and other Christian corporations should be able to deny their employees medical coverage on the basis of their beliefs. . . . America should not be able to hold a person hostage to their pregnancy, make one’s body a prison, and then call itself a land of liberty.

Jenee Osterheldt, in her column, “The Uterine State of America: Our lives depend on *Roe v. Wade*.”
Boston Globe

This decision is not just about abortion. It represents just one, albeit powerful, part of a multipronged, desperate effort by a shrinking and aging group, while they still wield power, to impose their vision of a 1950s white Christian America on an increasingly diverse nation.

Robert P. Jones, in his column, “Alito and public opinion reveal link between *Roe* and broader white Christian nationalist agenda.”
Religion News Service

If *Roe v. Wade* falls, people, mostly girls and women, will die. The conservative majority of the Supreme Court knows this. They don’t care.

Renee Graham, in her column, “This could be the unsettling of *Roe v. Wade* as ‘settled law.’”
Boston Globe

Our view is that nothing is achieved by criminalizing abortions or by forcing women to travel hundreds of miles to procure one in a state such as Illinois, where that right is protected. History teaches us that the number of abortions in America does not change much due to their legality or lack thereof; what changes is the health danger presented to women, both physical and mental. And the rich have always been more likely to be served than the poor. And, yes, all of that is relevant to *Roe v. Wade*.

Editorial: “A lousy day for the Supreme Court.”
Chicago Tribune

The system of white supremacy creates and perpetuates poverty in Black, brown, and Indigenous communities. Although *Roe* made abortion legal, it failed to make it accessible to communities who could not afford this basic health care procedure — or who were

denied by the state from being able to use their insurance to pay. Limiting abortion access is part of the decades-old anti-abortion strategy used to terrorize Black and brown communities.

Elecia Gonzales, in her column, “Abortion restrictions are white supremacy in action.”
Philadelphia Inquirer

The best argument for legal abortion is often the real-world effect of abortion prohibitions. But by the time the backlash to such laws generates enough momentum for reform, many women’s lives will be ruined. . . . The 2016 election, which allowed Donald Trump to reshape the Supreme Court, was, among other things, a referendum on women’s equality. Women’s equality lost.

Michelle Goldberg, in her column, “An America without *Roe v. Wade* will be a dark place.”
The New York Times

Go down the list of contentious legal questions, and it quickly becomes clear that conservatives do not follow Alito’s approach anywhere else besides *Roe*. . . . The reasons Alito himself gives, in short, for singling out *Roe* cannot explain the decision to overrule that case. All apply equally to opinions that Alito and colleagues have embraced and enforced with vigor. . . . Indeed, what is striking about the modern Supreme Court is not so much that its members have “ardent views” but that those views reflect the immediate priorities of the Republican Party.

Aziz Huq, in his column, “Alito’s case for overturning *Roe* is weak for a reason.”
Politico

It’s appalling because it doesn’t just chip a little piece off *Roe v. Wade*. It takes a pickax to it and in doing so, it opens up the risk of losing a whole stack of other rights that we’ve come to depend on.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren
The New York Times

It’s really quite a radical decision. It’s a fundamental shift in American jurisprudence. Every other decision based on the notion of privacy is thrown into question.

President Biden
USA Today

While most Americans have moderate views on abortion, this court is radically conservative and morally evangelical, dressed up as constitutional rigour.

Rosie DeManno, in her column, “Reversing *Roe v. Wade* would be an egregious assault on women’s rights.”
Toronto Star

It’s always easy to express concern about the unborn and the dead because doing so requires no actual responsibility, and it’s no surprise that many churches only ever seem to care about those groups in particular. They constantly talk about protecting fetuses and preparing for the afterlife while mostly neglecting the people who suffer as a result of their broken theology.

“The Friendly Atheist” Hemant Mehta, in his column, “If the Supreme Court overturns *Roe*, conservative Christians may regret it.”
OnlySky

The right-wing justices and their supporters appear ready to reject one of the Founders’ core principles: that religion shall not be imposed by government edict. . . . This is not about “culture.” It is about appropriating state power to enforce theocratically driven positions. . . . Let’s call it what it really is: state-enforced theocracy, or if you prefer, religious authoritarianism.

Jennifer Rubin, in her column, “Let’s throw out the term ‘culture wars.’ This is religious tyranny.”
Washington Post

It’s important to note that the policies we’re talking about here are basically a matter of legislating the religious beliefs of just one segment of the public.

Gail Collins, in her column, “Don’t be fooled. It’s all about women and sex.”
New York Times

The court’s coming decision to overturn *Roe* represents a straightforward attack on the American secular ideal. It will probably be the first of many developments, as the wall of separation crumbles and as conservative religious authority floods American life.

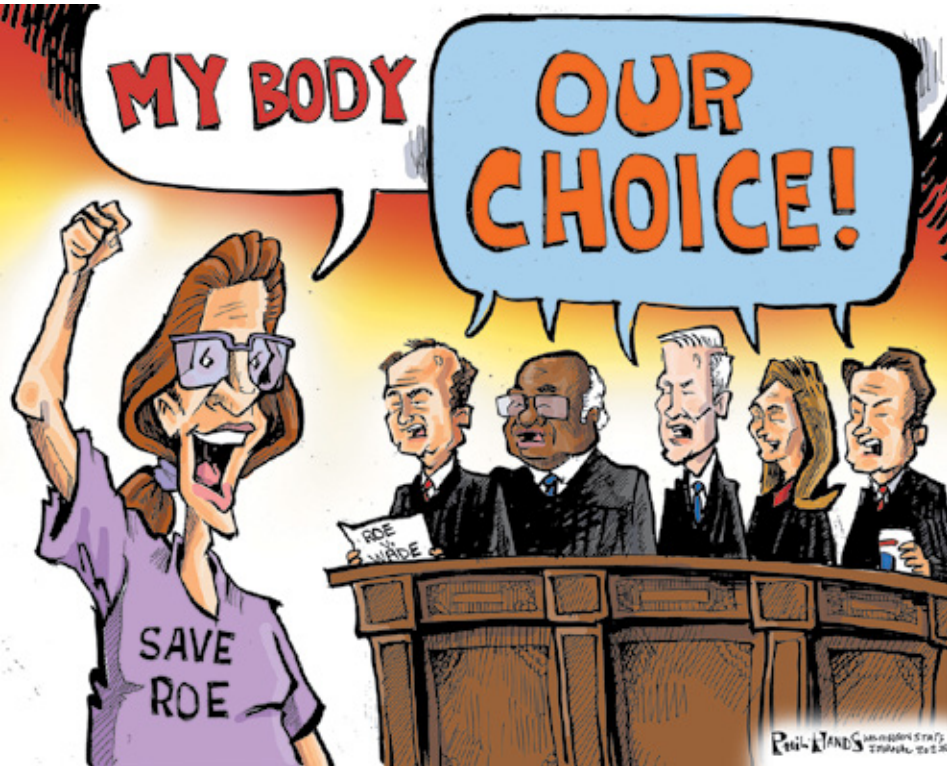
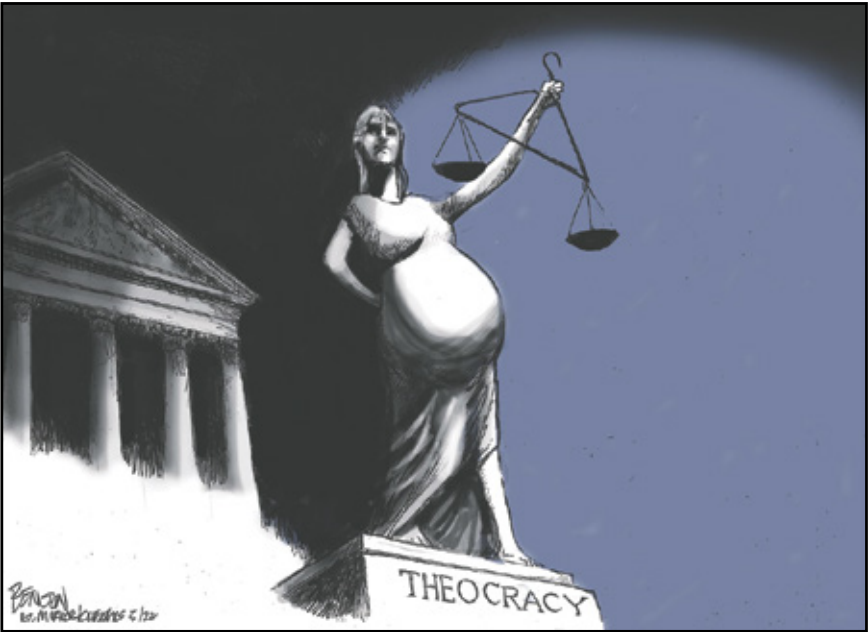
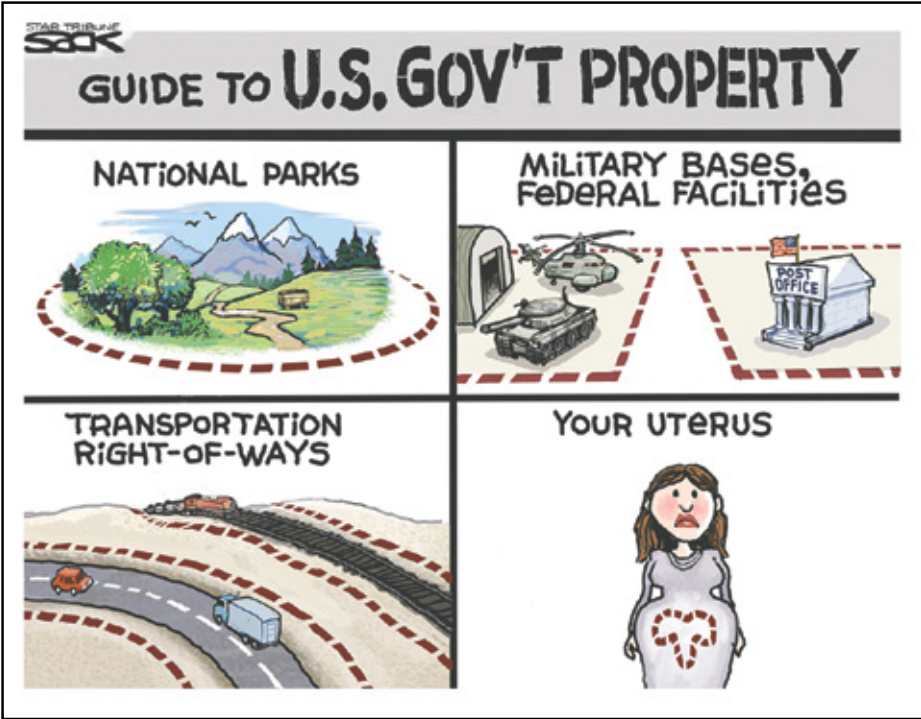
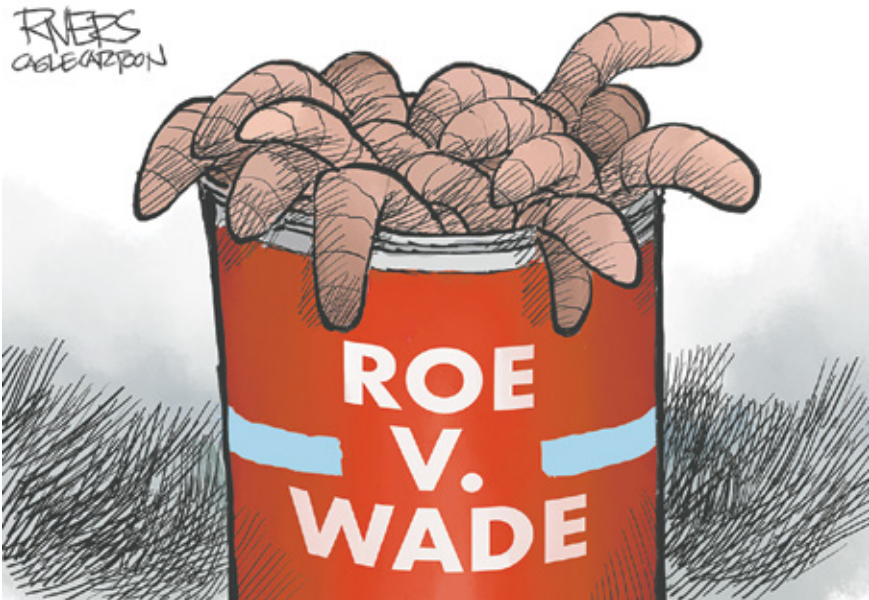
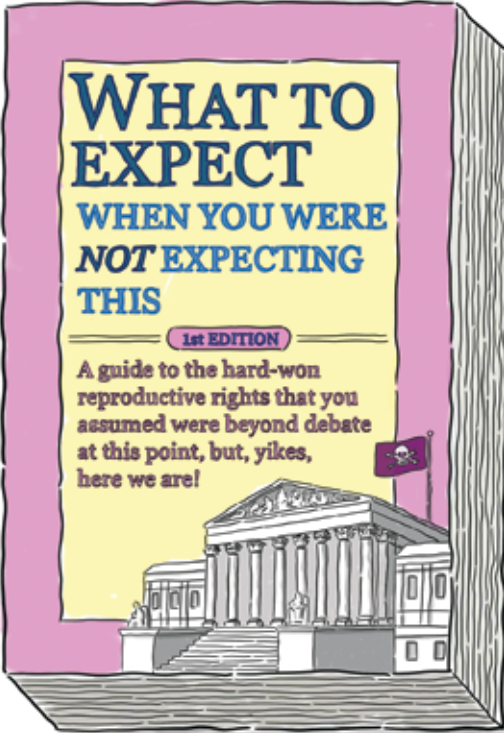
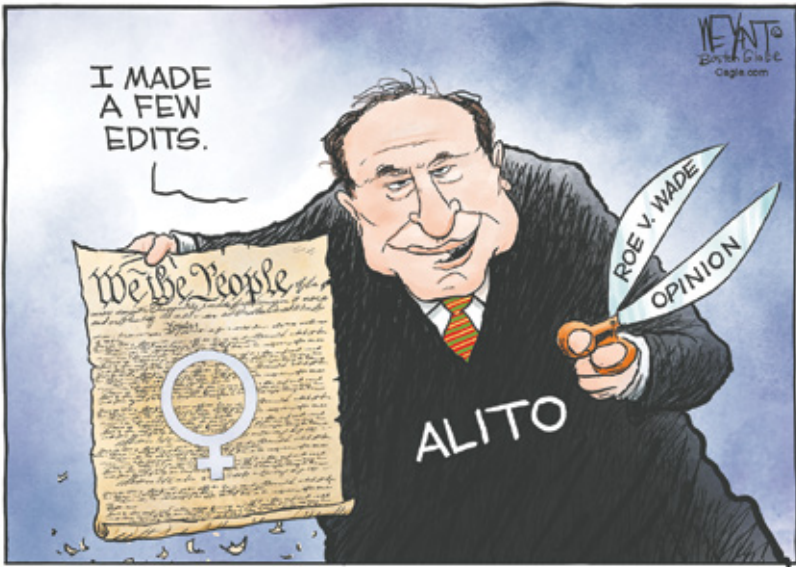
David Sehat, professor of history at Georgia State University.
Washington Post

The confirmation of Trump’s third Supreme Court pick, Justice Amy Coney Barrett — who some anti-choice activists believe was anointed by God to help the Supreme Court overturn *Roe* — could also strengthen the Religious Right’s already successful push to weaponize and redefine religious liberty in ways that weaken the Establishment Clause.

Peter Montgomery, in his column, “Overturning *Roe* is just the beginning.”
Right Wing Watch

Women Without Superstition
“No Gods—No Masters”
Edited by, Annie Laurie Gaylor
Collected writings of 50 women freethinkers of the 19th & 20th centuries (51 photographs).
—Published by FFRF.
696 pages / HB

Buy it from FFRF online
ffrf.org/shop



FFRF launches ‘secular values voter’ ad blitz

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is utilizing its distinguished membership in a timely and vital national “I’m Secular and I vote” ad campaign beginning over the July 4 weekend, and finishing by Constitution Day, Sept. 15.

“The midterm elections will be critical to policies affecting the separation of state and church and individual liberties,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

Adds FFRF Co-President Dan Barker: “Let’s put the public candidates and officials on notice that nonreligious, secular voters are here, that WE are the true ‘values voters’ and that it’s time that our secular viewpoint be heard and represented.”

FFRF will be featuring one FFRF member per state (or couples, in some cases) in full-page ads in daily newspapers in state capitals on Sunday, July 3. To extend the life of the campaign, a companion billboard will also go up, with a few exceptions. To hit larger metropolitan areas, FFRF is also running ads in Portland, Ore., Philadelphia and Chicago, and will be taking



Tennessee

Carl and Aleta Ledendecker, who runs the East Tennessee FFRF chapter, represent Tennessee in FFRF’s campaign. Their photo will also appear in the July 3 Tennesseean, along with description identifying Carl as “a retired educator, volunteer, Tennessean . . . and Secular Humanist,” and Aleta as a “retired Montessori educator, volunteer, Tennessean . . . and Atheist.”

ads in The New York Times, USA Today and Washington Post.

Typical of the ad is the one running in the Chicago Tribune on July 3 featuring “Friendly Atheist” blogger and writer Hemant Mehta (see ad on Page 16).

Each ad features the photo of a local FFRF member, most taken in front of their state Capitol building, and a de-

scription about them. The text reads:

“I’m one of more than 95 million secular Americans who are not religious. The ‘Nones’ (those of us unaffiliated with religion) are now 29 percent of the U.S. population. We’re the largest ‘denomination’ by religious identification!

“As a secular voter, I trust in reason, science and America’s secular Constitution.

“I want Congress, my state Legislature, my public officials and our courts to:

- “Keep religion out of government and social policy.
- “Keep religion out of public schools.
- “Keep religion out of bedrooms, personal lives and health care decisions, including when or whether to have children, and whom to love or marry.
- “Use my tax dollars only for *evidence*-based, not *faith*-based, purposes.

“If you agree with me, please vote your secular values.”

The ad encourages secular voters to join FFRF. It also links to the results of FFRF’s impressive secular values voter survey. (ffrf.org/valuesvoter)

“We’re so proud of and grateful to the individuals who have stepped forward to be part of this important, election-year statement of secular values,” adds Gaylor.

Future issues of Freethought Today will carry updates about the continuing campaign.

FFRF thanks members, particularly donors to its advertising fund, for making possible this campaign. If you’re interested in being part of this campaign, please see the accompanying story.



Georgia

Black Nonbelievers Founder and President Mandisa Thomas will appear in an ad in the Atlanta Constitution on July 3, in which she is described as “Mother, activist, organizer, longtime Peach . . . and Atheist.” Her billboard is at Courtland St. and JW Dobbs Ave.

Participants still needed

FFRF is looking for members interested in representing FFRF in its “I’m Secular and I Vote” campaign in remaining states. FFRF is seeking a cross-section of U.S. citizens demographically, by age (18 and up), gender, race, sex, ethnicity, etc. They must be registered voters. (To aid in representing younger freethinkers, members may wish to recruit free-thinking, voting-age children or grandchildren.)

Volunteers commit to obtain two different sets of photographs: one ideally in front of their state Capitol (possibly substituting a different iconic site). It’s helpful if you live near your capital city or are willing to travel there. The second photograph is a studio portrait taken for commercial use for the billboard. FFRF will reimburse for reasonable photograph-

ic fees. FFRF will provide a modest scholarship for students-only who participate. FFRF will finalize photographic and other details by the end of July and is seeking individuals who can follow through and meet deadlines, since the campaign involves contract commitments.

FFRF is still seeking a representative in these states: Alabama; Alaska; Arkansas; Delaware; Hawaii; Idaho; Kansas; Michigan; Mississippi; Missouri; Montana, Nebraska; New Hampshire; New Jersey, New Mexico; North Dakota; Oklahoma; Pennsylvania; Rhode Island, South Carolina; South Dakota; Utah; West Virginia and Wyoming.

If you’re interested, please fill out an application form and read more about it at: secularvote.ffrf.org.



Pennsylvania

Tom Schottmiller and Margaret Downey, both Lifetime Members of FFRF, are identified in the upcoming Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper ad on July 3 as “proud Pennsylvanians, married 48 years, parents, grandparents, lovers of science reason, critical thinking . . . and happily Atheist.” Margaret will appear in “I’m atheist and I vote” ads on kiosks in downtown Philly.



New York

FFRF Members Mira and David Peck will represent FFRF in its secular values voter ad in the Albany Times Union. Their respective descriptions in the July 3 ad will read: “Mira is a retired corporate exec, mother, Empire State citizen . . . and Atheist” and “Dave is a retired high school science teacher, father, Empire State citizen . . . and Atheist.” Their billboard will go up at NY2 at 2nd Avenue on the roof.



Connecticut

FFRF Member Suzanne Flathers will represent FFRF in its July 3 full-page ad in the Hartford Courant. She is described as “Grandmother, contract specialist, gardener, lifelong Nutmeg . . . and Atheist.” Her billboard is on Allyn Street, east of Union Place.



Virginia

FFRF Board Member David Tamayo and Hypatia Alexandria, founders of Hispanic American Freethinkers, will appear in a secular values voter ad in the Richmond Times on July 3 and on a 14x48 bulletin billboard on I-95 and 1401 Commerce Road, Richmond.



Indiana
Ryan Cadwell, who runs the Central Indiana Chapter of FFRF, represents FFRF in an ad in the Indianapolis Star running on July 3. He is identified as “Husband, father, developer, Hoosier . . . Freethinker.” He will be on a billboard placed near 8300 North Bash St., Indianapolis.



Texas
Cody Valdez, “A college student, dad, brother, Texan . . . and an Atheist,” will represent FFRF in its full-page ad on Sunday, July 3 in the Austin Statesman and in a 14x48-foot billboard on S. Lamar, west of Manchaca Rd., August.



Maryland
Parrish S. Knight, who’s been an FFRF member for more than 10 years, will be described in his July 3 ad in the Annapolis Capital Gazette as an “IT Specialist, philosophy student, longtime Marylander . . . and Atheist.” He is pursuing a Master’s in philosophy.



Colorado
Claudette StPierre, who leads FFRF’s Denver chapter, will appear on a billboard at 14th Avenue South and Fox in Denver saying, “I’m an atheist and I vote,” and in a full-page ad in the Denver Post on Sunday, July 3, described as a “pediatric nurse, gardener, Coloradan . . . and Atheist.”



California
Dulce Solorzano, identified as “a college student, human rights activist, Californian . . . and Agnostic,” will be featured in FFRF’s Sunday, July 3 ad in the Sacramento Bee, and on a billboard going up in late June on K Street and 20th, Sacramento.



Washington
Lewis L. Foerster is identified as “a father, veteran, president of Unfettered Free-thinkers of South Bend, Washingtonian . . . and a Humanist.” Linda M. Foerster is identified as “a wife, daughter, friend, Washingtonian . . . and a Freethinker.” They are featured in the upcoming July 3 ad in the Olympian as well as a billboard.



Minnesota
Lifetime Members Steve Petersen and Shirley R. Moll of St. Paul represent FFRF in the ad appearing on July 3 in the Minneapolis Star Tribune. Shirley is described as “a mom, grandmother and great-grandmother, Minnesotan and . . . Atheist.” Steve is described as “a retired letter carrier, student of life, Minnesotan . . . and Atheist.” They’ll appear in a billboard close to the Capitol building in St. Paul on East 7th Street.



Nevada
FFRF Member Tamami Tokutake represents FFRF in upcoming ad in the Reno Gazette, in which she’s described as “a Mom, retired tech program manager, artist, Nevadan . . . and an Atheist.” She will also be on a billboard on South Virginia Street near Mt. Rose Street.



Oregon
Cheryl Kolbe, a member of FFRF’s Executive Board, is identified as “a mother, grandmother, hiker, longtime Oregonian . . . and an Atheist” in the newspaper ad running in the Oregonian on July 3. (A similar ad is expected to run in the capital city of Salem in the future.) Cheryl will also appear on a billboard in Portland on NE Portland Hwy. near Simpson Street.



Arizona
FFRF Member Zenaïdo Quintano will be featured in a full-page ad in the Arizona Republic on July 3. He’ll be identified as “a retired corporate executive, small business owner, great-grandfather, native Arizonian . . . and Humanist.” The description will also appear in Spanish: “Soy ejecutivo corporativo jubilado, propietario de una pequeña empresa, bisabuelo, nativo de Arizona. . . y Humanista.” His billboard, in Spanish, will be at 7th Avenue, south of Polk Street.




Maine
Maine chapter leader Tom Waddell is pictured in the upcoming July 3 ad running in the Augusta newspaper, Maine Sunday Telegram. His identification reads: “Vietnam combat veteran, FFRF chapter director, Mainer . . . and Atheist.”

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

I'M SECULAR
and I vote



Hemant Mehta, Naperville, Ill., a secular values voter.

I'm a writer, blogger, podcaster, coach, lifelong Illinoisan . . . and friendly Atheist.

I'm one of more than 95 million secular Americans who are not religious. The "Nones" (those of us unaffiliated with religion) are now 29 percent of the U.S. population. We're the largest "denomination" by religious identification!*

As a secular voter, I trust in reason, science and America's secular Constitution.

I want Congress, my state legislature, my public officials and our courts to:

☒

Keep religion out of government and social policy.

☒

Keep religion out of public schools.

☒

Keep religion out of bedrooms, personal lives and health care decisions, including when or whether to have children, and whom to love or marry.

☒

Use my tax dollars only for *evidence*-based, not *faith*-based, purposes.

IF YOU AGREE WITH ME, PLEASE
VOTE YOUR SECULAR VALUES!

And, please, join the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

ffrf.us/voter 1.800.335.4021

or request a complimentary issue of FFRF's newspaper Freethought Today, ffrf.us/newspaper

FFRF • Chicago Ad • PO Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701 • 800.335.4021 • FFRF.org

☐ I would like to become a member (includes 10 issues of *Freethought Today* newspaper).

☐ I would like to donate to FFRF's Legal Fund. \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City / State / ZIP _____

Phone / Email _____

Make checks payable to "FFRF." Dues & donations are tax-deductible for income-tax purposes. FFRF protects membership confidentiality and does not divulge, rent, sell or give away its mailing list.

Annual Membership Dues

☐ Student \$25

☐ Individual \$40

☐ Household \$50

☐ Gung Ho \$100

☐ Sustaining \$250

☐ Sponsoring \$500

☐ Life Member \$1,000

☐ After Life \$5,000

☐ Beyond After Life \$10,000

★★★★ RATING
—Charity Navigator

FFRF has been working effectively since 1978 as a state/church watchdog, serving as the nation's largest freethought association, with more than 36,000 members. FFRF is a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit that educates, broadcasts and litigates. FFRF maintains a D.C. lobbying presence and a team of attorneys who end hundreds of state/church entanglements every year. Find out more about why nonreligious Americans are the real values voters and embrace a humanistic social policy at: ffrf.org/valuesvoter.

FFRF.ORG | FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

Paid for by the Freedom From Religion Foundation

*Source: Pew Research Center

See pages 14-15 for more on FFRF's national secular voters campaign. This ad will appear in the Chicago Tribune on July 3. Hemant will be featured in an "I'm an atheist and I vote" billboard at Peterson and Artesian avenues in Chicago.

White Christian nationalism strikes again

This article first appeared in the Washington Post on May 20 and is reprinted with permission.

By Samuel L. Perry and Philip S. Gorski

White Christian nationalism can be messy to define, but it’s critical to recognize its three animating impulses: freedom, order and violence — the ideology’s holy trinity. The freedom belongs only to Americans these nationalists see as like them (white men). The order is to be imposed on all those they don’t (everyone else). And righteous violence is to be deployed as necessary to achieve this twisted vision.



Samuel L. Perry



Philip S. Gorski

It makes sense in context. The ideology’s adherents are committed to instituting an ethno-culture that represents a shrinking minority — a traditionalist Christian social order in which the freedoms of white Christians are privileged. Theirs is a world where race, religion and national belonging have become virtually inseparable and are not necessarily tied to spirituality. And the spread of this kind of thinking is rapid and startling.

Over the last year or so, white Christian nationalism has become intertwined with the “great replacement” theory, which holds that a corrupt elite made up of Jews and Democrats is carrying out a plot to replace “real” Americans by engineering mass immigration from the Third World. Since 2015, that theory has captured the fringes and some in the mainstream on the right, from angry young men bearing tiki torches in Charlottesville; to pundits like Ann Coulter, Charlie Kirk, Matt Walsh and Tucker Carlson; to at least a half-dozen prominent Republican candidates and lawmakers, including Sen. Ron Johnson, Wis., Reps. Elise Stefanik, N.Y., and Scott Perry, Pa., Arizona state Sen. Wendy Rogers, and J.D. Vance, Ohio’s GOP nominee for the Senate.

In citing the “great replacement” in a lengthy document posted online, the Buffalo suspect appears to have justified plans for his murderous assault by articulating what many of his fellow citizens already believe. “If there’s one thing I want you to get from these writings,” the suspect begins, “it’s that white birth rates must change.” Combined with a menacing “invasion” of non-white immigrants, low white fertility rates, he warns, “will ultimately result in the complete racial and cultural replacement” of whites.

According to a recent survey by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Pub-



Image by Shutterstock

lic Affairs Research, a third of all American adults now embrace the idea that “an effort is underway to replace U.S.-born Americans with immigrants for electoral gains,” even if they wouldn’t shoot up a grocery store in its furtherance.

That “American” implies “Christian” is not an uncommon belief, especially if you’re a white American. In a nationally representative survey we fielded in March, we found that 28 percent of all whites and half of conservative whites affirm that “being a Christian is very important to being truly American.” For many white Americans, Christianity is more of an ethnic culture and identity than a set of spiritual beliefs. It means “White people like us.”

In *The Flag and the Cross*, our new book on white Christian nationalism, which we have both been studying for some time, we show that the “holy trinity” embodied in it is anchored in a mythological version of American history that goes something like this: America was founded as a Christian nation; the Founders were traditional Christians; the founding documents are biblically based; God has therefore bestowed immense wealth and power on America and given it a mission to spread freedom and religion around the world; but that mission and those blessings are now threatened by the presence of non-whites, non-Christians and non-native-born people on American soil. Today, this story is propagated by a veritable Christian-nationalist industry that includes radio stations, video series, scores of books and entire organizations dedicated to telling white conservative Christians that the nation is their birthright.

For a segment of Christians, the battle over abortion is just one front in a wider war to make America Christian again — by any means necessary. They are not pro-life so much as pro-control. We know this because the Americans who hold the strongest antiabortion stances are not consistently “pro-life.” When we asked a nationally representative sample of white Americans about their political views on issues including abortion, the death penalty, gun control and law enforcement, here’s what we found: Among white Americans who believe that abortion should be outlawed, more than half think we don’t use the death penalty often enough, 4 out of 5 see “good guys with guns” as the best solution to gun violence, and nearly half support police enforcing order by “any means necessary.” By comparison, among whites who think abortion should be kept legal, only 17 percent think we should

use the death penalty more, 1 in 4 think “good guys with guns” stop bad guys with guns, and less than a quarter support carte blanche for law enforcement.

The majority of those with the strongest anti-abortion views also want to impose their vision of a Christian nation on other Americans. We asked the same group of white Americans various questions about America’s relationship to Christianity. Among those who want to outlaw abortion outright, roughly two-thirds believe both that the government should formally declare the United States a Christian nation and that making

God’s kingdom more present on Earth involves changing laws to reflect biblical principles. Among those who believe that abortion should remain legal, by contrast, only 7 percent hold either of these views.

It’s important to note that white

Christian nationalism is not the same as conservative white evangelicalism. Some evangelicals reject the ideology, and many non-evangelicals and even some non-Christians embrace it. In our book we show that about 20 percent of Americans who believe that the federal government should declare the nation Christian don’t even identify as Christian — a view that aligns with the Buffalo suspect’s view of Christianity. Answering his own question about whether he thought of himself as Christian, he wrote in his online post: “No. I do not ask God for salvation by faith, nor do I confess my sins to him.” He added that “I do however believe in and practice many Christian values.”

When *Roe* was originally decided in 1973, 85 percent of Americans were white and more than 85 percent were Christian. A half-century later, conservative white Christians are just another minority group, albeit an extremely powerful and well-organized one. Not content with this diminished status, some are no longer content with majority rule, either. They want rule by “we, the people,” which they understand to mean “our kind of people.”

The Supreme Court itself is now an instrument of minority rule by white Christians. Consider: Of the five justices who reportedly voted to strike down *Roe*, four were nominated by presidents who lost the popular vote, and five of the six conservative justices were confirmed by senators representing a political minority. The new conservative majority on the court represents a shrinking minority of conservative white Christian Americans. It is a bulwark against the popular will and, increasingly, a battering ram against settled law.

White Christian nationalists want control over the other two branches of government, as well. In previous studies, we showed that even before the 2020 election, Christian-nationalist ideology was a leading predictor that white Americans thought we make it too easy to vote. If the goal is control, then the last thing you want is full democratic participation. Rather, you want to raise the bar so that only the “worthy” can have a say. White Christian nationalism is powerfully related to belief in Trump’s “big lie” about a stolen election, and today, some adherents of white Christian nationalism favor insurrections and bullets over elections and ballots.

In August 2021, we asked Americans what they thought about the future of the country and how much they agreed with various statements related to violence. The patterns we observed were unequivocal. The more that white Americans agree that the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation, the more they affirm that “true American patriots” may have to resort to physical violence to save the country. Given the connection between Christian nationalism and the desire to completely outlaw abortion, it shouldn’t surprise us that 42 percent of white Americans who support banning abortion also believe that physical violence may be necessary to rescue the country. Less than 6 percent of whites who want to keep abortion legal support this view.

A surprising and disproportionate number of white conservative Christians are inclined to believe that defending and preserving a white and Christian America will require violence. In the August survey, 27 percent of white evangelicals agreed that “true American patriots may have to resort to physical violence in order to save the country,” roughly double the percentage for other religious groups.

Prominent white Christian nationalists often talk explicitly about the “great replacement” theory, making clear that religious and cultural transformation is their main concern. Charlie Kirk, former director of the Falkirk Center at Liberty University and a prominent Christian speaker, accused President Biden of letting Afghanistan “fall apart” because he “wants a couple hundred thousand more Ilhan Omars to come into America to change the body politic.” Rep. Omar is not from Afghanistan. But she is a Muslim. And for Kirk, as for the shooter, that means she can’t ever be truly American.

Similarly, on Facebook, outspoken Christian nationalist Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene shared a video claiming that “Zionist supremacists” conspired to overrun Europe and replace whites there, while Muslim refugees were “flooding” Europe in order to replace its legal systems with sharia law. Greene commented, “This is what the UN wants all over the world.”

As the Buffalo suspect explains, the perceived threat is not just racial but religious or, more specifically, ethno-cultural. The white Western way of life needs defending, by law or by violence.

Of course, not all conservative white Christians embrace the “great replacement” theory. And very few would endorse the shooter’s acts. Still, any remaining boundaries between white nationalism and Christian nationalism are becoming blurrier by the day.

Samuel L. Perry is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Oklahoma. Philip S. Gorski is a professor of sociology at Yale University. They are co-authors of *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*.

FFRF’s Freethinkers of the Year awards

The following are the acceptance speeches given by FFRF’s 2021 Freethinkers of the Year. They were introduced by FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert.

Rebecca Markert: It’s my honor to introduce this year’s Freethinkers of the Year awards, which are given to plaintiffs and litigants who have won lawsuits to end entanglements between religion and government. It includes a plaque and a \$1,000 honorarium. This year we have multiple winners. They are plaintiffs in two of the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s recent successful lawsuits.

I’m going to call on our Alabama plaintiffs first.

Just before the 2020 election, we filed a federal lawsuit challenging an egregious mandatory religious oath, which citizens in Alabama had to swear in order to register to vote. FFRF’s Patrick Elliot and Elizabeth Cavell were the attorneys in the case, and I’m happy to report that we won that lawsuit in April [2021]. This significant victory was possible only because of these local plaintiffs who stood up publicly to challenge this religious test.

We’d like to congratulate and thank Robert Corker, Chris Nelson and Heather Coleman Nelson, and Randall Cragun.

Speaking on behalf of these plaintiffs is Randall Cragun. He is a visiting assistant professor at Birmingham Southern College in Alabama. He received his master’s and Ph.D. in economics at Clemson University. He researches how the contraceptive ecosystem affects fertility, education, career choices and other life outcomes.

Please welcome Randall.

By Randall Cragun

Thanks, everyone. I want to say a little bit about why I think this case was important. This certainly was not a groundbreaking case. It didn’t set new precedent. It wasn’t something that should have had a big impact, say, on national level politics in the United States. But I think that part of why it matters is that it was not new. When I moved to Alabama three years ago, I went to register to vote, and I found that I had to sign this voter form that required that I made some religious statement.

I was not willing to do that. I thought that would have been dishonest. It would have felt to me like I was betraying some of my values. I contacted the secretary of state’s office and asked how I should go about registering to vote when I was not willing to sign this form. I knew that this had already been addressed by courts. The courts had already decided that they had to have some alternative. But the response that I got from the secretary of state’s office was that there is no alternative. If you modify this form, if you strike out those words, your registration will be rejected. And you will not be allowed to vote.

They told me that I was not allowed to participate in the political system unless I made this religious claim, even though it had already been established by courts that they could not do that.



From left, Chris Nelson, Heather Coleman Nelson, Robert Corker and Randall Cragun were plaintiffs in FFRF’s successful Alabama lawsuit over a mandatory religious oath on a voter form.

So why does that happen? After that, I went looking for some representation. I contacted multiple attorneys and, basically, everyone said, “Well, we don’t have any expertise in this. There’s not much we can do, and we’re not willing to take this on.”

I had sort of given up hope on this. I said, “Well, I guess I’m just going to have to deal with the fact that I am not a full participant in Alabama society.” And then a friend said, “Why don’t you contact FFRF?” I was not a member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation at the time, but I am now, and the reason is that I got a response from it saying, “This is important, and we want to help you.”

What happened then? Well, they changed the form. So now you can strike out those words, and there’s also a box that you can check to say, “I’m not willing to agree to this religious oath.”

I have to wonder why Alabama Secretary of State John Merrill thought it was a good idea to change the form to be more complicated, instead of just getting rid of it. There’s no reason it needs to be in there, none at all. It serves no purpose. There’s no reason for administrative purposes or anything else that those words need to be there. But, instead, they made the process harder and more confusing just to

try to keep that language there. So, even though this was a victory in some sense, where now I’m allowed to register to vote, there’s still this sense that I am not a full member of Alabama society because it is owned by Christians, because they are the default.

And you don’t have to look very far to see this. In some of the conversations I’ve had with people, when they didn’t know that I was a plaintiff, they would say things like, “Why is this organization from Wisconsin coming into Alabama and trying to change our way of life?” And I don’t know who this “our” is because I live there. This is my way of life. And I just wanted to live my way of life. And yet people don’t see it that way. It’s very common. It seems people like to say, “This is a religious state. This is a Christian state. Alabama is a Christian place, and the people are Christian.” But only some are.

Yes, I am now allowed to register to vote, but that’s not enough. Inclusion is not enough. Accommodations are not enough. Every person deserves to have full ownership of society. And that’s true for cases of religion. It’s true for cases of race and all kinds of other things. And when we treat this like it’s just a thing that we have to deal with because it’s a minor issue where

we have to sign a form, that’s not going to change.

And so I’m really glad that FFRF took this case and made me feel like I actually had a voice and could do something about it. Thank you so much.

...
Rebecca Markert: In 2015, FFRF, the Central Florida Freethought Community and a coalition of national and local groups plus five individuals sued over censorship of secular invocations in Brevard County, Fla. Our plaintiffs won that case, including an appeal to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

All five individuals are receiving this award. Unfortunately, Ronald Gordon and Chase Hansel could not make it. But Keith Becher, Jeffery Koeberl and David Williamson are here.

Jeffery wanted to say a few words, so I’m going to give him the floor.

By Jeffery Koeberl

Just to relate a quick anecdote: Why am I here? I was not really enthusiastic about jumping into this as a police officer employed by a chief who’s appointed by local politicians in a very conservative, very Christian area of the country. The idea of suing local politicians as an atheist, I was apprehensive. I was scared.

One day my daughter came up to me and she said, “Dad, I’m having trouble with something at school. I need your advice.” She said some of her friends were bullying other people and it made her uncomfortable. And she wanted to know what she could do. And I said, “Well, if you hang out with them, you might as well be bullying them, too, because there’s no difference. So, you can do that or you can walk away.” I told her the best thing to do is speak up and say something because that’s how you stop them.

She said, “I’m afraid of what would happen.”

I said, “Yeah, bullying thrives on fear.”

So, she did it, and she came back and she told me about it. She was very proud. And it occurred to me I should take my own advice. And I did. And I’m glad I did.

So my suggestion to you is: Don’t let fear inform your actions, and live in a way that’ll make your daughters proud.

...
Rebecca Markert: Now, to tell us more, including a recent, very positive ending to this longstanding litigation, is our good friend and inspirational activist David Williamson.

David is the co-founder of our Central Florida chapter and has built a thriving secular community in the Orlando area. He has served on the Central Florida Commission on Religious Freedom and the Interfaith Council of Central Florida. He’s the secretary of the Florida Humanist Association and the co-coordinator of the biennial conference FreeFlo. Welcome, David.



From left, Jeffery Koeberl, David Williamson and Keith Becher (along with Ronald Gordon and Chase Hansel, who were not in attendance at FFRF’s convention) were given FFRF’s Freethinker of the Year awards for being plaintiff’s in FFRF’s successful lawsuit over censorship of secular invocations in Brevard County, Fla.



Photo by Chris Line

David Williamson watches a video of the secular invocation he gave in Brevard County, Fla., in January 2021 during his award acceptance presentation at FFRF’s Boston convention on Nov. 20, 2021.

By David Williamson

Of all the effort that went into the victory in this case, the hardest work by far was done by attorneys. The passion the FFRF legal staff has for their work and our shared interest in secular government is truly remarkable. And the best measure of this isn’t just its successes, but in the longevity of the team that it has built. I want to acknowledge Rebecca Markert for her leadership of the fabulous team of attorneys at FFRF. Rebecca was involved in our case.

The lead attorney in this case was Alex Luchenitser of Americans United for Separation for Church and State. They had staff working on the case, as well. We also had support from the ACLU and ACLU of Florida, so I want to be sure to thank all involved for their efforts.

And I also need to acknowledge Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker, who have supported our chapter at every step and who continue to support the growing FFRF legal team. The work that Annie Laurie and Dan and others who lead national organizations have allowed the collaborations that are continuing to happen more and more in the recent years. So that’s fantastic.

Since local groups are truly the backbone of activism, I want to also acknowledge the three organizational plaintiffs. Those groups are the Humanist Community of the Space Coast, the Space Coast Freethought Association, also known as the Brevard Area

Atheists, and the Central Florida Freethought Community, or CFFC, where I serve. The power we wield, and especially the power sharing we can do at the local level, is more valuable than even a well-written letter by a constitutional attorney. The attorneys will tell you this, as well.

We joined a battle against government prayer that was already well under way. Some of you know that when Annie Laurie was a lowly sophomore at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, she helped found the Freedom From Religion Foundation because of the prayers that she encountered when she went to interact with her local city and county governments. So, this is truly the first issue on which the Freedom From Religion Foundation has been working, and I thought that was notable.

While our 11th Circuit Court victory allows atheists to conduct invocations alongside others, unfortunately, not all of the recent government prayer cases have gone as well. In some venues, there is still inequality and discrimination against atheists and others. Our own experiences, even since this victory in Brevard, has shown that by no means have we fixed Florida’s prayer problem — yet. But we’ve done many good things outside the courts, as well. We don’t just sue people, right? That’s how we get into the news, and it makes it look like that’s all we do at the local level and at the national level. But there’s so much more than that.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Randall Cragun tells the convention crowd about why he would not sign the mandated religious oath on voter forms. “I was not willing to do that. I thought that would have been dishonest. It would have felt to me like I was betraying some of my values.”

Since we sent those first letters requesting inclusion in Brevard and others in 2014, our FFRF chapter, the CFFC, has conducted many invocations. This initiative for secular humanistic invocations has, in my opinion, been the most successful one our chapter has pursued since we were established nine years ago. We’ve even made it possible for there to be a secular invocation in the Florida House of Representatives in 2018. So far, we’ve offered inclusive secular invocations in 23 city and county venues with the help of 41 different invocators.

As of early November [2021], the CFFC has conducted 107 invocations in central Florida.

I want to take a moment to give very special thanks to my partner in good trouble and everything else, Jocelyn Williamson. She really drives this initiative and even writes many of the invocations that are given by her and others, including myself. Our website is a great place to find out more: CFL-Freethought.org. Each of those invocations are transcribed. For anyone who wants to plagiarize them, please feel free.

The CFFC has made one of our goals to ensure that in every local government meeting where legislative prayer is occurring there will be an atheist giving secular invocations. This project really has engaged our followers and has helped others, including our elected officials, to know that we exist, to understand that we care about local government, and most importantly, to learn that we have something positive to offer. Something, in my opinion, that is far superior to the exclusive sectarian Christian prayers that opened these meetings in the most divisive way possible — by starting with religion.

But the Brevard County commissioners liked it that way. For the five-and-a-half years of litigation, the county made a bet. They bet a lot of other people’s money that the court would agree that atheists didn’t belong. The court proved them wrong. So how much did it cost them to try and keep us out? Let’s watch the video of Brevard’s first secular invocation. This was back in January of 2021.

[Video plays of Williamson giving invocation.] “Thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today and for the honor of solemnizing your meeting on behalf of the citizens of the county. And I want to thank you and your staff, in particular, for its hard work during this challenging period, keeping us all safe. There’s only so much time available to us in life, and the fact that all of you have dedicated so much of yours is a credit to the service you do, and we really appreciate it.

“Thomas Jefferson wrote that government is the strongest of which everyone feels themselves a part. As we begin the day in service together, we remember the solemn responsibility we have to our shared community. With that in mind, we remember all those who live in or visit the community and who will be affected by the decisions made here today, possibly for generations to come, whether visiting the Space Coast for just a day as a visitor to a local beach or boutique or for an entire career of public service. While we are sometimes participants in it, we are always benefactors of our democracy and the important work of bodies such as this.

“Knowing that our words, our decisions, and our actions directly impact so many others, we strive to make compassion the foundation for our important work here today. And that we serve with integrity and kindness toward one another and to all those who serve as representatives in local government. Together, let’s embody

the words of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. when he said, ‘The good neighbors look beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all of us human and, therefore, family.’

“May we strive for balance between listening and reflecting, between speaking and acting. Finally, let us incline our ears toward reason, apply our heart to understanding and seek knowledge we can use to find common ground among the citizens for the betterment of the county. Thank you.” [Video ends.]

You know why that sounded like a prayer? Because religious people took speeches like that and pointed them upward. That’s the only difference.

So, Brevard County bet a lot of money and lost. They paid nearly half a million dollars for that invocation not to happen. But it happened anyway. And another again by my co-plaintiff, Keith Becher, back in July [2021]. With that settlement, our attorneys were paid for at least some of their time. The plaintiff organizations and individuals received a small amount of damages, and the world is a better place for everyone, except the taxpayers of Brevard County.

Insurance claims covered the settlement. But that nearly half a million dollars does not include the effort of the county staff and outside counsel they hired that was spent trying to preserve the discriminatory practice they had in place.

But there’s so much more to local activism than lawsuits. And our victories are most cost effective when they don’t go to court. Everyone wins when we don’t go to court. I want to encourage you to continue to push back against the mythology of Christian nationalists, to continue to fight for inclusion, to continue to demand for the equal rights for nonbelievers and anyone else who’s not in the majority. We need all the friends we can get.

You never know which of those letters the FFRF legal team writes that will turn into a federal case and an important legal victory. All victories are worth celebrating. But remember, equal access for religious perspectives is not an acceptable alternative to secular government. It’s a temporary condition in which we must survive while we fight for the first and most fundamental freedom enshrined in our Constitution — freedom from religion. Thank you.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Jeffery Koeberl took his own advice that he gave to his daughter when he decided to become a plaintiff in FFRF’s lawsuit: “Don’t let fear inform your actions.”

Convention speech

Data prove nonreligious are more moral

This is an edited version of the speech Phil Zuckerman gave on Nov. 20, 2021, at FFRF's convention in Boston. To watch it, go to ffrf.us/speeches-2021. He was introduced by Sue Kocher, a member of FFRF's Executive Board.

Sue Kocher: I met Phil Zuckerman some years ago, know him through FFRF and through Triangle Freethought Society, and he's been very kind and generous with his time toward the movement. He is the founding chair of the nation's first Secular Studies Program at Pitzer College, where he's the associate dean and the professor of sociology. He's written many, many books, including *Living the Secular Life*, *Society Without God* and *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*. His latest book is *What It Means To Be Moral*.

Please welcome Phil Zuckerman.

By Phil Zuckerman

Man, what a crowd. This is exciting for me. I teach at a small liberal arts college, so this is fantastic.

Let me start with a couple of stories to get things going. As I was preparing for this, I was just trying to think about what I've been experiencing lately, what we've been going through, and this just kept sticking in my mind like sand in a jar of Vaseline. I just couldn't get it out.

About four or five or six months ago, things were opening up in L.A. I live in Los Angeles and my older daughter lives in a nice hip part of L.A. called Silver Lake. Restaurants were just opening up. So, my wife and I drove across town to have a dinner with her and her boyfriend at an outdoor patio at a hip, cool place in Silver Lake.

Just as we were parking, I saw a crowd of folks. They had some guitars and some signs. And it just so happened that this restaurant my daughter picked was across the street from a Planned Parenthood. These people were organizing a protest. It was early evening, so Planned Parenthood had already closed, but they were out there on the street, and they had all these pro-life signs.

As we're walking by, there was this woman who was handing out signs. And, of course, they were all saying "Life," "Pro-life," "Jesus," "God." None of them was wearing masks. As the woman approached me, I said to her, "You say you're pro-life. Why aren't you wearing a mask?" She said, "God will protect me."

I looked down. I said, "You're wearing shoes."

She said, "Well, I'm on the city street."

"You're wearing glasses."

She says, "Well, I'm nearsighted."

"You're wearing clothes."

And now she's offended.

"So, you have to wear shoes because you don't want to damage your feet. You've got to wear clothes to protect you from the elements. And you're wearing glasses because God won't cure your vision. And yet God will protect you from this pandemic?"

And to me, it spoke volumes. Of course, my kids were pulling me. "Come on. Not again. Not again."

Differences in morality

I was thinking, how can I contrast this with some of the work I do and the way I think about these issues? And I remembered what happened to a cousin of mine and his mom, my Aunt Edna.



Phil Zuckerman speaks at FFRF's national convention in Boston on Nov. 20, 2021.

I have some relatives in Denmark, where I've been fortunate to live for a couple of years. Many, many years ago, my cousin, when he was 2, started having symptoms. He wasn't doing well, wasn't feeling well, wasn't healthy. Test after test after test after test. Hospitals. This and that. Not a fun time.

When the tests came back, it showed he had childhood leukemia. His mom, my aunt Edna, was at the hospital, and when the diagnosis came in, he was 3 years old. A young woman shows up at the hospital and enters where my aunt is and says, "I am so sorry about your son. I understand the diagnosis. I am here for you. I will be your personal secretary. I will be answering any mail you have. I will be paying your bills. I will be taking out your trash. I will be cleaning your house. I will be doing your laundry. I will be doing your grocery shopping. And I am just here for you for anything you need, because you need to focus on your son now, who's sick."

You know how much this is going to cost to have this person? Free — subsidized by the National Health Care of Denmark. This woman was a social worker who was paid through taxes to help parents like this in need, so they don't have to deal with job stuff, bills, just because their kid is having a tough time health-wise. (By the way, my cousin survived. He is alive and well today.)

These stories kind of illustrate to me the difference between a theologically based morality and a secular humanist-based morality.

In the first one, with religion, is a kind of presented moral superiority that is actually depraved and harmful. And in the second one, is a kind of secular humanist situation, a very understated less-touted morality. No one in Denmark is running around saying, "Look how morally superior we are with

our universal health care. Look how morally superior we are by paying attention to the dictates of science and empiricism. Look how morally superior we are by taking care of people in need." They don't say that. And yet, it's actually alleviating suffering, which, to me, is the goal of any moral system or legal system.

So, it's interesting to me how this plays out in our world, especially here in the United States, where the moral high ground is claimed by those who are often doing the most damage. And those of us who work to make the world a better place, work to alleviate suffering, we do so out of humanist values that are not proclaimed as such necessarily, and are certainly not recognized as such by the wider society.

We've got to change that. The question is not, "How can you be moral if you don't believe in God?," but "How can you be moral IF you believe in God?"

Data better than anecdotes

One of the things that I try to teach my students — I'm a sociologist by training — is that you can find an anecdote to illustrate anything. Anecdotes are fun, they're good, they're illustrative, they're engaging. But it's not solid data. I tell them that when they're in a debate with somebody, it's a good idea to present their arguments in the best of light and then show why it's wrong, not find a certain anecdote, because that can be a strawman argument type of situation.

But we've got the data. We've got the data on today's burning moral ethical issues. We've got clear, strong correlations. The more religious you are, you fall on one side of these issues, and the more secular you are, you fall on another.

And by the way, just so you know, I'm often told by people, "Phil, there's a lot of liberal religious people out there who agree with your positions." And I'm like, "Right, because they have a secularized version of religion." I mean, hello. I know friends who are Episcopalians and Reformed Jews and progressive Catholics. And on every issue, they don't take things literally. They don't take the bible literally. It's all because they are leaning toward the secular side of things. And, of course, that's why we join hands on these issues.

So let me walk us through some of them. I don't want this just to be a rambling list here, but I think it's so important.

When we sit back and think, "OK, what are we facing today, at least in the United States, who among us is doing the most to alleviate suffering? Who follows the stay-in-place mandates, who wears masks, who gets the vaccine?" Well, we've got the data.

Atheist Americans are the most likely to get vaccinated in this country. And that's an altruistic act because you're trying to help everyone, not just yourself. Some people say, "Isn't it my right? If I don't want to get a vaccine and don't want to wear a mask." I'm like, "Is it your right to drink and drive?" Give me a break. You're causing suffering. You're causing unwanted victims. When it comes just to the basic pandemic, we see our morals are not only just as good as the religious, but better, more active and engaged in helping others and solving problems.

I think about the climate crisis. Who's more likely to understand it and want to take action to alleviate it? The more secular you are, the more you fall on that side. For example, a recent PRRI study found

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Photo by Ingrid Laas

Phil Zuckerman

that over 80 percent of secular Americans accept the evidence that human activity is causing climate change, and they place addressing climate change at the top of the list of their political priorities, while only 33 percent of white evangelicals accept such evidence. And yet it's the white evangelicals who have been running this country for the previous four years, ran the White House, packed the Supreme Court, packed the lower courts, the appellate courts, the circuit courts.

Whew. We've got our work cut out for us. Thank goodness there's FFRF. My goodness! I cannot tell you what an honor to be here and the work they do and how many people I refer to them when they're in legal straits.

Anyway, women's reproductive rights are under assault right now in our country, right? Women's ability to have autonomy over their own bodies. And again, we see, in fact, FFRF did some excellent research on their own membership. I consider members of FFRF the most committed to the secularist cause.

What do we see among supporting women's reproductive rights: 98.8 percent of active secular voters and FFRF members support women's reproductive rights. Yes, that is the highest rate there.

Race and racism. The deep poison, the deep crimes of this nation. Right. Where do we stand? There was a woman, Deborah Hall at Duke, who wanted to do a study on racism and religion. And she wanted to show how the religious care more about racism, are concerned more about racism, particularly, she's talking about white Americans here. She gathered every legitimate national sample

she could find that had a representative sample of folks about correlating religiosity to racism to see where Americans fell. And surprise, surprise, what was her finding? Agnostics, atheists and secular humanists reported the lowest levels of racism compared to all other religions. There it was.

And we see this time and time again, which is interesting because both the secular and the religious tell a kind of story about the unity of humanity. Every religion claims that there's this Daddy God — we're all this Daddy God's children, so we're all brothers and sisters.

Secular humanists know a different story. It's that we all come from primates. One story has data and evidence to support it. The other is a myth.

What's interesting is where do we fall — those of us who accept the scientific, evidence-based notion of all being one, we live that out more, we act out that more and even in our politics reflect that. That's not to say we don't have a racism problem. It's hard to live in the United States and not internalize that racism. And, yet, on these measures, the best measures we have, the more secular you are, the less likely you are to express those and act on those. And I'm proud of that.

I've got some more data here. Among Americans who believe that racial discrimination is a major problem in the United States, 76 percent of all Americans say so. But 96 percent of active secular members like you say it is such.

Whether it's LGBTQ rights, whether it's animal rights, whether it's to stem gun violence, whether it's caring for the well-being of democracy, whether it's helping refugees fleeing suffering, whether it's supporting death with dignity, on issue after issue after issue that actually relates to how people experience the world and whether they're going to suffer or thrive, secular humanists come down on the moral, ethical side and the more religious folks on the opposite.

And this needs to be known, and this needs to be trumpeted, and this needs to be hammered.

That's the what. So, now the question is, why does it play out this way?

Empathy and compassion

I would argue that the foundations are quite different. When you accept that there's no magical beings out there, and it's just us on this planet spinning around, you tend to frame your morality or base it on empathy and compassion. For each

one of those issues that I've raised, you just go there, not on obedience to an imaginary and vengeful god.

We base our worldview on a here-and-nowness. I'm sure there's a word for that in German that's just perfect. But we don't really have that in English. But we live in the here and now rather than living our lives yearning for pie in the sky. That's going to affect decisions we make, plans we make, politicians we support, things we care about.

One of the issues that my students ask me, "What's so bad about religion, Phil?" That's a good question. We got to be able to answer that. But one of them is, in every study we have: The more religious you are, the more tribalistic you are. Religiosity and tribalism, xenophobia, nationalism are highly correlated. Again, that's not to say there are some secularists out there who are xenophobic and tribalistic and so on. However, the correlation is robust that we are actually more cosmopolitan, meaning we see ourselves as citizens of the world much more than the religious, who see themselves much more in terms of their membership to a particular tribe, a particular group which is conducive toward ingroup sympathy and outgroup antipathy.

And we all have to struggle with that. It's part of our evolutionary past. But somehow, for some reason, the secular folks have progressed farther along on expanding that circle, as Peter Singer talked about.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Phil Zuckerman says the question is not “How can you be moral if you don’t believe in God?,” but “How can you be moral IF you believe in God?”

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CRANKMAIL

This issue's edition of Crankmail features not-so-lucid arguments from those who are less educationally inclined. Printed as received.

Crosses: Quit bitching about the 3 crosses in my town. You don't live here fucking bitches. Fuck nuts like you is the reason Clint Eastwood called this generation pussies. We proudly display our 4 crosses in this Town if you don't like it fuck you and your momma the whore that birthed your whiny pussy ass. — *Taylor Macomb*

Wrong: You can try to scare us or threaten us all you want but it will not work. We will just put more crosses up all over the hills of Tennessee and on every hill in every city of the United States. It is called the freedom of religion and there is nothing written in any federal document stating a separation of church and state, nor is it implied anywhere either. — *Russ Veldman*

F-You!: !Assholes like you fucks: Go fuck yourself you unAmerican pieces of shit — *Jake Devillers*

Satanic foundation: By stopping your existence. You try to remove prayers from schools, you can choose to hear a prayer, just like I can choose to not look at rainbow flags or LGBTQ people. Maybe there should be a FREEDOM FROM GAYNESS FOUNDATION to offset this one. You dont wanna hear a prayer, then take a bathroom break or crunch on potato chips

instead, but stop this madness. Freedom from religion is IGNORING IT, not REMOVING it. — *Arnold Carter*

Mind your own business: You can keep your stupid demon thoughts to yourself. Worry about your own evil and leave Tennessee alone. If we wanted your opinion, we would have asked for it. We are kind people, unlike you. It's none of your business what other states have so get over yourself. — *Jessie Petersen*

So sad: Just reading an article where you guys have stopped prayer before football games in our state. I'm truly heartbroken for the members of this organization. The fact that you guys obviously do not know or love the Lord, the God that created YOU, is heartbreaking. Prayer is all we have and to be able to go before the God of this universe to ask for protection over these players, is just devastating that you've stopped this. Where does your hope lie? Because my hope is in Jesus Christ. Something/someone that will never falter or leave me. And I pray this organization will crumble because you guys are missing the truth that lies right before your eyes. — *Kristen Howard*

Shame on you: Stop running those awful ads. The world needs God now more than ever so keep your smarmy words to yourself. You're commuting the one sin that won't be forgiven, damn fools. God isn't just a "rumor" going around since the beginning of time. — *Tammy*

And finally, another sort of cardinal virtue for secular folks is scientific empiricism. We are interested in things like data and evidence and research, and we tend to heed it. We know it's not perfect. We know it's flawed, but we know that it is a method that is self-improving.

Whenever science comes up, some student always says, "Oh, science is terrible. Science has done so many bad things. Science has made so many mistakes. They said this and then that was wrong. And they said this and that was wrong." I was like, "Well, you could only prove that was wrong through better science. How did you know that was wrong? How did you know that was harmful? There's only one way to know how many teeth are in a horse's mouth. And that's to count."

We understand this sort of value of the scientific method rather than rely on myths, fantasies and prayers. And that's not to say that some people in really tough situations need myths, fantasies and prayers to get through the night. I understand that. But our job, as I see it, is to address the conditions that are producing the suffering, not simply provide myths and fantasies in the wake of that suffering. To me, that's not the way to do it. And we're actually living that in the choices we make, the pursuits we pursue, and the political choices we make.

That's the good news as far as I'm concerned. Thank you so much for listening.

What they’re saying about the coach prayer case

It’s ironic that at a time when the Right is suddenly so committed to “parental involvement” in public schooling they’ve taken up as a folk hero a public school employee who could be reasonably seen as “indoctrinating” unwilling students through coercive measures. . . . What the Kennedy case presents is a gateway into how the radical right begins to weaponize public education in an overt attempt to solidify white Christian authority, a favorite red-meat issue for their rabid and increasingly volatile base.

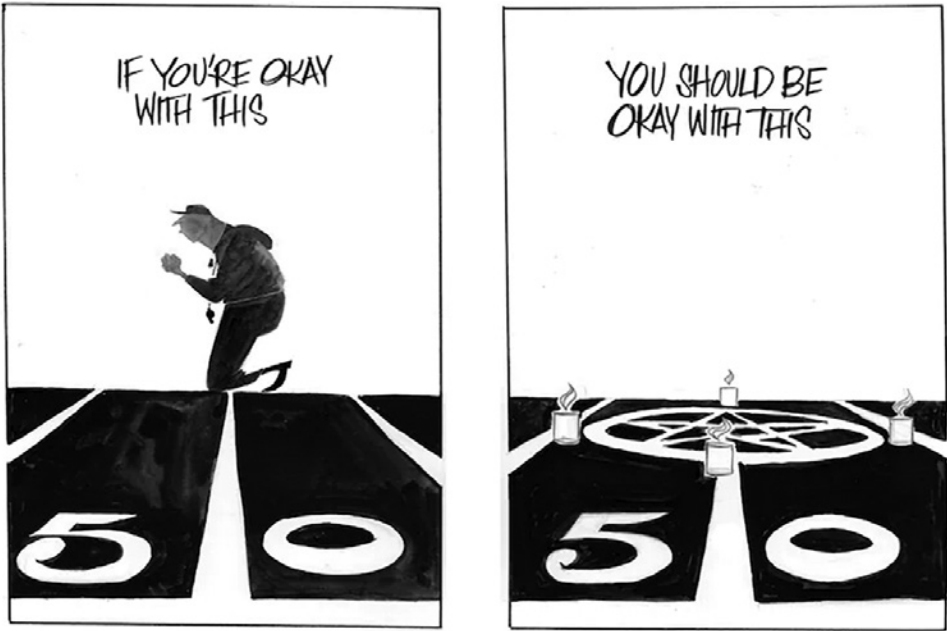
Danielle Moody, in her column, “Conservatives will use the fight over prayer in schools to attack diversity.”
The Daily Beast, 4-27-22

Contrary to what religious conservatives often seem to believe, the separation of church and state isn’t an attack on religious freedom but a defense of it. A person’s religious belief (or the lack of it) is a personal matter in which government should have no role. . . . Given the court’s rightward lean today, many believe justices might weaken the wall between government and religion. That would be a dangerous slippery slope for believers and nonbelievers alike.

Newspaper editorial, “Religion case will test if justices really are originalists, or just partisans.”
St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 4-25-22

Every few months, another conservative Christian media darling arrives at the Supreme Court, claiming they have been victimized by oppressive government agents wielding the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause against them. And every time, they get a sympathetic hearing from the conservatives on the court. That’s because the court’s project to whittle the separation of church and state down to a sliver is proceeding inexorably in one direction. . . . The story the right tells about Kennedy is one of a humble, pious coach who wanted only to engage in private prayer after games and was persecuted by his employer as a result. That story is a complete distortion of the facts in this case. But it’s a common one, in which conservatives claim that if they are not allowed to impose their religion on others, then they have been victimized and the Constitution must bend to accommodate them.

Paul Waldman, in his column, “The Supreme Court’s threat to the separation of church and state.”
Washington Post, 4-26-22



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So long as the public morality around democratic institutions is cast in terms of pencil pushers and rules, there will never again be a public health, education, child welfare, or other mandate that cannot be brushed aside with the argument that a lone person of faith is suffering under its heartless, bureaucratic strictures.

Dahlia Lithwick, in her article “The holy morality of the Supreme Court’s most sympathetic plaintiffs.”
Slate, 4-27-22

The hostility that we are seeing from these justices seems to reflect a perspective that separation has somehow been forced upon the court. . . . It’s very strange, because this is a principle that the court has roundly endorsed over the years, but now they act like it’s an alien concept.

. . . The court seems to be moving toward what we might call “one-sided separation,” committed mostly just to protecting religious communities against government regulation. . . . When it comes to government support of religion, religious expression the public square, I suspect we are going to see a very low and broken wall going forward.

Legal scholar Stephen K. Green, author of *Separating Church and State: A History*, as quoted in the article, “The decline of church-state separation.”
Religion and Politics, 4-26-22

Most likely, the court will leave in place some of the current rules against schools actively pressuring their students into religious behavior, while also taking a huge bite out of the Constitution’s Establishment Clause. . . . A majority of the justices seemed eager to shrink this constitutional provision significantly. . . . At the very least, it appears likely that public school teachers, coaches and other school officials will gain some ability to subtly pressure students into religious activity that students, or their parents, may find objectionable.

Ian Millhiser, in his column, “The Religious Right had a great day in the Supreme Court.”
Vox.com, 4-25-22

Perhaps Coach Kennedy’s pastor — not his principal — should have counseled him not to lead postgame prayers with kids he has power over. These prayers were public, not private. They were teacher-planned, not student-led. . . . Emboldened conservative justices will open the door to more nominal, cultural Christianity. It seems that in the era of former President Donald Trump and his judges, that’s all so-called conservative Christians really want.

Jacob Lupfer, a self-described Christian, in his column, “The Supreme Court debates public prayer. So should we.”
Religion News Service, 4-26-22

To suggest that Coach Kennedy’s young players feel free to join, or not

join, his prayer session is to simply ignore what anyone who’s played football well knows. Of necessity, coaches have coercive power. . . . High school players are especially beholden to their coach. They don’t want to jeopardize their playing time by displeasing him. Imagine being a 16-year-old kid on Coach Kennedy’s team. The game is over. He’s convening a meeting and giving a motivational speech. That’s what coaches do all the time. The players are crowding around him, there’s maybe even someone there who’s vying for the same position as you. Are you going to turn your back and skip the group meeting?

Former NFL player Frank Lambert, in his column, “A Steelers punter on church and state.”
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 4-21-22

The court is moving in the direction of encouraging religion to enter the public square and to infuse government. And there never has been a period since the 19th century when the court was that willing to just let the wall of separation between church and state down. . . . Religious and political or governmental institutions should stay as far apart as possible if the society is not to tear itself apart.

Laurence Tribe, professor of constitutional law at Harvard, as quoted in the article “The court and culture wars.”
The New York Times, 5-2-22

Schoolchildren already face tremendous pressure to fit in. A coach shouldn’t add to that pressure by making them feel that following their religious tradition is a prerequisite for being part of the team. . . . Coaches, including the coach in this Supreme Court case, have every right to believe what they want. But students have rights to their religious freedom too, and it’s the duty of public school employees to protect those rights.

Carl Wilmsen, a labor activist specializing in social justice issues, in his column, “SCOTUS must protect religious freedom.”
The Progressive, 4-28-22

Bremerton

Continued from page 1

Kennedy refused an accommodation that would allow him to pray in the school building, athletic facility, press box or on the 50-yard line after his duties as coach had ended. He refused to stop making his communal prayer part of a public school sporting event.

It is entirely reasonable, and constitutional, for the Bremerton School District to make sure that an employee’s religious activity is not interfering with job duties. Ultimately, the former coach’s prayers became a spectacle and interfered with the rights of conscience of students.

At the homecoming game in 2015, Kennedy and an onslaught of pious performance artists rushed the field after the game, knocking over some stu-

dents. Kennedy invited a state legislator to join his prayer and address the team.

True religious freedom means that students are not pressured or encouraged by school staff to engage in religious activity. Religion is personal and students’ rights of conscience must not be interfered with by a coach who wants to impose religion on other people’s children.

One Bremerton parent reported that his son felt “compelled to participate” because he feared that he “wouldn’t get to play as much.”

Other parents said that their children participated in the prayers because they didn’t want to be separated from the team.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh recognized such concerns during the oral argument this week when he noted that every player “is trying to get on the good side of the coach.”

Inevitably, those with minority viewpoints, such as the third of teenagers today who have no religious affiliation, Jewish students, or even Christians who are not evangelical, become outsiders once school staff members lead students in prayer. Also, non-Christian prayers will have to be permitted on the same terms.

Those who are cheering for a “win” for Kennedy should fully consider the implications. Be careful what you wish for.

The solution to this acrimonious religious controversy has already been found. Decades of Supreme Court cases reaffirm the wisdom of separating state and church, especially in our public schools. It is students who are at risk of having their religious freedom violated, not a zealous coach who was given every opportunity to exercise his religion without interfering with the rights of others.

No student ought to be expected to pray to play, or to “get on the good side of a coach,” in a nation predicated on true religious liberty.

Patrick Elliott is senior litigation counsel at the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

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God is not on Russia’s side in invasion

By Amitabh Pal

The Russian Orthodox Church and its head, Patriarch Kirill, have appallingly defended President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and are urging Russians to support the war as well.



Photo by Chris Line
Amitabh Pal

Kirill has actively promoted Russian warmongering, bizarrely describing the nation’s mandatory military service as “an active manifestation of evangelical love for neighbors.” He also seems to have fully bought into the Russian government’s propaganda about a genocidal Ukrainian campaign to wipe out separatists in the country’s Donbass region.

Indeed, Kirill is completely in agreement with Putin’s stated rationale for the invasion — that Ukraine is a part of greater Russia. He has asserted that Russians and Ukrainians “come from one Kievan baptismal font . . . and share common historical fate.”

Kirill has also helped spread conspiracy theories, declaring that pro-Russian factions in Donbass, Ukraine, are being persecuted due to a “fundamental re-



The Russian Orthodox Church’s Patriarch Kirill meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin after liturgy in this 2013 file photo.

jection of the so-called values that are offered today by those who claim world power.” He claims this world power is posing a “test for the loyalty” of other countries by demanding that they hold gay pride parades.

Putin, for his part, has also turned to religion to fire up the Russian people. He excitedly informed a crowd gathered for a pro-war rally in a Moscow stadium that the Ukraine invasion was launched on the birth anniversary of the Russian saint Theodore Ushakov. He also quot-

ed the bible, saying, “There is no greater love than if someone gives his soul for his friends.”

The alliance between Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church stretches back many years. In 2009, Kirill blessed Russia’s nuclear arsenal, handing out religious images to the crew of a nuclear submarine and the commander of Russia’s strategic missile forces. These weapons, he said, could only be given to people “with a clear mind, an ardent love of the Motherland, responsible for

their work before God and the people.” Kirill then completely supported Putin during protests in 2011-12 against electoral fraud.

He even called Putin’s reign a “miracle of God” for the benefits it provided.

The 2012 sentencing of a feminist punk group, Pussy Riot, for holding a protest inside a Moscow cathedral to express opposition to both Kirill and Putin cemented the union even further.

Not long after, Putin passed a law, fervently backed by the church, outlawing distribution of LGBTQ materials to minors.

Following his invasion of Crimea, Putin built a gargantuan monument called the Victory Church in Moscow’s Patriot Square, at a cost of \$50 million. There are weapons displayed at the entrance and paintings inside touting the achievements of Russian militarism. Around the same time, Putin installed a statue of Vladimir the Great — the person who is said to have made Russia Christian — near the Kremlin.

The tight bond between Putin’s government and the Russian Orthodox Church has manifested itself all the way from the Kremlin to Ukraine, with horrible results. It is a connection that should be repudiated by people of faith — and those without it — all over the world.

Amitabh Pal is FFRF’s communications director. This article was sent out through The Progressive and the Tribune News Service.

Darrow continues to shine



The Clarence Darrow statue outside the Rhea County Courthouse in Dayton, Tenn., now stands freshly cleaned and polished. The site is home to the famous Scopes “monkey” trial in 1925, where Darrow defended Scopes and William Jennings Bryan was the prosecutor.

Photos by Anthony Tesori



Real Van Breda (on the scaffolding), Eliot Specht (on the ladder) and Carl Ledendecker of the FFRF East Tennessee Chapter put the finishing touches on the cleaning and polishing of the Clarence Darrow statue in Dayton, Tenn. “It only took a little over an hour to get the statue looking really nice!” chapter President Aleta Ledendecker said. “There was a large group of tourists from Louisville who came by during the cleaning and wanted to know more about what we were doing. They applauded the work of FFRF!”



Carl Ledendecker wipes down the base of the Darrow statue, which was created by sculptor Zenos Frudakis. FFRF was the majority underwriter for the statue project which was dedicated in July 2017.

LETTERBOX

Right-wing Catholics dominate Supreme Court

The leaked draft of the 5-4 Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* is the direct result of four ultraconservative Roman Catholics on the court who were nominated and confirmed in the knowledge that they would never vote against the “sacred teachings” of “Holy Mother, the Church” and would vote to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and vote against LGBTQ rights. The fifth vote to overturn will come from Neil Gorsuch, a former Catholic conservative who is now a Protestant conservative.

Six of the last seven Republican Supreme Court nominees have been right-wing Catholics, even though that group comprises a small percentage of the U.S. population. These appointments and confirmations were made in direct violation of the Constitution’s “no religious test” clause.

This will be the first time in U.S. history that a constitutional right has been taken away from citizens, and not conferred on them, by the Supreme Court. There needs to be a backlash. We will no longer be a secular democracy if there are no consequences for our theocratic foes, who are just getting started.

New York

When I was in college, my girlfriend became pregnant and had a scary and illegal abortion that was successful. In the aftermath, we wanted to be sure nothing like this ever happened again (without abstention)!

We found Dr. Henry Morgentaler in Montreal, who discovered a way to modify a stomach pump so that it could effectively remove a fetus from the uterus. He started a clinic and, before long, had 20 clinics. Abortions were inexpensive and I never heard of any complications.

He was eventually arrested for performing abortions. Finally, in 1988, the Canadian Supreme Court overturned his criminal conviction in a precedent-making decision legalizing abortion.

He later was the first president of the Humanist Association of Canada. Has FFRF paid tribute to this brilliant and good man?

California

Editor’s note: Yes, he is included in FFRF’s Freethought of the Day series. Go to ffrf.org/news/day.

Roe v. Wade decision is a religious conceit

Why is that the pending decision of the U.S. Supreme Court to strike down *Roe v. Wade* is characterized by the media only as a ruling by conservative justices? Let’s insert the adjective that most aptly applies — religious and in particular, Catholic and evangelical. This is the truly appalling nature of the draft *Roe* ruling. These justices are seeking to impose their personal religious beliefs on the country via legal rulings which will have a profound impact on certain laws and the civil rights those laws protect and uphold.

The conservative attorney general of Louisiana was recently interviewed on a PBS news program, and she could



barely contain her glee over the likely *Roe* decision’s “protection of unborn babies.” This is an entirely religious conceit, since the medical and scientific facts have established that a fetus is not viable outside the womb prior to 24 weeks, and its removal does not constitute taking a human life.

The chilling aspect of the interview was that the attorney general made it quite obvious in her refusal to answer a direct question on the subject, that Christian nationalists like her would use the high court’s basis for overturning *Roe* to proceed with the removal of existing rights in other areas, such as gay marriage. And she has a lot of company. Red states are filled with many office holders on the local and national level who would like nothing better than to replace our democratic republic with a theocracy, and to hell with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

If all of this is not sufficient to fully galvanize the pro-choice voters throughout the country, it will be very surprising. Hope springs eternal.

California

Candidate’s slogan could be read differently

Looking at Georgia governor candidate Kandis Taylor’s campaign slogan, I think some people might not notice that “Jesus Guns Babies” is actually a well-formed sentence. I wonder if she is going to make a drawing of him using an AR-15 in a delivery room.

South Carolina

Hutchinson speech was off-putting to this member

It takes a lot to get me to sit down and write a letter to the editor of my oldest and favorite charity. But the proverbial straw finally broke this camel’s back.

I found the March 2022 convention speech article, “Check your white privilege, freethinkers,” by Sikivu Hutchinson to be disturbing, distasteful, condescending and needlessly accusatory.

The irony was absolutely surrealistic: A preacher of the new religion of woke racism and identity politics preaching dogma, original sin and hellfire to an audience of mostly liberal, mature

white atheists.

While I do recognize the good works and intentions of Hutchinson, was the language of blame and exhortation necessary or advisable?

Florida

We have to prepare for post-Roe response

An errand unavoidably led me past a Crisis Pregnancy Center located a block from where I live. A scene playing out in the parking lot gave the impression of a patient who fled the clinic moments before and was pursued by a clinic worker. Neither woman had a coat on in the freezing February weather. A wild-eyed expression of shock and panic was on the young woman’s face.

I wondered what medical lie, conversion tactic or heavy-handed adoption ultimatum by the Crisis Pregnancy Center had compelled her fight-or-flight reaction. In a microsecond, I silently cheered the young woman’s instinct to flee, and considered some sort of intervention. My decision, derived from reading Robin Marty’s *Handbook for a Post-Roe America*, was to step back and live to fight another day. The instant I got home I made another donation to Women’s Medical Fund.

Not long afterward, I read Barbara Alvarez’s article about Crisis Pregnancy Centers. The implications of that article reinforced my decision to disengage.

It is obvious that we will all need to cultivate canniness and caution in action and speech. We will need a clear understanding of if, when and how much private or public advocacy is a match for individual levels of jeopardy.

As a pragmatic optimist, I wonder

Lead Us Not Into Penn Station
Provocative Pieces
By Anne Gaylor
A must-have for any freethinker, this gracefully readable book contains Gaylor’s classic writings.
—Published by FFRF. 80 pages / PB
Buy it from FFRF online @ ffrf.org/shop

how to respond in favor of abortion access in an environment of post-*Roe* criminalization. It would gall me to miss a single opportunity to speak up! I am counting on FFRF to frame the discussion in its customary ethical and legal contexts. Thank you for keeping the discussion alive.

I think about the young woman frequently, and hope that everything ended well for her.

Wisconsin

‘Godly’ school board member should resign

I am appalled that Miami-Dade School Board member Lubby Navarro not only proposes school prayer, but proclaims that “Jesus is the only God”! Apparently, Navarro is unfamiliar with American history and democracy. She should read the writings of the Founding Fathers (who were largely deist), which clearly opposed government mandates of religion and advocated separation of church and state. The United States was founded as, and is, constitutionally a secular nation.

Freedom of religion allows Navarro to practice her religion as she sees fit, but it does not sanction imposing her beliefs on others who do not share them. Freedom from religion is equally important as freedom of religion. It is not just question of minority religions being affected, but also a large number of Americans who are nonbelievers.

The only decent thing for the school board to do is to ask for her resignation.

Florida

A simpler explanation for Mary’s pregnancy

Although Gary Larson’s “Quick summary of a current belief system” [in the April issue] is very good, I have had some thoughts, perhaps inspired by God, but probably just my reaction considering Occam’s razor: The simplest explanation is usually correct.

I don’t think Joseph would have accepted Mary’s explanation. She was a young girl who was being taken care of by a Jewish facility and a powerful religious official in the facility had impregnated her. In order to keep his position and avoid stoning, the official concocted a story which claimed God impregnated Mary. Coming from him, that would be acceptable to Joseph (and everyone else). Then Mary and Joseph married and traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem so his friends would be none the wiser.

Another item useful to developing Christianity is the idea that Mary ac-

The Born Again Skeptic’s Guide to the Bible
By Ruth Hurmence Green
A Missouri grandmother debunks the bible as no one has debunked it since Thomas Paine.
—Published by FFRF. 440 pages / PB
Buy it from FFRF online ffrf.org/shop

tually had twins — two identical boys (see the Acts of Thomas). Although the details were not released to me, I could easily devise a story where no one knew there were two of Jesus, where the second Jesus still lived in Bethlehem, and only showed up in Jerusalem three days after hearing about the crucifixion of his brother. Now there’s no need for miracles.

Florida

Religious demonstrations are always Christian

In all the debate over separation of church and state, and over school prayers, crosses on government land, slabs of commandments in court rooms and the like, it strikes me it may be easier to win the cases by pointing out that these public demonstrations of religion are particular for one religion, namely Christianity. It should be blindingly obvious to any pro-democracy Christian politician or judge that government favoritism to one religion can never be condoned as we are not a Christian theocracy. What people do in private is different, of course. That is apart from that small matter of the Constitution.

Pennsylvania

Let’s push back against religious intrusion

I was thinking about all the different ways communities or schools are trying to push religion onto unsuspecting citizens. What if, when they send out a flyer or bible verse, another one is sent that is the antithesis to the one being sent?

I am currently in the middle of FFRF’s book, *The Not So Good Book*. After reading in Freethought Today of all these efforts to foist religion on the community and reading what’s stated in the book, why not show how bad the bible actually is? I understand that some areas may be off limits, especially with certain ages of kids, but I believe these fundamentalists should be battled and stood up against with their very own words. Their hypocrisy would get them into fits after people start asking questions, which would hopefully accelerate the church exodus. This would be especially emphasized with abortion. The bible states in certain verses that women and children should be killed. That’s the antithesis of their current stance on abortion. What other books reference murder and genocide in the way the bible does and are allowed on public school bookshelves?

I am getting tired and a bit jaded with all these religious fanatics getting a pulpit and not being squared up against, or, at least, some sort of



FFRF Member Dave C. of North Carolina sent us this photo. He writes: “We visited Santa Fe, N.M., and went by the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. I found the gift shop sign just outside the entrance to be most amusing. Never miss an opportunity to ‘fleece the flock.’”

national PR campaign pointing out how bad the bible is.

My feelings are that our current state of affairs will only get worse before it gets better, but since religion has been around for this long, my thoughts turn dim on the prospect of a more positive outcome in the future.

Oregon

FFRF at the vanguard of necessary change

I wish to thank FFRF and its new legal fellows. We, FFRF, and these law school grads are at the vanguard of the change that is so desperately needed. One day, there will be no distinctions such as LGBTQ and binary, etc. The world will come to realize that we are all people in one group and FFRF will have helped bring that about.

Kentucky

Column on Satan was a devilishly good read

I thoroughly enjoyed PJ Slinger’s essay about the devil in the May issue, though its many twists and turns made my head spin. You’re right, PJ, the devil’s in the humorous details. Great fun!

Arizona

The need for FFRF’s work is increasing

I am 82 and decided to make a legacy gift to FFRF now as the need for protection of our freedoms from theocrats is increasing. I had the good fortune to be raised by parents who did not attend church. A couple of brushes with Christianity — once in my teens and again in my mid-30s — only made me more aware of the church’s bizarre myths and extreme atrocities.

Rhode Island

April issue was filled with interesting info

Once again, I found much in the April issue of Freethought Today that struck a chord with me.

In the Letterbox, Michael Brandt suggested that those who trust in divine intervention “pay in cash and go to the back of the line” because of their effects on our health care systems. Perhaps a better solution would be simply to suggest that they be consistent in their beliefs. If they get Covid, they should continue to trust in divine intervention and stay home. Throughout the pandemic, my heart has gone out to the poor health care workers overwhelmed by caseloads of

Write to us

To send a letter to the editor for Freethought Today, please email it to editor@ffrf.org.

the unvaccinated and devastated by losing patients who trusted in divine intervention only until it didn’t work.

I appreciated the speech by Megan Phelps-Roper in that it gave a good example of how you “catch more flies with sugar . . .” A respectful discussion is much more likely to cause people to question their traditions than making fun of them will.

There was also much of interest in “In the News.” The bill allowing people to sue teachers if they offer religious views opposing those of their students might not be such a bad idea. It would only take one atheist student per classroom. Seriously, it might finally result in true separation of church and state. Assuming that teachers have the usual mix of religions in their classrooms (even if they’re all Christian), they wouldn’t be able to say anything religious, for fear of offering a view opposed to the view of some student.

It was also interesting to learn that atheists are underrepresented in U.S. federal prisons. Such data would be useful when speaking to those who worry about the ethics of atheists.

Thanks for another interesting issue. I just got my May issue today, so I will begin wending my way through it as time allows. It’s so nice to have a community of people who think the way I do.

Colorado

Our protests helped move prayer events

Small victories are always welcome. Last year the Warren, Mich., National Day of Prayer event was celebrated at Ascension Macomb Hospital, a Catholic hospital. This year, the National Day of Prayer in Warren will be celebrated at De La Salle High School, a Catholic high school. This is where the celebration belongs.

I think our having 25 people protest the event at the City Hall in 2019 was successful in getting this event moved to an appropriate location. Thank you for all of you who participated in the 2019 protest.

Michigan

Don Addis cartoon book was enjoyable

We enjoyed *Cartoons for the Irreverent* very much. I wish Don Addis had lived to witness the Trump presidency. Endless material would have been presented for him and his pen.

California

Crossword answers

C	A	B	A	L		A	M	P		D	E	L	E	
B	R	A	V	E		B	O	A		S	I	B	Y	L
S	A	T	I	N		L	A	N		U	M	B	R	A
	B	E	A	G	L	E		D	I	N	E	S	E	N
			N	T	H		N	A	O	H				
D	A	L		H	A	Z	E		N	A	M	I	N	G
E	G	I	S		S	O	U	R		T	U	B	E	R
V	I	C	E		A	L	T	E	R		S	E	R	E
I	L	I	A	D		A	R	I	A		K	A	V	A
L	E	T	R	I	P		A	N	N	A		M	E	T
			V	E	I	L		C	R	T				
M	A	S	T	E	R	S		C	H	O	I	C	E	
A	T	L	A	S		S	E	A		U	N	A	R	M
C	O	O	P	T		U	R	N		S	E	P	I	A
E	P	E	E		E	A	T		E	A	S	E	D	

Cryptogram answer

Religion punishes questioning and rewards gullibility. Faith is not a function of stupidity but a frequent cause of it.

— Wendy Kaminer

FFRF’s ‘Freethought Matters’ mug

Celebrate FFRF’s TV show.... because freethought matters! Ivory imprint on burgundy with a glossy finish. 8 fl. oz. American made mug.

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FFRF convention, Oct. 28-30

On to San Antonio!

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation in San Antonio for its 45th annual convention from Oct. 28-30 at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio. (For information on the guest speakers, see page 6.)

General schedule

The official starting time of the convention at the Hyatt Regency is 9 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 28, continuing through Saturday night. Registration will open by 8 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 28. FFRF's membership and State Representatives meetings will take place Sunday morning, ending by noon.

The conference will offer an optional Thursday 4-6 p.m. appetizer/cash bar reception and early registration.

Plan to come early and/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.

Return the handy registration form on the right or sign up at ffrf.us/2022convention.

Registration

Registration for the convention is only \$75 per FFRF member, \$80 for a companion accompanying a member, \$130 for nonmembers (or you can save money by becoming a member for \$40). High school students or younger are free and the college student rate is \$25.

Make your room reservations directly (see info box on this page). We encourage you to register early and book your hotel rooms as soon as possible. Sorry, only partial refunds after the Oct. 10 registration deadline. After Oct. 23, no refunds will be issued.

Optional Group Meals

We've provided meals with the most commonly requested dietary preferences. Please specify other requirements on the registration form under ADA/food allergy accommodations.

Friday Grab & Go Box Lunch (\$60)

Grilled Vegetable Wrap (Vegan)

Wrap of baby greens stuffed with a duo of grilled zucchini and roasted butternut squash with sweet, roasted pecans and wrapped in a spinach tortilla spread with roasted red pepper hummus

Garden Salad with Grilled Chicken (gluten free)

Grilled chicken garden salad with baby lettuce, grape tomatoes, artichoke hearts, cucumbers, candied pecans, dried cranberries with grilled chicken breast, served with a creamy balsamic vinaigrette

Turkey Sandwich

Oven roasted breast of turkey with early harvest lettuces, provolone and slices of cucumber on a potato bun and maple-pumpkin butter cream cheese

Friday Dinner Reception (\$65)

Hearty reception with beef steamship for carving with horseradish cream, au jus and mini rolls; pulled BBQ pork slider with pickled onions on sesame roll; ranch spiced chicken satay with tomato BBQ dip; vegan jackfruit al pastor quesadillas with roasted corn, black beans, Monterrey Jack cheese served with mango salsa; crudité's with poblano hummus and spinach dip; Southwest Caesar salad (charred corn, black beans and croutons with Ancho Caesar dressing); self-serve mac & cheese station (white cheddar mac & cheese tossed with green chiles, mushroom and caramelized onions). Cash bar provided.

Saturday Nonprayer Breakfast (\$55)

Eggs, potato, bacon, and fruit cup service. Vegetarians will receive "melted" tomato in place of bacon. Vegan meal is vegan scrambled eggs with melted tomatoes and vegan cranberry orange scone. Beverages are orange juice, coffee and tea.

Saturday Dinner (\$95)

Caesar salad (heart of romaine, aged Parmesan, smoked garlic ciabatta croutons with creamy Caesar dressing); seared chicken breast with jalapeno-apricot glaze, melted leek and bacon jam; mascarpone risotto, and mixed cauliflower. The vegetarian option is



The Hyatt Regency San Antonio is home to the 2022 FFRF convention.

roasted acorn squash stuffed with vegetables and herb quinoa, coriander spiced carrot puree and aged saba. The vegan/gluten-free option is vegetable ravioli, wilted spinach, asparagus tips, charred cauliflower, tomato-caper sauce. Dessert is chocolate cappuccino cake with vanilla whipped cream or vegan/gluten free chocolate-banana mousse with fresh berries. Beverages are coffee and tea. Cash bar provided.

Please note that meal costs reflect the cost to FFRF; we do not mark up these prices.

Room Reservations

If you need an accessible room, please state your needs when you make the reservation. Indicate you're with the "Freedom From Religion Foundation" block.

Hyatt Regency San Antonio

123 Losoya
San Antonio, TX 78205
210-451-6200, ffrf.us/hotel
\$205 (single/double occupancy)
\$215 (triple/quadruple occupancy)
Cutoff date is Sat., Oct. 1, 2022.

State and local taxes (currently 16.75%) and fees will apply. Group rate includes standard internet.

Overflow options

Hilton Garden Inn Downtown San Antonio

408 E Houston St.
San Antonio, TX 78205
210-222-8811

Rates are \$149 for single or double occupancy. Cutoff date is Sat., Oct. 1, 2022. In addition, state & local occupancy taxes of 16.75% and a city tourism fee of 1.25% apply.

Valet parking, subject to availability, is \$33 plus tax of 8.25% per night per vehicle.

Menger Hotel

204 Alamo Plaza
San Antonio, TX 78205
Phone: 210-223-4361

Toll-free 24-hour reservations: 800-345-9285

Rates are \$139 for single through quadruple occupancy. Cutoff date is Sat., Oct. 8.

In addition, state & local occupancy taxes of 16.75% and a city tourism fee of 1.25% apply.

If guest leaves earlier than the scheduled departure date when guest is in-house at the hotel, there will be a charge of \$75, plus 16.75% tax. Cancellations less than 48 hours prior to arrival will be assessed one night's room and tax.

Overnight parking, subject to availability, is \$18 plus 8.25% tax.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

NATIONAL CONVENTION

SAN ANTONIO | OCTOBER 28-30, 2022

45TH CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: ffrf.us/2022convention

REGISTRATION FEES	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___	\$75 \$ ___
Spouse or Companion (Non-member accompanying member)	___	\$80 \$ ___
Child (High school or under accompanying registrant)	___	Free \$ ___
College Student with ID	___	\$25 \$ ___
<input type="checkbox"/> I am interested in hotel, meal or travel scholarship		
Non-member	___	\$130 \$ ___
<input type="checkbox"/> Or, I will join FFRF for \$40 (and save \$15)	___	\$115 \$ ___

OPTIONAL MEALS / EVENTS

We've provided meals with the most commonly requested dietary preferences. Please specify other requirements below under ADA or food allergy accommodations.

Friday, October 28

Grab & Go Box Lunch				___\$60	\$___
Registrant 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Chicken Salad (Gluten Free)	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetable Wrap (Vegan)	<input type="checkbox"/> Turkey Sandwich		
Registrant 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Chicken Salad (Gluten Free)	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetable Wrap (Vegan)	<input type="checkbox"/> Turkey Sandwich		

Friday Dinner Reception					___\$65	\$___
Registrant 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegan	<input type="checkbox"/> Gluten Free		
Registrant 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegan	<input type="checkbox"/> Gluten Free		

Saturday, October 29

Non-Prayer Breakfast					___\$55	\$_____
Registrant 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegan	<input type="checkbox"/> Gluten Free		
Registrant 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegan	<input type="checkbox"/> Gluten Free		

Saturday Dinner			___\$95	\$_____
Registrant 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Chicken	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian Stuffed Squash	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegan/Gluten Free Ravioli	
Registrant 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Chicken	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian Stuffed Squash	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegan/Gluten Free Ravioli	

► Total \$ _____

☐ I am adding a donation to sponsor student convention scholarships. \$ _____

Please tell us about any ADA or food allergy accommodations needed in order to fully participate.

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

- ☐ I attest that I and my guests will be fully vaccinated for Covid-19 as of 10/14/22.
☐ I attest that I have a physician's order against my vaccination.

Name of Registrant 1

Name of Registrant 2

☐ I am including additional registrants (enclose your additional list, with meals, if any).

Address

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Phone* Email*

Credit Card Number Expiration Date / Security Code

Billing Name / Signature *Contact information for in-house use only

Registration deadline October 10, 2022 (Unless event is sold out)
Registration cancellations received Oct. 11 through Oct. 23 may be refunded, less a \$25 cancellation fee. After Oct. 23, no refunds will be provided.