

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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and wins**

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to make a
difference'**

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Daley dose of secularism



On April 6, FFRF's Metropolitan Chicago Chapter placed colorful banners in Daley Plaza promoting the secular views of the Founders. Supporters who helped erect the display are, from left, Rick Schuch, Bob Hunter, Shane Stapley and Steve Foulkes.

"This is to counter and protest a religious prayer shrine that's placed annually on government property by a private Catholic organization during the so-called 'Christian holy week,'" says chapter President Steve Foulkes.

Are courts returning to Victorian Era laws?

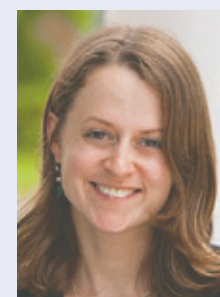
Comstock Act may be used to deny women access to abortion pill

This article first appeared on Slate.com on April 19 and is reprinted with permission. Editor's note: On April 21, the Supreme Court ruled that mifepristone would be available as the litigation plays out in a lower court.

By Mary Ziegler and Reva Siegel

The fate of mifepristone, a drug used in more than half of abortions in the United States, will now be decided by the same conservative justices who reversed *Roe v. Wade*, ending Americans' right to legal abortion after nearly half a century of access.

In its ruling on the mifepristone case on April 13, the 5th Circuit offered the Supreme Court an outline for a faux compromise: the divided three-justice panel did not revoke the original approval of mifepristone as Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk had



Mary Ziegler, a law professor at UC-Davis, is a noted abortion rights expert and advocate. She will be speaking at FFRF's national convention

Mary Ziegler

and will receive FFRF's "Forward Award." (See Page 3 for more on the convention.)

(though the appeals court seemed open to doing so at a later stage of the litigation). Instead, the 5th Circuit proposed bringing back all kinds of limits and restrictions on the drug that haven't been in effect since 2016: limiting its use to the first seven weeks of pregnancy (instead of 10 weeks) and requiring three in-person doctor visits instead of a telehealth consultation.

The kicker, though, was the 5th

See *Comstock* on page 2

Here they are! FFRF members' 6-word stories

By Bill Dunn

"Gods: a monumental waste of time" could have been a six-word headline on this piece. We asked readers in March to submit their own six-word stories about their reliance on or journey to freethought/nonbelief. Believe this: Religion took it on the chin.

FFRF received more than 125 submissions, and we've printed them all. (Because we didn't mention contractions or specify if hyphenated words counted as one or two, both qualified.)

We have also listed the states along with the names, and for those who listed their city, we have included that, too.

Thanks for engaging and your enlightening, and remember this: Even unmolested altar boys wise up!

Turn to Page 6 to read the varied and vibrant submissions from FFRF members.

Courts push religion over rights

This is the speech given by Daniel Mach on Oct. 29, 2022, at FFRF's national convention in San Antonio. He was introduced by Steven Hirtle, chair of FFRF's Executive Board. To watch the full speech, go to ffrf.us/convention-2022.

Stephen Hirtle: I am here to introduce our next speaker, and there's a little story that goes with it. In 2017, FFRF Lifetime Member extraordinaire Henry Zumach approached FFRF about creating an endowment for a new award called the Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award. Note that if you put these together, you get FFRF's FFRF award.

Hank has grown the endowment to \$35,000. I'm honored to introduce the recipient of the 2022 Henry H. Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award, which is going to the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief. Accepting the award on behalf of the program is its director, Daniel Mach.

Dan often writes, teaches and speaks about religious freedom issues. He currently serves as an adjunct professor of law at the George Washington University Law School, focusing on constitutional law and religious

liberty. We know he'll have a lot to say about both of these topics. Please come up, Dan, and accept this plaque, and the award on behalf of the ACLU.

By Daniel Mach

Good morning, everyone. The sun is shining today, the birds are singing and I'm going to ruin that all with some good old-fashioned pessimism and a little doom-saying thrown in for good measure.

First, I want to thank FFRF for hosting this wonderful event and for this honor. We at the ACLU can always count on FFRF, whom we view not only as our colleagues, but also as our friends and almost as our family. We are with you walking hand in hand or joining together on amicus briefs, supporting each other's litigation or collectively reminding the government that it should stay out of the religion business.

Ours is a special partnership, and it's a vital partnership and it's never been

more necessary. As you know all too well, we find ourselves in an unprecedented, dangerous era for religious liberty. It all starts at the top, with the U.S. Supreme Court and its ultra-conservative super majority. I'm going to talk a bit about that today.

The justices in that supermajority have embarked on an alarming project to elevate the free exercise of religion, which we at the ACLU value highly, but they're elevating it above other crucial rights and constitutional protections, and, at the same time, they are engaged in an outright assault on separation of church and state, which is, of course, a cornerstone of religious freedom.

Disturbing trend

This past Supreme Court term, two cases in particular illustrate this disturbing trend. Both were about religion in schools.

The first case was called *Carson v. Makin*, in which the court required the state of Maine to fund private religious education if it supported private secular education.

What was the case about? Briefly, it involved a school voucher-type program

See *Courts* on page 12



Photo by Chris Line
Daniel Mach

Comstock

Continued from page 1

Circuit’s deployment of the Comstock Act, the 19th-century anti-vice law that has quickly become a centerpiece of anti-abortion attacks. While the court didn’t reach a definitive conclusion, it hinted that the Comstock Act makes it a crime to mail every drug or device intended or adapted for abortion.

The mifepristone case will reveal the true commitments of the conservative Supreme Court justices who reversed Roe in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Services. In that decision, the conservative justices claimed to be returning the abortion issue to the people, but was their talk of democracy just an excuse for supporting abortion bans? Will they now go further than Dobbs’ cherry-picked history by reviving Victorian laws that women had no voice in enacting in order to continue restricting abortion access?

Last summer in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Services, the court claimed that overturning Roe and Planned Parenthood v. Casey would “heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people’s elected representatives.” But before the mifepristone litigation began, we already knew that Dobbs’ claimed commitment to democracy was merely a fig leaf barely concealing this court’s hostility to abortion.

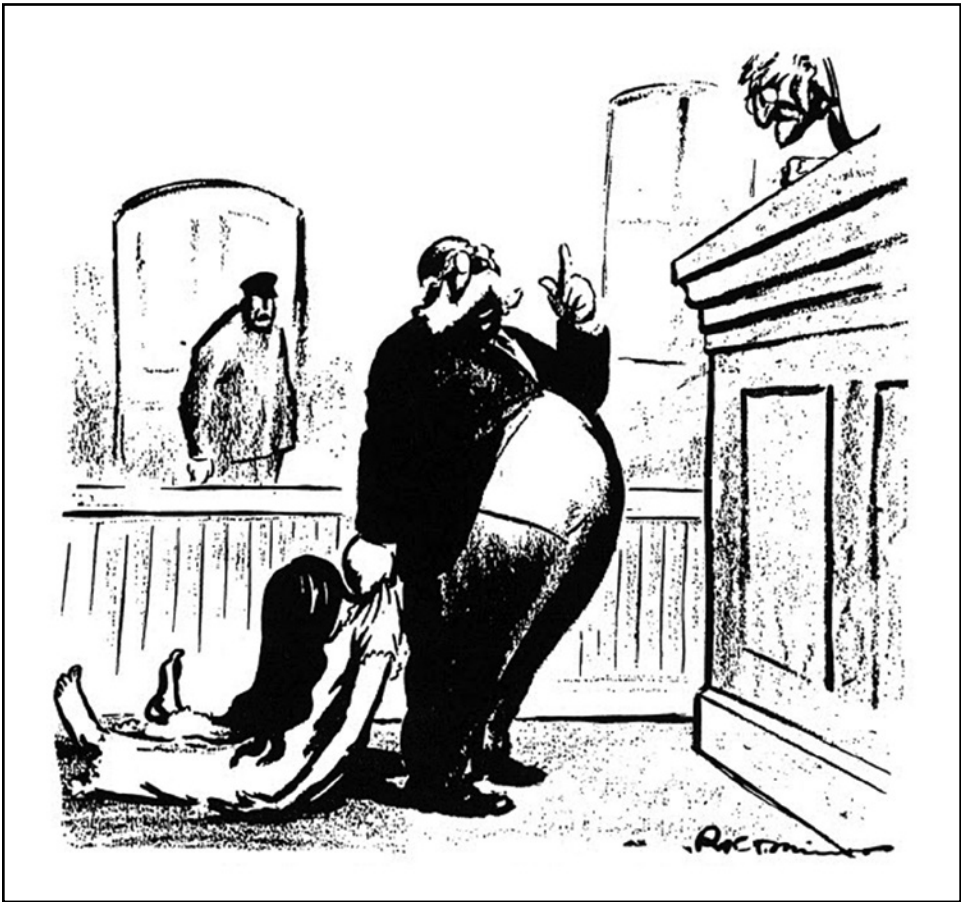
Democracy requires more than voting. As the court’s conservatives explain in cases involving armed self-defense, religious liberty and speech, constitutional democracies must protect the

basic rights of those who participate in public debate in order to insure that voting is free and fair. Few Americans would call a majority vote “democratic” if the government excluded disfavored groups of citizens from voting, imposed restrictions on speech, or denied citizens an equal opportunity to participate. Keeping this in mind, we can see that Roe and cases protecting liberties of intimate and family life are “democracy-reinforcing”: These constitutional rights supported the democratic participation of groups long excluded from public life by the traditional organization of the family.

In overturning Roe in the name of “democracy,” the Dobbs court was applying a constitutional double standard: reasoning about women’s rights as it would never reason about the rights that conservatives prefer. Dobbs’ commitment to democracy is thin at best—to take just one example, the Dobbs court talked about returning “abortion to the people’s elected representatives” without mention of women’s continuing underrepresentation in legislatures or the nation’s traditions of resistance to mothers and pregnant people serving as political leaders.

If the justices in the Dobbs majority want to demonstrate that they are serious about “returning the issue of abortion to the people’s elected representatives,” they need to reverse the Kacsmarky ruling and the 5th Circuit’s order—not only the unprecedented decision to overturn a decades-old FDA decision, but also, just as importantly, any claimed justification found in the anti-abortion provisions of the Comstock Act of 1873. The interpretation of Comstock on which Kacsmarky and the 5th Circuit rely has been rejected by federal courts for generations, and sets a standard that American voters would never support today. For a court to suddenly endorse this long-rejected view does not leave abortion law “to the people.” It instead resurrects archaic understandings of a law passed at a time when women were denied the right to vote and reflects attitudes about women that supported that exclusion.

In 1873, the year Comstock was enacted, the Supreme Court declared it was constitutional for states to prohibit women from serving as lawyers, the next year ruling that it was constitutional for states to prohibit women from voting. In this era, a woman who consented to marriage was deemed by law to consent to sex with her husband, any time, in any circumstance. Legal authorities of the era assumed that women existed to



GrangerAcademic.com

“Your Honor, this woman gave birth to a naked child!”

bear children and that law should enforce that role. The Comstock statute banned the mailing of materials related to abortion and to contraception, imposing one of the earliest bans on birth control. The Comstock law was not simply anti-sex—the law opposed information and articles enabling non-procreative sex as “immoral.” When a minister protested Comstock’s prosecution of contraception, claiming in a letter to the New York Times that “there ought to be laws ... to guard the mothers from burdens that prevent them from caring for children that they have,” Anthony Comstock attacked him as “crazy, stupidly ignorant, a very bad man at heart.”

Comstockian beliefs are increasingly visible in some parts of today’s anti-abortion movement. Powerful figures within the movement equate most contraceptives, including the birth control pill, with abortion, or argue that contraceptives increase the risk of cancer or other medical harms (they do not). Further, these groups and individuals tend to view nonprocreative sex as a threat to women’s health. These views are not shared by the majority of Americans who would not support a law banning access to abortion and birth control today.

Conservative claims on Comstock reach beyond the mifepristone case. The architects of Texas’s S.B. 8, the notorious bounty bill, are now seeking to revive Comstock because their interpretation of the long-abandoned statute would provide the modern movement what democracy never could: a national, no-exceptions ban on abortion, one so broad that it could sweep in a range of other drugs, including emergency

contraceptives and many other medicines counterindicated for pregnancy.

It doesn’t end there. Since the 1960s, the gold standard for the anti-abortion movement has been the recognition of constitutional fetal rights — something, advocates claim, that would lead to a nationwide ban on abortion. Even this Supreme Court doesn’t seem ready for that — the justices just turned down a fetal personhood case from Rhode Island. And voters aren’t interested either. To the contrary, since 2022, the abortion issue has hurt Republicans in contested congressional and state judicial races and led to a string of victories in abortion ballot initiatives for those who support reproductive rights. Polling shows that after Dobbs, there is broad-based support for abortion rights, even among Republicans. Six in 10 voters support legal abortion in most cases; just over a third want it to be entirely or mostly illegal.

That, for the anti-abortion movement, is the beauty of the Comstock Act: No one has to pass anything. Voters don’t need to agree. All that is needed is a group of federal judges willing to revive the interpretation of Comstock that prevailed during the era before women were granted the vote and constitutional rights of equal citizenship. All that is needed, in other words, is for them to ignore equality under the law and the will of Americans today.

We do not believe the justices in the Dobbs majority are committed to returning “the authority to regulate abortion to the people.” But with the meaning of Comstock and the fate of mifepristone on the line, now is the perfect chance for some of those justices to prove us wrong.



By John Cole. caglecartoons.com

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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.”

FFRF adds two more to convention line-up

Planned Parenthood Director **Jen Castle** and Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty Director **Amanda Tyler** are the two latest additions to FFRF's national convention speaker line-up. The two will each be presented with prestigious FFRF awards.



Jen Castle



Amanda Tyler

The annual membership and State Representatives meeting will take place Sunday morning, Oct. 15.

For registration and hotel information, please turn to the back page.

Accepting the \$35,000 Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award on behalf of Planned Parenthood will be Jen Castle, the national director of abortion service delivery at Planned Parenthood Federation of America. She leads a team that supports the delivery of exceptional abortion care by Planned Parenthood affiliate staff across the nation through training, mentoring, and consultation. Prior to joining the national Planned Parenthood office in 2015, she spent 14 years at PP Northern New England as a clinician, health center manager, director of abortion services, and associate medical director. Jen has worked and provided training in all abortion care clinical roles, and has been doing her heart's work as an abortion provider since 2005. She is one of a very few nurse practitioners in the country trained to perform procedures later



Cynthia McDonald of the Godless Gospel singers.

in pregnancy, and has long served as a clinical preceptor, training innumerable residents, fellows, and other advanced practice clinicians in abortion care.

Amanda Tyler will be receiving FFRF's Champion of the First Amendment Award. She is executive director of Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC), which upholds the historic Baptist principle of religious liberty; defending the free exercise of religion and protecting against its establishment by government. She is the lead organizer of BJC's Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign and co-host of BJC's "Respecting Religion" podcast. She received her J.D. from The University of Texas School of Law. She oversaw the co-production with FFRF of the report, "Christian Nationalism and the January 6, 2021 Insurrection" and testified before Congress in 2022 about the ways in which Christian nationalism provides cover for white supremacy.

Other convention speakers and award winners will include:



Emily Olson

The **Godless Gospel**, which performed for the first time at FFRF's convention in San Antonio in 2022.

Emily Olson, a member of the city council in Owosso, Mich., a town

of 15,000 residents, will receive FFRF's "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" award. She is a small business owner and new member of the council. Her refusal to stand during the Pledge of Allegiance and her brave motion to discontinue prayers to open council meetings failed by a 5-2 vote and resulted in a serious death threat.

Lizz Winstead will be given FFRF's "Emperor Has No Clothes Award." She was co-creator and head writer of Comedy



Lizz Winstead

Central's "The Daily Show," forever changing the way Americans get their news. She also co-founded Air America Radio in 2004, co-hosting "Unfiltered" every morning with Rachel Maddow and hip hop legend Chuck D. Her book of essays, *Lizz Free or Die*, was published by Riverhead Books (2012). She writes satiric commentary for a number of newspapers, does regular commentary on MSNBC and makes appearances on HBO, CNN and Comedy Central Presents. A prominent abortion rights activist, Lizz is one of the founders of Abortion Access Front, a team of comedians, writers and producers who use humor to destigmatize abortion and expose the extremist forces working to destroy reproductive rights access in all 50 states.

Kate Cohen will receive FFRF's "Free-thought Heroine" Award. She is a columnist for the Washington Post, where



Kate Cohen

she has written about America's reflexive deference to religion and its effect on education, health care and human rights. Kate is the author of *We of Little Faith: An Atheist Comes Clean (And Why You Should Too)*, forthcoming from Godine Press. She will sign copies of her book at the convention.

Mary Ziegler, a noted abortion rights expert and advocate, will receive FFRF's "Forward Award," given to those who are moving society forward. Her newest

book is *Roe: A History of a National Obsession*. Ziegler is a law professor at the University of California-Davis. She will also sign copies of her books.



Mary Ziegler

There will be a panel of secular, non-religious state legislators. Already confirmed for this panel are Minnesota state Rep. **Mike Freiberg** and Wisconsin state Sen. **Kelda Roys**.

Freiberg has served as a Minnesota state representative since 2013, after serving on the Golden Valley (Minn.) City Council for nine years. He is a founding member of the Secular Government Caucus. As a legislator, he has focused on issues related to health care, local government, the environment and election policy. Freiberg works as an attorney for a nonprofit organization committed to improving public health. He has also worked as an adjunct law professor, teaching courses in legislation and public health law.



Mike Freiberg



Kelda Roys

Roys, who was first elected to the Wisconsin state Assembly in 2008, served as minority caucus chair in 2011 and was elected to the state Senate in 2020. Kelda earned her B.A. in drama, politics and cultural studies, magna cum laude, from New York University in 2000, and her J.D., magna cum laude, from the University of Wisconsin Law School in 2004. She has worked as an attorney, a small business owner, and former nonprofit executive. An ardent supporter of abortion rights, she currently serves on a number of committees, such as Administrative Rules, Finance and Judiciary.

CRANKMAIL

Welcome to the latest installment of *Crank-mail*, where we share with you some of the emails and social media comments we get from some of those seemingly on the lower end of the educational spectrum. Printed as received.

Baptism: Trying to condemn a sheriffs department for promoting baptisms? Shame on you it is through the blood of Christ that we all have the opportunity to be saved. How can you honestly think atheism is The answer? To think that when we die that's it it's over is just plain foolish. You threaten them with a lawsuit... So please, I beg you threaten me with a lawsuit you cowards... — *Corey Theissen*

Sad: I was SHOCKED at what I saw on your

website. ALL of you have PERVERTED minds. There is NO hope for all of you. I have all the TRUTH I need to PROVE what I say. I'd like to know happened in your lives to make all of you so EVIL and FULL of HATE. SO SAD and UNBELIEVABLE!!!!!! — *Dorothy Dix*

Your foundation: I HOPE ALL FOUNDATION AND ALL INVOLVE, i HOPE YOU ALL BURN IN HELL FOREVER. i LOVE GOD AND JESUS. YOU ALL LOVE THE DEVIL. ENJOY THIS LIFE BECAUSE ITS NOT FOREVER. YOUR EVIL AND DISTOTRED. ENJOY YOUR ENTENAL DAMNATION — *Frank Smith*

Prayer: God is in Control and you can't do anything about it. It's unconstitutional to stop prayer at schools! — *Aaron Miller*

You need to pray: Man you retarded dumbasses are just like PETA, hypocritical, irrelevant, and full of hate. And there's absolutely nothing that you clowns can do to stop people practicing their religion. I pray every single day. Sometimes I pray in public. I have converted many atheists into believing in God. Oh! As a matter of fact, the University that I attend here in Colorado eliminated your organization from campus after it was found that two of your members were sexually harassing a student. Of course they were expelled from the University and we all had a good laugh at that because they kept on throwing your name around. But of course they would. Y'all are all stupid AF. You clowns probably need to leave Deion Sanders alone before you make him even more filthy rich. What a bunch of fucking losers. — *Jeff Tilden*

Liars!: Leave Deion Sanders along...or meet me and we will see what happens. You gutless constitution shredding lying fuckers should all be prohibited from using oxygen. Get the fuck off the planet. — *Steve Jung*

First amendment: You can start with stop persecuting, coaches who devoutly believe in God, our Creator. You have no right to interfere with his God given right to prayer. It is his first amendment right. And there is nothing in the bill of rights that says "separation of church and state." And as for him being paid to coach and not act, well (#1) he is not acting, (#2.) he can pray anytime he wants to. So much about what he gets paid for. Your Anti-Christ organization, is nothing more than a subversive organization, to destroy The prime fabric of our great nation. In short, you're a communist organization. — *John Walsh*

Shame on you: if you don't believe in God then why do you have to advertise get off our TV and airways I am so sorry for you because really none of us know if there's a heaven and hell but you're sure going to feel it !why don't you just kill yourself now ? Swim with fishes now scattered in the oceanYou have chosen hate over faithDo your campaigns off the air I pay for RON — *Mark Garrett*

What??: I was literally HORRIFIED at the commercial from Ron Reagan yesterday on our CBS station. The mocking at the end about "not afraid to burn in hell" or something close to that scared me to death b/c he DOESN'T HAVE A CLUE WHAT IS IN STORE FOR HIM OR ANY OF THE REST OF YOU if you don't turn to Jesus

for forgiveness and his salvation. — *Kim Tuthill*

Hell is real: I just wanted to say that this is the saddest thing I have ever seen! Do you know how dangerous it is for this to be out of to the public! I will be praying for you and your soul! Also, an atheist doesn't believe in anything. You little commercial makes the comment they aren't afraid of going to hell! Did you know God created hell? Did you know that the pretty angel in heaven is the devil that runs this hell you're not afraid off! — *Sarah Stewart*

Trust in god: Im not into religion im a lover of jesus christ an our creator. .i was a none believer until i felt the creator power. An jesus sprit. .these are puppets from the devil . too lead you away from god. God is real .heaven is real so is Hell .think when your flesh die .your sprit what gives you life will be judge .please dont follow this fools .pray too highest power who created life in all of the univserse .there is a god TRUST.. — *Donnell Smith*

Repent now: Look up the accounts of folks on their death beds regretting their choice to join Satan and his wickedness. If you have ever experienced darkness imagine that for eternity, not to mention the fact that your in flames for all eternity with not a drop of water ever your permanently there no one will pray you out of there you have sealed your fate. If you have low tolerance of pain hell is not the place for you. — *Debbie Guinn*

JESUS IS SAVIOR: MARK MY WORDS YOU EVIL AND WRETCHED GENERATION!!! ALL PRAISE BE TO JESUS, NOT TO ALLAH, BUDDAH OR ANY OTHER DEAD THING WORSHIPPED BY FOOLS!!!!!! — *Bill Hill*

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
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Freethought Today Cryptogram

QJW FBUY KA VLIWCNQBLIGLP KA

NKTWQJGLP GN LKQ WZGIWLWU

AKC PKI. GQ'N WZGIWLWU KA B

FBUY KA VLIWCNQBLIGLP.

— FBECWLWU YCBVNN

This puzzle is from *Freethinking Cryptograms* by FFRF member Brooks Rimes, available on Amazon.com for \$9.95. 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
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68						69				70				
71						72					73			

Answers on page 25

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

- Across

1. Lover’s blow

5. Cheerleading syllable

8. Head and shoulders sculpture

12. Chocolate substitute

14. Protozoic ____ or Paleozoic ____, e.g.

15. ‘70s Ford model

16. Dispatch boat

17. Frigid

18. Amazon purchase

19. *James ____, U.S. President: “Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind”

21. *Jim Hightower, latest Clarence ____ Awardee

23. Recipe amt.

24. G in 1000 g.

25. Computer image acronym

28. Sign of boredom

30. Silver one is a good thing

35. Magnifying glass

37. Like happy people’s glasses

39. A in AV

40. Ancient Peruvian empire

41. Native American emblem

43. Suggestive look

44. Get on a horse

46. Half-frotten
- Down

1. Dishonest scheme

2. Mauna Loa output

3. Desiccated

4. Propose

5. Jockey strap

6. ____ de Triomphe

7. Composer known as Father of the String Quartet

8. Ethiopian currency

9. Press back arrow

10. One-pot meal

11. Craggy peak

13. Commanding
15. Actress ____ de Rossi

20. 1960s abstractionism

22. Be unwell

24. Unclogs

25. Conquer, as in Everest

26. Major Italian seaport

27. Bring upon oneself

29. Golf club option

31. Zilch

32. Vitruvian Man, e.g.

33. Marilyn to Lily Munster

34. *Irreverent Russian novelist, inspiration for a park name

36. Castle-building supply

38. Sasquatch’s cousin

42. Myna, alt. sp.

45. Bank employee

49. Jersey call

51. *N.P.R.’s freethinker Ira ____

54. Type of fishing net

56. Not pathos

57. London subway

58. Competent

59. *Big Bang’s original matter

60. Smoke plus fog

61. African river

62. Canal in a song

63. Cincinnati ballplayers

64. Snake in the grass

66. *Certain Jane of 1973 fame



This church posted this sign on the fence of a public school in Bloomfield, N.J., prompting FFRF Member Dan Bailey to get involved.

Church overstepped on school property

FFRF Member Dan Bailey saw a state/church violation and decided to see if he could remedy the problem. Thanks, Dan!

By Dan Bailey

In October 2022, I noticed a sign hung from a public elementary school’s fence that read “Christian Faith Center Parking.” The school is across the street from a church by that name. I contacted the Bloomfield, N.J., school district superintendent’s office to inquire about the sign and why it was affixed to public property.

It seemed apparent that the church was using the school’s parking lot for its members’ use on Sunday mornings. Eventually, I was contacted by the school district’s lawyer and was told that the lot is available to the public on evenings and weekends when school is not in session. When I raised the issue of the church’s parking sign, the lawyer, Nicholas Dotoli, said he wasn’t aware of any signs, but would look into it.

I continued to watch the situation at the school and found that the gates surrounding the lot were locked every evening and on Saturdays, and the sign was only posted on Sundays. The only time the gates were open was on Sundays between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Dotoli sent a letter to the church telling it not to post its sign on the school fence. But nothing changed. I let Dotoli know that the sign was still up and he said he would make contact with the church pastor, which he did in person. After this visit, the sign was no longer placed on the fence, but the gate was still locked, except for Sunday mornings.

In January, I visited the school and noticed signage posted by the school district, which clearly states that the school grounds can only be used by special board permission. After consulting with FFRF Attorney Madeline Ziegler, I took her advice and filed a FOIA request with the Bloomfield School District seeking any communication between the district and the church relative to the use of school property.



Dan Bailey

But, before I could file my request, I had a face-to-face conversation with the church sextant on a Sunday morning. He told me that he had the key to the lock on the gate and it was his responsibility to open and close the gate on Sunday mornings. Apparently, the school district had given keys to the church staff. I augmented my FOIA request to include any information or communication about providing keys to district property to the Christian Faith Center. My request was honored, but the district did not find any communications, directives or information about this undocumented special use.

Interestingly, the Bloomfield School District declined to provide some responses based on an exception in the FOIA rules that allow them to withhold specific information if it relates to emergency plans, which is something the district lawyer alluded to in one of his responses. He said that the relationship between the school district and the church was part of the school district’s emergency response plan. I asked Dotoli to explain why a neighboring church would be given access to district property in the event of a school emergency, but he declined to answer.

In February, after persistent emails and phone calls to Dotoli, I received an email from him that said the school parking lot would not be restricted to church use, and that the church would no longer post signs or manage the gate. His research indicated that a prior school principal had entered into a casual agreement with the church which gave it special access in conflict with district rules. Dotoli said that school administrators at the elementary school were advised against entering into any unauthorized arrangement with any group or business.

The Christian Faith Center sits on two tax-exempt lots assessed for \$1.3 million. If it paid all applicable property taxes, it would be approximately \$44,000 per year. Parking is tough in most New Jersey towns, so I can see why they would want to leverage public resources to support their private, religious enterprise. It seems that they could use some of those annual savings to enter into a financial agreement with the school district and actually pay for the parking. But why pay if you can get it for free?

Of course, I will continue to monitor the situation.

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: C => R.

Groff v. DeJoy

Court seems to favor religious workers

The U.S. Supreme Court appears ready to change employment law in favor of religious workers, charges the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

The court heard arguments on April 18 in *Groff v. DeJoy*, which involves a challenge by a rural postal carrier who is contending that he should have been permitted to take all Sundays off. During the lengthy arguments, the court appeared to struggle with how to apply the law and how to provide guidance to employers.

“The Supreme Court appears ready to give preferential treatment to religious workers to the detriment of everyone else,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

The plaintiff is Gerald Groff, a former postal worker who accepted a position to work on an as-needed basis, necessarily tending to involve weekends, but who requested not to work on Sundays because it was his Sabbath. The U.S. Postal Service initially accommodated Groff’s request by scheduling co-workers to work Groff’s shifts on Sundays, but the much smaller station he chose to then transfer to could no longer accommodate him.

Lower courts have ruled in favor of the Postal Service because Groff’s chosen accommodation placed an undue hardship on it. FFRF filed an amicus brief before the Supreme Court last month asking it to affirm the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals’ judgment.

“Religious employees do not have the legal right to dictate that an employer must impose disruptive conditions on co-workers,” states the brief. “It is improper under Title VII for religious employees to claim a right to interfere with the lives and working conditions



of their co-workers because they claim to have religious obligations.”

During the arguments, the justices recognized that employment cases are necessarily context specific. Groff’s attorneys seek to make it much easier for religious employees to require their employers to provide time off for religious reasons. Groff is represented by First Liberty Institute, which is a Christian nationalist legal group.

One of the issues in the case is whether the Supreme Court should overturn the 1977 *TWA v. Hardison* case. There, the court held that an airline did not have to diverge from its seniority system in order to accommodate an employee who observed the Sabbath. Justice Elena Kagan strongly questioned why the court should overrule its prior

precedent, especially since Congress has elected not to change the law in over four decades. She remarked, “You can count on like a finger how many times we have overruled a statutory ruling in that context.”

Justice Brett Kavanaugh indicated that whatever test is announced by the court may not easily resolve many disputes. “The hard thing is going to be how to apply it and I’m not sure we can give you a full manual of how it’s going to play out,” Kavanaugh remarked.

One underlying theme during the argument was how the court had previously overturned its prior cases on the Establishment Clause. Justice Samuel Alito and the attorney for Groff sought to use those cases to argue that the broader legal landscape had changed.

Alito asked at one point: “Do you think that a change in this court’s understanding of the meaning of the religion clauses of the First Amendment is a relevant factor in determining whether the statutory interpretation in *Hardison* should be revisited?”

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson later countered that line of questioning by noting that Congress could still change the law applicable to employer religious accommodations if it wanted to do so, in light of new interpretations of the Establishment Clause. “Setting aside the fact that there has been a change in terms of the court, presumably Congress knows that and could change the statute now,” Jackson said.

FFRF Counsel Elizabeth Cavell says, “Although Congress has specifically declined to adopt this statutory meaning, this activist court is stepping in to privilege religious claims above all other interests.”

Groff’s proposed religious accommodation framework will lead to significantly more and contrived religious accommodation claims, FFRF’s amicus brief points out. “Employers should be able to satisfy their undue hardship obligation by demonstrating that the accommodation is likely to: increase costs, decrease revenue, disrupt the work environment, create a danger to employee health and safety, increase employee turnover and dissatisfaction, increase liability related to discrimination claims by other employees, or otherwise prove unworkable,” states the brief.

FFRF is hoping that the nation’s highest court will listen to such voices of reason.

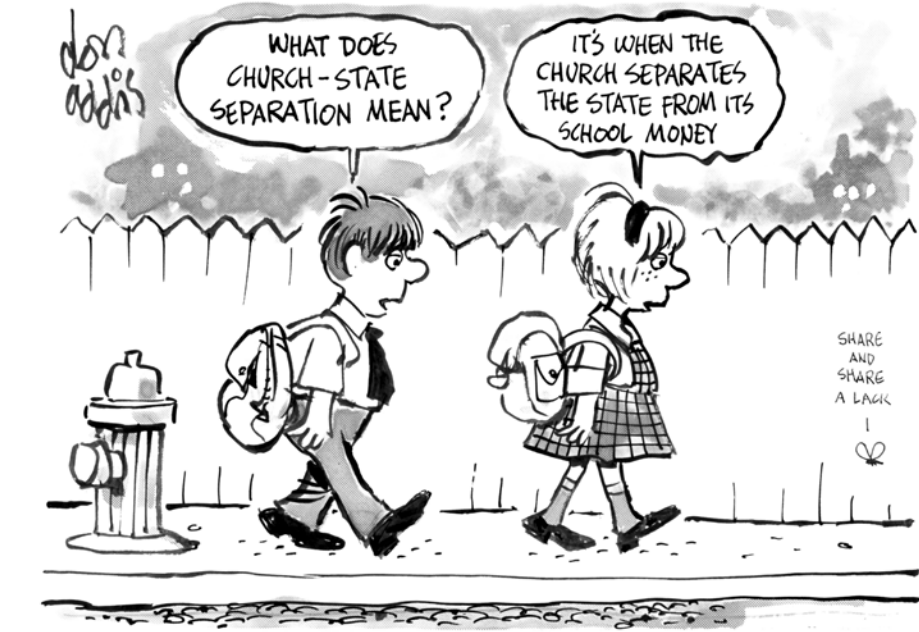
FFRF: Catholic charter school in OK must be rejected

FFRF warns that a constitutional showdown on public funding of parochial school education is occurring in Oklahoma, after the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City and the Diocese of Tulsa have applied to create a religious, public-funded charter school. The application, if approved, would establish the nation’s first publicly funded religious charter school.

Brett Farley, executive director of the Catholic Conference of Oklahoma, the public policy organization for the Catholic church, said he welcomes the chance for this to become a test case to examine the legal scope of the Establishment Clause.

At the hearing on April 11, where every public speaker opposed the application, the charter school board unanimously voted against the creation of St. Isidore of Seville Virtual School. Despite the consensus, the board seemed conflicted, and seemed to spoon-feed recommendations on how the church might alter its application to warrant further consideration.

The presentation made to the board left a number of questions unanswered, such as relating to special education programs, technology concerns and governance structure. The executive director of the Catholic Conference of Oklahoma could not give a straight answer on whether or not LGBTQ students and staff would be allowed in the school.



Through an open records request submitted in February, FFRF has learned that the Catholic charter school would intend to follow all laws, rules and regulations required by the state only as long as they do not conflict with Catholic law. In other words, Catholic entities in Oklahoma are not hiding that this will be a pervasively sectarian Catholic school in all respects, and they plan to ignore any laws or policies that they don’t care to follow.

FFRF had sent a 10-page memo to the executive director of the State-wide Virtual Charter School Board

on Jan. 4, explaining why the application is unconstitutional, contrary to then-Attorney General John O’Connor’s advisory opinion that a charter school may be religiously affiliated. Since then, O’Connor has been replaced by Attorney General Gentner Drummond, who reversed his predecessor’s opinion, saying it “misuses the concept of religious liberty by employing it as a means to justify state-funded religion.”

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt has said that he “100 percent” supports the school’s approval, despite Drummond’s opinion against it.

Most of the opposition by individuals commenting on the application at the hearing came from self-identified religious people. But that didn’t stop Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters from issuing a diatribe against “radical leftists” opposing this approval because they “hate the Catholic Church.” The board chair reproved Walters, noting that his accusation was not consistent with the testimony.

The proposal is clearly unconstitutional, as FFRF’s memo laid out. The state statute specifically states that a private school cannot be converted to a charter school, that the charter school must be “equally free and open to all students as traditional public schools” with public oversight, and that charter schools cannot be sectarian.

The April 11 board meeting made two things clear: the public overwhelmingly opposes this scheme, and the approval of the application will be challenged in court, one way or another.

It is unfortunate that Walters, as the superintendent of public instruction, seems set on tearing down secular, public education and replacing it with exclusionary, religious indoctrination at the public’s expense.

The board must fully reject this application when it comes before the board again.

IN THE NEWS

W.Va. prison sued over forced Christianity

The West Virginia Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation is being sued by American Atheists, which claims its client is being forced to participate in religious activities in order to be eligible for parole.

Andrew Miller is serving a sentence of 1-10 years, and could be released as early as April 3, 2025, as long as he is a “good” inmate. Miller requested secular accommodations, but the prison wouldn’t allow for them.

According to the lawsuit, the prison runs a program called Residential Substance Abuse Treatment, and inmates who are placed in that program are required to complete it if they want to be granted parole. But the handbook for the treatment program is loaded with Christianity, including the Lord’s Prayer and Serenity Prayer. And some of the required homework includes answering “what God means to me” and “what prayer means to me.”

Miller then requested an alternate secular option for the program. But his request was denied and was told he had to complete the Christian-based program. He’s been denied parole several times because he hasn’t finished the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment program.

Wyoming bans selling, using abortion pills

Wyoming Republican Gov. Mark Gordon signed into law on March 17 a bill that makes it a felony to prescribe, sell or use “any drug for the purpose of procuring or performing an abortion.”

The legislation takes effect July 1. Violators could face up to six months in prison and a \$9,000 fine.

Medication abortions are already included in the overall abortion bans in a number of states.

“There’s no stone that anti-choice extremists will leave unturned as they seek to do everything they can to ensure that abortion is banned across the nation,” NARAL Pro-Choice America President Mini Timmaraju said in a statement.

Judge dismisses lawsuit by 36 Methodist churches

A North Carolina Superior Court judge dismissed a lawsuit filed last year by 36 United Methodist churches demanding to sever their ties to the denomination over their support of gay marriage, according to a report by the Religion News Service.

Judge Richard Doughton issued an oral ruling March 20, dismissing the suit brought against the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, its board of trustees and Bishop Kenneth Carter Jr.

The suit represented a departure from the approved plan for churches wishing to leave a denomination over the ordination and marriage of LGBTQ Christians. Most churches wanting to leave the United Methodist Church work through the denomination’s official disaffiliation plan, which gives them until Dec. 31, 2023, to cut their ties. So far, 1,994 U.S.-based United Methodist churches have left the denomination out of an estimated 30,000 congregations.



NASA official gets sworn in on Carl Sagan book

Makenzie Lystrup became the first female director of NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center and chose to be sworn in with her hand on a copy of Carl Sagan’s *Pale Blue Dot*, not a bible.

On his “Friendly Atheist” Substack blog, Hemant Mehta writes: “That title is a reference to the indelible image taken by the Voyager 1 space probe in 1990, which Sagan so memorably talked about in this passage:

“Look again at that dot. That’s here. That’s home. That’s us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every “superstar,” every “supreme leader,” every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there — on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”

Supreme Court rejects preacher’s challenge

The U.S. Supreme Court on March 20 declined to hear a traveling Christian evangelist’s free speech challenge to a University of Alabama requirement that he obtain a permit before handing out religious pamphlets and preaching from a sidewalk adjacent to its campus, according to a report by Reuters.

The justices turned away an appeal by preacher Rodney Keister of a lower court’s ruling rejecting his claim that the university’s permit requirement violated free speech rights under the First Amendment.

In 2016, Keister preached using an amplifier and distributed Christian literature from a sidewalk adjacent to the university campus in Tuscaloosa, trying to engage passersby. School officials told Keister he needed a permit for a public-speaking event.

The university’s policy requires a permit application 10 business days in advance (which has since been reduced to five business days) and sponsorship by a student organization or university academic department.

N.Y.’s Diocese of Albany files for bankruptcy

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany in New York is seeking bankruptcy protection as it faces hundreds of lawsuits alleging sexual abuse.

Bishop Edward Scharfenberger announced the Chapter 11 filing after months of negotiations between the upstate New York diocese and lawyers representing plaintiffs over a potential settlement.

The Albany diocese, like others in the state, is dealing with a deluge of lawsuits

dating to when New York temporarily suspended the statute of limitations to give victims of childhood abuse the ability to pursue even decades-old allegations against clergy members, teachers, Boy Scout leaders and others.

Some attorneys representing plaintiffs against the Albany diocese accused it of using bankruptcy as a legal tactic.

Archbishop stops priest from hearing confessions

Milwaukee Archbishop Jerome ListECKI has stripped retired priest James Connell of his ability to hear Catholics’ confessions because Connell is lobbying about the need to require clergy to report sexual abuse revealed in the confessional.

Connell, 80, told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel that ListECKI has ordered him to stop speaking publicly about repealing what’s known as clergy penitent privilege. Connell has for years worked with anti-clergy sexual abuse groups. Wisconsin is among 33 states with laws protecting conversations between clergy and penitents. Only six states have laws requiring clergy to report abuse.

Connell thinks ListECKI could further penalize him for continuing to speak out. “I will not keep quiet. I will not be silent. This is all too important.”

Court upholds clergy privilege in abuse case

The Arizona Supreme Court has ruled that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can refuse to answer questions or turn over documents under a state law that exempts religious officials from having to report child sex abuse if they learn of the crime during a confessional setting.

The ruling was issued April 7 but not released to the public until April 25, the Religion News Service reports. A lawsuit filed by child sex abuse victims accuses the church, also known as the Mormon church, two of its bishops, and other church members of conspiracy and negligence in not reporting church member Paul Adams for abusing his older daughter as early as 2010. This negligence, the lawsuit argues, allowed Adams to continue abusing the girl for as many as seven years, a time in which he also abused the girl’s infant sister.

Clergy in Arizona, as in many other states, are required to report information about child sexual abuse or neglect to law enforcement or child welfare authorities. An exception to that law — known as the clergy-penitent privilege — allows members of the clergy who learn of the abuse through spiritual confessions to keep the information secret.

Cartoons for the Irreverent: Celebrating the wit of Don Addis

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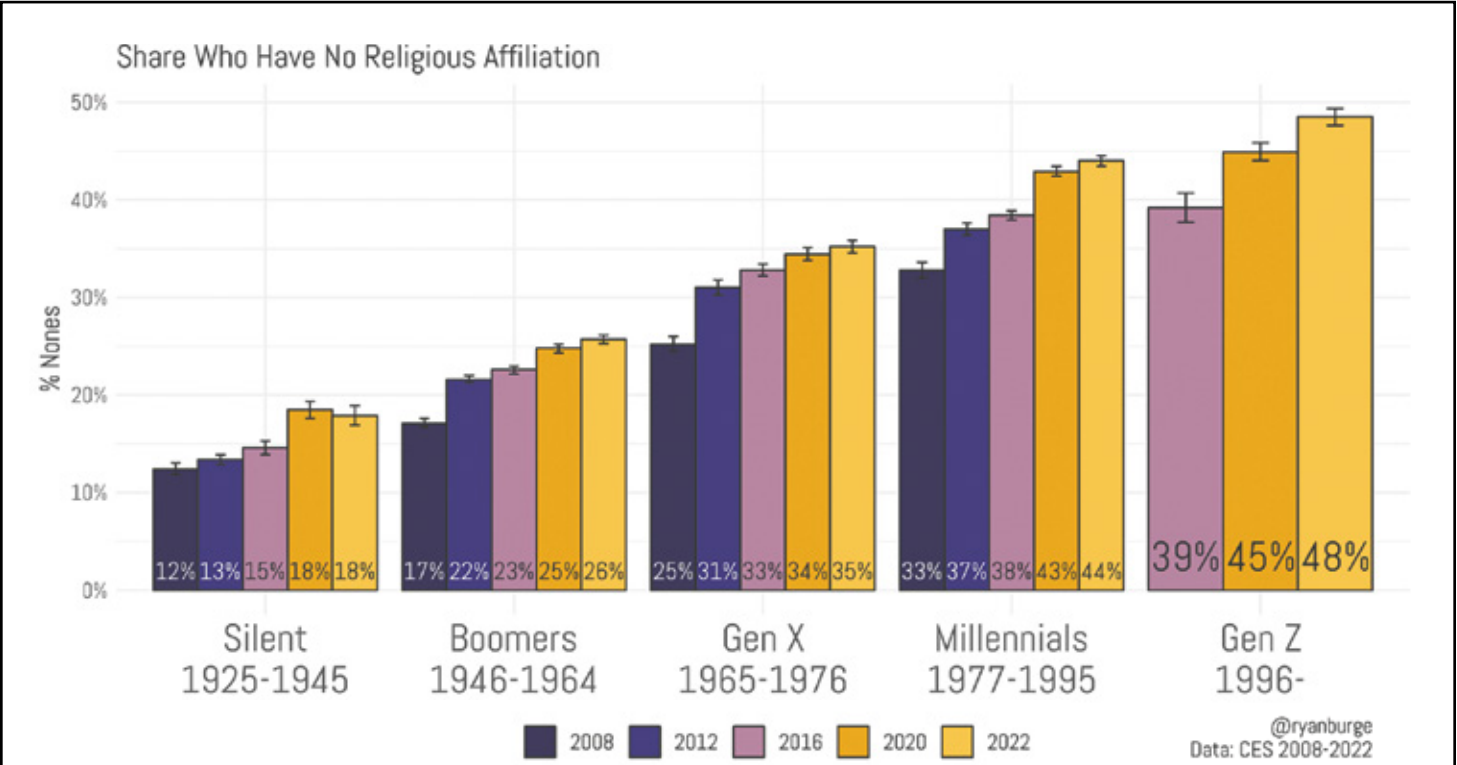
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ger law following the Supreme Court decision in June 2022 to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

66K couldn’t get abortion in own state after Dobbs

Around 66,510 people were unable to receive a legal abortion in their home state between July and December of 2022, according to data shared with FiveThirtyEight by #WeCount, a national research project. That number includes more than 43,830 people who were unable to receive an abortion because their home state had banned the procedure, and an additional 22,680 whose home states restricted or reduced access to abortion — a list that includes Arizona, South Carolina, Ohio, Georgia, North Dakota and Indiana.

A FiveThirtyEight analysis of the data shows that since July 2022, the number of abortions have spiked dramatically in states like Illinois, a pattern that suggests people in states where abortion is banned are driving hundreds or even thousands of miles to reach the nearest state where abortion remains legal. Of the 66,510 people who couldn’t get an abortion near home, an estimated 35,330 seem to have traveled to obtain one. But the data also shows 31,180 people were seemingly unable to get a legal abortion at all. It is unknown whether those people remained pregnant, or got an abortion some other way.

Texas House votes to ban funding for vouchers

The Texas House voted 86-52 on April 13 to amend the budget to ban state funding for “school vouchers or other similar programs,” according to the Texas Tribune.

The amendment came at a crucial time — the same day the state Senate passed legislation to create a voucher-like program and five days before a House committee considers proposals on the subject.

The 86 votes that the amendment received were less than the 115 votes a similar amendment to the House budget got during the last legislative session. However, the “vote itself is essentially symbolic, as the amendment is expected to be stripped by the Senate before the final budget is passed,” the Texas Tribune reported.

Only 52 members voted in favor of school vouchers, far short of the 76-member majority needed to approve any such legislation in the House.

Florida’s 6-week abortion ban signed into law

Gov. Ron DeSantis on April 13 signed Florida’s six-week abortion ban into law just hours after the GOP-led Legislature approved it.

The legislation will upend Florida’s status as an abortion haven in the south, cutting off access for thousands who would otherwise travel from neighboring states each year for the procedure.

The Florida House approved the bill, S.B. 300, on a 70-40 vote on April 13. The state Senate approved it the previous week.

Florida now joins at least 15 other states — including Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky and Louisiana — with a full ban or a six-week ban on abortions, a point at which many people don’t yet know they’re pregnant.

Almost half of Gen Z has no religious affiliation

Members of Generation Z, those born after 1996, are the least likely churchgoers ever surveyed, according to raw data from the Cooperative Election Study, with 48.5 percent of them claiming no religious affiliation. “It seems statistically justifiable to say that by the time the United States has another presidential election, half of Generation Z will identify as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particu-

lar,” writes sociologist Ryan P. Burge, who analyzed the study. Those born in 1945 or earlier are still the most religious, with only 17 percent considered “Nones,” those who are atheist/agnostic or “nothing in particular.” For the Boomer generation (1946-1964), 26 percent are Nones. For Generation X (1965-76), that number increases to 35 percent. And 44 percent of Millennials (1977-1995) are Nones.

Pa. district sued for prohibiting Satan Club

The ACLU has filed a lawsuit against the Saucon Valley School District in Pennsylvania for not allowing the After School Satan Club to meet in a district school. The lawsuit was filed March 30 in the U.S. District Court for Eastern Pennsylvania.

Superintendent Jaime Vlasaty had first allowed the group to meet, then rescinded that permission after claiming the club violated school board policy by not clearly communicating it was not sponsored by the school district.

“The . . . decision to cancel the After School Satan Club in response to public opposition sets a dangerous precedent,” Sara Rose, deputy legal director of the ACLU of Pennsylvania, said in a news release. “The First Amendment protects the expression of unpopular or controversial views from government censorship. Once the district opened up school facilities to outside use, it was bound by the First Amendment to grant equal access to all groups, regardless of their religious beliefs or viewpoints.”

7 countries have majority that don’t believe in God

There are now seven countries where a majority of their residents don’t believe in God, according to an analysis by Isabella Kasselstrand, Ryan T. Cragun and Phil Zuckerman in their new book *Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society*.

The seven democratic countries in the world today with more atheists, agnostics and assorted nontheists than God-believers are Estonia, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic.

Sweden leads the way with 63.9 percent of its residents saying they don’t believe in God. The other six, in descending order of nonbelief, are the Czech Republic (61.6 percent), South Korea (59.4 percent), the Netherlands (56.3 percent), Estonia (54.3 percent), Norway (52.7 percent) and United Kingdom (51.6 percent).

‘Steep decline’: Latinos are leaving Catholicism

A new Pew Research Center survey found the share of U.S.-born Latinos identifying as Catholic dropping from 67 percent in 2010 to 43 percent in 2022.

Among the 65 percent who said they were raised Catholic, 23 percent said they no longer identified as such. “That’s a pretty steep decline,” Pew researcher Besheer Mohamed told Religion News Service.

The share of U.S.-born Latinos who say they are atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” is now at 30 percent, up from 10 percent in 2010 and from 18 percent in 2013.

Still, Latinos remain about twice as likely as U.S. adults overall to identify as Catholic, and considerably less likely to be Protestant

criminate against religious students by barring private religious schools from receiving public funding for special education resources.

Six parents and two private Orthodox Jewish schools in Los Angeles filed the federal lawsuit on March 13 in the Central District of California, alleging that it’s impossible for children with disabilities to attend religious schools and receive the same funding they’d otherwise be entitled to had their parents sent them to non-religious schools.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act equips states with grants to fund special education services for students with disabilities, but in California, the lawsuit notes, “only ‘nonsectarian’ schools are welcome.”

The parents allegew that California is violating their constitutional free exercise of religion rights and want the state’s prohibition on funding to religious schools to be deemed unconstitutional.

Idaho stops interstate travel for abortions

Idaho Gov. Brad Little on April 5 signed into law a bill that makes it a crime for adults to help minors travel to other states for abortion care without parental consent. Idaho is the first state to make it a crime to travel to another state for an abortion.

The law bans adults from “recruiting, harboring, or transporting” pregnant minors for abortions without parental consent, noting that such activity would still be illegal even if the abortion itself is provided out of state. The bill also criminalizes helping a minor obtain abortion medication without the consent of a parent or guardian. Both activities are considered “abortion trafficking” under the new law.

A conviction for abortion trafficking comes with a minimum sentence of two years in state prison, and a maximum sentence of five years.

Idaho already has a near-total ban on abortion that was enacted as a trig-

Parents sue California over funds for special ed

A group of Orthodox Jewish parents of children with autism are suing the state of California, claiming it dis-

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- Crankmail cranks out unbelievable religious hypocrisy!
Jorg Aadahl, San Mateo, Calif.
- My god! Never mind, not mine.
Jon Alexandr, California
- Gods passé, reason here to stay!
Helene Alter-Dyche, Illinois
- No gods, no masters, love wins!
Kate Amon, Fremont, Calif.
- Completed crossword. 96% correct. Best yet.
Alan Ardanowski, Michigan
- Fuck Alito, Kavanaugh, Clarence and Ginni.
Madison Arnold, New York
- FFRF, I'm glad I found you.
Richard Armstrong, West Virginia
- I don't believe any of this!
David Balint, Pennsylvania
- Futilely prayed, faith decayed. Not afraid.
Michael Birtchet, Oregon
- Old isn't fun. Death doesn't count!
Michael G. Brady, Florida
- What sick fuck would create leprosy?
Michael Brandt, Wisconsin
- Appraising Faith, she wore her colander.
Margo Brault, Baton Rouge, La.
- Religion Promotes Ignorance, Just Ask Anybody.
Art Brodsky, New York
- Nonviolence could be our climate solution.
Jim Bronson, Eugene, Ore.
- Cataract science; now I see clearly.
Gladys Burritt, Eureka, Calif.
- Religious autocracy is for the weak.
Crystal Butcher, West Virginia
- Nothing to it, forget the gods.
Bill Cain, Indiana
- Eve was not created from Adam.
Marge Carl, Connecticut
- Middle child, escaped rules, now protester.
Lynn R. Chong, New Hampshire
- No shepherd lord, have not wanted.
Courtney Corda, Danville, Calif.
- Raised Catholic, science major, Agnostic now.
Gary Corda, Danville, Calif.
- Hitchens ever dissolves mind-forg'd manacles.
Dave, New York
- From a nun to a none.
Gemma Dehnbostel, Florida
- New York Jew became California Freethinker.
Stan Deutsch, Sacramento
- I am I — until I die.
James Divine, Washington



“Two Ways to Go” (1896) by editorial cartoonist Watson Heston from *The Freethinkers’ Pictorial Text-book: Showing the Absurdity and Untruthfulness of the Church’s Claim to Be a Divine and Beneficent Institution and Revealing the Abuses of a Union of Church and State.*

Six-word stories

- Speaking in tongues never made sense.
William Dunn, Wisconsin
- Religions: the attempted personifications of nature.
William Dusenberry, Broken Arrow, Okla.
- Born a rabbi's son, I escaped.
David Dvorkin, Denver
- Childhood prayers unanswered; homelessness expedites reason.
Carla Elliff, Illinois
- Undoing indoctrination leads to lasting liberation.
Scott Elliff, Illinois
- Raised religious, college, no more nonsense!
Denise Featherstone, California
- May God save us from religion.
Bob Frankel, Colorado
- Prayed to God. Didn't do squat.
Eric Flyer, Phoenix
- “Would I lie to you?” Yes!
Edwin S. Foote, Kentucky
- Outgrew Santa Claus, then outgrew God.
Alan Frazier, La Vergne, Tenn.
- Airplanes! Career. Adolescently unexpected. Godlessly blessed.
Dan Fregin, California
- HATED
REJECTED
SEXUALLY,
MENTALLY,
PHYSICALLY
ABUSED
Henson Frost, Oak Island, N.C.
- Plant an acorn, grow an Oak.
Ivy Garlynd, Kauai, Hawaii
- I never believed in Santa either.
Kathy Garmus, Connecticut
- Tabula rasa humanely filled with reason.
John Gesimondo, Old Bridge, N.J.
- Heaven calls, fluffy clouds. No thanks.
Rick Gilbert, California
- I think, therefore I'm an atheist.
Debbi Golden-Davis, Tucson, Ariz.
- Trust in Lassie, she brought help.
David Habecker, Florida
- God is nothing more than existence.
Peter Hall, Haines, Ore.
- Childhood indoctrination. Teenage contemplation. Adult liberation.
Christopher Harris, Indiana

- Road Less Taken: Maybe, Maybe Not.
John Heiligenstein, Indiana
- No god, so good, I'm glad!
Gus Heist, Illinois
- Grieving God. Moving on. Loving life.
Sarah Henn Hayward, Spokane, Wash.
- Never believed! So relieved. Life's fun!
Deborah Hilpibre, Illinois
- Cancer twice – survived. Why? Science rules!
Cheryl Huber, Port Charlotte, Fla.
- Religious indoctrination dismissed; common sense engaged!
Steve Jacobs, California
- The BuyBull made me an atheist.
Julie Johnson, Galesburg, Ill.
- Theodicy failed and now I'm free.
Heidi Johnson, Maryland
- Boomer loses Golden Ball, discovers groundlessness.
Jeffrey K. Jones, Virginia Beach, Va.
- Synagogue? Church? Mosque? No thanks. Godless.
Frederic C. Kaplan, Pennsylvania
- Pious try us; ain't hoodwinking freethinking!
Katrina, California
- Living my best life. Without gods.
Patricia Kayden, Maryland
- Intelligent design: stillbirth, ALS, cancer, Alzheimer's.
David Kehe, Bellingham, Wash.
- Not Perfect, but Mostly Good Enough.
Rudolf Kellmann, Highland Mills, N.Y.
- I love Jesus. Great lawn care!
Mike Kirkland, California
- White cane lost from blind faith.
John Klemaseski, Minnesota
- Teen at Revival, certainly godless now.
D.O. Knudson, Wisconsin
- Nourishment, community, answers found in nature.
Kaitlin Knudson, Wisconsin
- Good non-Christians doomed to Hell? No!
Wendy Koch, Loveland, Colo.
- Reached adulthood, stopped believing in magic.
Alfie Kohn, Massachusetts
- Wasted Religious Youth. Now: Freedom, Life!
Constance Kolpitcke, North Carolina

- Believed I knew, learned I didn't.
Stephen Kraus, North Carolina
- The Civil War has not ended.
Richard LeFevre, Kennesaw, Ga.
- Christianity's Insanity
Sagan's Sagacity
Reality's Clarity.
Dan Lewandowski, Texas
- I went, I sat, I fled.
Deidre Link, Washington
- Tubes tied in '77: Bodily heaven!

Barbara Lund, Michigan

- Zeroed patriarchs. Rid religions. Living SCIENCE.
Blue Maas, Iowa
- Mother indoctrination. Lifetime fighting for freedom.
Daryl McDonald, Michigan
- Santa isn't real, but God is?
Maureen McKinney, Ellensburg, Wash.
- Parents never took me to church.
Sandra McMillan, Rhode Island
- Got a brain, gods not needed.
Ross Meisner, Minneapolis
- Life has no stirring background music.
Dennis Middlebrooks, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- What if Martin Luther was wrong?
Sheila Monk, Missouri
- Religion: The Root of All Evil.
Morley
- Santa. Easter bunny. Tooth fairy. God.
Paul Morsey, Kentucky
- Baptism, sex, marriage, Hell, death, decomposition.
Michael Mueck, Massachusetts
- So many “the one true religion.”
Jon Noll, Seattle
- Heard myths; discovered science; reason prevailed.
Howard M. Notgarnie, New Jersey
- Praying child, questioning youth, aging atheist.
Shirley Ogletree, Texas
- Atheism freed my mind to think.
Dolores O'Neill, Princeton, N.J.
- Weekday church: dark, silent — where's God?
Priscilla Oppenheimer, Lancaster, Pa.
- Biblical Why for modern universe, seriously?
David Orr, Ohio
- Imaginary friend, public policy, please no!
Linda Palter, Michigan
- What the hell was I on?
Paul Partezana, Muncie, Ind.
- Charismatically religious parents
Alienating son
Me
Robert Payne, California
- Beautiful loving parents, misguided religious instruction.
Ann Pollard, Kentucky
- Abortion must be legal, it's not!
Nancy Rattmann, Colorado
- Didn't lose religion, just outgrew it.
Craig Reynolds, Michigan

- Cynicism is always funner than certainty!
David Rotert, Minneapolis
 - Predestination plus free will equals nonsense!
Jane Russell, California
 - GAY
HYPNOSIS
EVANGELICAL
UNCONVERTABLE
eXvangelical
IGTHEIST
Brian Bright Saylor, Oregon
 - Go to church? Nope. Never again.
Sue Schuetz, Cross Plains, Wis.
 - “Religion? No questions!” I asked anyway.
Michael Scott, Arizona
 - Hellfire? Hell no! Desire now aglow.
Pam Shaouy, Georgia
 - evolution many gods one god atheism
Jack Simpson, Wisconsin
- No Religion, No War, Global Peace.
Deanne Singer, New York
 - Free to be a reasoning me.
Gail S. Smith, California
 - Loving husband died. I died too.
Peggy Smith, Halifax, N.S.
 - No evidence for god. No belief.
Salvador F. Sola III, New Jersey
 - Jesus lived. Jesus died. The end.
Kathy Steel, Texas
 - When you’re dead you stay dead.
David G. Stork, California
 - Enlightened, scientific son changed our minds.
Don Sturm, Normal, Ill.
 - Life’s hard. Tried God. Didn’t help.
Teri Sullivan, Illinois
 - Nothing before, something now, nothing after.
Doug Tanner, Minnesota
 - Doubt before you die, live well.
Jay Tarantino, Massachusetts
- Childhood religious prison; I escaped.
Carolyn W. Threlkeld, Kentucky
 - I once believed. Now I think.
Joe Todaro, California
 - Theism gone — now a WOKE freethinker!
Charles Townsend, Canaan, N.H.
 - The certified chaplain is lacking insight.
Marcia Tunik, Washington
 - I don’t have faith in faith.
B. Tyger, Santa Cruz, Calif.
 - Church failed to stifle independent thought.
Stephen Van Eck, Pennsylvania
 - Bible nonsense, evolution study, enlightened atheist.
Robert Van Fleet, Chico, Calif.
 - From dust to dust: a must.
Glenn Waring, Upper Arlington, Ohio
- Our lives are ultimately a tragedy.
Paul Warrick, California
 - Once! We’re gone, life lives on.
Jesse Weber, Washington
 - So this is life? Bummer, dude.
Art Weissman, Florida
 - Godless. Bertrand Russell deserves my thanks.
Gary Welch, Bellevue, Neb.
 - Holy books are full of holes.
WK Wenger, California
 - Boy believer, science reader, Mormon leaver.
David Whittaker, Riverton, Utah
 - My cat is my higher power.
Dale Winkler, New Hampshire
 - The gunman found them huddled, praying.
Mark Zappy, New York

Crisis pregnancy centers only serve to deceive

This column first appeared on Central-Maine.com and is reprinted with permission.

By Tom Waddell

Anti-choice extremists have been restricting abortion access since Roe v. Wade was passed in 1973. One tactic Christian nationalists use is establishing centers that look like places where women can get an abortion but only receive anti-abortion rhetoric. There were 780 abortion clinics in the country before Roe was overturned, but there are still 4,000 centers masquerading as women’s health care centers.



Tom Waddell

Known as crisis pregnancy centers (CPC), they offer free ultrasounds but do not provide comprehensive reproductive health care. Instead, they use names similar to genuine pregnancy centers to deceive women and encourage them to make appointments. The names sound like what pregnant women who don’t want to have a child need. However, once inside, women are lied to, shamed and pressured about their reproductive health decisions. This tactic often delays the procedure to push them past the deadline for a legal abortion.

CPCs are anti-abortion counseling centers that lie to pressure women to carry a pregnancy to term. They tell women that abortions often result in being sterile, that most women regret



Image by Shutterstock

Crisis pregnancy centers around the country masquerade as abortion centers, but instead women are “lied to, shamed and pressured about their reproductive health decisions,” says FFRF Member Tom Waddell.

having an abortion, and that the risk of post-abortion suicide is high. Research doesn’t support these lies. Current research has found that the post-partum death rate has climbed in America. “In 2021, the U.S. had one of the worst maternal mortality rates in the country’s history, according to the CDC. The report found that 1,205 women died of maternal causes in the United States in 2021. That represents a 40 percent increase from the previous year,” NPR reported recently. Some physicians suggest that overturning Roe v. Wade will lead to an increase in maternal deaths. Factors include millions of women losing access to maternal care, abortion restrictions, CPCs delaying care for pregnancy complications, and closures of rural

maternity wards. Crisis pregnancy centers are not regulated medical clinics, do not need a license, and don’t have to follow federal health care privacy laws. This means they can use any personal information you give them in any way they want. Many CPCs get women to sign a contract to carry their pregnancy to term. These CPCs then send the agreement with the woman’s personal information, including her social security number, to every local woman’s health care clinic. The goal is to intimidate patients and physicians from having or delivering complete women’s health care. CPCs are deceptive. They try to open near actual abortion clinics and use names that sound very similar to

real women’s health care centers. Yet, even after Roe v. Wade was overturned, CPCs kept growing. For example, the Christian Action Council, later renamed CareNet, has over 1,100 affiliated CPCs in its network. Crisis pregnancy centers are considered religious outreach programs protected by the First Amendment. This allows them to picket genuine women’s health care clinics, pass out literature and encourage pregnant women to visit a local CPC. However, many CPCs are starting to be held accountable for their deceptive practices. California has state-wide regulations, and New York City and San Francisco have passed ordinances requiring truth in advertising. The latest brick to fall in the wall between democracy and Christian nationalism is Walgreens. The nationwide pharmacy chain caved when Republican attorneys general from multiple states demanded they (and other pharmacies) not sell or ship mifepristone, the medication used to terminate a pregnancy, once they are certified to do so by the FDA. Walgreens even said it would not sell the medication in some states where women still have the right to choose [although it has since backtracked after public blowback]. However, there is some pushback. CVS previously confirmed it would provide mifepristone where legal, and at least one state, California, is pushing back. Gov. Gavin Newsom announced, “California won’t be doing business with Walgreens or any company that cowers to the extremists and puts women’s lives at risk.” FFRF Member Tom Waddell is president of the Maine Atheist Freethinkers and Humanist Association.

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Kentucky legalizes school evangelizing

This column first appeared in the Lexington Herald Leader on March 16 and is updated and reprinted with permission.

By Linda Allewalt

On March 24, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear signed into law legislation that prohibits a school district from punishing an employee for engaging in private religious expression.



Linda Allewalt

The law is intended to expand public school teachers' rights to share their religious beliefs with students and other staff. According to an article on Kentucky Today, "Public school employees would also be allowed to sponsor student religious clubs or organizations, plan religious events, wear religious clothing, symbols or jewelry. They would also be permitted to decorate their desks or other personal spaces with personal items that reflect their religious beliefs."

State Rep. Chris Fugate, who sponsored the bill, stated, "This is a piece of legislation that hopefully will embolden those Christian teachers who are not ashamed of their faith, but sometimes



Image by Shutterstock

out of fear do not say anything about their faith or hold prayer meetings with other teachers."

I worked for many years in public school classrooms as a teacher's aide and as a substitute teacher. I am very familiar with the environment of a classroom and how the teachers and children interact. The very best teachers are the ones who make their classroom feel like a comfortable space and where all the students feel as though they are equal and valued in that little community they share daily.

The Supreme Court rulings in 1962 and 1963 that people refer to as the point at which "God was kicked out of the schools" came up because

children were being exposed to daily Christian-based prayers and the Christian bible in the classroom. This led to students of other faiths (and no faith) to feel like outsiders every day in their school.

I am also an atheist. When I first read about this legislation and considered the fact that atheism is also protected speech under the First Amendment, I imagined what it would be like if I was once again running a classroom under this law. I could imagine wearing my Freedom From Religion Foundation shirt that says, "Unabashed Atheist: Not Afraid of Burning in Hell." I could wear my nice big "A" atheist necklace. I could put a copy of Christopher Hitch-

ens' book *God is Not Great* on my desk next to my pencil holder. I could put up a little sign with one of my favorite quotes on it by Chapman Cohen, "Gods are fragile things. They may be killed by a whiff of science or a dose of common sense."

I could go on with this idea, but I think you get my drift. I wouldn't do any of this, even if the law said I could. Why? Because it's wrong, both morally and ethically, and violates everything I ever learned about the role of the teacher in a classroom of children. It is also wrong to harangue the people you work with every day with proselytizing pamphlets and out-loud vocal prayers.

When a teacher is more invested in pushing their religious rights than they are creating an equal community, void of divisiveness, with the staff in the building and all the children in their classrooms, they don't belong in the profession. They are taking advantage of the captive audience of children for their own purposes. It's beyond reprehensible.

Let's call this legislation for what it is: A blatant attempt by many Christians to use the public schools to proselytize and evangelize. If it actually had anything to do with First Amendment rights, it would focus on the individual children sitting in those classrooms and their rights to be free from religious or political coercion.

FFRF Member Linda Allewalt is a retired educator from Shelbyville.

Columnist fails to show power of prayer

By PJ Slinger

In the aftermath of the Nashville shooting on March 27, where three 9-year-old schoolchildren and three adults were killed, there was a column published in the New York Times on March 30, titled, "In the face of tragedy, petitioning God is an act of faith."

It was written by David French, a conservative columnist for the Times, who is a believer in the Christian God. As I read



PJ Slinger

it, I tried to imagine myself as a believer to better understand his thought process.

He writes: "In an increasingly secular culture, there is often a misunderstanding of the true purpose of prayer. If you don't believe in God, it may strike you as silly, something beneficial only to the extent that it provides a placebo effect. At its worst, it can seem like a cheap and easy way to respond to a terrible, preventable tragedy. Prayer, in this formulation, is a substitute for action. It's a way that a guilty culture can feel good about itself even as it does nothing — nothing but watch children die. Again."

OK, no need to step out of my own thoughts to wholeheartedly agree with that paragraph.

But then he goes on: "When there is genuine belief and genuine humility, prayer is something else entirely. It's an act that — again, presuming you believe anything close to what I believe — con-

nects you to the creator of the universe."

OK, now I have to step back and play make-believe to try to understand this. It "connects you to the creator of the universe."

Connects you how, exactly? Through your thoughts? Is God communicating directly into your brain with understandable language? What is the actual "connection"? Or is it just a "feeling," which you take for "connecting"? Is it a one-way street? Or is there some type of reciprocity or acknowledgement from God? If so, what form does that take?

French continues: "Petitioning God is more powerful than petitioning any president."

OK, so petitioning individually to any president is actually not very powerful, so saying petitioning God is more powerful is not really that strong of a statement.

But let's take his statement for what I presume he means, that petitioning God is indeed quite powerful. Again, I ask: How? Powerful in what respect? Powerful to God, or powerful to the petitioner?

Back to French's column: "For the faithful believer, prayer isn't a substitute for action, it's a prerequisite for action."

So, you can't take any action until you've prayed? Is this for any event, large or small? If not, what is the magnitude of an event where you will need to pray before you take action? What is then expected of the prayer? Will the prayer reveal what then needs to be done in the real world? Or is it more of a motivational tool? "OK, I've got God on my side now, so let's do this course of action!"

French goes on: "Moreover, petitioning God is a tangible act of faith. It reminds believers of their ultimate sense of trust in an eternal presence. It reminds us of the very concept of eternal life."

So, in this paragraph, French seems to be saying that prayer isn't necessarily supposed to do anything other than remind the praying person that God is an "eternal presence" and that there will be "eternal life." So, I guess prayer is just a reminder to the believer that God is the ultimate protective sky-daddy.

The column continues: "I prayed that God would comfort the families of the fallen."

Here's where I have a big problem. It goes back to the definition of God, where it is claimed to be omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent. First of all, if God is all those things, as most Christians believe, why are prayers even necessary? Isn't God maybe ahead of the curve on who may need comforting in times of hardship or disaster? You think you need to remind him via your prayer to comfort those who are grieving?

God: "Thanks, David! I almost forgot! I was busy changing the outcome of a basketball game because somebody prayed for that."

Of course, God (the omniscient) must have known this murderous rampage would happen, yet did nothing to stop it. Why? So, God will allow the murder of these innocent people, but then, with a little prodding from prayers, comfort those who are grieving (because of the massacre he allowed)? Ugh.

Thinking this way seems both extremely egotistical on the part of the believer ("I have the power to tell God something he may overlooked") and goes against the very definition of the all-knowing God (who apparently needed a reminder to comfort the grieving).

On we go: "But the specificity of the prayer is much less important than its

existence."

Here, French is saying it doesn't necessarily matter what you are praying for, but rather the fact that you are praying is really all that matters. I'm starting to get lost in all these variables.

And finally, he writes: "God have mercy, we ask."

Again, it seems as though he is asking for God, who allegedly has a divine plan, to potentially alter it to give mercy to those who need it. Well, what if God's divine plan was to not give mercy? Is God gonna change its mind because a few people prayed? And, doesn't God allegedly know the thoughts of every single person on Earth? So why is prayer even necessary then? He already knows what you are thinking. A separate prayer is just overkill.

While it seems I'm picking on this columnist specifically, I'm mostly just using his arguments (which are pervasive throughout the Christian community) to try to figure out why people pray or what they expect from it.

It still doesn't make sense to me.

PJ Slinger is editor of Freethought Today.

American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll

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Freethinker of the Year Award

FFRF plaintiff fights city hall, and wins

This is the speech given by Daryl Cobranchi at FFRF's national convention in San Antonio on Oct. 28, 2022. He was introduced by FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott. To watch the speech, go to ffrf.us/convention-2022.

Patrick Elliott: I'm here to introduce Daryl Cobranchi, who will be receiving FFRF's Freethinker of the Year award, along with Eric Engle, who couldn't join us today. They were essential plaintiffs in one of our winning lawsuits. We challenged the city of Parkersburg's (W.Va.) practice of reciting the Lord's Prayer before every council meeting.

The suit was filed in 2018 and we are thrilled that the federal judge ruled in May 2022 and has permanently enjoined the practice. The judge has also awarded us our attorney's fees in that case. Daryl



Photo by Chris Line
Daryl Cobranchi

has shown extreme patience and resolve while the city was flagrantly violating the Establishment Clause. He began to work to correct this violation more than seven years ago. The city continued with the Lord's Prayer practice despite FFRF's warning letters to cut it out.

In 2017, Daryl and the other awardee were part of a coalition that advocated that the City Council adopt a nondiscrimination ordinance. On the other side were members of local churches opposing it, who happily joined in unison with the City Council during the Lord's Prayer. The meetings were packed, and there was a clear division between those who were saying the prayer and those who weren't.

After the nondiscrimination ordinance was voted down in 2017, Daryl was quoted in the local newspaper: "For far too long, this council has acted as if the only people whose opinions matter are conservative Christians." Later that year, he wrote a letter to the editor that said the council's practice "assigns second-class status to anyone who's not Christian." His opposition to the prayer caused a member of the council to personally criticize Daryl.

Daryl ultimately gave up a leadership position in a local political party. Thankfully, he stood firm and he was a co-plaintiff in our winning case. While it is not much



Photo by Chris Line
Daryl Cobranchi, right, is presented with FFRF's Freethinker of the Year Award by FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott on Oct. 28, 2022, at FFRF's national convention in San Antonio.

consolation, the city will be sending him a check for exactly \$1. Daryl has said that he's going to definitely save it. More importantly, the city is permanently enjoined from continuing to violate the Establishment Clause.

FFRF has offered the Freethinker of the Year Award since 1985, and usually it's received by successful state/church litigants. We cannot take or win any of these lawsuits without crucial local plaintiffs.

This award includes a plaque and a \$1,000 award, but Daryl has generously refused the honorarium, saying that FFRF needs it more. Please join me in welcoming our 2022 Freethinker of the Year.

By Daryl Cobranchi

I want to tell some of the stories of the genesis of the lawsuit that brought me here today.

I grew up in a mostly practicing Catholic family, living in the heart of conservative Southern Baptist country — Greenville, S.C.

By "practicing," I mean the whole nine yards. Mass every Saturday evening or Sunday morning, etc. The

lone exception to following all of the church's teachings — I only learned many years later — was that after having three boys in three years, my mom said, "Enough," and went on the pill. This, of course, was a sin, according to the church. She dutifully had to confess this sin each and every week.

Eventually my dad decided to get a vasectomy, another sin, because, per his understanding, then he'd only had to confess once. Religion can make you do some strange things.

Anyway, I went through the four C's of Catholic youth indoctrination — catechism, confession, communion and confirmation.

Growing up a religious minority was a challenge, at times. I was regularly told I was going to hell for my family's beliefs. My first serious girlfriend invited me to her church. This was apparently part of the mating ritual in Baptist country. I warned her that if the preacher started in on Catholics, I was leaving. Sure enough, that was the topic of the evening. I suspect it was aimed specifically at me. My girlfriend almost wrenched my arm out of its socket, pulling me back down into the pews.

Later that same year, I gave serious thought to starting a religious riot in my high school. Every student assembly started with a student-led prayer ending with "in the name of Jesus, amen."

I was always uncomfortable with this formulation. I thought I knew enough about the Constitution that

this was probably illegal. I was one of the student leaders on campus and was one day told that I would be leading the prayer at the next assembly. Told, not asked.

I had previously read that you could convert to Islam by reciting, "There is no God but Allah" and "Muhammed is the prophet of Allah" in Arabic. I found a translation guide and planned to lead the senior class in the prayer. Converting the entire class to Islam would have likely gotten me kicked out of school, and I backed down, but it was a fun fantasy for a while.

Many years later, married with four kids, I came out as atheist. It had been brewing in my mind for a while. What pushed me over the edge was learning that something like 90 percent of physical scientists identified as atheists. That was me — I'm a chemist by training — and I finally felt free to claim the title.

The coming out led to a few tears from my wife, but we managed to stay together. Right around this time, I started attending city council meetings in Fayetteville, N.C., where we were living. They always started with a moment of silence. Cool, no problem. I didn't bow my head or close my eyes. There was nothing to pray to. Then I got transferred to Parkersburg, W.Va. After getting settled into our new home, I started attending the city council meetings. I was more than a bit surprised when it opened with the Lord's Prayer. It was led by the council president, with all the audience being invited to stand and participate.

I checked with a politically active friend and learned that it was always so and had been the practice for many years. The first few times I stood along with everyone else, but eventually decided to stay seated and silent.

I had heard of FFRF and your support for separation of church and state issues. So, I contacted y'all. This contact led to a letter to the council. The council basically told us to pound sand, and that led to the lawsuit.

FFRF's Patrick Elliot, Chris Line and the other lawyers who pushed the case through over several years were all top-notch. My co-plaintiff Eric Engle and I never doubted that FFRF would win, and y'all did, 100 percent down the line.

So, the council is now prohibited from starting meetings with council-led prayers.

Now my atheist, Jewish and other non-Christian friends can attend city council meetings without being made to feel as if they are second-class citizens.

Thank you for all that you do.

“Religion can make you do some strange things.”

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Photo by Chris Line

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Sacramento	KQCA-MY	(Ch. 58)	8:30 am
San Francisco	KICU-IND	(Ch. 36)	10 am
Seattle	KONG-IND	(Ch. 16)	8 am
		(Ch. 16 or Ch. 106 on Comcast)	
Washington, D.C.	WDCW-CW	(Ch. 50, 23, 3)	8 am

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

Yip Harburg, from his book:

Rhymes for the Irreverent

A Nose Is A Nose Is A Nose

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

Illustrated by Seymore Chwast, published by FFRF

Courts

Continued from page 1

in Maine, a tuition assistance program, which pays for students in rural areas who don't have their own public high schools, to go to another public or private high school. Under the program, the state will pay, but not if the school uses the government funds to finance religious instruction or indoctrination. Now, the limitation that the state placed on those funds reflected both the state's longstanding interest in promoting separation of church and state, and the fact that this was a unique program that was meant to provide some rough equivalent of a public education to those who can't get it.

In June, the Supreme Court ruled 6 to 3, a very common vote at this point, that the state's restriction on that funding violated the federal Free Exercise Clause because it supposedly discriminated against religion. Now, why is this a problem?

When it comes to government funding of religion, the script has been completely flipped. In the past, the court used to guard against government-funded religion, and for good reason. Shielding taxpayers from compulsory support of religion lies at the heart of the Constitution's religious liberty protections. In fact, James Madison, the principal architect of the First Amendment, explicitly warned against government funding of religion because it would be the first step he feared in permitting the state to force citizens to conform to the preferred faith of those in power.

Now, though, the court isn't just allowing such funding, it is requiring it.

And the Maine case, Carson, went further than ever before. In two earlier decisions, bad ones to be sure, the court had held that states couldn't deny funding solely on the basis of the recipient's religious status. That is, just because they themselves were religious.

But, in Carson, the court expanded that rule to prevent states from denying funding based on the religious uses of the money, including religious instruction or indoctrination. This is all despite the fact that not too long ago, the court recognized that such funding could violate the Establishment Clause, which protects the separation of church and state.

As the defense in that case warned, we're now not only at a point where the court is ignoring the separation of religion and government, which would be bad enough, the court now thinks that protecting that vital separation is somehow its own constitutional violation. That further limits what states can do on their own to protect us all when the federal courts are falling short, which they're doing all too often these days.

Kennedy v. Bremerton

Now, the other truly dangerous religion decision from last term was a case called Kennedy v. Bremerton.

In Kennedy, the Supreme Court held that a public school had to allow its football coach to pray at the 50-yard line after games. Now, this case is problematic for so many reasons. I don't have time to get into them all right now, but here are a few.

First of all, the court's six-person supermajority did the same thing that it did in the Maine case. They decided that well-meaning efforts by the government, which in this case was the public school, to maintain church-state separation, have now become their own constitutional violation.

The case is also a telling example of the lengths to which this new majority on the court will go to advance its cru-



Photo by Chris Line

Daniel Mach is director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief.

sade — playing fast and loose with the facts when it suits them, even when there's photographic evidence to the contrary, like there was in this case. In the Kennedy decision, the majority adopted what one lower court called a deceitful narrative that had been spun by the coach and his lawyers.

In the case, the Supreme Court described the coach's prayers as personal and quiet, but they were nothing of the sort. The coach delivered his prayers audibly, at the 50-yard line, immediately after of games, and often surrounded by students. In the court decision itself, there are pictures that show this. The majority also said that the coach had given up any intent to pray with his students, when, in fact, he repeatedly demanded that he be able to continue praying with his students, even saying he was "helping these kids be better people."

The court also claimed that no students were coerced into the prayer, but the record in the case shows that some of the families complained and they said they participated in this prayer with the coach only to avoid separating themselves from the team and suffering all of the possible consequences that can come with that. Like losing playing time.

Regardless, that misses the point. As the Supreme Court had recognized for over 50 years before that, just forcing students to make that choice, putting them in that position to choose between joining your teacher or your coach in prayer, or choosing not to and making a public protest, and sending that message to someone who has such authority over you — just putting students to that choice is inherently coercive, and therefore, unconstitutional. That's what the court had acknowledged many times. Not this time.

Killing the Lemon test

Now, maybe one of the biggest bombshells of the Kennedy case was that the court finally scrapped what was known as the Lemon test for determining whether there is a violation of the Establishment Clause, whether the separation of church and state has been breached. That test, dating back to the '70s, has had its critics over the years, but it's generally served the cause of religious freedom pretty well over the years. Not anymore. In the Kennedy case, the court took the final step of killing that test and its offshoot, something known as the endorsement test, and maybe showing a little bit of embarrassment at how many landmark cases the court has been overturning lately. The court pretended in the Kennedy case that the Lemon test was

already dead before this case. They said it had long since abandoned the test, even though that was just not true.

But they didn't want to come out and say, "OK, here's another one we're overruling." Now it will be much harder to show that a government action or policy violates the separation of church and state.

It's now not enough to prove that, say, a government religious display or a government-sponsored prayer has the purpose or has the effect of promoting or endorsing religion, as had been the case under the Lemon test, which had been in place

for the past 50 years. So, what's the new test that the court gives us to replace this Lemon test? The court only offers vague suggestions. The court says we should determine whether the Establishment Clause has

been violated by reference to "historical practices and understandings."

Historical practices and understandings? What does that mean? The court doesn't say. The court doesn't even try. But, if other cases are any indication, "history" might mean everything from what the founders supposedly thought about a specific religious practice, to some hopelessly malleable notion about the country's overall commitment to religious exercise.

And, if that is what "historical practices and understandings" mean, then government action promoting religion could almost always be found constitutional. Anything goes, maybe. Unless the government is actually forcing you to attend church or forcing you to profess religious beliefs with the threat of criminal or civil penalties. Yeah, it's scary and I fear we're going to see a lot more blatant religious favoritism very soon.

Unfortunately, those are not the only bad developments in the Supreme Court, as you all know. Obviously, there is the radical Dobbs decision, which overturned Roe v. Wade. While that is technically not a religion case, I think you can see why religious favoritism is looming in the background of that case. This was a shameful revocation of a vital constitutional right, and the court's conservative majority effectively sanctioned an understanding of abortion that is largely associated with particular religious viewpoints, with no regard for the fact that followers of other faiths or none believe that access to abortion is essential for all.

Codifying religious views

As we know, there is a wide diversity of faith perspectives and non-faith perspectives about abortion. Yet, immedi-

ately after Dobbs, many lawmakers are rushing to codify just one set of religious views at the expense of all others, including the nonreligious.

The extreme conservatives have gotten so used to having their way on the Supreme Court that they cannot fathom a loss, even a minor procedural one.

Take the recent dispute over Yeshiva University in New York, where an LGBTQ student group has been denied recognition by the school solely because it's an LGBTQ student group. What does that mean? They can't hold meetings on campus. They don't have access to bulletin boards or the listserv at the school to announce their activities. So, they went to state court.

A few facts are important to know here. First of all, an LGBTQ student club has existed at the Yeshiva Law School for decades, and Yeshiva's public policies guarantee equal treatment under New York City's human rights law. For those reasons and others, the lower court in the state ruled for the student group. They said that the human rights law applied, the civil rights law applied, and that the school had to recognize the group.

The school went straight up to the Supreme Court, seeking emergency relief. They said, "Please help us, you've got to fix this!" Maybe a little surprisingly, the Supreme Court denied that emergency relief, but don't get your hopes up too much on this. The denial was just based on procedural grounds. It had nothing to do with the actual merits of the case. It was all about the procedural hoops that the school should have jumped through but didn't before going to the Supreme Court.

You have to do certain things before you just try to skip over and go straight to the Supreme Court. The school didn't do that, and the Supreme Court said, "OK, do that first and once you've done that, you can come back to us." That doesn't seem like such a big deal, right? The court didn't say anything about the substance of the case and yet there is a fairly angry dissent written by Justice Samuel Alito complaining basically that the sky is falling for the ultraconservatives. They couldn't believe this was going on. They characterized that what the school group was doing is asking New York to enforce the state's preferred interpretation of Torah, of scripture. That was not what was going on in this case at all, but nonetheless, the conservatives were so up in arms in court they called it a shocking development. They promised that when the case got back up there, they'll rule for the school. "Don't you worry" is what they said.

Even a slight bump in the road for them is treated as some dramatic shocking development.

Religious rights above others

All of these recent cases in the Supreme Court follow on the heels of action in recent years to elevate religious exercise above other rights and civil liberties.

For example, the courts relatively recently sided with a social service provider who, for religious reasons, discriminated against couples who wanted to be foster parents. The group wouldn't certify them because they said certifying gay couples was against their religious beliefs. This is one of our cases and the court ruled for the service provider. It said that they had a right to get the contract with the city of Philadelphia, and to continue discriminating against families.

In a related matter, the court has sided with businesses. In the Hobby Lobby case, which you probably know about, it said they don't have to have insurance that's required by the Affordable Care Act.

They don't want to cover contraception for their employees for religious reasons. This is the same Supreme Court that, at the height of pandemic, gave churches a religious exemption from health and safety measures. And let's be clear: The court isn't just elevating religion over nonreligion, which would be bad enough, it has this automatic embrace of only certain types of religious cases.

Compare two cases. First, the Masterpiece Cakeshop case, another one where we were on the losing side. That seems to be a theme here. There was a bakery that discriminated against our clients, a same-sex couple that wanted a wedding cake. The court sided with the bakery. In none of these cases has the court come out and said, "Yes, there is a blanket religious right to discriminate." There are nuances in a bunch of these cases. In this case, they said the process was tainted, the process was anti-religion. Why? For one thing, some of the government officials involved in enforcing Colorado's anti-discrimination laws had made some statements that the court said were so blatantly hostile to religion that they tainted the process.

Here are the statements: "It is one of the most despicable pieces of rhetoric that people can use to use their religion to hurt others."

This is another statement that was cited: "That the baker can believe what he wants to believe, but he can't act on that belief and discriminate if he decides to do business in this state." OK, that was it. Now, despite the fact that there was clear discrimination against gay couples, the court said that the entire process was tainted and we can't enforce the civil rights laws in that case.

OK, thus far I've focused on the Supreme Court.

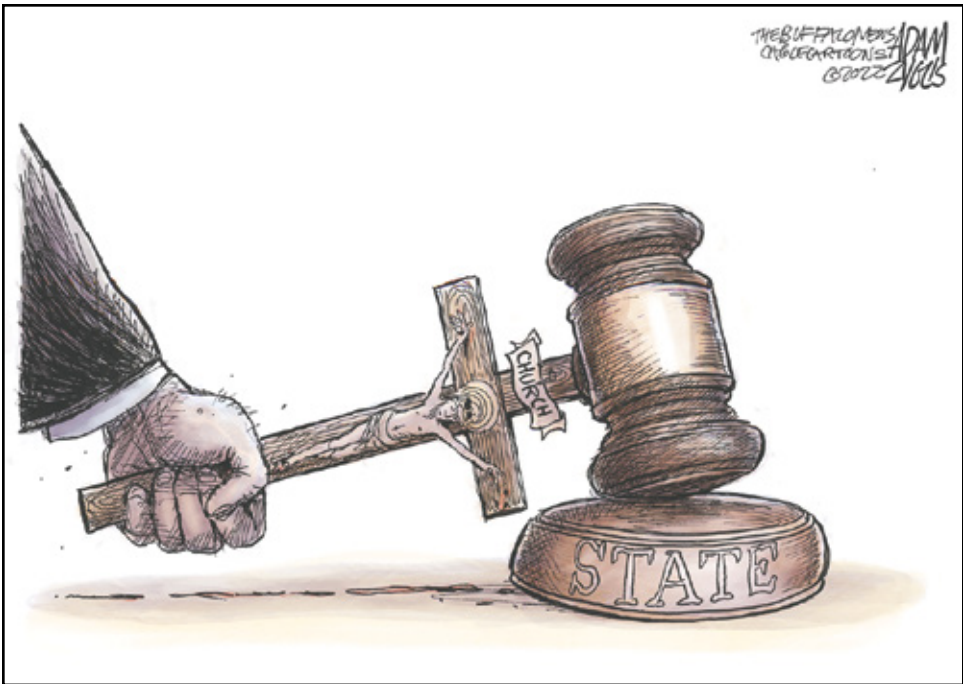
Not just Supreme Court

But the lower courts have seen their fair share of mischief, too. Last month, in an FFRF case, a federal court of appeals actually allowed a justice of the peace, here in Texas, to lock his doors and open court sessions with a prayer ceremony.

And a federal panel amazingly said that was fine, and said it was not coercive. Keep in mind what's going on here. This is a prayer ceremony. If you want to excuse yourself, you have to let the court know, and the doors are locked and then you have to appear before this judge who started the prayer ceremony. The federal court said, "That's fine, it's not coercive."

As always, FFRF is fighting the good fight, but you see what we're all up against here.

A federal judge, also here in Texas, ruled that employers who have religious objections to provide coverage for prep



for medication for HIV infection don't have to provide that coverage because of their religious objections, even though it's required by the Affordable Care Act. That same judge ruled for plaintiffs challenging another ACA rule. This time, it was an HHS regulation clarifying that the Affordable Care Act bars health care entities from discriminating against patients and employees because they are transgender or because they seek reproductive care.

The list goes on. In public schools, just garden-variety, old-school violations of the separation of church and state remain. They're prevalent, despite the fact that the Supreme Court had set clear rules. This goes back to the seminal school's religion cases in the 1960s. Since then, that has been absolutely clear that public schools, teachers and staff cannot lead kids in prayer and generally that public schools can't favor or promote religious doctrine.

Despite that, blatant and widespread problems persist, even though the rules have been straightforward for over a half century.

I'll just give you a few examples of that. We had a case in Tennessee: School events regularly featured Christian prayer. Every week the middle school principal instructed students to pray. One teacher read her students bible verses every morning. There were biblical quotes on the walls, messages posted throughout the school with religious content, and a large Latin cross was painted on the wall of the school gym.

“The extreme conservatives have gotten so used to having their way on the Supreme Court that they cannot fathom a loss, even a minor procedural one.”

In another situation in Louisiana, they read the Lord's Prayer over the PA system. I'm talking about public schools here, not private schools.

School officials called evolution a fairy tale and urged students to take the bible literally. Our clients were mocked when they even questioned this.

At a parish in Louisiana, from another case a few years earlier, our client was a Thai Buddhist sixth grader. His science teacher promoted creationism in class, told students that the Big Bang never happened, and that the universe was created by God approximately 6,000 years ago, called evolution impossible and stupid, and that stupid people made it up because they don't want to believe in God.

Then this was the proof that they're right and evolution is wrong: If evolution was real, the teacher said, it would still be happening. Apes would be turning into human beings. Yeah.

Just one final example of this kind of thing, this time in South Carolina. School officials were promoting religion at every turn. But it culminated in an evangelical revival assembly that had the stated purpose of "saving" students. It was a full-day event, and it featured a minister who delivered a sermon, a Christian rapper, and church members who prayed with students, and students at the event were urged to sign a pledge dedicating themselves to Christ. Students who didn't attend the revival were forced to spend the afternoon in the suspension room. Sometimes these things are hard to prove. Sometimes students tell us what happened and then the school denies it all. In that case, the Christian rapper himself was so proud of the event that he filmed it all and posted it online, so that was helpful.

Now, these cases are just the tip of the iceberg. There are cases where we have families that are brave enough to step up and complain. Now, the last ones I mentioned, the schools caved. The family in the South Carolina case won their case, but at great personal sacrifice. They were harassed at their home, they received death threats, their dog was poisoned. They couldn't get jobs, they lost a bunch of job opportunities and they eventually had to leave town. Things like that happen in many of these cases. In the Louisiana case, as a result of the school official's conduct, our client was bullied and became so physically ill that they couldn't attend school and they had to transfer and go 25 miles away.

The family was targeted for harass-

ment, including people showing up dressed in KKK hoods.

We won't give up the fight

Yeah, so, that's some of the bad news. Where does that leave us? Well, the good news is that we will never give up the fight.

Our rights are too precious, and we, and you, and everyone in this country who cares about their liberties, will not back down. First of all, we won't back down in the courts. We're going to keep fighting there, too. Take the issue of prayer in schools, for example, as I mentioned earlier. The Supreme Court's majority in that Kennedy case, in the coach case, went out of its way to embrace this deceitful narrative about what actually happened. The court pretended, contrary to the evidence, that the coach was only asking to give quiet personal solitary prayer. Now, that was all an absolute fiction, as the lower courts recognized, but now here we are, we should take the court at its word.

Public schools still have a duty to serve students of all faiths and those of none and significant constitutional restrictions remain on schools' employees' ability to promote religion to them. In that Kennedy case, the court upheld the right of the coach only — and this is important — only to engage in a quiet and private act of prayer that was not endorsed by the school. That prayer that fell outside of the coach's official responsibilities did not involve or coerce students and was not imposed on a captive audience. Leaving aside what actually happened, this is what the court pretended happened.

All of those elements were critical to the decision, and staff prayers that don't share those features are still unconstitutional like they've been for over a half century.

There's still a lot we can do. In fact, the Supreme Court has, in many cases over the years, including going back to the '40s, already engaged in a historical analysis of what the founders of this country believed about religion and what should or shouldn't be allowed when it comes to government religious favoritism.

In doing so, in all of those prior cases, the court repeatedly reaffirmed, based on this historical analysis, looking at what the founders thought, the idea that the government has to be neutral, not only among religions but also between religion and nonreligion.

So, we'll all continue to argue that the historical work has largely been done already by the court, which is not to say that the court won't shift gears or ignore all of that compelling analysis that it did in other cases, but it's just to say we're hardly operating on a blank slate. In other words, all is not lost in the courts, at least not yet. That said, we need to continue to fight outside the courts, too, maybe now more than ever. In legislatures, in op-eds, in town halls, on street corners, at the dinner table, we need to tell them that it is not OK to treat everyone who's not a member of the religious majority as a second-class citizen.

It is not OK to throw out half a century of precedent simply because you now have the votes. It's not OK to pretend to rely on some idea of what the founders of our nation originally thought about religious liberty and then completely forget about the fact that the key players in the adoption of the Constitution, way back when, they themselves recognized that religious belief or nonbelief is too precious to be left in the hands of government officials. And it's not OK for politicians, judges, legislators to give a free pass to employers, to businesses, or health care providers to discriminate in the name of religion and impose their faith on others.

It's not OK, and we will all keep fighting to make sure they know it. Thank you.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Executive Board Chair Stephen Hirtle presents Daniel Mach with the Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award during FFRF's convention in San Antonio on Oct. 29, 2022.

FFRF’s 2023 law student essay contest winners

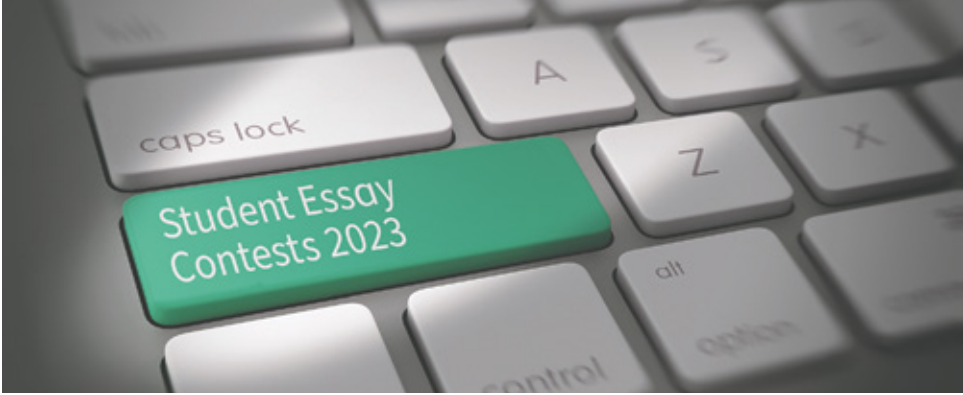
The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the three winners of the Diane and Stephen Uhl Memorial Essay Competition for Law Students.

FFRF paid out a total of \$9,000 to the winners of this year’s contest.

The winning essay is printed below, and the second- and third-place essays are posted online at freethoughttoday.com.

Law school students were asked to write on the topic of how laws banning or restricting abortion should be invalidated based on the religious liberty interests of a potential plaintiff.

For ease of reading, the essays (in print and online) do not include the foot-



notes and citations that were included in the authors’ submissions. Grading and selecting of the winners were done by the FFRF Legal Team.

Winners are listed below and include the law school they are attending and

the award amount.

First place: Kalyn Mizelle McDaniel, University of Texas School of Law, \$4,000.

Second place: Laura M. Eickholt, Ohio Northern University Law School, \$3,000.

Third place: Io Jones, University of Virginia School of Law, \$2,000.

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994 and grad students since 2010. The law school contest began in 2019.

Diane and Stephen Uhl Memorial Essay Contest Winner

Hanged on the gallows that he prepared

How expansive readings of the Free Exercise Clause pave the way to protect abortion rights

By Kalyn Mizelle McDaniel

“So, they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.” Esther 7:10

Haman is a character in the Hebrew bible whose ascent to power is subversive, defined by shrouded tactics to pursue his political ambitions. Ultimately, he constructs gallows, the infrastructure necessary to accomplish his goal: the execution of his enemies.

His plot is under way, yet the tides turn. Haman falls from political favor. He is sent to be executed — ironically — utilizing the same mechanism of death he constructed and sought to weaponize.

Groups claiming to be the singular voice for religious liberty have, similarly, utilized the courts to treat religious liberty as a vehicle to justify myriad harms. These tactics, however, may have built the infrastructure necessary to invalidate laws restricting abortion based on the religious liberty interest of potential plaintiffs.

Restrictions and bans on abortion should be invalidated based on the free-exercise rights of potential plaintiffs because: (1) under states’ Religious Freedom Restoration Acts (RFRA), restrictions on abortion substantially burden religious practice and are, therefore, constitutionally suspect; (2) these laws are unable to withstand strict scrutiny analysis; and (3) these laws are suspect under the U.S. Constitution based on the Supreme Court’s adoption of the most favored nation theory of religious liberty.

State RFRA statutes emerged in response to the Supreme Court’s *Employment Division v. Smith* and *City of Boerne v. Flores* decisions. Before *Smith*, neutral laws that imposed even an incidental burden on religion were subject to heightened scrutiny. The court, in *Smith*, diverted from that precedent and narrowed the protection holding that, absent the intent to discriminate, neutral laws of general applicability that burdened religion were subject only to rational basis review.

In response, and with varying motivations, a diverse coalition emerged to sup-



Kalyn Mizelle McDaniel

port the passage of RFRA in Congress. As passed, RFRA applied to federal and state actions and imposed a pre-Smith test to trigger heightened scrutiny for free-exercise challenges. In *Flores*, though, the Supreme Court limited RFRA enforcement to the federal government. States soon responded by enacting their own, often more expansive, versions of RFRA. Advocates in the states have since pushed courts to issue rulings prioritizing majority religious beliefs by granting exceptions to anti-discrimination laws. Advocates for church-state separation have called for revising RFRA statutes. Still, RFRA has been used in ways that genuinely protect religious minorities, and the protection it affords does not exclude religious practices that require access to abortion care.

Most state RFRA laws were modeled on the federal version of the statute, which requires actions by the states that burden religion to pass the rigorous “strict scrutiny” standard. This means that the government may “substantially burden” the exercise of a person’s sincere religious belief only if it shows that the “application of the burden to the person” (1) furthers a “compelling government interest” and (2) is the “least restrictive means” of furthering that interest.

Potential plaintiffs have a strong case that laws limiting their ability to access, perform, or counsel about abortion substantially burden sincerely held religious beliefs. Lawsuits on these grounds have commenced in Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Utah and Wyoming. Since state RFRA statutes diverge in specific protective language, advocates should tailor challenges accordingly. Plaintiffs in Indiana have successfully proved that the

state’s abortion bans “prevent or otherwise interfere with the ability of the plaintiffs . . . to obtain abortions as directed by their sincere religious beliefs.” Specifically, their religions (Judaism, Islam, Unitarian Universalism) direct them to obtain abortion care under a variety of circumstances, such as when a pregnancy jeopardizes the mental or physical health of the pregnant person without necessarily causing “serious risk of substantial and irreversible physical impairment of a major bodily function,” as the ban’s health exception would require. The Marion County Superior Court granted the Indiana plaintiffs’ preliminary injunction, blocking the ban from being enforced against the plaintiffs on Dec. 2, 2022.

Alternatively, in Missouri, the plaintiffs are clergy members and physicians. Their respective religions require them to counsel, perform and contemplate abortions with their patients and congregants. This religious practice, too, is substantially burdened, and advocates argue that the abortion ban violates Missouri’s RFRA by compelling conformity with a single religion’s practice.

Regardless of the specific right being burdened, anti-abortion advocates will question these beliefs’ sincerity and religious grounding. There is a long history of erasure by antiabortion advocates of the fact that faith motivates or even requires people to provide or obtain an abortion. The legislative history of RFRA reveals that anti-abortion groups opposed or attempted to modify RFRA because they feared it would create an independent statutory basis for the right to abortion. RFRA only passed when *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* codified privacy as the constitutional basis for abortion rights and assuaged the fears that the right would need to be grounded in free exercise. Accordingly, RFRA does not include proposed amendments

that would have prevented the statute from protecting abortion.

Plaintiffs may have to overcome objections to the sincerity of their religious beliefs.

However, longstanding precedent prevents the government from examining the legitimacy of a sincere belief. While a religious view “might seem incredible, if not preposterous, to most people,” courts cannot enter the “forbidden domain” of attempting to interpret religious doctrine or discern the relative importance or centrality of a religious belief or practice. This analysis would improperly entangle the government with religion in violation of the First Amendment.

Under state RFRA statutes, laws burdening plaintiffs’ religious beliefs must pass strict scrutiny analysis. The court has gone so far as to recognize that strict scrutiny is often “strict in theory, but fatal in fact” regarding most laws of general applicability. Additionally, the form of strict scrutiny that the Supreme Court has recently used in recent free-exercise cases, *Tandon v. Newsom* and *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, is particularly aggressive and nearly impossible to satisfy: requiring compelling interest and narrow tailoring.

In *Casey*, the court recognized the state’s interest in “protecting fetal life or potential life,” which states will likely cite as the compelling interest necessitating abortion restrictions.

However, under *Casey*, the state’s interest in protecting potential life became compelling only in the third trimester. In *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, the court harshly criticized this standard but declined to, at that time, establish a standard that would replace the trimester approach. It is unlikely that the present court would recognize that the compelling interest is present from con-



“We Dissent” is a monthly podcast by three women who are powerhouse attorneys at the major secular organizations in the U.S., including FFRF’s Rebecca Markert and Liz Cavell.

Listen in as they discuss developments affecting state/church separation in the U.S. Supreme Court and lower federal courts.

Join us @ we-dissent.org

ception, given the missed opportunity to do just that in Dobbs.

Additionally, the compelling interest must be a secular one. The interest in protecting potential life from conception is inherently religious. The answer to the question of when life begins differs between people of different or no faith. It additionally serves as the foundation of central tenets of faith. Accordingly, adopting one particular faith's conception of when life begins raises an Establishment Clause challenge.

Even if protecting potential life is deemed a compelling state interest, it is very unlikely that the state laws would survive the narrowly tailored prong of strict scrutiny. In *Fulton*, the court found that a Philadelphia statute conditioning its foster care referral relationship on an anti-discrimination agreement was not narrowly tailored since it theoretically allowed some exceptions. The unanimous decision stated that the question "is not whether the city has a compelling interest in enforcing its non-discrimination policies generally, but whether it has such an interest in denying an exception to CSS."

Of the 17 states that have imposed more restrictive bans on abortion since the *Dobbs* decision, 12 have state RFRA statutes. Plaintiffs in the remaining five states may be able to challenge the statutes under the court's newly adopted most favored nation theory of religious liberty. Based on *Fulton*, any law "so long as it could potentially exempt some secular activity, is not generally applicable" and is therefore subject to strict scrutiny analysis. Every anti-abortion law

“Courts cannot enter the “forbidden domain” of attempting to interpret religious doctrine or discern the relative importance or centrality of a religious belief or practice.

in the country currently has some kind of exemption that could meet this standard.

The finding that the mere existence of a secular exception could be the basis for finding that a statute violates the First Amendment means that *Fulton* has radically expanded what the court is willing to consider under strict scrutiny. If these five states challenge their anti-abortion laws under the court's current free exercise jurisprudence, the strict scrutiny test should proceed like the state RFRA strict scrutiny analysis.

RFRA was built by a coalition that included individuals who intended to protect minority religious rights. However, the state statutes and federal protections for

religious liberty have been used as a cudgel to enforce religious power structures. Advocates should hold the court's feet to the flames by utilizing the current precedent to protect abortion rights. However, advocates should exercise caution. Precedents created utilizing RFRA will likely continue to be used by groups seeking to undermine equal protection laws. Advocates should not make the same mistakes as those who sought to weaponize religious liberty laws lest they build the infrastructure that may later be used in their own demise.

Kalyn is a second-year student at the University of Texas School of Law. She grew up in a religious community and attended Colorado Christian University, where she advocated for LGBTQ+ inclusion and became especially interested in church-state separation issues. This summer, she will be a constitutional litigation intern at Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and she hopes to continue developing her career as an impact litigator.

Religious oaths in court need to be eliminated

By Ryan Jayne

The British Journal of Psychology recently published a study that found jurors are more likely to convict defendants who opt for a secular affirmation rather than a religious oath when taking the stand. This anti-atheist discrimination is unsurprising — and the study is a sobering reminder of the ease of correcting it.



Ryan Jayne

The best solution is the simplest: to keep state and church entirely separate by omitting the religious oath altogether.

The U.S. Supreme Court has recently attempted to recast its Establishment Clause test in terms of coercion, as though the only thing the First Amendment prohibits is the government forcing someone to profess a religious belief. But FFRF has long fought for strict separation, which the First Amendment's authors understood was necessary. This study shows yet another reason why.

When a court requires criminal defendants either to swear a religious oath, as most do, or to give an alternative secular affirmation, it forces non-religious defendants to declare their lack of religion to the judge or jury. Imagine the outrage if criminal defendants were required to divulge to a jury that they were Jewish, Muslim or Catholic at the opening of their testimony! Anyone would see this as an in-

vasion of privacy and an unnecessary invitation to jurors to discriminate.

The alternative is simple: All defendants should be treated the same way by swearing to tell the truth under the threat of perjury. Most jurors would not mind this change, and the rare jurors who don't take secular affirmations as seriously as religious oaths are the very ones who will discriminate against nonreligious defendants. If all witnesses swore the same oath, discrimination would be greatly reduced at no cost.

Our courts of law are secular entities, centered on evidence and proof. Sprinkling in religion by encouraging witnesses to swear to an invisible deity makes no sense, and now we know that it also leads to discriminatory results. This study out of Britain should remind Americans that we were the first country to formally separate church and state, because we learned from Britain's mistakes. We should have gotten rid of religious oaths when we stopped being British subjects.

Eliminating religious oaths would match the tenor of the U.S. Constitution — the constitutionally prescribed presidential oath does not contain any religious language, and the only references to religion anywhere in the Constitution are exclusionary. At a time when the rule of law is being openly challenged, with religious rhetoric offered in its place, it is more important than ever that we fight for the strict separation of church and state and stand up against anti-atheist discrimination.

Attorney Ryan Jayne is a member of FFRF's Strategic Response Team, which spearheads FFRF's state-based legislative advocacy.

Freethinking at the farmers' market



The Ozarks Chapter of FFRF on April 8 participated in the first farmers' market of the season in Bentonville, Ark., where dozens of residents stopped to talk and give positive comments, according to Chris Sweeny, the chapter's leader. It was the first farmer's market also for Sweeny's daughter, Indie Sweeny McGuire.

Helping monitor the table and greet interested passersby were, from left, Linda Farrell, Sweeny, Linda K. Laue, James Brazeal and Kirsten Hawkins.

‘Parental bill of rights’ really a ‘bill of wrongs’

FFRF is warning that so-called “parental rights” bills sweeping the nation have sinister intentions.

While appearing to be an innocuous way to strengthen parent involvement in schools, they are a clear attempt to dismantle trust in the public education system and to allow a minority of Christian nationalist extremists to impose their views on other parents and children.

Language in state-level “parental bill of rights” proposals usually includes a prohibition on a state entity infringing on a parent's ability to direct the upbringing, education, health care and mental health of a minor child. More specifically, these bills often make curricula available to the public. The bills also often include grievance procedures for the public, not limited to parents, to voice concerns over what children are being taught. This has led to censorship of certain curricula and the removal of books in classrooms.

Florida led the way when its Legislature passed the “Parental Rights in Education Act” last year, also known as the “Don't Say Gay” law, which been heavily criticized. It forbids discussion touching on sexual orientation or gender identity in K-3 grades, also prohibiting “instruction that is not age appropriate” for other grades. It's also been condemned for essentially requiring the school to “out” LGBTQ students to parents. FFRF has called attention to a number of copycat bills across the country. One of those copycat law also comes

from Florida. The ridiculously named “Stop WOKE Act” restricts teaching on racial topics and diversity issues.

In 2022, after Florida enacted its law, 85 similar bills in 26 states were filed.

The U.S. House passed its own version on March 24. Although the Senate will not likely approve the bill (and President Biden will quite certainly veto it), the passage is a calculated political act. Opponents of the legislation are asserting that many of the rights protected in the bill already exist — and that it seeks to politicize classrooms and create a hostile environment for LGBTQ students.

The uptick in these bills has galvanized some Christian nationalists to scrutinize school curricula. The real problem comes, however, when parents gain unfettered access to their child's curriculum and start to impact the quality of education that all children receive. Objections to certain parts of a child's curriculum often come from a parent's flawed understanding of what is actually taking place in their child's classroom.

In short, parental bills of rights give white Christian nationalists and religiously motivated parents a heckler's veto over public school education.

Our public schools are a symbol of our democracy, and provide a chance for students to receive a secular education based on facts, not religion. Parental “bills of rights” are really a “bill of wrongs” and must be vigorously opposed.

Your weekly antidote to the Religious Right

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

FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

Champion of the First Amendment award

‘An opportunity to make a difference’

This is the speech by Nebraska state Sen. Megan Hunt, given on Oct. 29, 2022, at FFRF’s national convention in San Antonio. She was introduced by FFRF Board Member Jeremiah Camara, an author and filmmaker. To watch the speech, go to ffrf.us/convention-2022.

Jeremiah Camara: I’d like to introduce our next speaker, Megan Hunt. She’s a Nebraska state senator, and is a most unusual public official because she publicly identifies as an atheist. She was first elected to the unicameral Nebraska Senate in 2013 to represent District 8 and is committed to uplifting the voices of the marginalized and forgotten. In April, she led dramatic filibusters against an anti-abortion trigger bill that would have banned abortion care in that state once the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Her impassioned remarks and filibuster were credited with killing the bill in early April. Thanks to her activism, abortion is still legal in Nebraska.

Megan Hunt is an entrepreneur, activist and parent. She has worked with other senators to tackle food stamp reform, ban the harmful practice of conversion therapy, improve affordable housing, and ensure that caregivers during the pandemic were eligible for unemployment benefits. She currently sits on five committees in the Legislature. Megan’s work has been covered by major publications and she has received numerous awards. We’re very pleased she’s here today to accept this Champion of the First Amendment award.

By Megan Hunt

Thank you. It’s incredible to receive this honor. It is really difficult to follow people like Anthea Butler, who I admire so much. And Amy Hagstrom Miller, who’s coming up next. I met her in Washington, D.C. She probably doesn’t remember, but I thought she was the coolest person ever. I’m in this room with all these fantastic people and figures in the movement, and I just feel like this regular person, and I don’t know how I got into this mess. I don’t say that to put myself down or anything, just to say that, isn’t it incredible in life how one choice leads to another, and then you’re just like, “Oh my god! I’m responsible for things! I never wanted this to happen. I’m in too deep.” But, that’s pretty much been my life.

My background is really in entrepreneurship and activism. I’m a single mom; I have a 12-year-old son who’s in seventh grade and I’ve just been a gal in the neighborhood for about the past 18 years. I’ve been a business owner in my district for about 20 years and I ran a clothing boutique for about 12 years and now I run a stationery store, so who I am at the core is a mom in the neighborhood who has a shop.

Fork in the road

But, circumstances have come into my life so many times that caused me to take a fork in the road or make a different decision, and it just shows me how you don’t have to come from privilege, you don’t have to have money, you don’t have to have the biggest, strongest network ever; you just have to try to make the next right decision as much as possible. You find yourself in these situations where you really have an opportunity to make a difference for people, and that has been truly the honor of my life.

My background is as a business owner and a parent and everything. I never saw



Photo by Steve Solomon

Sen. Megan Hunt, an atheist, tells the FFRF audience how she stopped an abortion ban in the Nebraska Legislature.

myself getting into politics; it was never a goal of mine. I was not trying to square myself up to be in power or some big leader or anything. In 2005, Omaha public schools, which is the public school district where I lived, they were starting to consider updates to their comprehensive sex ed curriculum. At the time, the sex ed curriculum hadn’t been updated since 1971. So, in some cases, you had kids getting the same sex ed that their grandparents had gotten. And, of course, since 1971, we’ve had the AIDS epidemic, we’ve had an increasingly out and increasingly suicidal LGBTQ+ population, we have the internet and what goes on with that. There’s a lot more going on in society and we know that kids aren’t getting accurate information about their own biology and their bodies and the kinds of information they need in order to make responsible decisions for their future.

In my county in Nebraska at the time, we also had the highest rates — the highest rates — of STDs and STIs in the entire country. I was part of a group of people who knew that to make a difference in that number for public health, for the health of our kids, comprehensive sex education could go a long way.

It was as contentious as some of you probably can guess. There were public hearings, there was outcry, there were rallies on both sides. At one public school board meeting, there was physical fighting. People shouting slurs at LGBTQ kids, adults harassing children this way.

I was in this room — this overflow room, because the meeting was so big — and I’m looking around just thinking, “All we’re talking about is teaching kids medically accurate, age-appropriate research-based biological information about their bodies and their health.”

And the violence and the anger that this inspires in my neighbors, and the people around us, and our community, shows how little respect we have for ourselves, for each other, for public health, and for the researchers and scientists and people who do all the work to bring this information to us, so we can make the best decisions.

And that really concerned me. So, long story short, we did it. We ended up

updating the curriculum. The school board voted to add comprehensive sex education to the curriculum. It was very difficult, it was super arduous, and I can’t believe we did it.

Running for office

I found that people were seeing me not just as a business leader, but maybe a political leader. I had organized a lot of letters to the editor, I had organized rallies, I had done a lot of work with parents and teachers, myth-busting and trying to debunk lots of things other people were

saying. So, I started asking around, “If I ran for the Legislature, would you support me?” Everywhere I turned, people were like, “Yes, you should run, you should do it.” All of us have friends or cousins or neighbors where we think of them and we’re like, “They should run for office, they would be really good in city council or they would be really good in the House of Representatives, they would be really good on the school board,” but they don’t run because they don’t want to get involved in all this BS that we have to deal with. Keep pushing those people.

I’m really glad that I was asking around and trying to get people’s support because when I announced that I was running, everybody in my neighborhood and my community was right there with me. I won by a landslide and became the first queer person elected to the Legislature and the first woman elected from my district. I’m proud of that, but I also say it’s a dubious honor because it’s not great that it took until 2018 to elect an LGBTQ person. I’m like the Diet Coke of gay culture. There’s nothing challenging going on here. I feel a responsibility not just to speak for those people, but to hold the door open behind me and make sure that people from all kinds of life experiences are able to serve in public office, because we know that government works better when it actually reflects the identities of the people it serves.

And that’s some old rich white men, there are some of you out there, you should have some representation, but there’s too much, right? And in Nebraska, we’ve never had a Jewish state senator,

we’ve never had a Muslim state senator. We don’t have a lot of representation from people of different nationalities or different abilities, and all of these things denigrate government to me. I’m happy to be a nonbeliever and I can represent that group as well as I can, as an individual, but I don’t represent the scope of experiences of the people of Nebraska or the people around the country who our work affects.

That’s a big mission that I’ve had. I know that I’m speaking to an extremely friendly room, and a lot of you have been very active in this movement for decades, but how many of you know Sen. Ernie Chambers? For those who don’t, Sen. Ernie Chambers is the longest-serving state senator in Nebraska history. He served for 46 years. They implemented term limits because of him. He was often the only Black senator in the Legislature. For many, many years, he was the only person of color and the only Black man elected in the Legislature. He has been an extremely important mentor and friend to me, so receiving this award is even more meaningful, because he received this award in 2005, and I know that this organization means a lot to him. And when I got into the Legislature, we sat next to each other, by chance, and we really, really hit it off. It wasn’t because we’re both nonbelievers, it wasn’t just that. I think that we both understand what it feels like when you think the government doesn’t notice you or care about you or work for you.

It’s so important that young people, especially, as they’re starting to get involved in civic engagement and voting and things like that, that they understand that the government is literally for you. It’s not above you. It’s not better than you. It’s not for people smarter than you. It’s made up of people just like you, and it exists for you. So, I really try to encourage people to get involved, whether that’s deciding to run for office, or being engaged with the nonprofit community where you live. All of these things are so important for our civic health and all of you already know because I’m preaching to the choir, is that civic health is really bad right now, and the more we can react positively to that and get people involved in a positive way, maybe we can keep it on life support. It’s a difficult time, for sure, and it’s a difficult time to be elected.

Using the filibuster

Here’s one of my favorite stories about Sen. Chambers. He was really well known for his filibusters. He could talk for hours and hours and hours. All the senators are like, “Ernie’s talking. I’m going back to my office and get some things done, because I know it’s going to be hours before we get to anything.” And that’s a skill. That’s a skill that I really have tried to learn from him — how to use the rules, how to use procedures, motions, amendments, to hold things up.

Because in conservative states, like Nebraska or Texas, when we don’t have the votes to stop something terrible, or we don’t have the numbers that we need to get something done that needs to be done, we do have time. The gift that he gave me is just understanding how to use these procedures so that we can take up as much time as possible. We were debating an abortion restriction bill in 2019, and he traditionally would be leading a filibuster on something like that. He’s an old timer, he’s experienced, he’s teaching the rest of us because now in

Opportunity

Continued from page 17

the era of term limits, we have less of an idea of what’s going on. So, his mentorship was really important. But, as we’re debating this abortion restriction bill, he’s in his office downstairs the entire time. I’m filing motions, I’m keeping my light on so I can keep talking, I’m filing amendments, going off on these little tangents, doing my best. But, the whole time, he never came upstairs to help. I was a little perturbed by this. I’m like, “I gotta to do all this stuff myself now? What’s going on?” At the end of the bill when we had the vote, it was 16 hours or something of talking, he came upstairs for the vote and we lost, of course, but we didn’t make it easy.

That’s the other thing that I’ve learned is that another tool that you have in the toolbox, even if you’re not going to win the day, even if you’re not going to win the war or the battle that day, you cannot make it easy for them. You have to make them go home at the end of the night, sad and tired and exhausted, in a bad mood, regretting the day they brought that bill, because it was no fun to pass it. That’s what I feel like I’ve been able to do with every abortion restriction that has come through Nebraska. Even though we can’t always hold them off, they regret it because we made it so painful for them and that’s what gives me pleasure.

And I do think that’s a deterrent. I think that makes people think twice about introducing some little thing, they go, “Ugh, Megan is going to make it too tough, so let’s not.” That day that we had that vote and Ernie came upstairs, he came over to talk to me and I was sad, because of course, we lost the vote because we’re never going to have the numbers for this kind of thing, and he put his hands on my shoulders like this and he said, “Did you do everything you could?” I said “Yes, I did everything I could.” He said, “Well, then how can anyone ask any more of you?” I think about that all the



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Board Member Jeremiah Camara presents the Champion of the First Amendment award to Nebraska state Sen. Megan Hunt at FFRF’s national convention in San Antonio on Oct. 29, 2022.

time when it feels like a loss is inevitable, especially as a progressive in a conservative state. If you’ve done your best, how could anybody ask any more of you? And I asked him, “But where were you? Were you just in your office the whole time? Why didn’t you come up?” He said, “Because I needed to know when I’m not here anymore, that you can do that.” I still tear up thinking about that moment.

A special place

But the Nebraska Legislature is a very special place. It’s the only non-partisan legislature in the country. It’s the only one-house legislature in the country, so we don’t have a House and a Senate, and it’s also the smallest in the country, with just 49 members, so we don’t have any majority, minority leaders. All of our leadership is elected by the whole body with a secret ballot. So, there’s no overt party pressure to vote for the right person or anything. And for that reason, even though Democrats are in the minority, we actually have an outsized majority of committee chairmen, because

when the ballot is secret and you’re able to vote for the person who’s best for the job, progressives tend to take those positions. So, it’s a very special place. My view is just if I get to serve eight years in the Legislature, but in the pie chart in my life, the small time that I get to be in the Legislature, wear my little pin, have people call me “senator” in the hallway, that’s such a small slice of my life and it’s really a gift to have this time to talk for 16 hours a day, to frustrate conservatives as much as possible. But to get the death threats, to get the rape threats, to get doxed, to get my child threatened at school, to get all the things that come with, as Dr. Anthea Butler said, the danger that sometimes we need to put ourselves in to make a meaningful difference and ask yourself, “What more are you willing to do to make the change you want to see in the world?” I’m very mindful that I don’t want to waste that gift, that I won’t have this platform forever.

It’s very nice to meet all of you and receive this recognition. Thank you.

OVERHEARD

As a nonbelieving American, I’m put off, to say the least, by the reference to God in the pledge. While the pledge is hardly our biggest problem, it’s surely an unnecessary and all-too-often empty bit of symbolism. Its purpose is indoctrination. It’s fodder for the culture wars. Too often, it’s merely rote recitation. It’s anti-secular because it’s pro-God.

Nicholas Goldberg, in his op-ed, “Is the Pledge of Allegiance just an empty, performative ritual?”

Los Angeles Times, 3-20-23

As a lifelong atheist, I have always objected to forced public displays of religious belief [including the Pledge of Allegiance].

The words “under God” should be removed from the Pledge of Allegiance. And . . . perhaps we should remove the entire pledge and replace it with an ode to the Bill of Rights.

Frances Segal, in a letter to the editor.

Los Angeles Times, 3-26-23

Look, I believe firmly in the separation of church and state. For me, that’s bedrock for how our democracy works, I have no interest in living in a theocracy of any kind. In my view, we live in our faith and under the law.



Photo by Rebecca Hammel
Ralph Warnock

Sen. Ralph Warnock, when asked about politicking from the pulpit.

Religion News Service, 3-31-23

Every day I wake up at 91, I am happy without a coffin over my head. I don’t know where I’m going, but I do know from whence I came. I’m a New Yorker, born, half-bred and bred, who outlived my brothers and closest friends.

Malachy McCourt, Irish-American humorist, actor, author, bartender, nonbeliever and brother of Frank McCourt (author

of Angela’s Ashes), profiled after he was kicked out of hospice for not dying quickly enough. (McCourt was interviewed on FFRF’s “Freethought Matters” TV show, March 2021. Watch at: bit.ly/3lbcJni)

New York Times, 3-12-23

Imagine if fundamentalist Muslims in our community demanded every female wear a head-to-toe burqa, like the Taliban do in Afghanistan.

Suppose Orthodox Christians demanded everyone celebrate Christmas on Jan. 7, like in Russia?

Suppose you order a big, juicy steak at your favorite steak house on a Friday night, but the waitress brings you fish instead, because that is what her beliefs dictate. Or a waiter refuses to deliver pork.

These examples sound ridiculous, of course. They are laughable because we know with certainty these religious groups could never get serious consideration for such demands in America. So, what is the difference between these silly examples and the ones listed at the beginning? The difference is which people demand privilege — the privilege to force their own views onto their neighbors.

Columnist David Kashdan, in his op-ed, “Is one religion more valid than another?”

Times News of Kingsport, Tenn., 11-20-22

FREETHOUGHT BOOKS

The following books are by FFRF members on the topics of religion or freethinking. FFRF does not do book reviews. These books are not offered through ffrf.org/shop.

Into the Blue

By Joseph W. Stillwell

A detailed first-person account of remarkable experiences, of this world and beyond. This is a collection of personal stories, all true, interwoven in a sequence of increasing strangeness and otherworldly reality. Herein is but one more accounting that should give pause to those who believe that our species is unique unto all that exists.

Paperback \$13.99
Kindle \$8.99



Preachers vs. Porn

By Mark Kernes

Author Mark Kernes reports the findings of his investigations into how Christianity has evolved into a political force that supports conservative politics that specifically targets sex and sexual depictions to advance its political aims. Readers will find the author’s research and firsthand experience as a former court reporter and legal editor informative and enlightening.

Hardcover \$28.99
Paperback \$23.99
Kindle \$8.99



The Phantom God

By John C. Wathey

Computational biologist and neuroscientist John C. Wathey explores religious feelings not as the direct perception by the brain of some supernatural realm, nor as the pathological misfiring of neurons, but as a natural consequence of how our brains are wired. The author treats mysticism as a completely natural phenomenon that has behavioral and evolutionary roots that can be traced far back into our ancestry.

Hardcover \$25.49
Kindle \$21.49

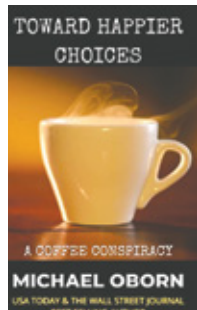


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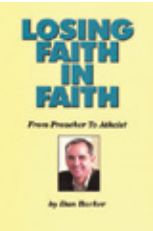
By Michael Oborn

Oborn’s book is an ambitious collection of feminist and humanist narratives hoping to derail millennia of dogma supporting cultural divisiveness and the suppression of women’s human rights. Why are women treated like second-class citizens in fundamentalist religions? Why is leaving the Mormon Church seemingly always a journey of suffered anguish?

Paperback \$10.18



Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist



By Dan Barker

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

Published by FFRF

Buy it from FFRF online
ffrf.org/shop

Jan. 6 insurrection

Expert: ‘Spiritual warfare’ played major role

This article first appeared on Yahoo News on Feb. 16 and is reprinted with permission.

By Jon Ward

Two weeks after President Biden was declared the winner of the 2020 election, a group of Christian pastors stood on stage inside a non-denominational church in a suburb of Phoenix, whipping the congregation into a frenzy of prayer mixed with violent and bloody imagery.

After 45 minutes of singing, and a request for money, and another 45 minutes of remarks from a featured speaker, the real show began: A rock band began playing anthemic background music while a procession of self-proclaimed “prophets” came to the stage to weave a tale of war between good and evil.

It was emotional, it was exhausting, and it was relentless.



Jon Ward

“Let there be the roar from the army of God!” yelled one Florida pastor named Donald Lynch, pumping his fist as hundreds of people stood around the stage jumping up and down, raising their arms in the air and crying out. “Release the roar! Release the roar! Out of your belly!”

Lynch spoke of a vision he claimed God had given him of an evil giant — symbolizing Biden and the Democrats — and of instructions he claimed God had given him to deal violently with that giant.

“God said, ‘Do you have the stomach to finish the job? Put your foot on his chin and expose the neck. Pick up that weapon and find you are strong enough to wield it,’” Lynch said, his husky voice straining. He began to shout. “Finish this! Finish this! I say finish this!”

It was pandemonium. It went on for over an hour. And this same scene was repeated in churches over the next month in seven states then-President Donald Trump was trying to throw out millions of legitimate votes in a bid to stay in power: Pennsylvania, Georgia, Michigan, Wisconsin, Nevada, New Mexico and Arizona.

Roughly two dozen religious leaders traveled to these battleground states over the course of a month, holding revival meetings where they mixed the rhetoric of violent spiritual warfare with prayers for the reinstatement of Trump in the presidency.

On Dec. 1, in Pittsburgh, an Atlanta-based “apostolic leader” named Jacquie Tyre kept her voice at a steady, constant yell around the halfway point of a nearly three-hour political rally and religious service.

“There is rising up a militia, that is connecting to the battlefield states, that will uncover, even beginning this night, the fraud, the corruption, the infiltration of evil from Pennsylvania to Georgia, from Georgia to Nevada, from Nevada to Arizona, from Arizona to New Mexico, from New Mexico to Wisconsin, to Michigan,” Tyre roared.

“God, we declare, that the militia men, the minutemen of the kingdom of God, are rising up in this hour,” she howled. “And, Father, we declare and decree in this place that there is no demon in hell and there is no voice out of government that can topple the kingdom of our God.”



Photo by Paul Weaver

A group known as the Jericho Marchers walks around the Pennsylvania Capitol on Jan. 5, 2021, during a rally to urge legislators to decertify the 2020 presidential election.

Meeting with officials

And it was all at the behest of Republican political officials in Washington, D.C., according to the leader of this effort, a pastor from South Carolina named Dutch Sheets. Little known outside his movement, Sheets would later meet with Trump administration officials at the White House on Dec. 29, 2020, a week before the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol by Trump supporters.

These meetings — and the religious philosophy that animated them — were a much bigger part of Jan. 6 than has previously been realized, argues Matthew D. Taylor, a scholar of Protestantism at the Institute for Islamic, Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore.

Taylor has produced a podcast series titled “Charismatic Revival Fury” that explains the roots of a movement called the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), which Taylor says became “the backbone . . . of Christian Trumpism” and then ultimately one of the driving forces behind the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol by Trump supporters.

“It’s really a movement that’s only been around for less than 30 years,” Taylor told Yahoo News, and was “seen as fringe, was seen as the realm of hucksters, seen as kind of low-brow and populist and extremist,” until Trump turned to its leaders to help him consolidate evangelical support during the 2016 election.

The NAR has also been “very hard to track,” Taylor said, because of the intentional way in which its founders were anti-institutional, anti-denominational and built a “mesh network” centered around individual leaders with large followings across the country and on social media and the internet. These leaders were organized by a man named C. Peter Wagner in the 1990s to form a governance structure that Taylor labels a “spiritual oligarchy.”

Taylor estimates that there are at least 10 million independent charismatic Christians in the United States, based on his analysis of the U.S. Religion Census conducted in 2020.

Demons and evil spirits

And Taylor shows that some of the Trump supporters in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6 had been told by this network of religious leaders that Trump’s defeat

was the work of actual demons, and that the Capitol itself was occupied by literal evil spirits.

On Jan. 1, Sheets told his roughly 300,000 followers on YouTube that a friend had a dream in which a “huge hand . . . from the sky” — which he also called “the hand of God” — “flicked the dome open” on top of the Capitol. “A very thick black smoke began rising up out of the building. The smoke was so thick it was almost solid, and actually it resembled a living thing . . . the darkness is an alliance with evil spirits,” Sheets said.

“We then heard a cavalry bugle playing the signal to charge, and we began moving toward the Capitol, not at a full gallop, but at a steady determined fast trot. As we started, on the ground in front of us, written in white letters, were the words ‘Don’t Stop,’” Sheets said. “God is coming to clean our government. Many in our Congress need to go.”

It is rhetoric like this, and the belief system that undergirds it, Taylor argues, that provided some portion of the emotional and psychological fuel for the violent and nearly calamitous effort to stop a democratic peaceful transfer of power on Jan. 6.

And this is why, he says, so many religious symbols and rituals were displayed that day — including the shofar, a horn used in Jewish religious ceremonies that has been adopted by Christian nationalists.

Taylor also specified that it was not simply a belief in “spiritual warfare” that inclined Trump supporters to lean toward real-world violence, but a more intensified and specific form of this belief system that he calls “strategic spiritual warfare.”

Many Christians around the world believe in “spiritual warfare,” Taylor said, but there are many different definitions of what this means.

At its most basic level, spiritual warfare simply means praying against evil. But the most radicalized versions Taylor believes are potentially dangerous include the belief that evil spirits take over and possess whole cities and institutions and can only be defeated by the physical presence of Christians — including some who call themselves “spiritual warfare generals” — engaged in intense prayer, singing, prophecy and other rituals.

Jericho Marches

For weeks leading up to the Capitol riot, Sheets and others in this network of self-proclaimed oracles told their followers that they needed to be physically present in D.C. on Jan. 6, to help wage this “strategic spiritual warfare” against these evil spirits, so that Trump could be reinstated.

This message was augmented by so-called Jericho Marches, held in many of the swing states, in which Trump supporters walked in circles around government buildings to reenact a story from the Old Testament. In that tale, the Israelites marched around the walled city of Jericho, conquered it with help from God and “destroyed with the sword every living thing in it — men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys,” as it says in the Book of Joshua.

There was also a Jericho March around the Supreme Court on Dec. 12, followed by a bizarre rally of religious and political leaders that equated Trump’s return to power as God’s will.

The rally showed that Trump supporters were “willing to tear down the country for a belief that they cannot prove, but that they will not believe is disprovable,” wrote Rod Dreher, a staunch conservative himself.

“Based on what I saw today,” Dreher wrote later in his dispatch, “the Christians in this movement do not doubt that Trump is God’s chosen, that they, by following him, are walking in light, and whatever they do to serve Trump is also serving God. They have tightly wound apocalyptic religion to conservative politics and American nationalism.”

And hours before Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol, Sheets told his YouTube followers that people had “gath-

“Roughly two dozen religious leaders traveled to the battleground states holding revival meetings where they mixed the rhetoric of violent spiritual warfare with prayers for the reinstatement of Trump in the presidency.”

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

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ered in Washington, D.C.” for “a Jericho March around the Capitol and Supreme Court grounds.” The indication is that some of the Trump supporters at the Capitol on Jan. 6 thought of themselves as participating in another Jericho March.

Mobilization of believers

Taylor, the religious scholar, told Yahoo News: “What you see breaking out and coming into the open on Jan. 6th is all of this rhetoric, all of this vocabulary of spiritual warfare, of mobilization, of battling demons. At some point, if you really believe that the election’s being stolen by demons and that demons are inspiring these other people to stop that — well, then it makes sense that you would try to take it over.”

And Sheets himself said he was asked to lead this crusade about a week after Biden had been declared the winner of the election.

On Nov. 23 — the day Sheets and other radical pastors gathered outside Phoenix — he told the audience how he had been called by “government leaders” in Washington, D.C., just after returning home from meetings with those same leaders in the nation’s capital.

“They said, ‘You can’t wait. You can’t plan this for two or three weeks,’” Sheets said. “And they said, ‘If you’re gonna do this and really do any good, you’re going to have to start now.’”

“I was in shock for a few minutes,” Sheets said. “Here’s civil government leaders prophesying to me, a spiritual leader, what we need to be doing to help turn this thing.”

Sheets had already been invited by Trump adviser Paula White Cain, in the fall of 2019, to be a part of an official White House effort to organize and mobilize Christians to pray for Trump’s presidency.

Taylor says that leaders like Sheets — who he calls “independent charismatics” rather than evangelicals or Pentecostals — never directly called for physical violence. But Taylor said he has identified about three dozen prominent leaders in the independent charismatic subculture who were either at the Trump rally on the Ellipse before the attack on the Capitol, or at the Capitol itself.



A woman holds a poster with a portrait of Jesus wearing a MAGA hat outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

He has not found any evidence that any of these leaders went into the Capitol or engaged in violence themselves.

Religious symbols, flags

But religious rituals and symbols connected to NAR-style beliefs were part of the syncretic stew in the crowd outside the Capitol during the riot: the blowing of shofars, prayer circles, “Appeal to Heaven” flags, and the singing of religious songs with violent spiritual warfare imagery.

One of the rioters who unlawfully entered the Capitol and trespassed into the Senate chamber itself said he was there to “plead the blood of Jesus on the Senate floor.”

“I praised the name of Jesus on the Senate floor. That was my goal. I think that was God’s goal,” said Joshua Black of Alabama, who was convicted of five federal charges in January and faces up to 10 years in prison.

And one of the most prominent NAR “prophets” — a woman named Cindy Jacobs — had obtained a permit to set up a sound system on the east front of the Capitol where she and others prayed, prophesied and sang songs as the mob invaded the Capitol.

Taylor is concerned that these reli-

gious leaders continue to hold significant influence over their followers and he has seen no reevaluation or introspection about the way this movement has blurred the line between religion and politics, and no moderating of the literal demonization of those with whom they disagree.

“They absolutely do not see the connection between what they collectively did in the lead-up to Jan. 6 and what transpired that day,” Taylor said on his “Charismatic Revival Fury” podcast.

“There has been, so far as I can tell, no internal reckoning among the New Apostolic Reformation leaders with what they did that fed directly into the Capitol riot, because they believe that they were simply there to pray and do spiritual warfare. And they blithely dismiss the truth that the rhetoric of violence stokes literal violence.”

“At some point, spiritual warfare tips over into actual warfare. You can only point to a group of people or a political party and say that they’re possessed by demons so many times before someone decides that those people need to be violently attacked,” Taylor said.

And major public figures on the far right have, at least since the 2020 election, begun to use violent and dehuman-

izing rhetoric about American politics.

“This is a war that we’re in, this is a big spiritual war,” Michael Flynn, a Trump loyalist who was director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said at an event in the spring of 2022 for Republican candidates in Oklahoma.

Flynn’s next sentence was, “I mean people like Nancy Pelosi, she’s a demon.”

Taylor said this kind of rhetoric from Flynn is part of a trend on the right, in which opponents are demonized, figuratively and sometimes even literally.

Lawenforcementexpertsincreasingly worry that this kind of rhetoric raises the likelihood of incidents like the attack on Pelosi’s husband, Paul, at his home last October.

The attacker, who espoused many baseless conspiracy theories common in the QAnon belief system, told law enforcement that he believed then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was the “leader of the pack’ of lies told by the Democratic Party,” according to an FBI affidavit.

“As the rhetoric of violence, the rhetoric of demonization, in a society rises and rises and rises, somebody’s going to pop off and do something. Somebody’s going to take that rhetoric very seriously and go and do something,” Taylor said.

Sometimes this kind of language is more subtle.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, has recently started to quote from a well-known passage in the biblical book of Ephesians, Chapter 6, which says to “put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” But in DeSantis’s version, “the devil” is replaced by “the left.”

“Put on the full armor of God. Stand firm against the left’s schemes,” DeSantis said last year.

Taylor said that if the 2024 presidential election is close, and there are legal challenges after Election Day, “if you have politicians who are willing to activate those animal spirits in the American populace, I would not be surprised if you saw mobilization of spiritual warfare campaigns that can tip over into actual violence again.”

Jon Ward is chief national correspondent for Yahoo News.

Chicago chapter member gives invocation

Howard Katz, a member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation Metropolitan Chicago Chapter, gave a secular invocation to open the Illinois General Assembly on March 1. He was told he was the first humanist celebrant, and perhaps even the first secularist ever, to deliver an invocation to the Assembly.

Here is the invocation he gave:

Good morning. My name is Howard Katz, and my title is that of a humanist celebrant.



Howard Katz gives a secular invocation in front of the Illinois General Assembly on March 1.

Ukrainian poet Lina Kostenko once said, “Courage is not something one can rent.” It takes courage to come to this room and decide on a daily basis what must be done to enrich the lives of all who live within the state of Illinois. Your work is to make sure that each of us can live in safety, that we can live our lives with our loved ones as we wish, that our children can learn the realities of the world in peace and safety, that health care decisions are available to all on an equal basis.

Each of us is a minority, with respect to something. It might be race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality or any other way we may be regarded as different. Each of us is also part of some majority. It is when we wear our majority hats that we need to be most mindful of how we treat others. We must pledge our

best efforts to help one another.

We can, as human beings, be rational in our approach to issues. Reason and science can help us solve the problems facing all of us, but only if we do so with the idea of cooperation and not as adversaries. By building on this, we should and can, work toward a future that, for generations, will allow for a culture that recognizes the ability of every person to live up to their full potential as they wish. But this happens only

when we live and lead by example and not by coercion in thought or belief.

Science educator Neil deGrasse Tyson once said: “I think the greatest of people in society carved niches that represented the unique expression of their combinations of talents, and if everyone had the luxury of expressing the unique combinations of talents in this world, our society would be transformed overnight.” We must as a society do what we can to encourage people’s

talents — not as a means of controlling ideas or thought processes, not as a means to control anyone’s personal autonomy, but as a means of enriching each and every person in our state in their pursuit of their individual growth and potential.

Today, let us remember that when we share with others that which is most important to us, listening begins.

When we acknowledge the concerns of others, when we say those concerns matter, compassion begins.

When we stand united against hatred, violence, and injustice, courage begins.

When we experience the full presence of each other, because of our shared humanity, in spite of our disagreements, this is where understanding begins.

May we be open to others’ ideas and beliefs, respectful of our differences, not threatened by them.

May we grow in understanding of our own motives. May we replace fear with knowledge, helping us to be patient and charitable in our dialogue.

While we often focus on our differences, today let us also seek to understand the ideals and values we share.

Today and tomorrow, let us value one another more than we did yesterday.

Thank you.

FFRF gets Christian displays taken down from rest stop

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation removed two sectarian religious displays from a local rest stop after the Freedom From Religion Foundation demanded action.

The state/church watchdog was informed by a concerned Wisconsin resident that a Latin cross and a sign displaying the bible verse “Blessed are the peacemakers” were displayed on a bulletin board in the Coloma Rest Stop. The rest stop is located in the town of Coloma in Waushara County and is owned and run by the DOT, making it state property.

FFRF wrote to Wisconsin DOT Secretary Craig Thompson requesting that the signage be removed immediately.

“It is a basic constitutional principle that the government cannot show favoritism towards religion,” FFRF Anne Nicol Gaylor Fellow Sammi Lawrence stated in the letter. “The First Amendment’s Establishment Clause requires that the government remain neutral between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.”

The displays signaled unconstitutional favoritism toward religion, and specifically Christianity over minority religions and nonreligious individuals. They were needlessly alienating to all non-Christians in a secular nation where nearly 30 percent of individuals identify as religiously unaffiliated.

FFRF received a letter from DOT Legal Counsel Eileen Miller Carter stating that department officials “have determined the current signs as described should be removed and we have accordingly direct-

ed our regional staff to remove the signs.”

FFRF extends appreciation to the Wisconsin DOT for correcting the issue and respecting the secular Constitution.

“Rest stops clearly should not be used to push a religious message. People deserve to travel freely without being proselytized by the state of Wisconsin,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We are hopeful that the Department of Transportation will monitor its buildings going forward to ensure that the freedom of conscience of Wisconsin citizens and tourists is respected.”

Christian flag removed

FFRF took action in Arizona after being informed of a religiously coded flag displayed in the Arizona State House.

An Arizona resident reported that an “Appeal to Heaven” flag was on display on the second floor of the Arizona State House. FFRF knew that the sectarian flag was on display in a section that was under the jurisdiction of the Arizona House of Representatives, creating the image of endorsement of evangelical Christianity.

“While the flag has ties to the founding of the U.S., it is now viewed as a Christian flag,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote in a letter to Speaker of the House Russell Bowers. “No purported secular purpose will detract from the overall message that the flag stands for Christianity and its display promotes Christianity.”

FFRF was pleased to learn that action had been taken by the House, as the “Appeal to Heaven” flag is no longer on display.



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, right, performed the ceremony.



Newly married Brenda and Gary Pattinson stand outside Freethought Hall in 1995 with Ron Pattinson and an unidentified bridesmaid.

An FFRF legacy



FFRF Events Manager Sadie Pattison

FFRF’s Events Manager Sadie Pattinson showed FFRF staff members some old photos from her aunt and uncle’s wedding held at Freethought Hall. We thought we’d share them with you.

Brenda and Gary Pattinson got married at FFRF’s headquarters in Madison, Wis., in 1995. Sadie’s father, Ron Pattinson, was the best man. Connie Pattinson, Sadie’s mom, is not shown in these photos.

Sadie was born three years later and was registered as a household member of FFRF with her parents in 1998.

“My dad was inspired by Dan Barker and became an ordained minister a few years later and has married a few freethinking couples since then,” Sadie said.

Gary and Sadie’s parents are still atheists and members of FFRF. Sadly, Brenda died from cancer in 2012.

THEY SAID WHAT?

There are some kids that do need Jesus first, before they care about science and math.

Kansas state Rep. Kristey Williams, speaking about motivation for SB 83, which would use state money to fund private schools starting in the 2023-24 school year. Each eligible private school student could draw a maximum of \$5,000 annually from the state treasury.

RawStory, 3-20-23

Drag shows are derisive, divisive and demoralizing misogyny, no matter the stated intent. . . . A harmless drag show? Not possible.

Walter V. Wendler, president of West Texas A&M, in a memo to the university community on the cancellation of a drag show planned on campus.

Yahoo News, 3-21-23

Do people believe that there is no devil anymore? Well, people who believe in God typically believe there’s a devil. Is it no longer a crime to consort with the devil? Well, I guess it’s no longer a crime in Connecticut to do that, but does that mean it wasn’t a crime back then? All these things need to be sorted out before this Legislature could say that these people all deserve exoneration.

Connecticut state Rep. Doug Dubitsky, who argued that the state’s Judiciary Committee did not have enough evidence that the people convicted on witchcraft-related charges in the 17th century were not guilty of those charges.

CTNewsJunkie.com, 3-29-23

Many of my constituents feel as I do that our seal should also reflect the importance of God as a constant reminder that our state’s agriculture, commerce, politics and economic fortunes are tied to its spiritual faith.

Tennessee state Sen. Rusty Crowe, who sponsored a bill that would incorporate the phrase “In God We Trust” into the Tennessee state seal. The bill passed the Senate unanimously (33-0) on March 20.

Friendly Atheist, 3-23-23



Chris Miller

We’re not having a climate crisis. . . . Green leafy plants actually absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen. It’s the way God made it.

Illinois state Rep. Chris Miller.

Twitter, 3-23-23

Vote as soon as you can, pray for this country, pray for this president. And if you got any money to give, give it.

Sen. Lindsay Graham, following the 34-count indictment against former President Trump.

Washington Post, 4-5-23

Sodom and Gomorrah proves that God hates sodomy, and sexual immorality and pride.

Victoria Jackson, former “Saturday Night Live” cast member, speaking at a city council meeting in Franklin,

Tenn., to discourage the city from holding a gay pride parade.

New York Post, 4-12-23

Do you know any kids who have been married at age 12? I do. And guess what? They’re still married.

Missouri state Sen. Mike Moon, suggesting that children as young as 12 should be able to get married, as he pushes legislation that would ban gender-affirming care for minors.

Kansas City Star, 4-13-23

I prayed to God that this would never happen. And I prayed and prayed and prayed. Only God can decide what happens from now on.

Jack Teixeira, the National Guard airman arrested over the Pentagon documents leaks, in a final message to his online friends.

The Independent, 4-14-23

Stop trampling on the God-given rights of the American people every time tragedy happens.

Former Vice President Mike Pence, at the annual NRA gathering, where other current and potential presidential candidates cited Scripture, issued calls for prayer and talked about protecting “the God-given right to keep and bear arms,” as South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem put it.

New York Times, 4-15-23

Donald Trump is the anointed of God. He is the battering ram that God is using to bring down the Deep State of Babylon.

Preacher Charles Pace, at the Mount Carmel chapel, longtime home of the Branch Davidian sect outside Waco, Texas.

New York Times 3-25-23

When there is genuine belief and genuine humility, prayer is something else entirely. It’s an act that . . . connects you to the creator of the universe. . . . Petitioning God is more powerful than petitioning any president.

David French, following the school shooting in Nashville on March 27, in his op-ed, “In the face of tragedy, petitioning God is an act of faith.”

New York Times, 3-30-23

Trump is joining some of the most incredible people in history being arrested today. Nelson Mandela was arrested, served time in prison. Jesus — Jesus was arrested and murdered by the Roman government.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, on the day of former President Trump’s arrest by the New York District Attorney’s office.

USA Today, 4-4-23

I stand with Christians worldwide, not the global bankers who are showing godlessness and degeneracy in our face.

Arizona state Sen. Wendy Rogers, as cited by columnist EJ Montini, who calls her “unhinged.”

Arizona Republic, 4-5-23

FFRF ON THE ROAD



On April 4, Dan Barker visited with former Christian missionary Erik Elster in Stockholm, Sweden. He is a member of The Clergy Project. Elster took Barker to visit the Vasa Museum.



Thirty-six years ago on May 30, 1987, Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, who now serve as FFRF co-presidents, were married at Sauk City’s historic Freethought Hall in Sauk City. On April 15, they returned to address the Free Congregation of Sauk City to walk down the aisle again in the renamed Park Hall, a 1852 building with an auditorium that the congregation recently restored, with many beautiful features including “secular” stained glass windows. The FFRF Board was proud to make a contribution toward that restoration.

Annie Laurie spoke about the rising of the “Nones” and how the Nones can save our secular democracy from Christian nationalism. Dan gave a concert at the piano with freethinking songs. They are pictured above with Park Hall organizers Fritz Parks and Susan Larkin.

The building, one of more than 30 in Wisconsin in the 1800s, was built by the Frei Gemeinde, freethinking Germans who fled after the failed revolution of 1848 and became abolitionists, suffragists and progressives in the United States. The hall became the center of Sauk City, where graduations were held, and is still a community resource that is treasured. It is now the only extant such Freethought Hall in Wisconsin — with the exception of FFRF’s office in downtown Madison, which is named Freethought Hall in honor of Wisconsin’s history.



The historic Freethought Hall in Sauk City, Wis., is now Park Hall.



FFRF Attorney Ryan Jayne, shown here with Iowa Atheists and Freethinkers (IAF) President Ashley Bennum, spoke in the Capitol building in Des Moines on March 23 at the IAF event, “Theocracy Is Un-American: A Rally for Secular Government.”



At the FreeFlo conference in Orlando, Fla., on March 11, FFRF Attorney Liz Cavell, right, was a member of a state/church separation legal panel, which included, from left, moderator David Williams, ACLU of Florida Attorney Caroline McNamara and American Atheists Litigation Counsel Geoffrey Blackwell. About 300 people attended the conference.

“It was a great conversation about the current state of the law and courts, with lots of audience engagement,” Cavell says.



Dan Barker, on behalf of Polish atheists, presents Richard Dawkins with the “Atheist of All Time” award at the “Atheist Days” conference in Warsaw, Poland, on April 1, where Dan also spoke and gave a freethought concert.



FFRF Legal Fellow Kat Grant and Liz Cavell spoke at the Loyola University Chicago School of Law on April 12 to discuss the anti-trans crusade in legislatures and courts. The event was in person and also via Zoom and recorded for dissemination to students who couldn’t be there.



FFRF attorneys presented a continuing legal education class in early March at the James E. Doyle chapter of Inns of Court, a professional membership organization that includes judges, of which at least four Dane County judges and one appellate judge were in attendance. From left, FFRF Attorney Ryan Jayne stands with Dane County Circuit Court Judge Susan Crawford, FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert and FFRF Attorney Sam Grover.



On April 3, Dan Barker, center, met with the leaders of Swedish Humanists, David Ronnegard and Ulf Gustaffson.

IN MEMORIAM

‘Jump Rope King’ Bobby Hinds dies at 91

Longtime and Lifetime FFRF Member Bobby “Sugar” Hinds, “The Jump Rope King” and boxing star, died March 14 at his home in Madison, Wis. He was 91.

He was born Sept. 22, 1931, in Kenosha, Wis.

Hinds made his fortune selling Lifeline jump ropes, which turned into a successful home fitness business.

Hinds called himself a humanist, and, in 2010, he was among the freethinkers whose



Bobby Hinds

statements and photos adorned Madison Metro buses in FFRF’s “Out of the Closet” campaign. His statement: “Being kind with an open mind is my religion.”

In 2014, he was a guest on FFRF’s “Freethought Radio” and also was profiled in Freethought Today, where he said his doubts about religion started “about age 13 when I began reading biographies of Clarence Darrow and Thomas Dewey.”

According to a story in the Milwaukee Journal, at age 13, Hinds “became the nation’s youngest Golden Gloves champion and caught the eye of John Walsh, legendary coach of the powerhouse University of Wisconsin boxing teams.”

“I never would have gone to college otherwise,” Hinds told the Journal Sentinel. Hinds who accepted the scholarship offer and attended UW with childhood pal and future Heisman Trophy winner and NFL star Alan Ameche, his backfield mate at Kenosha High School. Hinds went 38-0 in dual meets.

In 1955, Hinds married Joyce Harrington. They raised four children. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1956.



Bobby Hinds show prior to a fight (year unknown).

Hinds appeared on “The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson,” “The Merv Griffin Show” and “The Mike Douglas Show.” He also was featured on 10 million boxes of Wheaties. Time magazine dubbed him “The Jump Rope King.”

He was an inductee of the National Fitness Hall of Fame with other notables such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Charles Atlas and Jack LaLanne.

According to a story in the Wisconsin State Journal, CBS correspondent Charles Kuralt in 1978 did one of his “On the Road” segments on Hinds, who jumped rope for part of the interview.

The article stated that Hinds took Kuralt into the backyard of his home, which he had turned into a jump rope-making operation, and told Kuralt that he was making \$7,000 a day off the jump ropes and had quickly become a millionaire.

Hinds was a leader in the ’70s fitness movement, was an early adopter of resistance training, a way to exercise without weights that has remained popular.

Hinds’ office was full of souvenirs from musicians he had met: Mick Jagger, Tom

Jones, members of U2 and Pink Floyd, a State Journal story from 2000 noted. He saved backstage passes from John Denver, the Oakridge Boys, Marie Osmond and Lynyrd Skynyrd, and had photos of himself with Billy Joel, MC Hammer, Amy Grant, Phil Collins and Stevie Ray Vaughan, among others.

“My dad is just the most incredible person I’ve ever met,” his daughter Jil said. “He would get in people’s souls, and it didn’t matter if it was rock ‘n’ roll stars, everybody gravitated toward him. He was just a magnet for people, and they just loved him. He

was an incredible, incredible person.”

Jil said her father donated his body to the UW School of Medicine and didn’t want a funeral.

“Our condolences to his wife, Joy, and his children, including Jef and wife Jeanne,” said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. “Bobby was an early and steadfast member of FFRF, and such such a cheerful, optimistic, indefatigable supporter of freethought causes. He was one-of-a-kind.”

Bobby Hinds was part of FFRF’s “Out of the Closet” sign campaign.

Jim Wagner was CIA officer, cattleman

FFRF Member Peter James “Jim” Wagner, age 87, of Thomaston, Ga., died Jan. 22 at Upson Regional Medical Center.

Jim was born on Oct. 12, 1935, in Pittsburgh, Pa., to Peter J. and Genevieve (Vilsack) Wagner.

Upon graduating from Central Catholic High School in Pittsburgh, Jim joined the U.S. Army. After his duty in the military was complete, Jim was recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency. Jim served with the CIA for 29

years until he retired and moved to Thomaston with his family in 1986.

In Thomaston, he began a new life learning how to raise cattle, grow pecans, and pursue his passion for learning new things. A true Renaissance man, Jim was a member of Mensa, a published author, beekeeper, winemaker, sailor, photographer, pilot, bird watcher, and accomplished wood worker. He built several stringed instruments, furniture, RC airplanes, and an

experimental aircraft.

Jim contributed to his new community by serving as a member of the Upson County Tax Assessor’s Board, the Georgia Cattleman’s Association, and the Georgia Farm Bureau. With his 24 years of service on the Thomaston-Upson County Airport Authority, Jim helped expand the Thomaston-Upson County Airport from a small community airport into a thriving regional airport.

Gary Mead was longtime teacher

FFRF Lifetime Member Gary D. Mead 86, died June 16, 2022.

Gary was born Aug. 15, 1935, in Winterset, Iowa, to Earl and Velma Mead.

He was married to his wife Betty for 57 years. He was a graduate of Western State University (1957) and Adams State College (1974) and started working as a teacher for District 60 schools in Pueblo, Colo. He was known for his patience and kindness and for teaching respect and acceptance of others. He emphasized participation, sportsmanship and “doing your best” over natural athleticism.



Gary Mead

Gary worked at Centennial High School, teaching physical education and coaching girls’ softball and track. He refereed numerous high school football games. He was an avid golfer and, over the course of his lifetime, made six holes-in-one. He loved the outdoors, the Colorado mountains and vacationing with friends and family.

He loved music, listened daily, had access to it in every room of the house, including the patio. He liked watching classic movies and sports, especially golf and baseball. He was an entertaining and enthusiastic storyteller who recalled many life experiences with humor and joy.

Attorney Dick Olbrich dies

FFRF Donor Member Richard “Dick” J. Olbrich, 79, of Madison, Wis., died Sept. 27, 2021. Richard was a lifelong learner and supporter of education, as evidenced by his decision to donate his body to the University of Pittsburgh to be a research cadaver. He received two degrees from the University of Wisconsin (Letters and Sciences 1964 and Juris Doctorate 1967).

Dick spent his career as an attorney with the National Labor Relations Board in Washington D.C. In retirement, he returned to Madison to continue auditing classes at the University of Wisconsin.

Adventurist Robert Corya dies at 93

FFRF Member Robert Steele Corya, 93, died March 5.

He was born June 29, 1929, in Long Beach, Calif. He attended Butler University and then earned a BA degree from Indiana University in Bloomington, where he became a dormitory counselor.

He met his first wife, Betty, at Indiana University, and was married to her from 1958 to 1981.

As a journalist, Robert was employed at the Hagerstown (Indiana) Exponent, Richmond (Indiana) Palladium-Item, United Press International, and the Indianapolis News. He worked at Polar Ice Co., Model Ice Cream Co., Wm H Block Co, and Eli Lilly and Company during the summers.

While at the Indianapolis News, he was named Headline Writer of the Year in 1961 and was honored by the Indiana State Medical Association in

1967 for excellence in writing a series on mental health facilities in corporations. He served during the Korean War aboard the USS Monongahela, a tanker.

In 1978, Robert was elected president of the Society of American Business and Economic Writers. After retiring from the News (where he was the business editor) in 1985, Robert backpacked much of the Appalachian Trail, solo canoed the entire Wabash River, skied 25 mountains in North America with the Indianapolis Ski Club, and drove over a million accident-free miles, including driving twice to and from Alaska.

He was an avid bicyclist, riding in dozens of organized rides and races. He was a member of the Central Indiana Bicycling Association and the Indianapolis Hiking Club, walking more than 10,200 miles.

Robert’s family and close friends remember his pragmatism, great sense of humor, compassion for those less fortunate than he, eternal sense of optimism, and love of nature and the great outdoors.

Robert Hermann dies at 93

FFRF Member Robert A. Hermann of Lawrenceville, Ga., died July 10, 2022.

He was born March 12, 1929, in Missouri. He graduated from the University of Missouri and earned a Master’s degree from the American College of Financial Services. He worked for the Washington National Insurance Co. for 34 years. He served in the U.S. Air Force and was a 35-year member of the Lions International.

He married Martha Kolb in 1975, and they moved to Georgia in 1984.

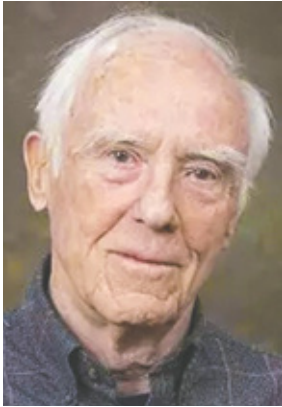
What Is a Freethinker?

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

Ramsay MacMullen was Roman Empire historian

FFRF Lifetime Member Ramsay MacMullen, 94, known as one of the greatest Roman historians of his age, died on Nov. 27, 2022.

He was born in Manhattan and educated at Phillips Exeter and Harvard. He taught at the University of Oregon and Brandeis before going to Yale in 1967. He retired in 1993 and became Dunham Professor Emeritus of History and Classics at Yale University.



Ramsay MacMullen

MacMullen is best known for his writings on the ancient Roman world, including early Christianity. He was extremely prolific, the author of nearly 20 books on Roman history, and more than 80 articles.

His wide learning enabled him to look beyond the historical parameters of other historians, and to use abundant unnoticed evidence concerning Romans in their individual and family rites and daily life to advance his views. His books, and the attention and acclaim they received, were influential in opening the now established field of social history.

MacMullen was encyclopedic in his learning, and extremely rigorous and exacting in his scholarship. At the same time, he was a warm, generous and so-

cially outgoing colleague to his scholarly friends and graduate students, and a respected teacher. He taught large lecture courses on Roman history, filling lecture halls with students on subject matters not guaranteed to draw crowds.

He was also the master of Yale's Calhoun College (now Hopper) for six years in the late 1980s and, along with his first wife, Edith MacMullen, dealt with all the complicated social and administrative issues of running a college full of young people.

All who knew him recognized that he was a Scot, stalwart and tough. He was ramrod straight and hiked and worked out into his 90s. Yet his dry, whimsical sense of humor and genuine interest in others kept him from being forbidding and put people at ease.

Among his many honors were the American Historical Association's Lifetime Award for Scholarly Distinction, which he received in 2001. The citation for that honor began, "Ramsay MacMullen is the greatest historian of the Roman Empire alive today." In 2013, he received the Arthur Kingsley Porter Prize from the College Art Association for a 1964 essay judged by an editorial committee to be one of the 33 "greatest hits" in the first century of the association's journal's publication.

For decades, MacMullen and his second wife Peggy enjoyed friends and family, theatre, music and travel. They were hikers in many mountain ranges, especially in northwest England.

Marise Hartley traveled the country

FFRF Member Marise V. Hartley, 89, died at her home in Bar Harbor, Maine, on April 9.


She was born in Dexter, Maine, on Sept. 10, 1932, the daughter of Juanita and Francis Clukey. Marise grew up in Dexter, graduating from NH Fay High School in 1951. After graduation she went to work at Merrill Trust in Bangor.

In 1954, she enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and was stationed at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., where she performed administrative work. While in the service, Marise met and married her husband, Bob. Marise's life centered around her family, and nothing gave her more pleasure than talking to or hearing about her children and grandchildren. Marise also loved to travel and after her retirement from 17 years at Castle Point VA Hospital, she



Marise Hartley

and Bob roamed the country for almost 20 years in a motorhome. Another of her hobbies was completing jigsaw puzzles. Having finished well over 400, she was always saddened when a final piece was missing, just as family and friends are now saddened by her departure. Marise and Bob recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary.



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists. FFRF has more than 40,000 members. FFRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible for income tax purposes.

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

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

Dr. David Rosenbaum, 77, was neurology instructor, physician

FFRF member David H. Rosenbaum, 77, died Sept. 3, 2022.

Born during the last year of World War II, in Pune, India, to Edmund and Senta Lucia Rosenbaum, David immigrated to Brooklyn via ocean liner at the age of 5. He graduated from Erasmus Hall High School as a member of the National Honor Society and attended Brown University, majoring in French literature, graduating cum laude.

He studied medicine at Duke University and later at New York University. David then served as a visiting fellow at the National Hospital for Nervous and Mental Diseases in London before completing his internship and medical residency at Bellvue Hospital. He then completed his neurology residency at Columbia Presbyterian in June of 1974 and began a long career at Mt. Sinai by becoming an instructor in neurology.

David met his wife, Catherine, at the Paris Health Club in 1979. They

married in May 1983 in their apartment in Manhattan. Dr. Rosenbaum continued working at Mt. Sinai, The Bronx VA, Montefiore Hospital and St. Barnabas Hospital for decades. He served on numerous committees, boards, task forces and working parties, earning scores



David Rosenbaum

In 2000, Dr. Rosenbaum began practicing in North Bergen, N.J., and became an attending physician at Englewood hospital, a position he held until his death.

of awards and accolades. He was the author or co-author of over 50 contributions to the medical literature in neurology.

Radiologist, family doctor Ed Kolner dies at 92

FFRF After-Life Member Edward Hirsh Kolner, 92, died Dec. 17, 2022, at Meriter Hospital in Madison, Wis. He was born Oct. 17, 1930, to Adolph and Amelia (Derman) Kolner in Valparaiso, Indiana.

In his own words: "I had a long and happy life. "I attended high school in my hometown, Valparaiso, Ind., received a B.A. degree from the University of Minnesota and an M.D. degree from the University of Chicago.

"I served my country as a flight surgeon and later as a Lt. colonel in the army during Desert Storm. I worked 20

years in family practice and 30 years as a radiologist.

"I was an atheist, a humanist and an existentialist. I enjoyed the popular music of my growing up years, travel, pickleball and books, and books,



Ed Kolner

and books. I had the love of three outstanding women: Mary Susan (Satterlee) Kolner, Gail Walker and KK Anderson). I fathered seven beautiful children who grew up to be strong and independent adults: Brian (Nancy); Elliot (Maxine); Dean (Jennie); Douglas (Dare); Neil (Leo); Anne (Kevin); and Emily. They were my greatest joy. What more could any man want?"

Psychology professor Leonard Ross dies

Leonard Ellis Ross, 92, died March 15 in Madison, Wis. While not a member of FFRF, his family posted in his obituary that "memorial contributions may be made to the Freedom From Religion Foundation."

Leonard was born on Dec. 15, 1930, in Burlington, Iowa, to Lloyd S. and Olive Ross (Bachman).



During the Korean War, Leonard served as a sergeant in the United States Army in Germany before returning home and earning a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 1959. He moved to Madison that year after being hired as a professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin. He remained there until retiring in 1992. He authored many articles and book chapters, won teaching awards and completed important research on the effects of alcohol when flying.

A deep and critical reader, Leonard found great satisfaction in history, historical fiction, investing, mysteries and politics.

LETTERBOX

Reagan ad should air on ‘GMA3’s ‘Faith Friday’

I had the TV on in the background while CBS’ “GMA3” show was airing with it weekly “Faith Friday” guest. It drives me absolutely insane every week to hear a major network promote this religious garbage.

I would love to see FFRF’s Ron Reagan commercial run during this segment!

Washington

FFRF mug makes daily tea time a pleasure

I find great pleasure daily when sipping my tea from the “Not Afraid of Burning in Hell” mug. I love the design of this special mug and it is so well made.

Thank you for all your never-ending work and dedication.

Washington

Mom and I kept it secret about our nonbelief

I was raised Catholic in the 1950s-1960s and my large family attended church almost every Sunday. My dad was only second generation from Ireland and it was important to him that we be raised Catholic. At first, Mass was said in Latin, which added a kind of surreal beauty and mystery to the whole thing. The incense, the music, the pageantry. Then, in the early 1960s, it switched to English. It totally lost its allure to me. “Sanguis Christi” repeated over and over was so much more beautiful than “Blood of Christ.” I cannot say that I really ever was into the whole thing at any point, but hearing what had been said in English really got me thinking. The realist in my little self just kept asking: “How can any of this be real?”

As I sat through Mass one Sunday, trying not to pet the fur collar on the woman in the pew in front of me, I began to really question the whole religion/God thing. I thought to myself, “Is this like Santa and the Easter Bunny, and when I’m older, Mom will tell me it’s fake?” When we got outside after the service and were headed to the car, I asked her. She shushed me and grabbed my hand. She told me that she agreed, but we could not talk about it here with Dad so close.

A few days later at home, we talked. She told me that she didn’t believe it all either, but went along because it was important to Dad (whom she adored). She said that some of it was just moral lessons that weren’t bad — like the 10 Commandments. It was just common-sense stuff about being a good person, which was always top on Mom’s list of stuff we needed to learn or be. The rest were just old dusty stories. She told me it could be our little secret and not to discuss this with my siblings.

I loved that she accepted my lack of belief and did not try to convince me to think otherwise. My parents both taught us to always learn and to question what we were told. They taught us to be independent thinkers and their lessons have served me well.

Washington

Ending Clergy Abuse activists visit Freethought Hall



Peter Isley (right), an internationally known advocate for survivors of priest abuse based in Milwaukee, visited Freethought Hall in March with colleague Sarah Pearson to tape an episode for FFRF’s TV show, “Freethought Matters.” Sarah is deputy director of Nate’s Mission, named for a Wisconsin man victimized by a priest who committed suicide three years ago after the Catholic Church cut off funds for therapy. She is the director of a new film, “Manufacturing the Clerical Predator.” Peter and Sarah are advocating for the promised full investigation and report on Catholic abuse of children in Wisconsin that appears to be stalled in the attorney general’s office. Sarah shares Charles Darwin’s Feb. 12 birthday, so they visited “Mr. Darwin,” FFRF’s silicone attraction in FFRF’s Joel Landon and Wanda Beers Library.

FFRF’s ad in Florida papers is appreciated

I want to applaud FFRF for its ad placement in the Tallahassee Democrat and the Miami Herald, calling out our pompous governor, Ron DeSantis. We are falling into a bad way here in Florida with sordid politics sweeping the state. I can’t thank you enough for your message and your willingness to tackle this highly volatile topic.

Florida

Freethought Today changed my life for the better

As a child growing up in in Catholic school/church, I remember being told that if we missed Mass on Sunday or a “holy day” without a good reason, we would go to hell unless we went to confession and confessed our “sin.” That is one of many stupid things the Catholic church teaches.

I got to wondering why other religions didn’t have these same “rules”? Would they go to hell, too? And, if there is only one god, why are there so many different churches? Shouldn’t all their rules be the same?

I will never forget the day I received a copy of Freethought Today in the mail. When I opened it, I dropped

it on the floor, as I thought I would go to hell if I read it. Later, I did read it . . . and that was a moment that changed my life forever. That was about 30 years ago and I am a new person. I no longer go to church or pray. Instead, I try to just be a good person and be kind to everyone.

Thank you to whomever mailed that first FFRF newspaper to me!

Nebraska

Do libraries order more religious-themed books?

If any of my fellow FFRF members are looking for an interesting research topic that would further the cause of freedom from religion, here it is.

Every week, Tulsa County Libraries emails its card holders with the names of the books, tapes, etc., that it recently purchased. It should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the excessive degree of religiosity of the stereotypical Oklahoman that Tulsa County Libraries order more religious-themed materials than any other category.

It’s no wonder why the sale of Christian books is, perhaps, one of the most profitable business ventures ever.

My hypothesis is that what’s happening within the Tulsa library system is also happening all over the country — just

waiting for someone to document it.

This would make a great Ph.D. dissertation, a Master’s thesis, or just an alarming book about how Christian zealots are milking our tax dollars from what should be public funds.

Oklahoma

‘Iranization’ of the U.S. gets closer every day

At 92, I’ve watched a lot of human history and I’ve seen stunning contrasts in governing cultures across the world. I wondered how I was so lucky to be born in this U.S.A. republic, back in 1930, in the heart of the beginning of the Great Depression, which ended by WWII.

Some of those previous global contrasts are now melding into alignment as our fragile democracy begins to look like an autocracy with the attempted coup d’etat on Jan 6, 2021. And it begins to look like a theocracy as I read the news about the poisoning of young schoolgirls in Iran, and think this disrespect and suppression of women has gained roots here in our nation in Christian nationalism and with the overturning of Roe.

I suggest we coin a new verb for this new culture shift in our nation: Iranization. I gift the term freely to all who wish to use it. Iran has both autocracy and theocracy. With Trump’s Supreme Court picks, we now have both.

California

Questioning hopefully led Witnesses to think

Not long ago, I encountered some Jehovah’s Witnesses, who were passing out literature. I asked them: “Do you believe in the biblical flood tale?” “Yes,” they responded.

“Then can you explain how llamas in Peru, bison in North America, pandas in China and koalas in Australia all managed to get from where the ark supposedly landed, over thousands of miles of hostile territory and open ocean, to the places where they are found today?”

They could not.

“You have some homework to do,” I said.

I didn’t even get into the question of the validity of the theory of evolution. It appears that at least I got them to do some thinking. It’s a start.

As long as we can go more than one step forward for every step back, we can eventually prevail.

California

‘Cathedral’ lyrics were true then, true now

With the sad death of David Crosby, I listened again to all his records, including the 1977 Crosby, Stills and Nash album “CSN,” which had the song “Cathedral” (written by Graham Nash).

The key lyrics are: “Open up the gates of the church and let me out of here! Too many people have lied in the name of Christ for anyone to heed the call. So many people have died in the name of Christ that I can’t believe it all.”

California

Please keep airing the Ron Reagan ad

I just wanted to tell you that I love the Ron Reagan ad you’ve been running on TV — and I’m a lifelong Christian. Please, please, keep airing it (and, if possible, new ones), more often, as Franklin Graham is airing his opposing version regularly during the evening news: “Pray this prayer with me!” No thank you, Franklin! Let’s double our efforts to keep the church out of the state! Thank you!

Massachusetts

Ex-Catholics should read *Prisoner of the Vatican*

I just finished reading a book by David I. Kertzer called *Prisoner of the Vatican: The Popes’ Secret Plot to Capture Rome from the New Italian State*. I recommend it to every ex-Catholic. It is truly an eye-opener, explaining how the pope came to be “infallible” and how two popes over 50 years tried to convince European leaders to invade Italy, break it up, and take the papal states back to give to the pope. It is interesting, fast-paced, and hard to put down.

FFRF, thank you for all you do for us “heathens.”

Washington

Let’s get religion out of the public sphere

When my father shed his blood in the fields of France during World War II, “under God” was NOT in the Pledge of Allegiance. President Eisenhower had it put in, which I believe was to appease Joe McCarthy. Isn’t it time that we fight the Christian right and remove it? And we have a U.S. Supreme Court that claims that Christmas is NOT a religious holiday. I am Jewish, and believe that there may be a God, but I believe that we must return to a nonreligious country if it ever was one. So, I just joined FFRF and made an additional contribution.

New York

There’s more than one set of commandments

I was listening to Freethought Radio, where they spoke of the contentious posting of the Ten Commandments in public locations (courthouses, specifically), and I obviously agree.

But there was something I didn’t know until I took the FFRF quiz (ffrf.org/biblequiz). That is the fact of there being three separate sets of Ten Commandments. This really resonated with me. While I agree that any reli-

Crossword answers

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



Photo by PJ Slinger

Visiting a former polygamist enclave

Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger recently took a vacation to southern Utah to see the majestic mountains of Zion National Park and other beautiful scenery.

While there, he also visited the town of Colorado City, Ariz., which sits on the border of Arizona and Utah, and was the home base of Warren Jeffs and his polygamist community. Jeffs, the former leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, has been in a Texas prison since 2011, serving a life sentence for sexually assaulting a 12-year-old and 15-year-old (who gave birth to his child), who were among his “spiritual wives.”

The building in this photo is the 44-bedroom house that used to be Jeffs’ home. Jeffs’ 65th wife, Briell Decker, who left the FLDS in 2012 after Jeffs was imprisoned, donated the property to a nonprofit organization. From there, the nonprofit turned the complex into the Short Creek Dream Center, which offers rehabilitation and recovery services, counseling, housing and food services.

The “Pray and Obey” signage on the chimney from the Jeffs era is still there, which was the phrase women in the FLDS were taught to follow, as they were expected to submit to Jeffs’ choice of husband for them, regardless of age. Women who were reassigned to a new husband had to obey those orders.

gious document shouldn’t be posted or promoted, it seems to me that very few people know this.

The first question regarding the commandments should be: “Which set?” This not only challenges the posting, but also would educate that there is more than one. How many times I’ve heard people fall back on, “What about just following the Ten Commandments?” To throw in that there is more than an “original” set might make people think again.

Washington

Joy Berry’s comments reflected my mother’s

Congratulations on your Sunday morning TV show “Freethought Matters.” I record them and watch them later with family and friends. They are all wonderful.

However, a recent program (April 2) was especially wonderful because it closely reflected my deceased mother’s wise words and counsel when I

was a boy!

Guest Joy Berry commented (paraphrasing): “We must not teach young children WHAT to think, but rather HOW to think. It is critical that we teach these marvelous young minds to evaluate what they are learning as opposed to just blindly accepting what they are being taught!”

I almost jumped out of my chair when I hear her say that! When Joy talked about raising children, I could hear my mother’s words. Joy was so correct.

Thanks you all for your fine work in teaching us all that “freethought matters”!

California

Future is bleak, but kids will pull us through

Religion at its core is based upon the terror of death, although human hubris enters into the formula, also. We must develop courage to fight our timidity in the face of our mortality. As far as pride is concerned, remember what Bertrand Russell wrote: “Man is a feeble speck.” In this context, our future looks bleak.

But let’s not forget our children! I think our brave and gifted kids will pull us through and that one day we will have a great civilization, until the sun finally closes the curtain on our little play.

Rhode Island

Christians should accept transgender children

To accept transgender children in our society should be considered as nothing more than common decency.

Most Americans profess to be Christian, and Mark 10:13-16 is a cherished passage in their holy scriptures, in which Jesus says: “Let the little children come to me.”

Isn’t what he said very clear? Yes, Jesus welcomed all children. He didn’t exclude any child from his presence or deny them his love for any reason. May I suggest that those who identify as Christians but shun trans children, ask themselves: “Since my savior loves all children and allows them to be near him, isn’t it my duty to imitate him?”

California

FFRF is the light at end of the tunnel

From all my walks in this cosmic laboratory, one regret I’ve had is that I wouldn’t live to see a cure for imbecility. With FFRF, now I can see a dim light at the end of the tunnel. Now, my one regret is that I didn’t find FFRF 50 years sooner!

Keep up the good work!

Oregon

Editor’s note: Thanks, Paul, but FFRF has only been around for 45 years, so you haven’t missed out on 50!

Judge pushes religious doctrine onto all of us

Greer Donley, an associate law professor at the University of Pittsburgh who specializes in abortion policy, was quoted in the Los Angeles Times as saying the Texas decision on the FDA’s longstanding approval of the abortion pill mifepristone is very concerning because “it’s opening the door to a world in which people can try to get safe and effective products removed from the market for political reasons.”

In fact, the impetus behind the opposition to abortion rights (and gay rights) is primarily religious, not political, although it’s certainly true that the Republican Party often uses religious belief as a basis for its political actions. That said, the judge in the Texas ruling is undoubtedly highly religious, and the basis for his ruling is his religion and its doctrinaire teachings on the subject of terminating pregnancies, rather than the FDA’s scientifically based evaluations. He gives himself away with the use of a term such as “unborn child,” rather than the appropriate medical terminology of “fetus.”

It is the continuing push by many in the Republican Party to inflict religious doctrine on our nation of laws and its secular government that is the most dangerous threat to democracy.

California

FFRF’s work helps bring sanity to the world

Thank you for doing so much great work in bringing some sanity to the world. I especially like your quote: “Organized religion always has been and remains the greatest enemy of women’s rights.”

Florida



Photo: Monona Terrace

The Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis., is the site of FFRF's 2023 convention from Oct. 13-15.

FFRF convention, Oct. 13-15

Meet us in Madison!

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation in its home city for its 46th annual convention from Friday, Oct. 13 through Sunday morning Oct. 15 at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis. For information on convention speakers, see page 7.

General Schedule

The convention will offer an optional Thursday afternoon open house at the Freethought Hall, running from 4-6 p.m. Convention registration will re-open at 8 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 13, with the program beginning at 9 a.m. and running through Saturday evening. On Sunday morning, the membership and State Representatives meetings will take place, ending by noon.

Return the handy registration form on the right, or sign up at ffrf.org/convo2023.

Registration

Registration for the convention is only \$100 per FFRF member, \$105 for a companion accompanying a member, \$160 for nonmembers (or, you can save money by becoming a mem-

ber for just \$40). High school students or younger are free and the college student rate is \$25.

Optional Group Meals

Vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options are available. Please specify requirements on the registration form.

Friday Dinner Buffet

- Beer Brats with Wisconsin Sauerkraut
- Grilled Chicken Breast
- Black Bean Burgers
- Baked Beans
- Assorted Wisconsin Salads

Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast

- Cheese and Chive Scrambled Eggs
- Applewood Smoked Bacon
- Baby Red Potatoes
- Muffins

Saturday Lunch

- Two Chicken Enchiladas
- Refried Beans
- Fiesta Corn
- Spanish Rice

Saturday Dinner

- Wisconsin Cranberry Chicken
- Champagne Tilapia
- Portobello Wellington
- Dessert trio

Hotels

We encourage you to register and book your hotel rooms as soon as possible.

If you need an accessible room, please state your needs when making the reservation. Please make reservations by Sept. 1.

Make your room reservation directly by phoning or find online links at ffrf.us/hotels2023. (See information below). Indicate you are with "The Freedom From Religion Foundation" block.

Hilton Madison Monona Terrace

9 East Wilson Street Madison, Wisconsin, 53703
608-255-5100
Rates are \$189 for a standard guest room.
Hotel is attached to convention site. Onsite self parking \$25/day.

Best Western Premier Park Hotel

22 S Carroll St, Madison, WI 53703
608-285-8000
Rates are \$209 for a standard guest room.
Hotel is 3 blocks from convention site.
Onsite valet parking \$25/day.

Sheraton Madison Hotel

706 John Nolen Dr, Madison, WI 53713
888-625-4988
Rates are \$269 for a standard guest room.
Hotel is 2.3 miles from convention site.
Free surface lot parking. Free shuttle service to downtown available.

FFRF 2023 NATIONAL CONVENTION MADISON OCTOBER 13-15

46TH CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: ffrf.us/convention2023

REGISTRATION FEES	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___	\$100 \$ ___
Spouse or Companion (Non-member accompanying member)	___	\$105 \$ ___
Child (High school or under accompanying registrant)	___	Free \$ ___
College Student with ID	___	\$25 \$ ___
Non-member	___	\$160 \$ ___
<input type="checkbox"/> Or, I will join FFRF for \$40 (and save \$20)	___	\$140 \$ ___

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. FFRF does not make money on convention meals. Prices include the 5.5% sales tax and 22% service charge.

Thursday, October 12

Freethought Hall Open House [Must register to attend] ___ Free
Check box if attending ☐ Registrant 1 ☐ Registrant 2

Friday, October 13

Friday Dinner Buffet ___ \$35 \$ ___
Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free
Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Saturday, October 14

Non-Prayer Breakfast ___ \$25 \$ ___
Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free
Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Enchilada Platter ___ \$25 \$ ___
Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free
Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Saturday Dinner ___ \$50 \$ ___
Registrant 1 ☐ Wisconsin Cranberry Chicken ☐ Champagne Tilapia ☐ Vegetable Portobello
Registrant 2 ☐ Wisconsin Cranberry Chicken ☐ Champagne Tilapia ☐ Vegetable Portobello

► 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 9/28/23.
☐ 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 _____

City _____ State / ZIP _____

Phone* _____ Email* _____

Credit Card Number _____ Expiration Date / Security Code _____

Billing Name / Signature _____ *Contact information for in-house use only
Registration deadline September 29th, 2023 (Unless event is sold out)