

# FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**We are under attack by the Supreme Court**

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Vol. 41 No. 3

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

April 2024

## Alabama ruling enshrines fetal personhood

The Freedom From Religion Foundation condemns the recent outrageous theocratic 7-2 ruling by the Alabama Supreme Court.

It describes frozen embryos as “children,” contains a bible-laden concurrence and endangers in-vitro fertilization in the state. The ruling clearly shows the religion-based mentality that drives anti-abortion legislation and court judgments.

The case involves an IVF patient who accidentally dropped and destroyed frozen embryos belonging to other couples, and whether that patient could be held liable in a wrongful death lawsuit. Alabama’s high court descended to a new low when it held that “unborn children are ‘children’” and encompassed frozen embryos under the state’s Wrongful Death of a Minor Act.

Alabama voters in 2018, before *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, passed a ballot measure granting fetuses full personhood rights, but the language

did not mention frozen embryos. After *Roe* was repealed, Alabama adopted a draconian abortion ban.

It is hard to think of a more un-American ruling than the concurrence by Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Tom Parker. In his theology-drenched concurring opinion, Parker openly cites religion and the bible: “The theologically based view of the sanctity of life adopted by the people of Alabama encompasses the following: God made every person in His image; each person therefore has a value that far exceeds the ability of human beings to calculate; and human life cannot be wrongfully destroyed without incurring the wrath of a holy God, who views the destruction of His image as an affront to Himself.” Parker added that “even before birth, all human beings bear the image of God, and their lives cannot be destroyed

See Alabama on page 11



## FFRF sues Memphis school on behalf of Satanic Temple

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of The Satanic Temple against the Shelby County Board of Education in Memphis, Tenn., over serious violations of the First Amendment.

Since November 2023, when The Satanic Temple sought to begin an afterschool club at Chimneyrock Elementary School, the school district has attempted to thwart it at every turn. Rather than allowing it to rent school facilities on the same terms as other nonprofit organizations (such as the Christian Good News Club), the Shelby County Board of Education, which operates the district, has chosen to defy the First Amendment. The district has charged

security fees, refused to adequately communicate, and generally treated members of the educational group as second-class citizens.

Memphis-Shelby County Schools “cannot pick and choose how much it charges an organization renting its facilities based on how much it does or does not favor the organization’s viewpoint, the content of its speech, or its religious beliefs,” asserts FFRF’s lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee. The district’s “unconstitutional behavior has chilled The Satanic Temple’s speech and substantially burdened its ability to exercise its religiously motivated practice of of

See Lawsuit on page 19



After-School Satan Club volunteers and local leaders hold up their sign at Chimneyrock Elementary School during the club launch on Jan. 10. From left, Samael Pleasanton, Derek Smith, June Everett, Eric Lison and LeighAnn DeJaynes.

## FFRF joins large coalition against school chaplains

In three open letters to state lawmakers, more than 200 individual chaplains, along with dozens of faith groups, the FFRF Action Fund and other secular and civil society organizations, are speaking out against a wave of proposed legislation seeking to install chaplains in public schools nationwide.

This year alone, bills in at least 14 states have proposed allowing public schools to employ (or accept as volunteers) chaplains to provide student-support services, including counseling and other mental-health assistance. The slew of legislation follows a similar measure passed in Texas last year.

**For more on public school chaplains, turn to page 18.**

The open letters highlight the dangers of allowing chaplains, who are typically not trained or certified to provide educational or mental-health services, to assume the responsibilities of qualified professional school counselors and other school staff. Students are likely to receive inadequate mental-health support that, in some cases, may be affirmatively harmful.

In addition, allowing chaplains in pub-

lic schools would violate students’ and families’ religious-freedom rights by inevitably leading to religious coercion and evangelizing of students. As explained in the chaplains’ letter, chaplains are trained to provide religious counseling to people in spiritual need. Not only are they unqualified to provide student mental-health services, but chaplains typically do not have the necessary experience or training to ensure that they adhere to schools’ educational mandates and avoid veering into proselytizing and other promotion of religion, which is unconstitutional when undertaken by school employees or volunteers.

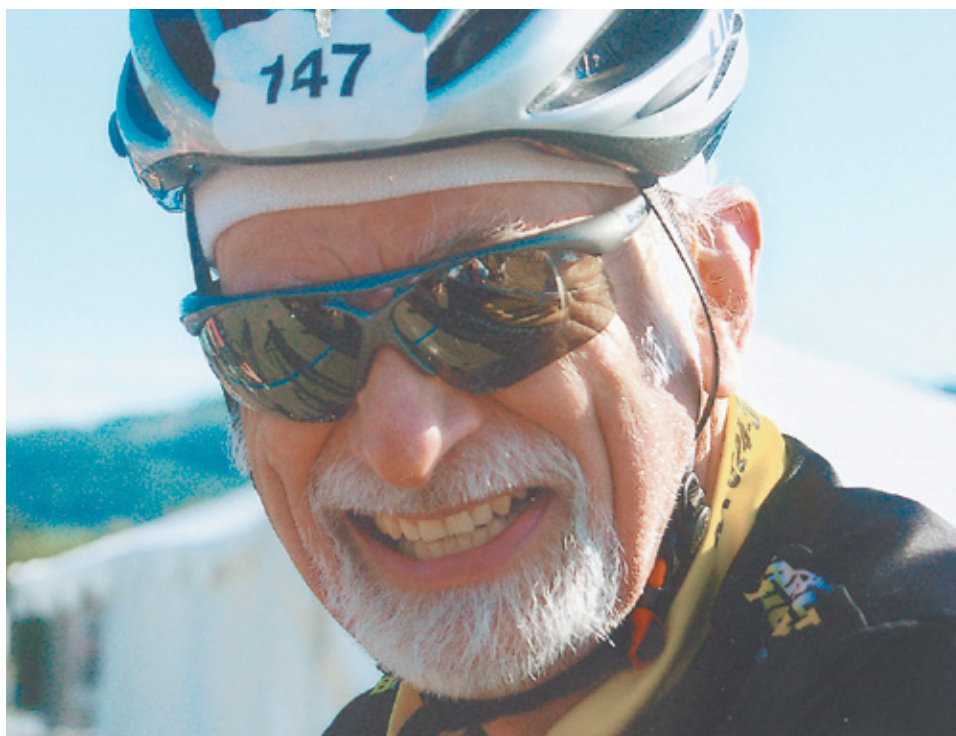
To date, school-chaplain bills have been introduced in 14 states in 2024, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma and Utah. The three open letters released today — one by a group of more than 200 individual chaplains, another signed by 38 faith groups, and the third endorsed by 34 secular and civil society organizations — urge state legislators to protect the integrity of public schools, as well as the religious freedom and mental well-being of students, by rejecting proposed chaplaincy programs.

See Chaplains on page 19



# Freethinking retired doctor leads a full life

**Name:** Steven Jonas, M.D.  
**Where I live:** Port Jefferson, N.Y.  
**Where and when I was born:** New York City (Manhattan), 1936.  
**Family:** Son and daughter: Jacob Jonas, 51; Lillian Wain, 49; four grandchildren.  
**Education:** B.A. from Columbia College, 1958; M.D. from Harvard Medical School, 1962; post-doc fellowship at London School of Economics, 1964-65; M.P.H. from Yale School of Public Health, 1967; M.A. from NYU in health management, 1997.  
**Occupation:** Doctor of public health and preventive medicine, board certified; professor of preventive medicine at Dept. of Preventive Medicine at Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook (N.Y.), 1971-2014.



Dr. Steven Jonas is shown participating in the 2007 USA Triathlon National Championships. Jonas has completed 256 triathlons over 37 years. He says the last triathlon he did was in 2018, but he still works out regularly at age 87.

**How I got where I am today:**

- Being fortunate in having the parents I had.
- The education at the grade/high-school, baccalaureate, and post-baccalaureate levels that I had.
- Being fortunate enough to have had work experience at both the New York City Health + Hospitals Departments.
- Getting my academic appointment at Stony Brook University, where I was able to put to good use all of the education and work experience I had had, continuing to work hard in a variety of preventive medicine-related disciplines, as well as with my own background and learning in history and politics, for all of the 43 years that I was at Stony Brook.

**Where I am headed:** A continued fruitful retirement, writing and publishing regularly on history and politics, and enjoying my family.

**Person(s) in history I admire and why:**

- James Madison, who wrote the Bill of Rights (and, as a strong supporter of the separation of church and state, placed

the Establishment Clause in first place in the First Amendment).

- Abraham Lincoln, who won the Civil War and ended the formal, legal system of slavery.
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who established the New Deal (yet to be completely fulfilled) and set forth the Four Freedoms (see the quotation below; yet to be fully achieved).

### MEET A MEMBER

**Quotations I like:**

- Abraham Lincoln (from the Gettysburg Address): “It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that

cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, [under God], shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the Earth.”

- Franklin Delano Roosevelt, from his State of the Union speech on Jan. 16, 1941: “In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression — everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship [God] in his own

way, everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want, which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear, which, translated into world terms, means a worldwide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor anywhere in the world.”

- Then (very immodestly), the quote with which I have headed every one of my published political columns since August 2018: “Either this nation will kill racism, or racism will kill this nation.”

**Things I like:** My family and my (continuing) work.

**Things I smite:** Today’s Republican Party and religious authoritarianism.

**My doubts about religion started:** When I was growing up in an agnostic/atheist household.

**Before I die:** I want to see Christian nationalism become a sideshow in the context of U.S. democracy, as it was before the arrival on the scene of Trump.

**Ways I promote freethought:** In my published writings on *OpEdNews.com*, and in my book, *The 15% Solution: How the Republican Religious Right Took Control of the U.S., 1981-2022* (available on Amazon). It is a fictional future-history, purportedly published on the 25th anniversary of U.S. constitutional democracy in 2048.

**I wish you would have asked me:** “What is your concept of the ‘afterlife?’” It is the secular concept that I was taught by my father: “Your afterlife is how memories of yourself, your family and your contributions to the progress of humanity live on in the minds and spirit of those you left behind.”

## FFRF seeks judges for four student essay contests

The Freedom From Religion Foundation proudly hosts five student essay competitions a year — four of which are judged by volunteer FFRF members and staff.

We are currently seeking qualified volunteer readers to assist with judging this year’s FFRF scholarship contests.

Do you have a special background and interest in encouraging freethinking students? Do you enjoy reading the winning essays in issues of *Freethought Today*? We are looking for judges who have backgrounds and

experience that make them particularly suited to judging student essays.

This background can include degrees in English or writing, being a teacher (or retired teacher), writing instructor or tutor, etc. — or other life experiences and freethought activism. With our contest dedicated to Black, Indigenous or Students of Color, we would like to be sure to include some BIPOC judges. With the graduate competition, it can be helpful, although not a prerequisite, to have judges who have advanced degrees or

have taught at the college level.

Required: Being able and willing to read essays remotely (online). You will not receive paper copies.

If you are selected as a volunteer judge, you will read all of the essays assigned to you and grade them individually on a scale of 0-2. You are also encouraged to add a comment about each essay. (You will be given the full judging and grading details once you have been selected.) You can contact Lisa Treu with any questions at [ltreu@ffrf.org](mailto:ltreu@ffrf.org).

FFRF’s final judges will review the finalists and the comments from the volunteer judges in their respective categories.

The 10 prizes in each essay contest range from \$3,500 for first place to \$300 for 10th place, with additional \$200 honorable mentions at FFRF’s discretion.

Volunteer judges will be identified and thanked by name in *Freethought Today* and in FFRF’s “Private Line.”

**To apply:** [ffrf.us/essayjudge](https://ffrf.us/essayjudge)

## FFRF FREETHOUGHT TODAY

Published by Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

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*The only freethought newspaper in the United States*

### We’ve joined Instagram!

*The Freedom From Religion Foundation has listened to your requests and is excited to announce that it has officially joined Instagram.*

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We look forward to connecting with you there!



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Denver, Sept. 27-28

# Katherine Stewart joins FFRF convention



Katherine Stewart Bonnie Garmus Jon Huertas Ron Reagan Michelle Goldberg Bradley Onishi Judy Amabile Brianna Titone Ryan Cragun Dan Barker

FFRF is excited to announce that author and investigative reporter **Katherine Stewart** will speak at FFRF's national convention in September in Denver. She will receive the "Free-thought Heroine" award.

The two-day event on Friday, Sept. 27, and Saturday, Sept. 28, will include an impressive list of expert commentators on religion, politics and Christian nationalism.

Stewart has covered religious liberty, politics, policy and education in her various professional roles. Her latest book, *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*, is a rare look inside the machinery of the movement that brought Donald Trump to power. The recent documentary feature movie "God and Country," co-produced by Rob Reiner and Stewart, is based on *The Power Worshipers*. Stewart's journalism appears in the New York Times op ed, NBC, the New Republic, and the New York Review of Books. She last spoke at FFRF's convention in 2021 in Boston.

Also appearing at the convention will be the evening keynote speakers **Bonnie Garmus** and **Jon Huertas**.

Garmus will accept FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award. Her charming and thought-provoking novel, *Lessons in Chemistry*, has sold in the multimillions.

The award-winning global phenomenon has been on the bestseller list for more than a year and was recently turned into a TV series on Apple TV starring Brie Larson. The novel, part romantic comedy and part satiric commentary, is about a determined chemist who encounters so much sexism in the 1950s that she turns to hosting a highly scientific TV cooking show. While the book's feminism has been much-remarked upon, almost every main character in it is a pronounced atheist.

Actor Jon Huertas is best-known for starring as Miguel Rivas for six seasons on NBC's popular "This Is Us." Audiences know him as Detective Javier Esposito from ABC's hit dramedy "Castle," as well as for a stand-out performance as Sgt. Tony "Poke" Espera in HBO's limited docudrama series, "Generation Kill." He is one of the few Latinx actors who has broken the ceiling in mainstream TV, portraying characters telling diverse but universal stories. He's an open atheist and will be speaking on "True Freedom: Breaking the Shackles of Religious Indoctrination."

FFRF is also excited for the return of "unabashed atheist" **Ron Reagan**, who recorded FFRF's long-playing TV commercial, and last spoke at a conference in 2015. Reagan, a political commen-

tator and broadcaster, is the freethinking son of President Ronald and Nancy Reagan.

Another crowd-pleaser returning to speak about religion and politics will be New York Times columnist **Michelle Goldberg**, whose book *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* in 2006 was an early warning call. Goldberg, who is also an online contributor to MSNBC, will receive FFRF's Clarence Darrow Award and statuette.

Also addressing Christian nationalism is **Bradley Onishi**, who is on the faculty of the University of San Francisco and co-host of the top-ranked religion and politics podcast, "Straight White American Jesus." He is author of the timely book, *Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism — And What Comes Next*.

FFRF, which held the first-ever panel of nonreligious state legislators at its conference last year, is assembling for the upcoming convention a panel of secular Colorado state legislators. Confirmed are: **Rep. Judy Amabile**, a businesswoman and progressive advocate, who represents the 49th district, and **Rep. Brianna Titone**, a geologist who represents the 27th district and was the state's first openly transgender state legislator.

"The Consequences of Religious Decline in the U.S." will be the topic for University of Tampa sociology Professor **Ryan T. Cragun**. Cragun, who served as a Mormon missionary before leaving religion, is an expert on the rise of the "Nones" (religiously unaffiliated) and author or co-author of a host of books including *Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society*, *What You Don't Know About Religion (But Should)*, *How to Defeat Religion in 10 Easy Steps* and *From One Missionary to Another*. Last, but not least, FFRF Co-President **Dan Barker** will be speaking about his forthcoming new book, *Contradiction: The Hidden Fallacy that Inverts Reality*. After 140 debates for FFRF, Dan proposes a new way of looking at assumptions behind "fine-tuning" arguments for the existence of a god.

The convention will feature its usual reports by the co-presidents, the legal staff and legislative/lobbying team, plus a chance to peruse FFRF book and product tables and mingle with other freethinkers. The annual meetings of the state representatives and membership take place on Sunday morning, Sept. 29.

Other speakers will be announced in future issues of Freethought Today.

Turn to the back page to register and find complete information or check online at [ffrf.org/convention2024](http://ffrf.org/convention2024).

## OVERHEARD

It is a real Christian nationalist threat to our judicial system to have Supreme Court justices who understand theologically and think of themselves theologically as above precedent and the rule of law. If they think that their allegiance is to a higher power and their allegiance is to the bible primarily before the Constitution, if they are invoking modern prophecies as the rationale for the work that they do, that should really raise questions about the separation of religion and state and the ways that Christianity and Christian nationalism is getting infused into the very structures of how our legal system is working.

**Matthew Taylor, senior scholar at the Institute for Islamic, Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore.**

*Religion News Service, 2-27-24*

Some followers of Christian nationalism have been duped into believing this movement is a legitimate branch of Christianity. Instead, it is a political ideology that uses the language of Christianity to hide its attack on religious freedom.

**Robert D. Crux, a former teacher, principal and superintendent of Adventist schools, in his column, "Religious liberty only for some?" which references FFRF's 2020 report "Religious Liberty Under Threat."**

*AdventistToday.org, 2-13-24*



Elie Mystal

The fundamentalist Christians running the joint only care to invoke God when bible-thumping can be used to justify controlling women, limiting their choices and forcing them to do something they don't want to do. God, to these glorified astrologers, is all wrath, no grace.

**Elie Mystal, in his column, "Alabama's IVF ruling is Christian theology masquerading as law."**

*The Nation, 2-23-24*

How does Christian identity alone make any person a better candidate for office? After all, many of the worst actors in American politics are professed believers. Scandal and corruption are so pervasive in the church that when a person says, "I'm a Christian," it tells me almost nothing about their wisdom or virtue.

**Conservative columnist David French in his article, "What is Christian nationalism, anyway?"**

*New York Times, 2-25-24*

There's a huge spectrum of theological opinion about when life begins or when personhood begins. There's no consensus here, so there's a lot of hubris in claiming — especially in the legal standing — that this is the theological viewpoint of an entire religious tradition. That's certainly not true.

**Rev. Katey Zeh, the head of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, responding to the Alabama Supreme Court's ruling on frozen embryos.**

*Religion News Service, 2-27-24*

Added up, the main effect of fetal personhood is to rob women of their right to control their own reproductive capacity and make a choice about when and whether to give birth. It subordinates the actual personhood of a woman or a teenager — as captured in her ability to think and reason and act of her own volition and for her own purposes — to the potential for personhood found in an embryo. It is, in effect, a profound attack on the dignity and equality of women. Proponents of fetal personhood may speak in the language of rights, but this particular right is freedom retracting, not freedom enhancing.

**Jamelle Bouie, in his column, "Samuel Alito opened the door to reproductive hell."**

*New York Times, 2-23-24*

The Dobbs majority's hope that legislatures and not courts will decide the abortion question will not be realized. Are they really going to allow women to die on the table because they won't allow an abortion which would save her life?

**Retired Justice Stephen G. Breyer, whose new book, "Reading the Constitution: Why I chose Pragmatism, Not Textualism" debuted in March**

**and criticizes the Dobbs decision, originalism and textualism.**

*New York Times, 3-19-24*



Jared Huffman

To now have those people not only have zero accountability for what they said and did . . . but to be given the prestige of a congressional invocation . . . should be alarming to people who care about this threat to

our democracy, as well as the continuing attack on church-state separation.

**Rep. Jared Huffman, on House Speaker Mike Johnson allowing Christian nationalist preacher Jack Hibbs to give the House's opening prayer on Jan. 30.**

*Religion News Service, 2-16-24*

For students who do not share the theology or religious beliefs of the school's chaplain, seeking guidance from a chaplain in times of distress may increase students' stress, confusion and isolation.

**Holly Hollman, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, in her column, "Public schools are not Sunday schools," regarding the Texas Legislature passing a law that allows public school districts to employ chaplains instead of trained counselors.**

*Time, 2-13-24*



- Across**
- Mr. Potato Head, e.g.
  - Ornamental pond dweller
  - Keyboard key
  - Civil War headgear
  - Tattled
  - Make amends
  - The lowest female voice
  - \*Norma McCorvey's 1973 opponent
  - Socially inept
  - \*There are atheists in \_\_\_\_\_
  - Ruler mark
  - Cedar Rapids native
  - Ancient Chinese dynasty
  - Popular flowering annual
  - Exhibited symptoms of respiratory disease
  - Draft pick
  - Of the forest
  - Field worker
  - \*Founding father of quantum chemistry Linus Pauling's Nobel \_\_\_\_\_ Prize
  - \*#36 Down's movie "Up in the \_\_\_\_\_"
  - Mercantile establishment
  - Opposite of knit
  - Bracelet for the arm
  - Jason Bourne's enemy, acr.
  - Hangs out with
  - Snacked, past participle
  - Unit of electrical resistance
  - Variation of meow

- \*"Out of \_\_\_\_\_, One" - U.S. motto before 1956 change to "In God We Trust"
- \*Novelist Upton \_\_\_\_\_: religion is a "mighty fortress of graft"
- Sheik's bevy
- Fountain treat
- Unfit to eat, for certain religious reasons
- \_\_\_\_\_ daisy
- Applications
- Mend, health-wise
- It is, contraction
- Greenwich time
- Oscar of sports world

- Down**
- Reggae precursor
  - Loot, dough or dinero
  - "\_\_\_\_\_ no good"
  - Common compound in pollutants
  - Down Under marsupial
  - Like days gone by
  - Unfortunate day for Julius Caesar
  - Rigid necklace
  - Egyptian hieroglyph
  - Beyoncé, a.k.a. Queen \_\_\_\_\_
  - Like most highways
  - \*Bye to freethinking Jean-Paul Sartre
  - \*"Last Week \_\_\_\_\_" with irreverent John Oliver
  - Hoist, old-fashioned
  - Got a blue ribbon
  - \*The Mother of Invention leader who called religious beliefs "dogma, rapture or necrodestination"
  - Intestinal obstruction
  - Closes in on
  - \*Freethinking Pulitzer-winning poet \_\_\_\_\_ Sandburg.
  - Illegal booze
  - Chill-inducing
  - Scary movie consequence
  - "\_\_\_\_\_ and the Real Girl," movie
  - Often goes with "vigor"
  - \*Freethinking "Michael Clayton" actor George \_\_\_\_\_
  - Counter seat
  - Automated teller
  - Decrees
  - Mother Goose story, e.g.
  - Swaddle
  - Unwholesome atmosphere
  - Not outlet
  - Longer than midi
  - Aphrodite's lover
  - Very pleased with oneself
  - Wraths
  - Get what you sow
  - Like certain potato
  - Tsetse, e.g.

### Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10
11					12				13	14	
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62						63				64	

Answers on page 21

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

### 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."



Meeting at the Joslyn Gage Museum and Social Justice Dialogue Center in Fayetteville, N.Y., were founding Upstate New York Freethinkers members, from left, Danielle Nagle, Jeffrey Galanta and Jerry Reed.

## FFRF gets its first New York chapter!

FFRF is excited to announce its newest chapter, the Upstate New York Freethinkers, the first chapter of FFRF in the state!

It was incorporated on Feb. 6 after being initially organized at FFRF's 2023 national convention in Madison, Wis. The Upstate New York Freethinkers chapter spans most of the state of New York, from the seven regions including Western, Finger Lakes, Central, Mohawk Valley, Capital District, North Country and Southern Tier.

On Feb. 14, the new chapter held an inaugural meetup at the Matilda Joslyn Gage Museum and Social Justice Dialogue Center, whose executive director is Danielle Nagle, a founding participant of Upstate New York Freethinkers.

The chapter's mission is "to challenge entanglement of religion and government and report First Amend-

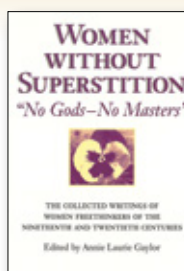
ment and Establishment Clause violations. We advocate for the separation of church and state as a philosophical and jurisprudential concept for defining political distance in the relationship between religious organizations and the state. We serve as a locus of actions, as individuals and as a community, to promote and support the work of FFRF. We embrace social justice through community education, individual activism and secular social events."

If you are an FFRF member from any of the seven New York regions and would like to join, contact the chapter at [info@unyft.org](mailto:info@unyft.org) or call 585-454-9921, or go to [unyft.org](http://unyft.org) for more information.

FFRF welcomes the Upstate New York Freethinkers!



### Women Without Superstition "No Gods—No Masters"



Edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor  
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### Freethought Today Cryptogram

L F D E P E C O E N Z Q S T L C K H Y X C J J F Z L J C L  
 G H Y A C J A H G Z O A E N X C L S E X G Z S A Z B F Q F F O Z  
 O F Y F N N Z L S F B E D , Q H X I A S I Z N E X G C L F F B E D  
 X A Z O O F Y F N N Z L S ? E N O ' X U E D D E O P T F C T D F E O  
 Z A F O Z G F C J P C K Z T L F X X S P C C K K F J E O E X E C O  
 C J E O N Z O E X S ? — Z L X A H L Y Y D Z L U F

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:

U O G R L Q T M H Y V B F D V P S L A C N V W G Y U O G K J E Z X V I .  
 T H E Q U I C K B R O W N F O X J U M P S O V E R T H E L A Z Y D O G .

This month's clue: B => V. Answer is on page 21.

This puzzle is from *Freethinking Cryptograms* by FFRF member Brooks Rimes, available on Amazon.com for \$9.95.



# FFRF ad lambastes Alabama theocratic IVF court ruling

## THEY SAID WHAT?

**IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP TO THE GROWING THREAT OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM**  
**LAWS SHOULD BE BASED ON OUR SECULAR CONSTITUTION, NOT ON 'THE WRATH OF A HOLY GOD'**

The word "God" appears nowhere in our secular Constitution. But "God" appears 41 times in the shocking decision in Alabama ruling that the "wrath of a holy God" is incurred if frozen embryos for fertility treatment are destroyed.

A court decision based on biblical belief, not constitutional principles, should be a wake-up call about the growing dangers of Christian nationalism.

This theocratic decision granted fetal personhood to zygotes while threatening to deny infertile couples the only means by which they can have children. Even though this assault against in-vitro fertilization apparently will be temporarily remedied by the Alabama Legislature, fertility treatment nationwide remains endangered by the anti-abortion goal to enact national fetal personhood legislation. Zealots aren't limiting their crusade to banning abortion and mifepristone. Contraception and same-sex marriage are next on the chopping block. Individual rights, our very democracy, will not be safe until religion is kept in its place — out of our laws.

On this International Women's Day, please act to defend endangered religious liberty. Stand up for the separation of church and state... before it's too late.

**PRESERVE DEMOCRACY — RESIST THEOCRACY**

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★★★★ RATING — Charity Navigator

FFRF incorporated in 1978 as a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit. We have 40,000 members and work to educate the public about nontheism and to defend the constitutional principle of separation between state and church. Our team of constitutional attorneys have rendered thousands of state church decisions. Our membership supports FFRF's ongoing litigation, "United Against" campaigns, student scholarships and other educational efforts. Read about the latest news about abortion at ffrf.org/news.

FFRF.ORG | FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

The Freedom From Religion Foundation ran a full-page New York Times ad March 8 on International Women's Day excoriating the recent anti-IVF Alabama Supreme Court decision.

"It's time to wake up to the growing threat of Christian nationalism," asserts the national state/church watchdog. "Laws should be based on our secular Constitution, not on 'the wrath of a holy God.'"

The ad points out that the word "God" appears nowhere in our secular Constitution, but appears 41 times in a concurring opinion by the Alabama chief justice, who warned that the "wrath of a holy God" is incurred if frozen embryos for fertility treatment are destroyed.

"This theocratic decision granted fetal personhood to zygotes while threatening to deny infertile couples the only means by which they can have children," as the FFRF ad notes, "Even though this assault against in-vitro fertilization apparently will be temporarily remedied by the Alabama Legislature, fertility treatment nationwide remains endangered by the anti-abortion goal to enact national fetal personhood legislation."

FFRF adds that "Zealots aren't limiting their crusade to banning abortion and mifepristone. Contraception and same-sex marriage are next on the chopping block. Individual rights, our very democracy, will not be safe until religion is kept in its place — out of our laws."

FFRF's ad concludes: "On this International Women's Day, please act to defend endangered religious liberty. Stand up for the separation of church and state... before it's too late."

Action taken in early March by the Legislature and governor to temporarily protect IVF procedures in Alabama still do not address the root problem of the court's decision: that embryos are legally "children," comments FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

I don't have one approach in business and another approach in ministry and another approach in church... I work for God, and God has given me a bunch of jobs to do.

**Oilman Tim Dunn, subject of the article, "The billionaire bully who wants to turn Texas into a Christian theocracy." Dunn says he is on a "holy war against public education, renewable energy and non-Christians."**

*Texas Monthly, 3-1-24*

God doesn't make mistakes.

**Missouri state Sen. Sandy Crawford, justifying her vote against a rape/incest exception to the abortion ban.**

*X, 2-8-24*

We've got to see the courageous churches come together. We're encouraging the churches to stand with us.

**Christian nationalist "apostle" Lance Wallnau, saying he wants churches to "challenge the IRS" over the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits nonprofits from endorsing or opposing political candidates.**

*Rolling Stone, 1-17-24*



When judges don't rule in the fear of the Lord, everything's falling apart.  
**Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Tom Parker, in a previous writing prior to the Alabama court ruling that a frozen embryo is considered a human child.**

*New York Times, 2-20-24*

Tom Parker

I am a Christian and I trust in God. In a lot of the dangerous situations I've been in, I believe he's the only reason I've come out of those situations.

**Kinney County Chief Deputy Armando Garcia, on why bible verses on squad cars are important, after FFRF sent a letter of complaint to the county asking to have them removed.**

*LawOfficer.com, 2-9-24*

If you dress like that and you get raped and I'm on the jury, he's going to go free... because you know, a man is a man.

**Rev. Bobby Leonard of Bible Baptist Tabernacle in Monroe, N.C. He later "apologized" by placing a message on the church marquee saying, "I am sorry for any hurt, I was wrong — Pastor Leonard."**

*MSN.com, 2-25-24*

In my view, Nazis and KKKs are terrible, but satanists are the worst and absolutely contrary to everything I believe and stand for.

**Lisa Davis, a member of the Board of Trustees for the Capistrano Unified School District in California, speaking against the After School Satan Club, which was started to counter a Christian-based Good News Club at a local school. (FFRF sent a letter to the board president asking for Davis to rein in her religious remarks.)**

*The Friendly Atheist, 2-27-24*

You would have to swear an oath to protect and to defend the death of the unborn.

**Missouri state Sen. Rick Brattin, head of his state chapter of the Freedom Caucus, saying he wouldn't be able to take an oath of office if Missouri voters approve a ballot to enshrine abortion rights in the state Constitution.**

*Associated Press, 2-27-24*

Some say that the Free Exercise Clause is in conflict with the Establishment Clause. I disagree. No one these days is contemplating the establishment of a state religion. But neither should we tolerate the establishment of, to again coin a phrase, a state "anti-religion."

**Utah state Rep. Mike Petersen, lead sponsor of a bill that would allow for a "thorough study" of the Ten Commandments in public schools.**

*Deseret News, 2-22-24*

Among other things, the wave of attacks against Catholics suggest that many activists would like countless Americans to abandon their genuine religious faith and submit to a godless, progressive pseudoreligion.

**Sen. Marco Rubio, after claiming that President Biden needs to do something to stop people from damaging Catholic churches, which Rubio says is because of Roe v. Wade being overturned.**

*Catholic News Agency, 3-6-24*

# FFRF to sheriff: Remove religious decals

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has insisted that a Texas sheriff department get rid of Christian decals affixed on its vehicles.

A concerned local resident informed the state/church watchdog that Kinney County has recently started putting bible quote decals on official law enforcement vehicles. On his official Kinney County

vehicle, one officer has Ephesians 6:11: "Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil." The same officer declares that "God is our one true leader" and that he hopes people will Google the bible verses when they see them so that they can "change their life." Other bible quotes include Mark 12:30, which commands people to "love the Lord your God," and Isaiah 6:8, which implies that officers are sent by "the Lord."

Exacerbating the violation is the fact that funding for the decals reportedly came from Texas' public-funded Operation Lone Star, which was designed to help border counties, such as Kinney County, respond to illicit border activity. According to local media, Kinney County Sheriff Brad Coe's secretary asked if Operation Lone Star funds could be used for bible decals — and Coe approved that use of funding. The secretary has justified the program by saying; "We need more Jesus and more of the Lord."

Kinney County must immediately remove the bible quotes from its official vehicles in order to respect the constitutional separation between religion and government and the diverse views of its residents and employees, FFRF writes. It is highly inappropriate for the county to display bible verses on government property and to issue public statements about how residents should be Christians.

"The Supreme Court has long held that the Estab-



Photo courtesy of The Center Square

"In God We Trust" and a bible quote are on this sheriff's vehicle in Kinney County, Texas.

Kinney County, and to nonreligious officers that their government employer assumes they are Christian and find the bible meaningful."

People interact with and rely on law enforcement during some of the most urgent times of their lives, FFRF reminds the sheriff. Nonbelievers and non-Christian residents should not be made to feel alienated and excluded because the local sheriff's office they support with their taxes oversteps its power by prominently displaying religious statements on its property. Having bible quotes on official law enforcement vehicles also puts non-Christian officers in a difficult position. They must either refuse — in line with their sincerely held religious or nonreligious beliefs — to join in a Christian affirmation or conform by abandoning those sincerely held non-Christian principles.

FFRF wishes to inform Sheriff Coe of its victorious 2016 lawsuit in Texas against Brewster County Sheriff Ronny Dodson, filed along with two individual plaintiffs, over his unlawful decision to affix Latin cross decals on county patrol vehicles. Shortly after, Brewster County removed the crosses and later formally agreed not to place such decals on these vehicles. The county also agreed to pay each individual plaintiff \$1 in nominal damages, a symbolic acknowledgement of constitutional violations, as well as \$22,370 in attorneys fees and court costs.

lishment Clause requires 'government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion,'" FFRF Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence writes to Coe. "The addition of bible quotes to the county's official law enforcement vehicles conveys a message to nonreligious citizens that they are not welcome or accepted in



# IN THE NEWS

## Nine agencies finalize religious liberty rule

Nine agencies of the Biden administration have finalized a new rule that officials say will improve religious freedom by protecting the rights of beneficiaries of social services funded by the government, a move applauded by FFRF.

The rule will affect those receiving help from the many social service providers that are faith-based and will ensure providers cannot withhold help based on faith affiliation nor require beneficiaries to participate in any religious activity in order to receive help.

The rule restores some religious freedom protections that were rescinded by the Trump administration that also affected people seeking job search and job training assistance, housing services and academic enrichment.

One of the key protections is a requirement that organizations receiving federal grants for U.S. social service programs inform beneficiaries of their right to not be discriminated against on the basis of their religion.

Another key aspect of the rule is the encouragement of government agencies funding U.S. programs to aid beneficiaries in locating alternative providers in their region that are more compatible with their beliefs and also are federally funded.

"These new rules will greatly help improve life further for secular Americans," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "They are a win for true religious liberty!"

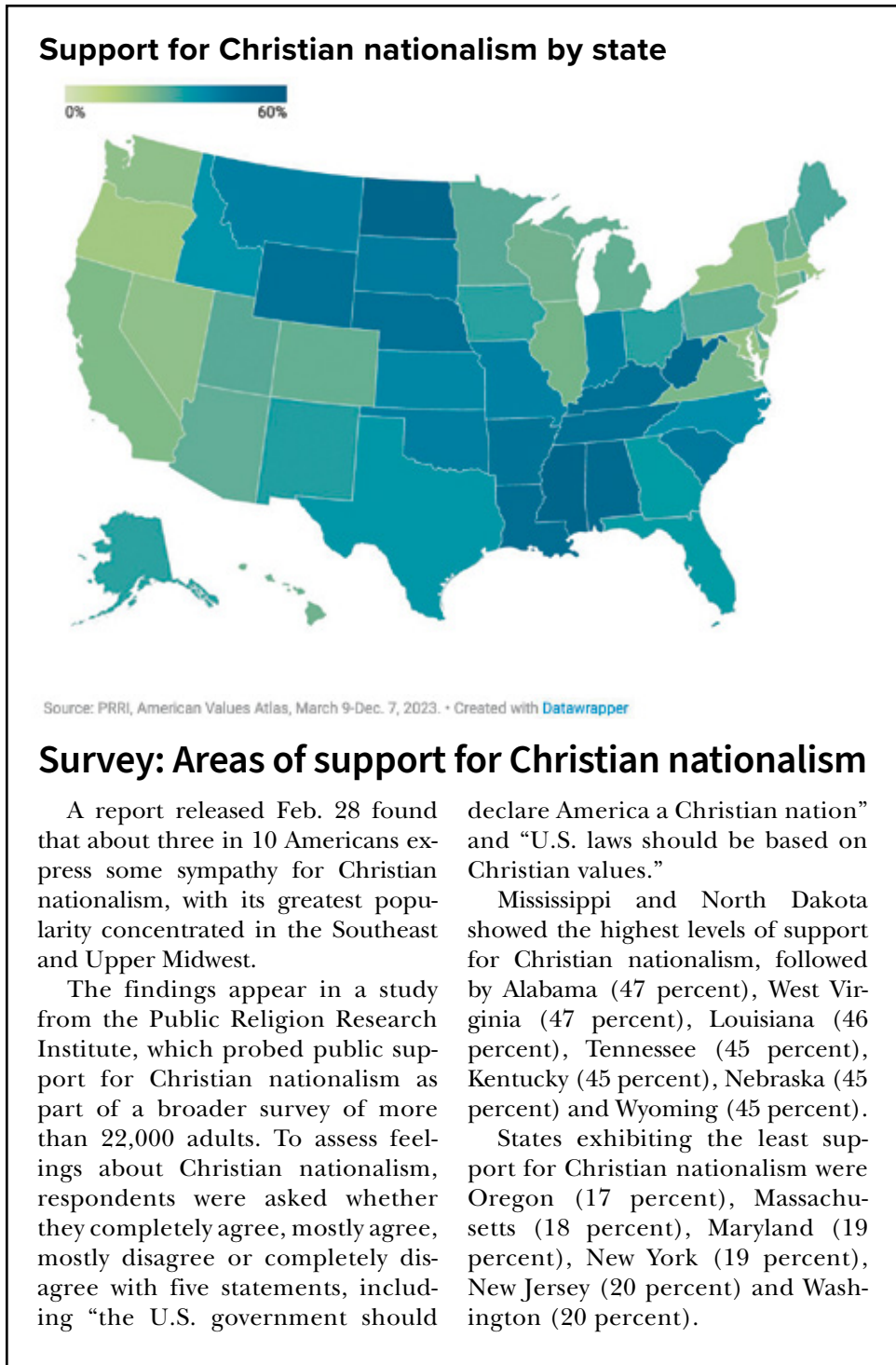
## Liberty U. fined \$14M for violating crime act

Liberty University has agreed to pay an unprecedented \$14 million fine for the Christian school's failure to disclose information about crimes on its campus and for its treatment of sexual assault survivors, the U.S. Department of Education announced March 5.

The fine is by far the largest ever levied under the Clery Act, a law that requires colleges and universities that receive federal funding to collect data on campus crime and notify students of threats. Schools must disseminate an annual security report that includes crime reports and information on efforts to improve campus safety.

Liberty has marketed itself for years as having one of the nation's safest campuses, with more than 15,000 students enrolled at the school in Lynchburg, Va. But its police department had a single officer with minimal oversight for investigating crimes during most of the time period reviewed by federal investigators, 2016 to 2023.

Many victims of sexual crimes feared reporting because of concerns of re-



prisal, the agreement stated. Several were punished for violating the student code of conduct known as 'The Liberty Way,' while their assailants were left unpunished."

## France enshrines right to abortion in Constitution

On March 4, France became the first country in the world to explicitly enshrine abortion rights in its Constitution — an effort galvanized by the rollback of protections in the United States.

The amendment referring to abortion as a "guaranteed freedom" passed by a vote of 780-72, far above the required threshold of support from three-fifths of lawmakers, or 512 votes.

"We're sending a message to all women: Your body belongs to you, and no one can decide for you," Prime Minister Gabriel Attal told lawmakers assembled in Versailles.

France decriminalized abortion in

1975. Abortion is legal there for any reason through the 14th week of pregnancy. That's more restrictive than in nearly half of U.S. states, where abortion is protected well past 14 weeks. This amendment won't in itself loosen any laws.

But while other countries have inferred abortion rights protections from their constitutions, as the U.S. Supreme Court previously did in *Roe v. Wade*, France is the first to explicitly codify in its constitution that the voluntary termination of pregnancy is protected.

## Court won't take up religious jurors case

The Supreme Court on Feb. 20 declined to consider whether potential jurors in an employment dispute involving a lesbian worker could be excluded because of their religious views on homosexuality.

The court rejected an appeal brought by Missouri Attorney General Andrew

Bailey in a case involving allegations of employment discrimination against the state's Department of Corrections.

Jean Finney, an employee, sued the department, saying she was retaliated against by a colleague after she began a same-sex relationship with his former spouse.

During the jury selection process, Finney's lawyer asked potential jurors if they had traditional religious beliefs or had been brought up to believe that "people that are homosexuals shouldn't have the same rights as everyone else."

Based on previous Supreme Court decisions, lawyers are allowed to exclude potential jurors without stating a reason but are barred from doing so on the basis of race and gender.

The case largely focuses on two jurors who said they believed that homosexual activity was a sin. But, the state argues, the jurors also said they believed that homosexuals should have the same rights as everyone else. The judge ultimately excluded three jurors who said they had conservative Christian beliefs.

## Reps. Balint, Swalwell join Freethought Caucus

Reps. Becca Balint, D-Vt., and Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., have joined the Congressional Freethought Caucus, bringing the total number of members up to 22 (all Democrats).

The main goals of the Freethought Caucus are to promote public policy formed on the basis of reason, science and moral values, protect separation of church and state and oppose discrimination against nonreligious people.

The Pew Research Center lists Balint as Jewish and Swalwell as Protestant.

## CVS, Walgreens start dispensing abortion pill

CVS and Walgreens, two of the country's largest retail pharmacies, received federal certification to begin dispensing mifepristone, one of two drugs used in medication abortions, in states where it is legal to do so.

CVS will start filling prescriptions for mifepristone in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, with eventual plans to expand to other states where the drug is legal on a rolling basis, according to a CVS spokeswoman.

Walgreens has begun dispensing the pill at some of its stores in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, California and Illinois, a spokesman for the company said.

The two pharmacies received certification from the Food and Drug Administration to fill prescriptions and dispense the commonly used pill, expanding access to abortion at a time when many states are further restricting a path to the procedure.

**The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible**  
By Ruth Hurmence Green  
A Missouri grandmother debunks the bible as no one has debunked it since Thomas Paine.  
Published by FFRF  
— 440 pages / PB Item #FB12

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By Vashti Cromwell McCollum

A compelling memoir on the historic legal battle to landmark Supreme Court victory ending religious instruction in public schools. (McCollum v. Board of Education, 1948)  
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Last year, the FDA passed a rule that allows pharmacies to fill prescriptions for abortion pills. Before this rule change was finalized, pregnant people had to get the drug straight from their doctors or by mail via telehealth consultations.

Mifepristone remains at the center of an ongoing legal battle between anti-abortion activists and the FDA. Anti-abortion rights groups sued the agency in 2022 over the approval of mifepristone — a drug that had been in use for more than 20 years.

## Abortion ban states are bad for mental health

People living in states that banned abortion in the immediate wake of the Supreme Court's decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* have worse symptoms of anxiety and depression than those who live in states without bans, according to a study published in February by researchers at Johns Hopkins University.

The researchers looked at respondents' self-reported anxiety and depression scores from about six months before and six months after the court overturned the constitutional right to abortion. They compared scores on a scale of 0 to 12 among people in states with and without trigger bans, abortion restrictions that went into effect as soon as the Supreme Court issued its ruling.

Before the court's decision, anxiety and depression scores were already higher in trigger states — a population-wide average of 3.5 compared with 3.3 in non-trigger states. After the decision, that difference widened significantly, largely due to changes in the mental health of women 18 to 45, what the authors defined as childbearing age. Among this subgroup, anxiety and depression scores subtly ticked up in those living in trigger states (from 4.62 to 4.76) — and dropped in those living in non-trigger states (from 4.57 to 4.49). There was no similar effect in older women, nor in men.

A wealth of research has shown that when people are forced to carry unwanted

pregnancies, it negatively impacts their physical health and finances — and mental health. In a survey conducted before the Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to abortion, women living in states with more abortion restrictions had higher rates of mental distress. In another study, states enforcing abortion restrictions between 1974 and 2016 had higher suicide rates in women of childbearing age in particular.

## Least-religious metro area in U.S. is Seattle

Seattle has the fewest residents who attend a religious service throughout the year, a new survey shows.

The data comes from the Household Pulse Survey, a product of the U.S. Census Bureau. The question on religious-service attendance is a new addition to the survey and had about 68,500 respondents nationwide.

A clear majority of adults in the Seattle area — around 64 percent — never attend church or religious services, or go less than once a year.

Among the 15 most populous cities in the United States, Seattle ranked the least religious, edging out San Francisco, where 63 percent never attend religious services, or go less than once a year. Boston was a distant third at 56 percent.

The whole state of Washington is nearly as nonreligious as Seattle. State-wide, 63 percent never or almost never attend religious services, just 1 percentage point lower than the number for the Seattle area.

## 80% think religion's role in society is shrinking

A Pew Research Center survey finds that 80 percent of American adults say religion's role in American life is shrinking, as high as it's ever been in Pew surveys.

Overall, 49 percent of U.S. adults say both that religion is losing influence and that this is a bad thing. An additional 8 percent of U.S. adults think religion's influence is growing and that this is a good thing. Together, 57 express a positive view

of religion's influence on American life.

The survey also showed that 72 percent of religiously unaffiliated adults (the Nones) say conservative Christians have gone too far in trying to control religion in the government and public schools, while 63 percent of Christians say the same about secular liberals.

About 45 percent of those polled said they had heard of Christian nationalism or read about it, with 54 percent saying they had never heard of it. Overall, 25 percent had an unfavorable view of Christian nationalism, whereas only 5 percent had a favorable view and 6 percent had neither a favorable nor unfavorable view.

When asked whether the bible should have influence over U.S. laws, respondents were evenly split: 49 percent said the bible should have "a great deal" of or "some" influence, while 51 percent said it should have "not much" or "no influence."

## Suit over city prayers blocked by Wyo. high court

A Wyoming man who filed a \$24 million lawsuit against the city and mayor for not letting him give enough atheistic invocations at city meetings has lost his appeal to the Wyoming Supreme Court.

Bruce Williams sued Gillette Mayor Shay Lundvall last spring on claims city leaders wouldn't let him deliver a proportion of invocations before council meetings matching the proportion of Wyoming atheists.

Williams gave one invocation per year for at least nine years. In three of those years, some Gillette City Council members walked out during his invocation, court documents say.

Williams alleges that with about 24 meetings per year, he should be allowed to perform nearly four invocations each year to represent, proportionately, the number of Wyomingites who are unaffiliated with religion.

District Court Judge Stuart S. Healy III dismissed Williams' lawsuit, saying the city and mayor have sovereign immunity from being sued — barring certain exceptions — but that Williams didn't

show any of the known exceptions when he filed his complaint. The Wyoming Supreme Court agreed.

## Pakistan man gets death sentence for blasphemy

A court in Pakistan has sentenced a 22-year-old student to death on charges of blasphemy over Whatsapp messages.

The court in Punjab Province said he had shared blasphemous pictures and videos with the intention to outrage the religious feelings of Muslims. A 17-year-old was sentenced to life imprisonment as part of the same case. Both have denied wrongdoing.

Blasphemy is punishable by death in Pakistan. Some people have been lynched even before their cases go on trial.

In the ruling on March 11, the judges said the 22-year-old was sentenced to death for preparing photos and videos which contained derogatory words about Prophet Muhammad and his wives. The younger defendant was given a life sentence for sharing the material.

## Faith and Liberty Center shuts down after 3 years

A \$60 million museum that purported to showcase the bible's role in American history has shut down less than three years after it opened.

The American Bible Society closed the Faith and Liberty Discovery Center in Philadelphia on April 1. The 40,000-square-foot museum, which cost a reported \$60 million to build, opened in May 2021 in the Wells Fargo building on Independence Mall.

Leaders at the ABS had hoped the center, which was designed for "sharing the importance of the impact of Scripture on the development of the United States," would draw a quarter million visitors a year, the Philly Voice reported in 2018. Actual attendance numbers were not made available by ABS.

# CRANKMAIL

Welcome to another installment of Crankmail, where we share a small percentage of the nasty correspondence we receive in emails, letters, phone messages and social media posts. Printed as received.

**FFR:** Keep your racist Wisconsin ideals far away from the state of Alabama. By condemning our governor for standing up for grown ass adults to have the right to their religious freedom? But your states authorities openly murder minorities? Your organization is grossly misguided, immoral, and far reaching. Look in the mirror before pointing the finger. — Jeff Brauer

**Auburn:** As a citizen of this nation and a Christian I would like to say respectfully that you are nothing

more but a liberal socialist communist radical that hates Christianity and other religions by your anti religious views. I am referring to your beef with auburn university baptizing students. Christianity is the greatest thing that happened and this nation is a judao/Christian one. — John Kubenski

**Religion:** Religion in schools is good. Fuck you and the horse you rode in on. — Frank Temp

**God is real:** You can shove your warnings up your ass. You have no power, you hold no sway. God is real and if any adult wants to be baptized, its none of your fucking business. Eat shit and die :) — Merv Nobler

**Pathic losers:** So, I have perused your drivel. Always the same conclusion - what are you so afraid of. Only possible conclusion - you feel the need to threaten students exercising their religious rights

seeking baptism. You're stinkin' scared that you're wrong. Unbelievably pathetic. — Janis Jopke

**Wrong:** You have no standing to object to those being moved by the Holy Spirit. Your ontology is questionable, but your morals are unquestionably wrong. Disband your horrid organization. I will fight you for the rest of my earthly existence. — James Davis

**Stay off my TV!:** Every time I see Ron Reagan on my TV, I feel my religious rights are being violated. He is not invited into my home to deliver his mess age. Where is my right that prevents him to show his face where his religious beliefs aren't in agreement with mine. I want to be free of Reagan and it wouldn't bother me if he did burn in hell — Linda Moehr

**Christianity:** This is a Christian nation no matter how often you write angry letters. You will not escape Christ's influence on the world. Since you like to bother people about this the first thing I'm going to do when I get off from working my ACTUAL job today is go to the store and buy a nativity scenes to put in my yard. Seriously, there's nothing more dangerous and stupid than nihilistic atheism. — Frank Schlegel

**Go away:** Stay out of community business. Let the majority of the community decide what they will permit or approve and not the minority. Majority rules. The Powerband represented our community well and performed historically important musical pieces this year. Do not attempt to change history. You can ignore it like many of us do your interference. Do not attempt to contact me in any way. — Joyce Kirk

**Racism:** The white race is exquisite. Before you think it's racist please view pink Floyd the trial with lyrics on YouTube. Colors don't have the ability to make racism. God didn't make a universe with a fatal flaw like that. Racism isn't skin color. Racism is somebody thinking sexually and getting disgusted sexually. If the white race is exquisite they can be

disgusted sexually more easily. The white race has a disability that makes racism. Divine love is when you like standing next to somebody. If you don't like standing next to somebody because you're disgusted sexually that makes racism. You could say that racism is a corruption of Divine love. The last thing before the wall comes down is exquisite wife and mother. That what disclosure is stuck on. It must be disclosed or the good that possible won't happen. — Robert McClintock

**Scared?:** I'm just wondering why your "Organization" even exists? Why does Jesus Christ scare you? Why does religion worry you? Is it really hurting you or is this just your way to make a little money and grab some attention? Putting this much effort into something you disagree with clearly states that you acknowledge God. — Russ Benhardt

**Baptism:** Leave Auburn University alone along with the students who are freely choosing to be baptized. You should all be ashamed of yourselves. These young men and women chose to get baptized and asked for help from people they "TRUST". Quit trying to push your "WOKE" "LIBERAL" agendas on the whole world!!!! — Janet Ned-erland

**Invisible force:** I have a question if a group of people that believe in an invisible force that promotes positive outcome in their lives and speaking to a crowd gives thanks to that force that their lives have been forever been elevated higher than they could have ever achieved on their own. This cannot be unconstitutional. What is unconstitutional is lying to that group of people that the invisible force has no authority over the minds of those people and his power is not needed for survival. It is sad when the wisdom that comes from organizations like yours snuffs out the hope of the invisible force that changes peoples lives for the better. — Guy Strong

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# VICTORIES

By Greg Fletcher

## Christian mini library removed from Ill. highway

The Illinois Department of Transportation removed a Christian Little Free Library that was unlawfully placed on government property after the Freedom From Religion Foundation alerted it.

A concerned community member informed the state/church watchdog of a religious “Little Free Library” at the intersection of Old Route 66 and Livingston County East. A Little Free Library is essentially a small kiosk filled with books where community members can take and leave a book for free. This library, however, was stocked entirely with Christian books, and there was a Latin cross painted on the side of the library. The Illinois Department of Transportation manages the right-of-way to that strip of land. Therefore, the library could easily have been perceived as being owned and controlled by the Illinois government.

FFRF Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow Samantha Lawrence wrote to the Illinois Department of Transportation and asked the Illinois Department of Transportation to investigate the situation.

FFRF’s letter moved the Illinois Department of Transportation to take action.

“The Illinois Department of Transportation has not posted or has no record of a permit issued to install this small kiosk within the state-maintained highway rights-of-way in that location,” a department official recently responded. “Last week, our local IDOT field maintenance yard crew inspected the area and removed the ‘Little Free Library’ kiosk in accordance with our policy regarding signs, billboards or advertising on IDOT property and Illinois highways right-of-way.”

## Ohio school district ends religious recruitment

A complaint by FFRF has resulted in an Ohio school district prohibiting outside groups, including religious organizations, from recruiting elementary school children during school lunch hours.

A concerned parent informed FFRF that last September, for the second year in a row, Lake Cable Elementary School had allowed adult representatives of the Good News Club to access over 400 students during the lunch period while on school property. Child Evangelism Fellowship, the club’s parent organization,

**Darrell’s mug shot**



**Darrell Barker of Washington sent us this image. He writes: “This ceramic Freethinker cup is now my favorite cup for a quiet pensive morning with coffee. After I dropped and broke one — clumsy me, my morning just wasn’t the same — I had to order another. Also, what I like about it is that the outside bottom is flat allowing for my electric coffee warmer situated by my easy chair to absorb more heat than other concave-bottom type cups. With FFRF staff’s good bubble wrapping and boxing, it comes to you in one piece. Just don’t drop it. I enjoy the creative logo, too.”**

“is a bible-centered organization composed of born-again believers whose purpose is to evangelize boys and girls with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and to establish (disciple) them in the Word of God and in a local church for Christian living.” Good News Club representatives spoke to students and promised kids that they would be given “candy and ice cream” if they joined the club. And Lake Cable Elementary sent a Good News Club permission slip home to be completed and returned to the school office.

FFRF Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote to Jackson Local Schools Superintendent Christopher DiLoreto, insisting that Jackson Local Schools commence an immediate investigation into this matter and make certain that Lake Cable Elementary cease allowing Good News Club representatives to recruit and proselytize students.

FFRF’s decisive action was successful. “The district has put an end to allowing access to outside groups at

the elementary buildings during the school day (as is already the case in all other buildings),” the legal counsel for Jackson Local Schools recently replied in an email.

## Michigan 4-H banquet will no longer have prayer

FFRF successfully fought to keep a Michigan 4-H Club awards banquet, which is a part of the Michigan State University Extension program, free from planned prayers.

A concerned parent reported that the Nov. 5, 2023, Berrien County 4-H Award Banquet included an apparently pre-planned prayer that was not listed on the event’s official program. Toward the end of the banquet, a 4-H leader was called to the stage, and led the attendees in a prayer that explicitly referenced God and Jesus Christ. FFRF’s complainant reported that past award banquets did not include

To read FFRF’s “Freethought of the Day,” go to [ffrf.org/day](http://ffrf.org/day).

prayer. The complainant reported that the prayer appeared to be planned, but for reasons unbeknown to them, the plan to include the prayer was not disclosed to attendees or those involved in planning the event.

FFRF Legal fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote to Kelly Stelter, Berrien County 4-H Program Coordinator, who then informed FFRF that an internal investigation took place. “This issue was addressed with the parties involved,” Stelter wrote.

## FFRF stops prayers at Oklahoma school district

FFRF stepped in to keep Depew, Okla., school students from having prayer imposed on them at a Christmas play by school staff in the future.

A concerned Depew Elementary School parent reported that on Dec. 14, a local preacher was allowed to lead students and parents in a Christian prayer both before and after the school’s Christmas play.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Leon Hiatt pointing out the constitutional violation.

FFRF received an email from the district’s legal counsel, Ryan K. Drummond. “After receiving your letter, the district investigated this matter and discovered that a preacher did give a prayer at the beginning and end of this year’s Christmas program,” Drummond wrote.


Hiatt informed the legal counsel that he spoke with administrators about the situation. Hiatt had assured Drummond that such an offense would not happen again.

## Evolution no longer under attack in Georgia schools

The Laurens County Schools in Georgia will no longer allow science teachers to spread their personal doctrine over Darwinism, thanks to FFRF’s efforts.

A concerned district parent reported that a science teacher at West Laurens High School told students that

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she didn't believe in evolution while teaching about it, undermining the scientific fact of evolution and promoting her personal religious beliefs. FFRF's complainant reported that the teacher explained Christian creationist beliefs to students and told them that they shouldn't trust the theory of evolution because Darwin rushed to publish his findings to be the first to publish the theory. The complainant reported that other science teachers in the district similarly promoted Christianity and denigrated the theory of evolution while teaching the subject.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Clifford Garnto, who responded that the situation had been managed. "We have addressed the concern with the employee and staff. Our employee's job is to teach the Georgia Standards of Excellence. This has been clarified and reinforced," he wrote.

### 'Faith' removed from Wis. PD mission statement

FFRF got the Neenah, Wis., Police Department to remove references to faith and God from its official mission statement.

A complainant reported that the Neenah Police Department's website indicated that the department operated under the "Pillars of P.R.I.D.E." The first pillar is labeled "priorities," which lists three values: "Faith, family, work." The website states that "Our personal convictions about faith define all that we do. Family is valued above work." Similarly, in 2019, the report included the same pillar, with

values listed as "God, Family, Work." In 2021, the Neenah PD Policy Manual described the "Priorities" pillar as "our personal convictions about faith define all that we do."

FFRF Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote to Chief Aaron L. Olson about the constitutional issue.

City Attorney David C. Rashid wrote back to FFRF, informing it that the pillar had been changed, noting that they "modified the purportedly offensive language on the police department's website concerning the use of the word 'God' as well as any other verbiage in the 'P' box of the Pillars (part of the Mission Statement) after the first sentence thereof."

### FFRF keeps prayer out of Veterans Day program

After a prayer was delivered in Weiser School District #431 in Idaho at a Veteran's Day assembly, FFRF worked to keep the district from infringing on district members' First Amendment rights.

A parent reported that on Nov. 9, 2023, the district held an all-school Veterans Day program that included religious messaging and prayer. The complainant reported that the event's speaker led students in prayer and repeatedly quoted the bible and that their children were deeply uncomfortable with the school-sponsored prayer and religious promotion.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Kenneth Dewlen, who responded to FFRF, noting that an investigation had taken place, and said that even though the local chapter of the Veterans of For-

eign Wars sponsored the event, action was still needed to be taken to prevent prayer in the future. "The Superintendent or their designee will ensure that they preview the Veterans Day Program agenda before the event," Dewlen wrote.

### FFRF gets Texas district to stick to Constitution

FFRF brought the Hardin Independent School District back in line with the Constitution after an inherently religious event was promoted through social media.

A parent reported that the district promoted the religious event, See You At the Pole, on the district's official social media and allowed adults to organize and participate in the event. SYATP is a "global day of student prayer," wherein students are encouraged to meet at their school's flagpole and pray before school. It is an explicitly Christian event and organization. On Sept. 27, 2023, a post from the official Hardin ISD Facebook page stated:

"We love seeing students participating in SYATP! What a beautiful morning! Thank you to our volunteers organizing these events!"

FFRF Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district. "It is well settled that public schools may not allow employees or outside adults to lead, direct, or encourage students to engage in prayer."

Legal representative for the district Melody Carrier reached out to FFRF, responding that the situation has been resolved. "The district has conferenced with the independent contractor who was involved in the incident," Carrier wrote. "The district will ensure that proper training on the separation of church and immediately addressed with all substitutes and the district will continue to stress with all employees the duties and responsibilities under the law."

### Christian iconography removed from Calif. school

FFRF has ensured that students at a California school will no longer be exposed to a Latin cross during class sessions.

A Chino Valley community member reported a Latin cross on display in the Chino Valley Adult School next to a poster of the Pledge of Allegiance.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to legal representation for the district regarding the violation. William A. Die-drich, an attorney from Atkinson, Andelson, Loya, Ruud & Romo, responded on behalf of the district. "Without addressing the legality of the display, nor acknowledging that a constitutional violation has occurred, the district has requested the Latin cross to be removed and the employee has complied," he wrote.

### OK superintendent won't pray to students at school

After an egregious violation of the Constitution, FFRF took action that would keep the Oklahoma school children safe from a proselytizing public official.

On Feb. 28, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters visited Riverside Elementary School to observe, meet with students, and to read to a second-grade class. Before reading to the class, Walters led the students in prayer delivered explicitly to God.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the district about the unconstitutional prayer.

Legal representative Bryan K. Drummond wrote back to FFRF about the prayer, informing it that the district was unaware that this would happen. "The administration and I have spoken about ensuring that this does not happen in the future and the administration is committed to ensuring that the law is followed," Drummond wrote.

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Photo by Chris Line

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# Let's thank the Alabama Supreme Court

This column first appeared in the New York Times on March 1 and is reprinted with permission.

By Linda Greenhouse

I never thought I'd be grateful to the Alabama Supreme Court for anything, but now I am. With its decision deeming frozen embryos to be children under state law, that all-Republican court has done the impossible. It has awakened the American public, finally, to the peril of the theocratic future toward which the country has been hurtling.



Linda Greenhouse

The U.S. Supreme Court's June 2022 decision that erased the constitutional right to abortion was an alert, too, of course, leaving Republicans scrambling to distance themselves from the fruits of the court they had populated with such glee only a few years earlier. The fact that religious doctrine lay at the heart of Justice Samuel Alito's majority opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* was perfectly clear, as I observed then. *Dobbs* is usually discussed today as a conservative power play, however, rather than as a projection of a religious view of fetal life onto both a largely unwilling public and the Constitution itself.

But there's no avoiding the theological basis of the Alabama court's solicitude for "extrauterine children," to use the majority opinion's phrase. In a concurring opinion in which he referred to embryos as "little people," Tom Parker, Alabama's chief justice, rested his analysis on what's become known as the Sanctity of Unborn Life Amendment that Alabama voters added to the state's constitution in 2018. "It is as if the people of Alabama took what was spoken of the prophet Jeremiah and applied it to every unborn person in this state: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. Before you were born I sanctified you,'" the chief justice wrote.

The decision was a shock, causing immediate chaos and heartbreak as fertility centers in Alabama paused their in vitro fertilization practices, crushing dreams of long-deferred parenthood even for couples whose



embryos were days away from being transferred. (The cowardice of the medical profession is a notable feature of the post-*Dobbs* era.)

But should it really have been such a surprise? The country is awash in religiosity when it comes to human reproduction. More than 120 Republican members of the House of Representatives have signed on as co-sponsors of the Life at Conception Act. Among them is their leader, Speaker Mike Johnson, an evangelical Christian who has called abortion "an American holocaust." The bill provides that "The terms 'human person' and 'human being' include each and every member of the species homo sapiens at all stages of life, including the moment of fertilization, cloning or other moment at which an individual member of the human species comes into being."

While the bill doesn't mention in vitro fertilization, the implications for IVF are clear on the face of its text. Now many of its co-sponsors are urgently assuring their constituents that they don't really mean *that*.

A startling example of religion infiltrating the engines of government is playing out in Idaho. The state's attorney general, Raúl Labrador, has brought on the group Alliance Defending Freedom, a prominent Christian legal organization, to help argue Idaho's Supreme Court challenge to

a Biden administration policy that requires hospitals to provide abortion if necessary when a woman arrives in the emergency room in a pregnancy-induced medical crisis. The federal law, the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act, requires hospitals to provide either "necessary stabilizing treatment" for any emergency room patient or a transfer to another hospital, while Idaho's abortion law permits terminating a pregnancy only in cases of rape and incest and to prevent "death."

In making its argument, Idaho argues in its brief to the court that it has a record of "150 years of protecting life" and that the federal medical treatment law "does not require emergency rooms to become abortion enclaves in violation of state law." The case is set for argument in April.

As the full force of the Alabama court's decision sunk in, the state's Republican governor, Kay Ivey, and leaders of the Republican-controlled State Legislature have vowed to enact a legislative fix to protect IVF. That may not be so simple. The 1872 state law on which Justice Jay Mitchell based his majority opinion, the Wrongful Death of a Minor Act, presumably could be replaced by new legislation. But Chief Justice Parker warned in his concurring opinion that the recent voter-approved constitutional protection for "unborn life" would stand in the way.

“The country is awash in religiosity when it comes to human reproduction.”

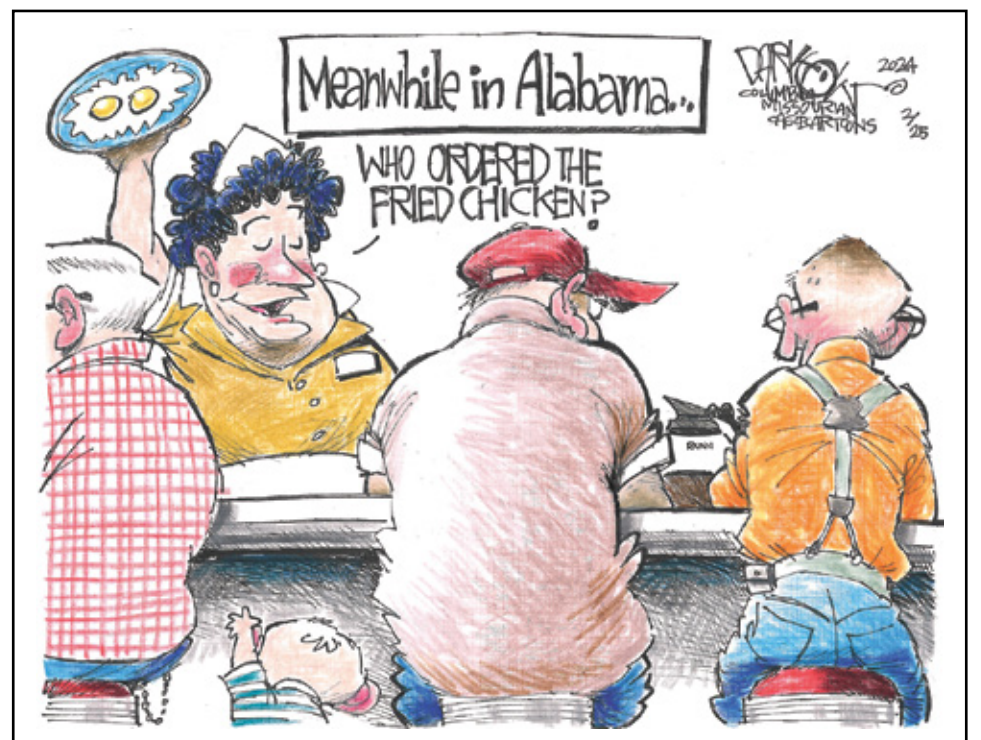
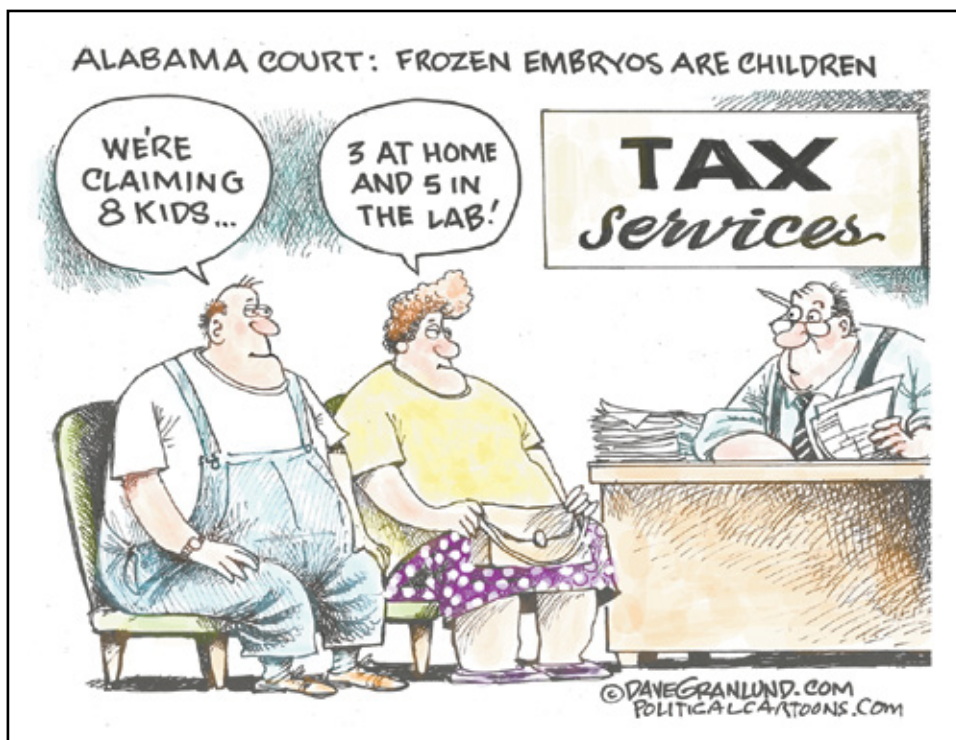
"Carving out an exception for the people in this case, small as they were," he wrote, in reference to the destroyed frozen embryos at the heart of the case, "would be unacceptable to the people of this state, who have required us to treat every human being in accordance with the fear of a holy God who made them in His image."

As Alabama's political leaders search for a way out of this mess, I can't help but notice their silence on the closely related subject of abortion. As soon as the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, Alabama's pre-*Dobbs* abortion law sprang into effect. It is a total ban, making an exception only to prevent "a serious health risk" to the pregnant woman, not for pregnancies resulting from rape or incest. As of 2021, Alabama had the fourth-highest maternal death rate in the country, behind only Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee. (To put this in perspective, a woman giving birth in Alabama is more than four times as likely to die in the process or soon thereafter as one in California.) Restoring access to abortion might seem to be a logical, even natural topic of conversation.

So why do we hear nothing from those so quick to self-protectively bemoan the state court's IVF decision? Religion is part of the answer, no doubt, but there is something more. Abortion is generally portrayed as a woman's issue; an unwanted or even dangerous pregnancy is her problem. Infertility, by contrast, is seen as a couple's problem. That means there is a man involved (even if, for lesbian couples, for example, or for single women, that man is only a sperm donor). And when men have a problem, we know the world is going to snap to attention.

Rhetoric about the "sanctity of unborn life," in the words of Alabama's constitution, has for too long been cost-free, a politician's cheap thrill. Now we see that, taken to extremes in the hands of the ideologues our current political culture nurtures, it has a price, one that society now seems reluctant to pay. For that realization, we can, as I said earlier, thank the Alabama Supreme Court.

Linda Greenhouse, the recipient of a 1998 Pulitzer Prize, reported on the Supreme Court for *The New York Times* from 1978 to 2008 and was a contributing Opinion writer from 2009 to 2021.







## (ALABAMA) OVERHEARD

It is humiliating to even have to say this: that women matter more than fetuses or embryos, that a frozen cell in a petri dish is not a human being, but we are. It is an absurdity to make this argument, an exhausting waste of our time, a degradation.

— **Guardian columnist Moria Donegan**

Not only are women not able to control not having children, they can't make the decision to have them. This decision is not about God, faith or scripture; it is about controlling women at what appears to be the cellular level.

— **North Carolina pastor Solomon Missouri**

The longer-term danger — indeed the apparent longer-term goal — is to raise and expand the definition of unborn personhood, to go after birth control methods and reproductive technologies that involve fertilized eggs. The ultimate aim, of course, is to have the fertilized egg declared a person from the moment of conception, under state constitutions and, ultimately, the 14th Amendment.

— **Washington Post columnist Ruth Marcus**

Women's health care is comprehensive, so taking or chipping away at one point affects the whole. You have to have comprehensive legislation and rules in place that allow women to decide whether or not they want to become pregnant, how to prevent pregnancy, how to terminate a pregnancy if they desire to, and how to continue pregnancy if they decide to continue.

— **Heather Skanes, an OB/GYN in Birmingham, Ala.**



**Karine Jean-Pierre**

Press Secretary **Karine Jean-Pierre**

Having three embryos in the freezer is not the same to me as having one that implants and become a pregnancy, and it's not the same as having a child. We have three embryos. We don't have three children.

— **Megan Legerski of Tuscaloosa, Ala., who is currently undergoing infertility treatment.**

The idea is absurd and unscientific. It is instead tied to a religious crusade to downgrade the personhood of women by conferring personhood on frozen embryos.

— **New York Times columnist Charles Blow**

Alabama is a dangerous theocracy. He [Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Tom Parker] is self-anointed as the divine guide to interpret your laws through ancient religious texts and his own 17th-century filter. You are subject to his delusions, his interpretation of God, his inner mandate, despite your pesky First Amendment right to believe your own religious truth, or to believe nothing at all.

— **AL.com columnist John Archibald**

You may think life is a matter of consciousness. Or you may think it is connected to the first stirrings of an embryo in the womb. Or you may simply think it is all pretty complicated. But it will not matter what you or I or anyone thinks or believes if the theocrats gain power. As in Alabama, they will use the law to impose their dogma on us all.

— **Seattle Times cartoonist David Horsey**



**Elizabeth Warren**

I said, once you've taken away the protection of Roe, courts are going to head in a lot of different directions in the states and that's exactly what happened.

— **Sen. Elizabeth Warren, referencing her earlier comments on Roe being overturned.**

on Roe being overturned.

We can be truly free only if we're confident we can go about our private lives without being monitored or intruded upon by the government and can practice whatever faith (or lack of faith) we wish regardless of the religious beliefs of others. A society where one set of religious views is imposed on those who disagree with them is not a democracy. It's a theocracy.

— **Guardian columnist Robert Reich**

The Alabama court had no moral authority to issue that kind of ruling in a constitutional democracy such as we claim to live in. They based it on a belief stemming from religious teaching, something that our Constitution has rejected as a consideration for governing and adjudicating. The court has no standing to issue a religious opinion.

— **Medium.com columnist Jim Bauman**

The stakes couldn't be higher. This single court decision is the throwing down of the gauntlet challenging America to choose sides: Either American ideals as defined by the Constitution or membership in a Costco version of Christianity, packaged in bargain bulk and cheap homilies.

— **NBA Hall of Famer and progressive blogger Kareem Abdul-Jabbar**

When you or your friend's IVF treatments are threatened, you want to know how this could happen? How could we be so stupid? Why didn't someone stop this? What can we do?

You can vote. You can care. You can pay attention. . . . But most importantly, be involved. I think we all see now the consequences of not.

— **Josh Moon, columnist for the Alabama Political Reporter, putting the blame on Alabama voters.**

Abortion bans and fetal personhood seek to control women; to surveil, criminalize and further marginalize those who are deemed a threat to prevailing hierarchies; and diminish their ability to participate in public and civic life by establishing legal and constitutional protections for fetuses that are being denied to them — a threat to democracy as clear as day.

— **Lourdes A. Rivera, president of Pregnancy Justice**

## Alabama

Continued from page 1

without effacing His glory."

Parker's concurrence references the *Theology Today* journal, a book by now-Supreme Court Justice Neil M. Gorsuch against medical aid in dying, the "Manhattan Declaration: The Call to Christian Conscience" theological screed, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, 18th-century English jurist William Blackstone — and the bible. Parker cites the sixth commandment along with Genesis 1:27, which he says speaks of the "creation of man" as being "in the image of God."

Parker argues, "We believe that each human being, from the moment of conception, is made in the image of God, created by Him to reflect His likeness. It is as if the People of Alabama took what was spoken of the prophet Jeremiah and applied it to every unborn person in this state: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, Before you were born I sanctified you.' Jeremiah 1:5 (NKJV 1982)." Parker can't cite any actual bible verse against abortion, of course, because none exists.

Parker concludes, "All three branches of government are subject to a constitutional mandate to treat each unborn human life with reverence. Carving out an exception for the people in this case, small as they were, would be un-

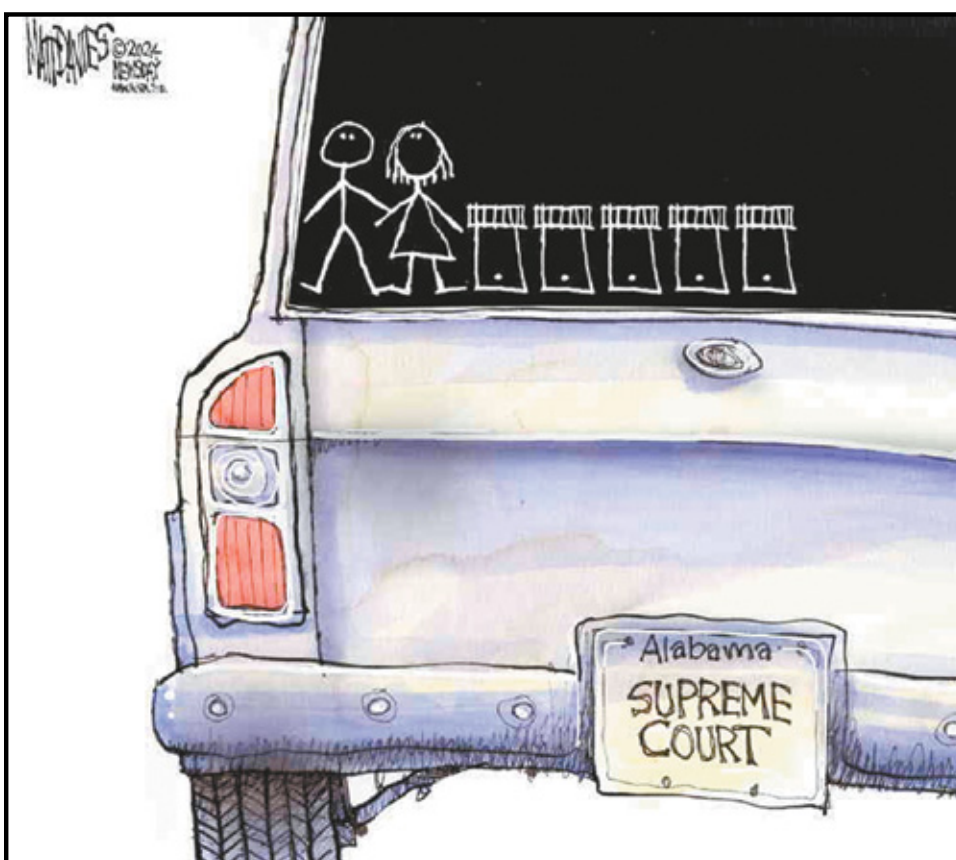
acceptable to the People of this State, who have required us to treat every human being in accordance with the fear of a holy God who made them in His image." ("Small" doesn't quite say it. At 3-5 days old, the zygote is measured by its number of cells (70-100) and is about the size of the head of a pin.)

Justice Greg Cook wrote a dissent expressing shock: "No court — anywhere in the country — has reached the conclusion the main opinion reaches. And, the main opinion's holding almost certainly ends the creation of frozen embryos through in vitro fertilization ('IVF') in Alabama."

Don't anti-abortionists, not to mention the pope who just slammed surrogacy with no sense of irony, ever wonder how it is "pro-life" to ban IVF, the only means by which many couples can conceive and give birth? More than 40 percent of U.S. adults say that they or someone they know has used fertility treatments, making the opinion, which likely will deny parenthood to many Alabamans, callous in the extreme. "Pro-lifers" ought to be making IVF a sacrament!

Does all this portend Christian theocracy?

"Not on FFRF's watch," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The solution is to vote out the theocrats and vote in executives, judges and legislators who understand that religious dogma has no place in our laws and social policy."





## Clarence Darrow Award

# We are under attack by the Supreme Court

*This is the speech (lightly edited) given by Elie Mystal at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 14. He was introduced by FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert. You can watch the video of the speech (and all other convention speeches) at [ffrf.us/con23](https://ffrf.us/con23).*

**Rebecca Markert:** I'm here to present the Clarence Darrow Civil Liberties Award to our next speaker. This is an award that's not just a statuette, it's actually a miniature replica of a 7-foot-tall statue, sculpted for FFRF by Zenos Frudakis, that sits on the courthouse grounds in Dayton, Tenn., the site of the Scopes trial, to balance out the grounds, which has a statue of William Jennings Bryan. Previous recipients of this award include Rep. Jamie Raskin, actor John DeLancie and journalist Linda Greenhouse, just to name a few. This year, FFRF is proud to present the Clarence Darrow Award to Elie Mystal.

Elie is the justice correspondent for *The Nation*, where he writes about social and racial justice. His first book, *Allow Me to Retort*, made the *New York Times*' best-seller list in April 2022. He's also the host of "Contempt of Court," a podcast series by *The Nation*.

He is the executive editor of *Above the Law*, a website that focuses on law, courts and justice. He's known for writing about law and politics, breaking down Supreme Court decisions. Elie received his undergraduate degree in government at Harvard University and his juris doctorate from Harvard Law School.

Please welcome Elie Mystal.

By Elie Mystal

**T**hank you so much for this honor, thank you so much for coming, thank you so much for caring about these important issues.

Obviously, when we're talking about religion and the freedom from thereof, we are talking about fundamentally a legal problem. And I'm going to talk a lot about those legal problems, which bring into stark relief why this conference and our pleas for secular political solutions to conflicts are so important.

Solutions that respect and acknowledge the humanity and dignity and safety of all peoples, regardless of their spiritual beliefs. But, I am no expert on global geopolitics, I'm not an expert on security or colonialism. I don't have a solution. If I did have a solution, frankly, I wouldn't be talking to you guys, I'd be talking to the good people in Stockholm and tell them all about my solution and then wait for my prize.

What I am an expert in, or at least what I play as an expert on TV, is American law and its constitutional promise to craft a country not based on a shared religion, not based on a shared ethnicity, not based on a shared culture, but a shared commitment to the rule of law and secular equality.

On that front that I know something about, I can tell you that America is failing. We are failing as a secular nation, and devolving into a brutal theocracy. And that failure is being led by the Supreme Court, which acts more like an unelected clergy than an impartial panel of judges.

The heart of that failure goes to the Supreme Court's decision that there is religious tension written right into the First Amendment, and its decision to resolve that tension in the favor of fundamentalist Christians and nobody else.



Photo by Kyle Hilker

Elie Mystal speaks at FFRF's national convention on Oct. 14, 2023, in Madison, Wis.

### First Amendment clauses

As most people here know, the First Amendment says: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Lawyers call these two ideas the "Establishment Clause" and the "Free Exercise Clause."

And, on paper, they make a lot of sense, right? The government will not force people into a religion, and it will not stop people from practicing whatever religion they want.

In practice, this country has always treated the Establishment Clause as an annoyance that mainly is there to get in the way of people saying "Merry Christmas," while putting a whole lot of effort into the Free Exercise Clause. So long as the religion that you wish to exercise freely involves some mention of Jesus Christ as the lord and savior, you know, bringer of good news, pizza, whatever it is, but as long as you have some mention of Jesus Christ, you're free to exercise your religion in whatever way you see fit. If you and your religion does not venerate Jesus Christ, then suddenly the country remembers that we're supposed to be secular and the government has an Establishment Clause that's supposed to prevent your exercise of your religion.

Don't believe me? Try having your kids pray seven times a day in the middle of school instead of praying just once on Sunday. And while you're there, tell me why Sunday isn't a school day to begin with.

See, America doesn't need to establish an official religion because it already has. Christian theological practices are already embedded into the very definition of what we otherwise call secular norms. If we were a truly religiously free country, Christmas would not be the holiday in which everybody has the day off. The Monday after the Super Bowl would be the holiday that everybody has a day off for.

Even things as obvious as the American military — the Army, which forces its new recruits to shave their heads and beards when they're signing up — that sounds secular until you remember that beard length

is pretty important in lots of cultures.

Put it like this: Gimli, son of Gloin, would view being made to shave his beard as anything but secular and, instead, a bit of indoctrination.

This is going to surprise some people, because, despite everything that I just said, for the most part, I am OK with this country's laxity when it comes to the Establishment Clause, because, bottom line, political rights and participation in this country are not gated behind religious faith.

Jews can still vote in this country. Muslims can still run for office and win in this country. Is it harder for people who are Jews or Muslims or non-Christians or atheists to run for office and win and do these things? Yes, it's harder, demonstrably so, but it's not prohibited, which is more than I can say about a lot of other places in the world. At a technical level, the Establishment Clause is satisfied, even if we often fail to live up to the spirit behind the clause. My Establishment Clause problems are not actually about civil rights, civil liberties or even cultural domination. My Establishment Clause problems are when people are forced to subjugate their literal bodies

to satisfy Christian puritanical theocracy.

The idea that people in the LGBTQ community should not be treated with dignity and respect in the marketplace — that's not a secular cultural norm, but a religious imposition.

### Abortion as a right

The idea that pregnant people cannot seek reproductive health care because such health care makes Jesus cry, allegedly, is the clearest example that we have to date of the U.S. government establishing one religion over all others.

Because, you see, the entire abortion debate should be inextricably linked from the Establishment Clause debate. Abortion should be constitutional under the right to privacy and, just for a second while we're here, if you happen to be one of those people who doesn't believe in the right to privacy, I got something for you: Abortion should also be legal under the 14th Amendment Equal Protection Clause. And if you don't like that, abortion should also be legal under the Ninth Amendment's protection of unenumerated rights.

And if you don't like that, it should be because I can think of nothing more cruel than being raped in prison and being forced to carry a baby to term.

And if you don't like all that, abortion should be legal at the very least under the 13th Amendment of the Constitution, which prohibits slavery, because I can think of nothing more unconstitutional than forced labor without compensation.

But I digress.

Banning abortion should be unconstitutional under the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. That's because the idea that life begins at conception is an entirely Christian, really fundamentalist Catholic idea and it's one that's not shared by many other faiths. Many other faiths view birth as the beginning of life and until then, it is the life of the mother that is paramount in those faiths.

Pregnant people don't get two votes when they show up to the ballot box because of conception. Citizenship certainly doesn't attach at conception, does it? And, in fact, most of the people who argue that life begins at conception will still argue that those lives can be deported, denied health care or medical benefits or educational benefits or any other governmental service.

We're at the point where people are being denied health care because of what other people think their God wants. We're at the point where women are being de-



Photo by Kyle Hilker

Elie Mystal hams it up for a photo with FFRF student essay winner Michelle Liao.



nied life-saving services for medical issues we know how to fix, but we can't because the doctors treating them are afraid of an inquisition after the treatments. Because of that, I tell you we're not a secular nation; we are a theocracy with better marketing.

And that's just my problem with the religious actors on the Supreme Court who ignore the Establishment Clause. That's not even the most dangerous aspect of the Supreme Court's approach to religion, and that's because the court spends most of its time super-charging the Free Exercise Clause and using its power to support bigotry by any means necessary.

The Free Exercise Clause is supposed to be a shield against government overreach. It's supposed to defend people against Christian overreach.

## Bigotry under the law

But that is not how the current Supreme Court uses it. The Supreme Court uses the Free Exercise Clause as a sword. They use it to force others who do not agree with the precepts of fundamentalist Christianity to live and work under its yoke, one bigoted baker at a time.

Essentially, in this country, any bigot with a dream can claim that their bigotry was ordained by Jesus Christ. Then they can claim that the normal operation of secular laws that would restrict or curtail their bigotry, like, say, a generally applicable anti-discrimination law, they say that those laws cannot be applied to them without violating the free exercise of their own religion. And remember, we are not talking about people who want to be bigoted in the privacy of their own homes, which they are certainly free to do.

I, myself, am horribly bigoted against stupid people! I don't like them. I don't like going to parties with them. I'm terribly prejudiced against stupid people, and I am allowed to be so. In fact, just on the subject of stupid people, we're not even talking about people with the weird desire to be bigoted in public and kind of go out there and drool about who they hate today or tomorrow. The Constitution protects their rights to be like that.

No, we're talking about bigots who want to enter the secular public sphere and use their so-called spirituality-based bigotry to deny goods, services, opportunities and public accommodations to others. That is precisely where the Constitution is supposed to draw the line.

But the Supreme Court will not draw that line. The court uses the Free Exercise Clause to trump all other constitutional principles, including the 14th Amendment's grants of equal protection to everybody. Apparently, we are all entitled to equal protection under the law unless we're gay and want to adopt a child, then that same equal protection doesn't apply to us. The desires of a religious organization that the state has put in charge of adoptions, which, like, why are we even doing that? But the desires of a religious organization that the state has put in

charge of adoptions must be respected over the equal protection to all people who happen to want to adopt a child.

That's what the Supreme Court tells us.

The trick, the thing, that the Supreme Court uses, the word play that it gets into is this word "hostilities." They've interpreted antidiscrimination laws as hostile to religion, specifically Christian faiths.

They get around the Establishment Clause, their own precedents, which they straight do not care about, because they claim to be able to divine hostility from generally applicable secular laws.

The court would have you believe that antidiscrimination laws target people of faith. Of course, the court is wrong. Those laws do no such things. Those laws target bigotry and discrimination. Now, if the practice of your faith happens to lead you to run afoul of those anti-discrimination laws, well, as they say in my community, a hit dog hollers. Maybe, if you're constantly running afoul of antidiscrimination laws, your practicing of your faith is a little bit discriminatory. That's the view at 30,000 feet.

## Kennedy v. Bremerton

I do want to talk specifically about two recent cases that kind of highlight just how far the court has gone away from any kind of normal operation of the First Amendment and how deep they are into this kind of theocratic overreach that I keep talking about.

The first case I'm sure many of you are aware of is called Kennedy v. Bremerton. This is the praying football coach case. Fightin' Joe Kennedy was a football coach in Washington who had the kink of enjoying to pray in the middle of the football field after every game. I'm sure Jesus says something about doing it in private, but nah, not for Joe. Joe wanted to make sure people saw him pray on the 50-yard line. The school was concerned. It was a public school in Washington state. They're like, "Joe, you can't do this, you gotta pray in the . . ." and Joe was like, "No! I gotta pray on the 50-yard line after every game!" And it became a Supreme Court case, and the Supreme Court ruled, 6-3, that the school impinged on Kennedy's free exercise of religion.

Not that Kennedy the football coach imposed on the free exercise of the religion of his football players, but that the school, by asking Kennedy not to pray at the 50-yard line at the end of every frickin' football game, that impinged on Kennedy's freedom of religion.

But, here's the thing: To get to his 6-3 majority opinion, Neil Gorsuch had to lie. Gorsuch had to make up a different Joe Kennedy, a private one, a man who only prayed by himself after the game in the dark. There was one picture that Joe Kennedy with like the lights off, headlights of one lone car as he took his knee. That man didn't exist. Instead, he was rushing out into the middle of the field as soon as the final whistle blew to do a prayer. He was leading all the players in prayer, standing in the middle of them, like he's doing a sermon on the mount.

The players themselves testified in court that they felt pressured to pray with the man in order to get playing time. All right, so if you want to be QB, you better sit with the coach at the end of the game and pray. But the school was going to let him basically get away with this until it became such a media firestorm that fans started showing up at the game and bum-rushing the field to join in with the prayer. And the parents



Photo by Kyle Hilker

Elie Mystal and FFRF Member Carolyn Golojuch pose for a photo during his book-signing event.

were then harassing football players who weren't at the 50-yard line praying with the coach and the rest of the team. That's when the school got involved. It turned into an entire media circus.

To find hostility to religion in a case where the man was imposing his religion on everyone else, Neil Gorsuch had to straight up make a different person, make up a different case, make up a different set of facts and rule on that. He had to invent, whole cloth, a man who was being persecuted, because the real-life guy was not. And just as the coda to that story, after this case came down, after the ruling, Joe Kennedy has to be reinstated. He's back on the team.

Do you know what he did two weeks later? He quit. Media circus over.

## 303 Creative

Hold onto this thought about lying. Because it's going to be important in the next case I want to talk about, which is 303 Creative.

This is a case about a Colorado woman named Laurie Smith who wanted to start a marriage website design invitation business that explicitly discriminated against LGBTQ people, which would have been a violation of the Colorado Antidiscrimination Act, again, a generally applicable secular law. The Supreme Court, of course, said bigotry was OK. I mean, at this point, obviously, right? Now, in this particular case, the court ruled for Smith on free speech grounds, not free exercise grounds. What that essentially means is that Smith was allowed to say or not say what she wanted to say, and what the court said was that it wasn't about her religion.

What Smith wanted to do was to post on her website that she would not serve same-sex couples. She wanted to make that as a statement. She wanted to again impose her religious beliefs on the entire public marketplace that same-sex couples were not welcome in her store before any same-sex couple asked her to damn thing. As most people here already know, Smith had no business, no clients, no website. This entire case is because Laurie Smith woke up one day and thought, "Hmm, it would be great if I could discriminate against gay people. What if I designed an entire business for that purpose?" But again, Smith, 6-3, and again, written by Neil Gorsuch. He again, made things up.

This time, Gorsuch had to make up a theoretical business with imagined clients

in order to get to his desired conclusion that Laurie Smith's rights were being taken away. To create the illusion of hostility, Gorsuch had to make it up, because in the real world, Laurie Smith was not in trouble. Nobody was persecuting her for her beliefs, nobody was forcing her to do anything.

If they asked her to do something, if they had said, "Laurie Smith, you have this business. Can you function in your business for me?" What they would have been asking her to do is direct people to their Williams-Sonoma catalog, right?

The other part of the media problem here is that this got really wrapped into, oh, but how can you force a person to be creative for you? This wasn't about creativity. If it was a case about creativity, I probably would have a different answer, right?

Let's pretend I can sculpt, I can't, but I'm a Play-Doh man and I can sculpt things and I'm really good at it and Donald Trump is like, "Can you sculpt me?" and I was like, "Hell, no!" And you're going to put me in jail to do that. Sculpting is obviously a creative enterprise. The government cannot force me to sculpt somebody I don't like, right? Same thing. I don't have to give a speech for anybody I don't like. This is not that case.

This is the equivalent of a Subway person saying I will not make you a sandwich because I am a sandwich artist and so I cannot give you baloney and cheese. This is a basic public accommodation service. And, while some might think there is some version of a possible marriage proposal website design that would become creative, the point is, we don't know.

Like, if we had had a real case with a real business and a real client, they would have asked her to do something. And then she would have said no and then we can assess whether or not what they asked her to do was actually a violation of her free speech rights, or if it was simple bigotry under a different name.

But nobody asked. And that is why the conservatives had to make it up.

Because they couldn't get to where they wanted to go if they had to deal with real people. The connection between 303 Creative and the Kennedy praying football case is that religious freedom is not under attack in this country. Free exercise of religion is not under attack in this country. Nobody is being fed to lions! Nobody is being forced to renounce their God. People are simply being asked to chew with their mouth closed in a respectable society.

To find hostility, the Supreme Court has to literally lie about the facts of the cases in front of them. And that is why what is under attack in this country is secularism, and it's an attack that's being led by the Supreme Court of the United States.

Thank you so much for coming.



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“America doesn't need to establish an official religion because it already has. Christian theological practices are already embedded into the very definition of what we otherwise call secular norms.”



## Forward Award

# What it means to lose a constitutional right

*This is the speech (edited for length) given by Mary Ziegler at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 13. She was introduced by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. You can watch the video of the speech (and all other convention speeches) at [ffrf.us/con23](https://ffrf.us/con23).*

**Annie Laurie Gaylor:** Our next awardee will be receiving FFRF's Forward Award, which is an ode by sculptor Zenos Frudakis to the "Forward" statue outside the Wisconsin State Capitol, one of the few public pieces of art by and honoring women. Previous recipients include Cecile Richards, Gloria Steinem, Margaret Atwood and, last year, Whole Woman's Health Founder Amy Hagstrom Miller.

This year's recipient is one of the world's leading authorities on the legal history of the American abortion debate. A native of Butte, Mont., Mary Ziegler is a graduate of Harvard University and Harvard Law School and lives in California with her family. She's a 2023-2024 Guggenheim Fellow and Martin Luther King Professor of Law at UC Davis.

Her most recent book is *Roe: The History of a National Obsession*, and before that *Dollars for Life: The Anti-abortion Movement and the Fall of the Republican Establishment*, which traces how the battle to reverse *Roe v. Wade* changed the rules of campaign finance, doomed the GOP establishment and made fundamental changes to American democracy.

By Mary Ziegler

**W**hen Justice Samuel Alito told us what it meant that *Roe v. Wade* had been overturned, he told us that the destruction of abortion rights was necessary to protect American democracy.

"The permissibility of abortion and the limitations upon it," he wrote, "are to be resolved like the most important questions in our democracy by citizens trying to persuade one another and then voting."

What I'm going to tell you today is that the history of *Roe's* death and the story of what comes next is very much a story about American democracy, but not the one that Alito might want us to believe.

It begins with efforts to bypass changes created in democratic politics, to recognize fetal personhood and to revolutionize what constitutional equality means, not just for women and other people who can get pregnant, but for people of color, people born outside of the United States and others who the Supreme Court has recognized as protected classes.

It's a history of how efforts have unfolded, not just to change which constitutional rights we have, but to change the ground rules of our elections from the flow of money into politics to the ability of people to vote. And, so, of course, the demise of *Roe* forces us to consider how we might achieve the demise of *Dobbs* or what reproductive justice means or what progressives have done wrong in the past that could be remedied in the future.

But it's also a reminder that the fall of *Roe* should matter to you even if you are past reproductive age or were never particularly interested in the abortion issue in the first place, because it's a story about not just the struggles over control of one's body, but control of the ballot box and the definition of equality.



Photo by Chris Line

**Law Professor Mary Ziegler, a 2023 Guggenheim Fellow, speaks about the history of the anti-abortion movement in the United States on Oct. 13 in Madison, Wis..**

## Beginnings

The struggles over fetal personhood were not, as Alito might have us believe, starting in the 19th century when there was an early anti-abortion movement led by doctors in the American Medical Association. These doctors certainly argued that a fetus was a separate biological person with moral standing, but they had no claims that they made about the Constitution or about rights. This, in some ways, was not surprising. At the time, the American Medical Association was deeply racist and making claims about constitutional rights or personhood almost inevitably meant to draw an analogy to questions of race.

It was in this era that prominent abolitionists from Frederick Douglass to Abraham Lincoln argued that the Supreme Court got it wrong in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, when it held that a man of African descent could not be a citizen and therefore had no standing in court. They argued that rights attached to all persons in the United States regardless of race, and that certainly included people of color.

Later generations of anti-abortion activists often compare a fetus to a person of color and say both are denied personhood or humanity. But the American Medical Association had no interest in making this argument, either before or after the text of the Constitution changed, because the analogy presupposes that people of color or actually were persons with rights and that was not something that people in the American Medical Association were prepared to acknowledge.

Abortion opponents in the 19th century didn't say anything about the Constitution and the people who wrote the Constitution didn't say anything about abortion.

But fetal personhood as a movement became deeply important in the 1960s. At the time, a predominantly Catholic movement initially wanted to argue simply that legal abortion was unnecessary. Catholic physicians argued that pregnancy was no longer dangerous and people no longer died during pregnancy, or that victims of sexual assault couldn't get pregnant at all.

There were arguments that there might

be an implied right to life in the Constitution, just as there are other rights not spelled out in the first 10 amendments of the Constitution. But this was problematic for abortion opponents who were against contraception because the Supreme Court's jurisprudence on implied rights had recognized a right to use birth control, as well. The need for a new constitutional argument became even more urgent in a world where abortion was a crime and deep racial and class disparities emerged.

Abortion opponents began arguing that, in fact, abortion was the equality problem and that the true victim of discrimination was the fetus or unborn child. To do so, they had to propose a complete reworking of equality law in the United States. Often, when we ask if someone is a victim of discrimination in the United States, we ask if they belong to a community that's been historically discriminated against. Anti-abortion lawyers conceded that wasn't true of fetuses. After all, there had been laws since the 19th century criminalizing virtually all abortions.

They argued that a history of past discrimination was quite simply irrelevant for all Americans, and what mattered instead was physical vulnerability. From the very beginning, this was an argument that would've had ramifications for many Americans. If accepted, it would've changed the way courts approached discrimination on the basis of race discrimination, on the basis of sex discrimination, on the basis of national origin and much more. It was an argument that captured the imagination of lay Americans who flocked to single-issue anti-abortion organizations across the United States in the 1970s.

## Partnership with GOP

For a decade and more, after *Roe*, the fight for a constitutional amendment led anti-abortion groups to forge a partnership with the Republican Party and sidelined members of the movement who didn't agree with the Republican Party's prerogatives, but a constitutional amendment of any kind really was not forthcoming.

Instead of openly defending the idea of personhood under the Constitution, anti-abortion groups just sought to write it

into other areas of the law. They did so in a way that shored up their relationship with a Republican Party at the time deeply committed to incarcerating people.

Ronald Reagan tapped into support for various victims' rights movements, but he redefined victimhood, suggesting that the way to vindicate the rights of victims was not to support them directly, but to harshly punish those who wronged them. Anti-abortion groups picked up on this idea, arguing that the fetus was a victim of crime who had been denied recourse. They fought for fetal homicide laws, which rapidly spread across the country, and for laws authorizing the criminal punishment of pregnant drug users for child abuse or child neglect.

At the same time, anti-abortion lawyers began to promote a vision of constitutional interpretation that would make it much easier to weave religious claims back into the law. And in doing so, they borrowed from conservative Christian litigators who were fighting against the legalization of same-sex intimacy.

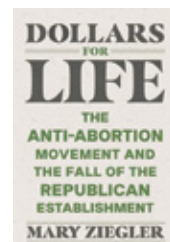
At the time, on occasion, when the Supreme Court was figuring out whether someone had a right to do something that wasn't spelled out in the text or Constitution, they would look to what they called history and tradition. But the justices recognized that history and tradition changed, that our traditions in 2023 are not the traditions we held in 1883 or 1903. Conservative Christian attorneys weren't happy with this and wanted to argue that traditions couldn't change because they were rooted in Christianity, which itself didn't change.

And, so it was, they argued in the 1980s, that "the right to homosexual sodomy" could not be protected because historically and traditionally "Western Christian society has considered the practice of sodomy as within the proper scope of government regulation." Anti-abortion groups recognize this could be a way for them to get their own constitutional goals achieved. They could argue that historically and traditionally our nation had not recognized a right to abortion.

So, this path to fetal rights seemed smooth and many expected that the way to get rid of *Roe* was simply to get Republicans elected who would vote to nominate and confirm Supreme Court justices. But that turned out not to be true. In 1992, a Supreme Court chock-full of Republicans voted to preserve what it called the essential holding of *Roe*, namely, that there was a right to choose abortion before viability.

## Looking to Buchanan

It was then that anti-abortion groups looked to the example of Pat Buchanan, who some of you may remember. Pat Bu-



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chanan was the Donald Trump of the era to a certain audience; he was good TV. He would literally wave a pitchfork and call his opponent — primary opponent Bob Dole — a funeral director, which was not entirely inaccurate. He also went over well with deeply conservative Republican primary voters until the then-Republican establishment realized that Buchanan was a toxic figure who may well lose a general election, and they buried Buchanan in a tidal wave of money.

Anti-abortion groups realized they needed to compete with that tide of money to get someone like Pat Buchanan over the hump. So, they joined a fight against campaign finance. They partnered with the Federalist Society and the conservative legal movement, and they found a way to argue that they weren't anti-woman because women were like victims of "big tobacco."

They were not innocent because it was OK to have an abortion, or it was wrong to punish someone who had knowingly had an abortion. They were victims because they didn't know what abortion was, just as tobacco users had been deceived by a massive deceitful industry. You see this analogy quite clearly with anti-abortion opponents who still refer to abortion as "big abortion," just as we see the analogy to "big tobacco." This argument was powerful because it suggested that women who did know what they were doing could, in fact, be punished for abortion.

The early anti-abortion movement was overwhelmingly Catholic and abortion rights supporters often criticized that movement by saying it was a threat to the separation of church and state, a way for one movement or one group of people to impose their theology on everybody else.

So, anti-abortion groups tried really hard to make it seem as if that wasn't the case. They refused to take on issues like the death penalty or contraception that could make their cause look more religious. But, by the 2000s, that had begun to change, and again, because of money.

So, money enabled people who had been on the margins to come to the forefront of the anti-abortion movement and to make the possibility of a Pat Buchanan success thinkable. It was this idea that brought anti-abortion groups to the forefront of the litigation of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Committee*, which was started, as many crucial campaign finance cases in the Supreme Court were, by anti-abortion attorney James Bopp. *Citizens United* was crucial for the anti-abortion movement, in part because many anti-abortion groups are corporations and *Citizens United* allows corporations to have unlimited independent expenditures. It also changed the balance of power in the GOP.

But after *Citizens United*, a great deal of money came in from what we now think of as outside spending — super PACs and nonprofits — that don't care as much what the mainstream GOP, if such a thing even exists anymore, would think.

Anti-abortion groups understood it was important to limit who could vote, too. And, yet, it was in the lead up to *Dobbs* that anti-abortion lawyers insisted that it was *Roe* that was the threat to democracy, that *Roe* had taken away the abortion issue from the people and stopped them from having a say.

This was the story Brett Kavanaugh told us. He promised a brighter tomorrow after *Roe*, the idea that we would all just sort this out among ourselves like friends, and that, sooner or later, the bitterness surrounding the abortion issue would fade into the rear view. That was never going to happen, in part, because the *Dobbs* decision was deeply counter-majoritarian and ran against what Americans had indicated they wanted in poll after poll for 50 years. It's also wrong, in part, because it's not what anti-abortion groups wanted, either. They want fetal per-



Mary Ziegler holds up the Forward Award, presented to her by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, on Oct. 13, 2023, at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis.

Photo by Kyle Hilker

sonhood, which is much more than the Supreme Court gave them in *Dobbs*.

### Aftermath of *Dobbs*

That's why we've seen a dynamic where, in the aftermath of *Dobbs*, Americans who support abortion have done remarkably well at the polls, winning every single ballot initiative on abortion rights to come before them since the *Dobbs* decision. It's also why, ironically, we've seen anti-abortion groups turn time and time again to the courts.

As we speak, the Supreme Court is deciding whether to hear a case, an unprecedented case, arguing that the Food and Drug Administration never had the authority to approve a drug that it signed off on 25 years ago, which would open the door to challenges, to any number of drugs any of us take in our lives.

It's why we've seen anti-abortion groups trying to resurrect the Comstock Act, a 19th-century anti-vice law that I taught as part of my legal history courses as a symbol of a bygone era as, in fact, a de facto ban on all abortions. The Comstock Act's language suggests that you can't mail any item intended or adapted for abortion or any other "indecent use."

It is the case that we're seeing this, in part, because abortion opponents recognize that fetal personhood is not going to be achievable through popular politics. Voters have never supported the idea of abortion bans with few or no exceptions as early as the 1960s. And, so, ironically, it's only through conservative justices like Justice Alito that we'll see this kind of effort succeed.

It's also why abortion opponents are now potentially threatening other rights, like the right to travel. We've seen laws like Idaho's, which bans abortion trafficking, making it possible to criminally prosecute doctors for performing abortions that are legal in their own jurisdictions, so long as someone that they're helping is from a state where abortion is not. We've seen the attorney general of Alabama signaling that he thinks he has the authority to do the same thing, a deeply uncertain question as a matter of constitutional law. We've seen abortion opponents use the argument that all rights that we have now, including even the freedom of speech, should be filtered through this lens of history and tradition, such that speech that our forefathers might not have recognized as legitimate in 1789 or 1868 would no longer enjoy protection, whether that's political speech, the speech of atheists, the speech of drag queens or much more.

It is that the standard for the anti-abortion movement has long remained a national ban regardless of what voters want.

### Other rights in jeopardy

And, at that point, of course, what other rights are in jeopardy? Well, of course, the right to contraception, because it was precisely in the 19th century that contraception was being criminalized by people like Anthony Comstock for the first time. Certainly not the right to same-sex marriage, or same-sex intimacy, because those things were being criminalized in different ways in the 19th century.

Potentially, *Dobbs* means something different for equality, too. This is what conservatives are arguing now in cases involving transgender youth and drag. They're arguing that *Dobbs* means you can discriminate against someone based on their ability to get pregnant, and that that's not sex discrimination. So, pregnancy discrimination is OK, discrimination based on your access to abortion is OK, discrimination based on any kind of health care that only one kind of sex could get potentially is OK.

All of this means that the anti-abortion movement has much broader ambitions for the court. Do I think the court is going to recognize fetal personhood soon? No, I don't. The court has turned down a fetal personhood case once recently, and Brett Kavanaugh, in his way, suggested, as he put it, that "the Constitution is scrupulously neutral — neither pro-life nor pro-choice." But, I, from experience, know that nothing is forever with Brett Kavanaugh, and that is a promise with an expiration date.

What we've realized instead, then, and we're seeing much more forcefully now, is that the struggle over abortion has always been about much more than *Roe*, and indeed about much more than abortion. As women of color have long argued, fights over abortion can't be separated from the fights over the struggle for good health care or the ability to raise children. What's become clear from history is that struggles over abortion can't be divorced from the struggle to have elections dictated by voters rather than money, or the struggle to guarantee that people who want to vote have the ability to do so.

What comes after *Dobbs* will change how we understand our bodies into whom they belong. But it'll remake the body politic, too. It's why we're seeing efforts to change the language of ballot initiatives or to take ballot initiatives away from voters altogether. It's why we're seeing so much effort to channel issues into the courts that voters could resolve themselves. Because from the 1960s onward, the fight over abortion has been a struggle over the separation of church and state, and it's been a struggle over what we mean about equality under the law and who gets it. It's become, I think, a fight over the kind of democracy we want to have, or indeed, if we will have one at all anymore.



Mary Ziegler, right, signs a copy of her book for FFRF San Francisco Chapter Leader Dana Treadwell.

Photo by Kyle Hilker



# Climate change: Simple, serious, solvable

The Freedom From Religion Foundation hosted longtime meteorologist Bob Lindmeier to speak on the topic of climate change. The event was held March 21 at FFRF's headquarters (Freethought Hall) in Madison, Wis.

Lindmeier is senior chief meteorologist for WKOW in Madison and a member of the American Meteorological Society, the AMS Station Scientist Committee, and the Citizens' Climate Lobby. (He is married to FFRF's IT Helpdesk Associate Sheryl Lindmeier.)

The following is an excerpt of his hour-long presentation, which included numerous graphs, charts and images.

By Bob Lindmeier

It's a pleasure to be here.

Over the years, as I was doing my job, concentrating on the next seven days of weather for my viewers, I was keeping track of what climate scientists were saying and the research they were putting out. I noticed how really alarmed they were becoming on what was happening in our climate.

But, I also noticed that there was a disconnect with the general public. Much of the public didn't share that alarm. I was like, "What's going on here? Why aren't they concerned like I am, and climate scientists are?"

So, I delved into it. I found out how misinformed the nation is, and how the fossil fuel industry has been instrumental, unfortunately, in putting out that misinformation - enough that people are just confused, not really knowing what is happening.

But our climate problem is the following: simple, serious and solvable.

Let's talk about how simple it is in the scientific world that I live in. When you get away from the political world and the discourse that goes on there, it is unquestioned that climate change is real. It's us causing it. It's dangerous.

Scientists overwhelmingly agree it's very important. It is widely agreed upon: 97 percent of actively publishing climate scientists agree that humans have caused climate change. What about that other 3 percent? That's the fossil fuel industry and scientists who are in their pockets, unfortunately.

But, we have solutions that are technically feasible, economically affordable, and politically viable. It's really simple, actually.

The reason that climate change and temperatures are increasing — and the scientists back in the 1800s knew this — is because of the burning of fossil fuels, the burning of oil, the burning of coal that's



Photo by Chris Line

Meteorologist Bob Lindmeier delivers an encompassing presentation on climate change at FFRF's Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis., on March 21.

putting more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, along with other greenhouse gases, that is causing the average temperature of our atmosphere across the world to rise.

This warming has had serious implications. Our seas are rising due to the melting of land ice: glaciers, primarily.

But, we're also seeing more wild weather. We're seeing extreme weather events because warming the atmosphere supercharges it, and that supercharging manifests itself as extreme weather events that are becoming more intense and more frequent.

Winters are by far our fastest warming season in Madison. It's over four degrees Fahrenheit warmer than it was back in 1970. If you think about 1970, that was just a little over 50 years ago, and we've had that much warming in that short a period of time. The end effect is our summers are getting longer, our winters are getting shorter.

And this past winter is an excellent example. One of the ways that really is shown is in the coldest temperatures we experience every winter. Back in 1970, our average coldest temperature was 20 degrees below zero. Now it's 12 degrees below zero. So, it's 8 degrees different. And again, climatically, this is just a snapshot of time.

Evolution has not kept up with climate

change, so there's mistiming taking place in insect pollination, in birds, food supplies being disrupted. Plants are sprouting earlier. We're getting that allergy season going earlier. We have crop damage. In the last decade, we've had major crop losses in vineyards and fruit orchards.

And, the impacts on health are many, including injury and death. Ultimately, mental health is a big one. Heat stress, insect-borne diseases, lung disease and allergies ultimately are impacts from climate change.

And allergies and asthma have increased so much because we have a longer and more severe allergy season. This is especially impactful for the young, for the elderly, for those who are sick and ill. It's a big problem that's just going to get worse because our growing season is about a month longer than it was back in 1970.

At the rate things are going, you don't want to add another 2 degrees Celsius. If we go up just another half degree, you're adding more sea level rise to the point where 10.4 million people are exposed to that rise and will have to move. You'll have virtually the entire coral reef ecosystem disappear. Over 400 million people in urban areas are exposed to severe drought and at least one ice-free arctic summer.

Fortunately, it is solvable.

One big thing that we can do — kind

of the low-hanging fruit — is reduce our electricity consumption; reduce our carbon footprint.

A carbon price is the single most powerful tool available to the government to reduce American's carbon pollution. The idea is to charge a fee on fossil fuels at the source.

When you do that, yeah, fossil fuels become really expensive, but inflation takes off, too, as this transition occurs. But, if you take the fee and give it back to us as a dividend, then that really mitigates that inflationary cost to us and makes it doable - makes where it really, it can happen. The benefits are we get to net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Another big way is through better buildings, and there's effort going on here, but there's a lot we can do to make our own buildings more energy efficient: putting in glass that's more efficient, insulation improvements, electric heating and cooling, getting away from any kind of natural gas.

And there's something that you can do personally, and that is eat less meat - eat more plant-based foods. The more you can eat as a vegetarian, the more you're going to help our planet. And I'll tell you, I was a meat eater like no one else not that long ago. But with the help of our vegetarian daughter, I have been eating more and more vegetarian and finding out how good it is.

What else can you do personally? Have conversations with your family, friends, and neighbors about climate change. Hopefully, this talk spurs you to have those conversations. It can be difficult sometimes, right? There's a lot of politics, unfortunately, intertwined with climate change. It shouldn't be that way, but it is.

Vote for candidates that advocate for climate change solutions.

I don't care if it's a school board, a village, city, town, state, or federal. What is the position of each of those candidates on climate change? Make sure that factors into your decisions. Join an environmental organization. As an individual, you feel powerless, but when you join a group, that really changes things.

We have what we need, to make changes. This is why I'm here today talking to you. I think that's why many of you are sitting here right now. You're thinking about your kids. You're thinking about your grandkids, because you look at those upward temperature curves by the end of the century, if we don't make changes. We can't go there. So, it's up to us to help them.

Thank you.

“Evolution has not kept up with climate change, so there's mistiming taking place in insect pollination, in birds, food supplies being disrupted.”



This chart from Lindmeier's presentation shows the 10 hottest years globally all occurred in the past 10 years.



Photo by Chris Line

Dozens of FFRF members showed up to hear Lindmeier's talk.



# FFRF Action Fund helping curb health care sharing ministries

By Mark Dann

In recent months, the Freedom From Religion Foundation has made significant strides in protecting consumers from the harmful practices of health care sharing ministries. This effort is spearheaded by the reintroduction of the Federal Health Share Transparency Act late last year and the introduction of similar legislation in state legislatures in Minnesota, Arizona and South Dakota.

As you may know, health care sharing ministries are junk insurance entities in which participants who typically share religious beliefs make monthly payments to cover the health care expenses of themselves and other enrolled members. Stories continue to emerge about how consumers are being duped into joining health care sharing ministries, which can be quite lucrative. Health care sharing ministries are not considered insurance, so there is no guarantee that subscribers' claims will be paid even for expenses that meet membership guidelines for "covered services." And it goes without saying that abortion and contraception are nonstarters for most health care sharing ministries.

Rep. Jared Huffman, co-chair of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, initiated a thoughtful approach by first engaging the executive branch to address concerns regarding these health insurance outfits. He explored whether existing mechanisms could tackle these issues before pursuing legislative action.

Along with other members of Congress, Huffman sent a letter to the Federal Trade Commission inquiring about consumer abuses involving health care sharing ministries. The FTC responded that it lacked the authority to intervene without further congressional authorization. In partnership with FFRF,

Huffman then mobilized a coalition comprising organizations involved in health care, secularism, LGBTQ rights and church/state separation. The collaboration led to the introduction of the Health Share Transparency Act in 2022, with a subsequent reintroduction in late 2023.

This year, FFRF has advanced a multipronged federal and state strategy to advance Health Share Transparency Acts around the country, inspired by existing laws in Colorado, regulations in Massachusetts and Huffman's federal bill.

We were able to win the support of secular leaders to champion Health Share Transparency Acts in their respective states, such as Minnesota state Rep. Mike Freiberg, who participated in FFRF's convention last year and has appeared on FFRF's TV show "Freethought Matters"; Arizona state Sen. Juan Mendez, winner of FFRF's 2013 Emperor has No Clothes Award, known for his significant contributions alongside FFRF; and secular ally South Dakota state Rep. Erin Healy.

This coordinated federal and state legislative strategy tremendously benefited from the expertise of Ryan Jayne and Ryan Dudley, who manage state governmental affairs for FFRF. Our goal in the coming years is to introduce more such legislation across additional states, as the initiatives in Minnesota, Arizona and South Dakota continue to gain momentum.

Notably, Huffman, Freiberg and Mendez stand out as secular legislative champions while Healy, a religious ally, connects personally with the cause.

Secular legislators have a deep understanding of the detrimental impact health care sharing ministries have on communities, advocating for health care that is not predicated on religious affiliation. They quickly grasp the issues at hand, recognizing that championing a cause means dedicating significant time and resources, potentially at the expense of other matters. We are honored to have their courage and leadership on this issue.

Secular representation is essential,



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as it often emphasizes the importance of state/church separation. Many officials support the separation of state and church, but few actively make it a priority. Secular lawmakers are often informed by personal experiences and are fully aware of the consequences when religion and government mix.

FFRF Action Fund has successfully engaged and advanced legislation at both the federal and state levels so far this year. Our overarching strategy aims to integrate similar pieces of legislation wherever possible — fighting for our values in Washington, D.C., and state legislatures nationwide.

The efforts of FFRF and secular legislators against health care sharing ministries have significantly advanced consumer protection and the separation between state and church. This collaborative success lays the groundwork for future legislative initiatives, highlighting the need for ongoing advocacy and the critical role of secular representation in protecting the constitutional principle of secular government.

We will use the momentum from these achievements to fuel further advocacy. FFRF Action Fund, the advocacy arm of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, plans to make critical endorsements in the 2024 campaign at the federal, state and local levels. Thanks to your support, we have never been more active and are making a tangible impact. We couldn't have done this without you.

Mark Dann is FFRF's director of governmental affairs.

## FREETHOUGHT BOOKS

The following books are written 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](http://ffrf.org/shop).

### The Forbidden Bible Stories

By Lou Skoczek  
Paperback \$18

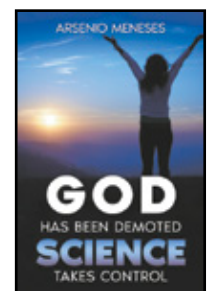


Very few Christians read the bible to know what the preachers hide from public knowledge. This book analyzes several biblical passages, such as God showing how to spit in the face of racists or how Jews are forced to eat their children for dinner, all done without

having to interpret anything beyond what is written. God admits his finite credentials that sooner or later he will cease to exist.

### God Has Been Demoted: Science Takes Control

By Arsenio Meneses  
Kindle \$9



Very faithful to the importance of science and technology, the author questions the benefits of continuing discussions around concepts based on religious foundations, seeking to draw the attention of our society that we will have more guaranteed benefits if we focus our financial and intellectual resources on the search for solutions that science can offer us.

The author also addresses issues related to how impractical it is for events foreseen in religious foundations to occur in today's advanced world, in addition to denouncing groups that take advantage of the spiritual fragility that many people have for personal benefits, usually financial.

### The Lost Gospels of Mariam and Judas

By Harry Lee  
Paperback \$20.99

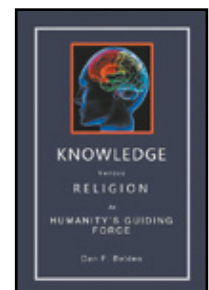


Yeshua the Nazarene, the fierce warrior, recruits 12 captains and an insurgent army, leading them into battle against Roman occupiers, while Yeshua struggles to understand his own destiny. The story is a secular and logical explanation for the mystery that has

puzzled humanity for the last 2,000 years. Who really was the Galilean man named Yeshua, and how did he become the lord and savior, Jesus Christ?

### Knowledge Versus Religion as Humanity's Guiding Force

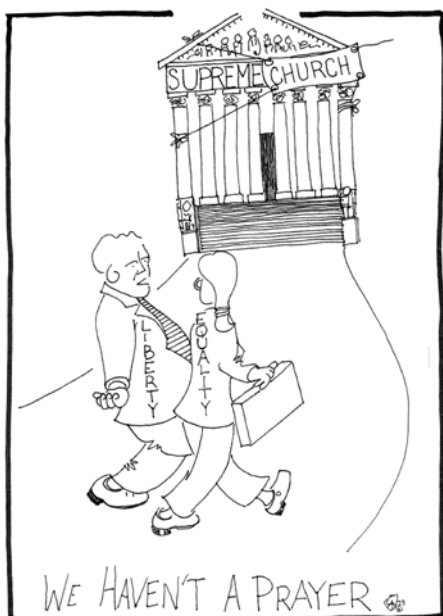
By Dan F. Belden  
Paperback \$11.95



Has knowledge or religion provided better answers for living our lives and moving societies forward? There is now a rich abundance of knowledge available to effectively manage our thoughts, behaviors and actions. The result has been innovative approaches and solutions

transforming our lives, and our planet, with the hope of forming a cohesive world that is more capable of cooperating with one another to resolve our differences than initiating wars. We no longer depend upon authoritative institutions to do it for us. A fuller sense of joy for living this life will follow. Waiting for your reward of heaven, or fueling your fear of hell, starts to lose its appeal.

## Supreme Church of America?



FFRF members Gary Farson of Ohio and Greg Cahill of California each submitted artwork to FFRF regarding the U.S. Supreme Court and its not-so-subtle movement away from state/church separation. Farson's cartoon is on the left and Cahill's is on the right.



# 13 states copying Texas on school chaplains

By Ryan D. Jayne

Texas lawmakers are once again showing the rest of the country the wrong direction to head into.

The Lone Star State passed a shocking law late last year that requires every school district to vote on whether to create a chaplain program for district students, whereby unlicensed chaplains work in mental health capacities. This law would allow chaplains to be hired either as paid or volunteer school guidance counselors while exempting them from meeting the significant academic and other requirements demanded of bona fide counselors. The law provides only one minimal safeguard: the prohibition of chaplains who are on the sex offender registry.



Ryan D. Jayne

The argument offered was that school counselors are in short supply, so schools need additional adults with some sort of “counseling” experience. But the problem is that the unconstitutional law invites school districts to hire clergy to proselytize public school students. Schools cannot facilitate or support meetings where adults provide religious guidance to students on campus during the school day. The

Texas law does not require parental consent or prohibit chaplains from taking advantage of students at their most vulnerable moments with the aim of converting them.

The force behind the Texas bill and others being introduced around the country is the National School Chaplain Association (NSCA), which describes itself as a “Christian chaplain ministry.” It is a subsidiary of a group called Mission Generation Inc., whose goal is for chaplains to bring Christianity to “unreached” children between the ages of 4 and 14, and to lead school assemblies with prayer. The group’s CEO, Rocky Malloy, has testified with a straight face that the association has served more than 27 million people in 30,000 schools and that during this time no students at any of those schools died of suicide. The group is plainly aiming to exploit the school counselor shortage in order to missionize other people’s children, and is willing to make laughable, patently false claims to get into public schools.

With the Texas law in effect, the state’s more than 1,200 school districts had until March 1 to vote on whether to adopt chaplain programs. While many have made the right choice, others have taken up the offer to turn schools into religious recruitment grounds. As chaplains spring into action in the relatively near future, parents and students will have to vigilantly defend the right to an education free from divisive religion by challenging in court the coercive practices of chaplains. FFRF will be there to defend those rights.

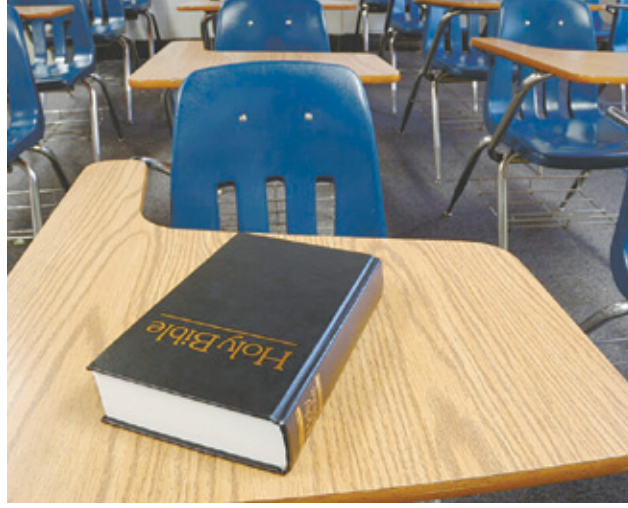


Image by Shutterstock

Unfortunately, 13 other states have followed Texas’ lead and are considering copycat bills in various forms: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma and Utah.

Let’s start with the most flagrantly unconstitutional. Georgia’s SB 379 is similar to the Texas law but includes no safeguards whatsoever. Plus, it absurdly defines the term “chaplain” as “a clergy member who is trained to serve in a secular environment; provided, however, that such term shall not include any person who is a satanist.”

Prohibiting chaplains who have a “scary” religion like The Satanic Temple confirms that these lawmakers envision chaplains promoting religion to students who do not already share the chaplain’s religious beliefs. If they thought chaplains would not proselytize nonadherents, there would be no need to worry about disfavored minority religions. But the reality is that they know Christian chaplains will be promoting Christianity — and they want to make sure that’s the only game in town.

Indiana’s chaplain bill was uniquely bad for two reasons. First, the bill combined public school chaplains with a provision requiring schools to approve all requests for “released time” religious instruction. This provision was signed into law this year under HB 1192, while, fortunately, the chaplain language was removed. Effectively, the bill simultaneously tries to push religion onto students both on campus and off campus. Second, the bill allowed individual principals and superintendents to hire chaplains, rather than inviting school districts to create chaplain programs. This would permit each principal to bring a chaplain of their own preferred denomination into their school — even if the local school board disapproved of violating students’ rights in this way.

Oklahoma has two unique chaplain bills, SB 1984,

which contemplates schools “contracting” with chaplains in lieu of counselors, and HB 3122, which has a chaplain provision similar to many others but coupled with all sorts of Christian nationalist nonsense, ranging from allowing public school to teach intelligent design to allowing schools to “display a memorial cross that is symbolic of the Christian faith.” It would be hard to make it more clear that the chaplain bill is intended to promote Christianity.

Other bills are closer copies of the Texas law, including Alabama’s HB 59, Iowa’s HF 2073, Kansas’ HB 2732, Nebraska’s LB 1065, Mississippi’s HB 1016, and Missouri’s SB 1376. Maryland’s HB 1234 is the most minimal, simply stating that chaplains may be included as “volunteer aides.”

Some chaplain bills include additional safeguards, ostensibly to help ensure that students are not coerced into meetings with proselytizing chaplains. For example, Ohio’s HB 240 prohibits chaplains from meeting with students “in lieu of” school counselors, Utah’s HB 514 allows the state Board of Education to require chaplain training, and Florida’s HB 931 would require school districts to post its chaplains on the district website, and would require parental consent prior to chaplains meeting with students. While these provisions do address some concerns, they do not and cannot correct the most fundamental problems, and can even exacerbate them.

Schools should not be in the business of endorsing particular religious leaders or swapping professional mental health professionals for unlicensed outside adults. The possibilities for abuse in such situations are rife, particularly with sensitive topics that chaplains may regard as “sins” or suggest can be prayed away. There are 16 school-free hours in the day plus weekends, in which students and their parents can seek out pastoral counseling of their choice in tax-free churches.

FFRF is opposing these bills all over the country, through testimony, op-eds, and mobilizing our advocates to contact your legislators. Opposition to school chaplain bills has been vocal, ranging from secular voices to chaplains themselves, but all-too-many Christian nationalist lawmakers don’t care. The real solution is for Americans to stop electing people who use their government offices to impose their personal religious beliefs onto other people and their children.

Ryan D. Jayne is FFRF’s senior policy counsel.

ffrf ACTION FUND

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## Chaplains don’t belong in public schools

This article first appeared in the *Orlando Sentinel* on Feb. 22 and is reprinted with permission.

By Jocelyn Williamson

A concerning piece of legislation is poised to further blur the line between state and church in Florida’s public and charter schools. HB 931 is being debated in Tallahassee. If passed, it would permit school boards to allow volunteer chaplains into our public schools.

Authors of the bill want every school board member across the state to vote on a chaplain policy. It will be a sort of “religious test” to be taken in front of constituents. Vote “Yes” if you love God. Vote “No” and you could be accused of being anti-religious by your political opponent and their supporters.

As a non-Christian mother of a Central Florida public school graduate, I am not only concerned about the religious privilege a school chaplaincy would provide, but also for the welfare of students with mental health issues, or just the day-to-day challenges of being a kid in the world. Could our kids, religious or otherwise, be

told to “pray away” their problems or get a special invite to the next youth night at a church, synagogue, temple or mosque so they can “get right with God”?

Proponents of the bill contend that chaplains would serve a secular purpose by providing “support, services and programs” to students. I should not be the only person questioning the appropriateness of religious leaders filling a secular role that trained counselors and licensed mental health professionals should fill, thus preventing clergy from imposing their religious beliefs on impressionable students.

“Unchurched” kids from ages 4 to 14 are common targets for religious conversion, and public school chaplaincies will be seen as another opportunity for what is often referred to as “campus ministry.” In Central Florida, evangelists already have after-school programs for elementary schools, athletic program ministries, and Christian clubs for mid-

dle and high school students. The organizations that stand up and support these programs openly acknowledge their goals are to reach everyone’s child without regard to the child’s or parent’s faith perspective.

The introduction of religious school chaplains will establish a school-sanctioned, exclusionary, faith-based system that fails to address the needs of a diverse student population. Mental health professionals and counselors, on the other hand, are educated, often certified, and required by school board policies and procedures to assist students in a non-biased manner without regard to the religious perspective of the professional or the student.

For chaplains who try to take into account the religious perspective of students, the only way to do so is to ask about religion or belief in a higher power. Such inquisitions are intrusive and inappropriate in a public school setting. This flawed bill disregards the religious diversity of students and may very well cause a well-meaning school board or principal to end up in court.

Which school board will be the test case and have to explain to The Satan-

ic Temple why their ordained Minister of Satan is not welcome? While I am unconcerned about Satanists who don’t believe in Satan, what about a cult leader? Both of these chaplain candidates might have legal standing if refused by the school.

This bill opens our schoolhouse doors to anyone who wants to be a chaplain. No professional certification or universally accepted credential is required. You don’t even have to have a religious affiliation. I actually like that part, though.

Anyone who can pass a background check can be a public school chaplain — even people you want nowhere near your kids.

HB 931 and its companion in the Senate (CS/SB 1044) pose a significant threat to our kids’ religious freedoms. Legislators should prioritize the rights of students and parents above clergy members, some of whom already consider Florida public schools their mission fields.

FFRF Member Jocelyn Williamson is co-founder of the Central Florida Freethought Community and president of the Florida Humanist Association.



Jocelyn Williamson



# Mythology, taken as truth, is just a lie

By Barbara G. Walker

Nowadays, the more liberal sort of Christians and Jews tend to look tolerantly upon biblical improbabilities as mythological fables drawn from the nursery age of humankind, or even as obscure allegories. The original writers, however, had no such ideas. They obviously intended all their words to be taken as literal truth, directly provided by God, who couldn't lie.

Believers tend to disparage the confirmed existence of the same fables in other, older, heathen mythologies that the biblical writers plagiarized. Scholars know that the Old Testament patriarchs were mythical figures, with counterparts in Egypt, Babylon, Sumer, Greece and India, and that the ancient Middle East had literally dozens of god-begotten, virgin-born, dying-and-resurrecting messiahs and saviors. Traditional believers try to keep this information suppressed. They would like to maintain that all the other gods were mistakes, and only Yahweh still lives — somewhere, if not in the sky anymore.

And a surprising number of Christians still insist on the literal truth of biblical fables, even today when science has made it abundantly clear that there is no heaven in the sky or any hell underground; that the universe was not created 6,000 years ago; that there could never have been an Edenic garden or a Noah's ark or a flat Earth, as the bible claims. Neither could green plants exist before the sun, nor could days and nights consisting of mornings and evenings — and so on and so forth through



**A surprising number of Christians still insist on the literal truth of biblical fables, even today when science has made it abundantly clear that there is no heaven in the sky or any hell underground**

hundreds of God's egregiously unscientific statements. Mythology taken as literal, historical truth is neither a fairy tale nor an allegory; it is a lie. And almost the entire content of the Judeo-Christian bible is a tissue of such lies.

Why are these products of primitive ignorance still being maintained in a civilization with knowledge that easily disproves them? The answer has always been clear: for money. Rich, powerful institutions like churches have an insatiable desire for ever more of their tax-free money, and disproof of biblical lies may threaten their endless income. Thus, churches have been traditionally hostile to almost every scientific advance of the past three centuries. Many continue, against all reason, to deny rock-solid facts of geology, paleontology, physiology, cosmology and evolution. To such people, remaining determinedly unenlightened is the definition of faith. And from their authorities' point of view, that kind of faith is required for their

own continuing influx of money. Hence, congregations are deliberately trained to remain aggressively ignorant.

And what is the product that the faithful buy, with all their tithes, offerings, donations and widows' mites? Simply: hot air. Early Christians, referring to their god as the Logos (the Word), spoke more truly than they knew — because every god is made of nothing but words. Furthermore, most of the words are lies.

A god like the biblical one, telling crude, unsophisticated lies, is not really very credible. Therefore, believers have come up with many excuses for him. Putting the fear of God into their flocks, God's shepherds insist that no one can dare to judge him. God's ways are inscrutable; no mere mortal can know the mind of God; even to presume an inkling thereof is a sin. But then they turn around and claim to know exactly what God wants (always more money) and tell the sheep exactly how God wants them to behave, along with the shearing. It

seems that God's inscrutability depends largely on who is doing the scrutinizing.

Many people deliberately ignore all questions about the authenticity of God or his cruder mistakes, fearful of offending their more pious neighbors, or of probing too deeply into their own doubts. They prefer to call themselves agnostic (by derivation, "no knowledge") rather than atheist ("no God"). They may even attend a church for social reasons, but seek to know little or nothing of their own sect's history or theological tenets.

Sometimes, modern agnostics feel that, in the absence of hard evidence, the existence of God can't be clearly proved or disproved. Therefore, they withhold judgment. But this is not as rational as it sounds. Lack of evidence is proof of nothing. One cannot disprove the existence of vampires, ghosts, elves, dragons, fairies, demons or the Flying Spaghetti Monster but that's no reason to believe in them. Gods are just as imaginary as any other allegedly supernatural being, and the burden of proof of their existence rests on the believer. To claim anything as a truth, when it is supported only by lies, is the very negation of logic.

Is it necessary, as is often claimed, to believe biblical lies in order to be a good person? Well, hardly. It has been demonstrated over and over that nonbelievers are usually generous, kind people, and the criminal population contains a greater percentage of believers. Perhaps the defining virtue of nonbelievers may be honesty. They don't like lies. They don't want to be told lies. And they don't tell lies — which makes them more admirable than the traditional God.

*FFRF Life Member Barbara G. Walker is a researcher, lecturer and author of 24 books. Her *Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* has been in print since 1983 and was named *Book of the Year* by the *London Times*.*

## Lawsuit

*Continued from page 1*

fering inclusive, welcoming religious clubs at public schools."

Further, the school district's rental security fee policy vests unbridled discretion in an administrator to arbitrarily assess fees against disfavored groups, squarely in violation of the First Amendment, the suit contends. In Forsyth County, Ga., *v. Nationalist Movement*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that a policy that similarly vested a government administrator with unbridled discretion to arbitrarily assess security fees against disfavored groups violated the First Amendment.

The district's discriminatory behavior gained a national spotlight in December when the district held a press conference in which school board members, administrators, and other officials expressed hostility toward The Satanic Temple and validated community members' hostility toward the After School Satan Club's then upcoming first meeting at Chimneyrock Elementary.

Shortly after the press conference, FFRF sent the first of three complaint letters to Superintendent Williams in response to the deeply concerning and discriminatory remarks. FFRF's letter urged the district to continue to abide by the First Amendment and allow The Satanic Temple to rent facilities in accordance with the district's own written policies. And the letter further explained that if

the district bowed to the community's attempt at a heckler's veto, it would violate the Constitution by discriminating against The Satanic Temple on the basis of its viewpoint. The school district has not yet responded.

Instead, it notified The Satanic Temple in early January via a late-afternoon phone call that it had assessed a "special security fee" of \$2,045.60 against The Satanic Temple for "additional security." The district also charged The Satanic Temple another fee of \$250 for "field lights." The Good News Club, which describes itself as a bible-centered organization of born-again believers whose purpose is to evangelize boys and girls with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, meets every week at Chimneyrock Elementary, and has not been assessed any "special security fee" or a fee for "field lights." FFRF and The Satanic Temple requests to the district for a fee waiver were ignored, and so The Satanic Temple reluctantly paid the \$2,295.60.

On Jan. 10, Memphis-Shelby County Schools finally allowed The Satanic Temple to hold the first after-school meeting at Chimneyrock Elementary. When club leaders arrived at Chimneyrock, they discovered that various district administrators, school board members and members of the clergy were already at the entrance of the building. On Jan. 12, The Satanic Temple submitted four rental requests for monthly meetings — with dilatory and unhelpful responses from the district.

The district has since then continued attempts to thwart The Satanic Temple and deter its club for students from meeting



at Chimneyrock. The district has abruptly changed the meeting time, unceremoniously canceled rental applications, refused to communicate with the Temple regarding rental rates, and continued to treat the Temple unfavorably.

The Satanic Temple seeks an order for prompt approval of its reservation requests by Memphis-Shelby County Schools. It also seeks to reserve Memphis-Shelby County Schools facilities without the district attempting to charge discriminatory rental fees. Accordingly, The Satanic Temple requests a declaratory judgment from the district court that the board's behavior violates the First Amendment and permanent injunctive relief, enjoining the school district from continuing to discriminate against The Satanic Temple and the After School Satan Club.

FFRF Senior Litigation Counsel Patrick Elliott and FFRF Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence prepared the complaint.

## Chaplains

*Continued from page 1*

"As trained chaplains, we strongly caution against the government assertion of authority for the spiritual development and formation of our public school children," states the letter from more than 200 individual chaplains in 40 states. "Families and religious institutions — not public school officials — should direct the religious education of our children."

"Government-sanctioned chaplains may be permissible in some limited settings — but not in our public schools," the 38 faith groups write. "For example, our government has provided chaplains in the military, prisons and hospitals — places where chaplains are needed to accommodate the religious-exercise rights of people who would otherwise not be able to access religious services. Public school children face no such barriers."

"All should feel welcome in public schools," write the 34 secular and civil society organizations, including FFRF Action Fund. "Even well-intentioned chaplain policies will undermine this fundamental premise of our public education system and violate our longstanding First Amendment principles."

"It is anathema that schools would swap bonafide counseling professionals with unlicensed chaplains," says FFRF Action Fund President Annie Laurie Gaylor.



## LETTERBOX

### Appeasement in TV ads is noticeable

Thanks for printing Jeremiah Camara's convention speech, "The Age of Appeasement." I had certainly noticed the appeasement in TV commercials, but didn't know the name for it.

The instance that bugs me the most is "Jake from State Farm." They couldn't even introduce a new character. They had to suddenly turn white Jake into Black Jake, no explanation. Ridiculous!

Camara also made some great points about white Jesus. But when he said that people's drawings of Jesus are "pretty much the same," I think he is being too kind. The drawings are ugly much the same.

Mayland

### Supreme Court needs more religious diversity

My concern has to do with the religious affiliations of the Supreme Court justices. All nine belong to some mainstream religion. There is one Jewish justice, one Protestant and seven Catholics! Recent polls show that 30 percent of the U.S. population have no religious affiliation. Everyone agrees the Supreme Court should reflect the racial and gender population of the country, so it was a big deal to finally get some women and people of color on the court. But the Supreme Court should not only reflect the country's racial and gender demographics, but its religious demographics, as well. Based on current religious affiliations, two Supreme Court Justices should have no religious affiliation.

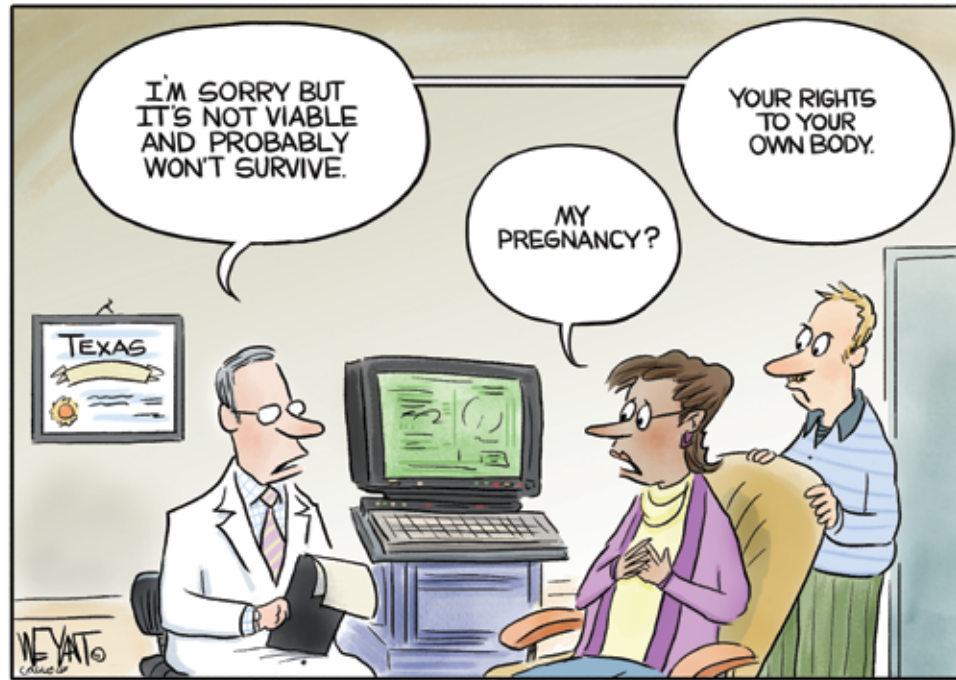
Colorado

### Once again, religion is making people sick

This particular tale started with a one-time Scientologist inaptly named Jim Humble, a mere human who possessed the vainglorious conceit that he was an immortal from Andromeda. In the late 1990s, this dubious fellow invented an elixir called Miracle Mineral Solution, which was claimed to cure virtually any disease, from cancer to diabetes to Alzheimer's, and, four years ago, Covid-19. This sort of thing is allowed to happen way too much by government, especially if it's cloaked in religion.

This particular snake oil was basically a mixture of pool chlorine and vinegar, with some lemon juice, supposedly to activate it, but actually added as a futile effort to mask the foul taste. The citric acid in the latter just happened turn it into an industrial grade bleach, which was even more toxic.

Fourteen years ago, Humble and a guy named Mark Grenon founded the Genesis II Church of Health and Healing in Bradenton, Fla., for the sole purpose of selling their non-potable potion. They did this to take advantage of Florida's very generous negligence to properly regulate religious organizations, or anything that pretended to be. They received another benefit and incentive four years ago when Ron DeSantis signed bills exempting non-traditional and alternative medicine from professional standards and accountability. One of the motives for these bills was to give protection to the religious views that are often the motivation behind irregular practices. Who cares if they're exploitative or dangerous. Freedom!



Now, this vile concoction had already been known to cause symptoms of poisoning, like vomiting and liver failure. No matter. They kept selling it and, for the most part, the government looked the other way. But they were about to get a boost from an unexpected source. At the dawn of the pandemic, the Grenon family and their cohorts, who together had sold a million dollars worth so far, wrote letters to Donald Trump touting it as a cure for Covid. In no time flat, by political standards, Trump was seen on camera suggesting that perhaps people might benefit from ingesting disinfectant. This could only have happened if his idiot staff thought the idiot suggestion was of sufficient value to pass on to him.

After this, thousands of people started calling Poison Control after having ingested bleach. We will never know how many people died from this, or from consuming Miracle Mineral Solution, or from relying on religious crackpottery in general instead of science-based treatments.

This should be a warning to the sane. The insane, who nearly always exhibit aberrant religious ideation, are beyond hope. Despite the immortal Humble having died, his elixir failing to prevent that, and although Grenon's home was raided by the Feds and his family finally arrested, false hope springs eternal. Miracle Mineral Solution is still available!

Pennsylvania

### Are we going backwards because of religion?

While secularism gains strength in many countries, especially in the more progressive nations, we seem to be gliding backwards over here. Superstition has established itself almost as a political force, with science and climate deniers thriving, Holocaust deniers walking freely around, QAnon flourishing, 9/11 and moon landing deniers, not to mention election fraud

advocates! There is no end to it!

What else can be the reason, if not for religion gaining ground again?

California

### Council member surprised me with his response

Reading the Jan./Feb. issue of Freethought Today, and mindful of the near-daily admonitory letters from the ever-watchful FFRF legal guardians regarding separation of religion from government, led me to write to a local Republican seeking a seat on the Gulfport City Council. I did not expect much, but imagine my surprise at the return note.

"Don, I don't think I could have put in any better words than you just did! I don't think we should mix it with city business now or in the future. Thanks for reaching out to me and I welcome any other questions or concerns you may have. — Tom Bixler."

Florida

### Point out that atheism is the humble alternative

While discussing the relative merits of atheism vs. religion with religious folk, I have found the following argument to be very effective. I recommend use of it to anyone who wishes to make a dent in a religionist's confident view of their beliefs and their negative view of atheism. Introducing the argument usually gets a laugh from the religionist: Atheism, the humble alternative?

Their preconceived notion is that atheists are deluded, or arrogant and conceited, having turned their back on the deity (or deities). The first point to make is that atheists don't defy a deity, they simply don't think one exists. That point made, the following argument can be introduced.

Whether called an atheist, agnostic,

### Write to us

To send a letter to the editor for Freethought Today, please email it to [editor@ffrf.org](mailto:editor@ffrf.org).

freethinker, infidel, humanist or equivalent term, such a person has no positive belief in a supreme being or beings. Instead, atheists accept that they are a very small and very temporary part of the universe. They acknowledge that the universe got along just fine before they were here, and will do just fine after they are gone. They understand that the laws of the universe take no notice of humans or their concerns. They accept that the universe was not designed for them. Their goal in the one life they do have is to enjoy it and try to leave the world a better place than they found it, and not make a big fuss when it is time to go.

Contrast this view with that of the believer. The believer thinks that the lord of the universe, the supreme being, cares about them personally and has created a life plan just for them. They believe that the lord of trillions of stars and planets spread across billions of light years takes time out from governing the universe to listen to and act upon their prayers. They think that the natural world was designed by a supreme creator for the benefit of humans. And, when they die, the believer believes they will have eternal life sitting in glory beside the lord and master of the universe.

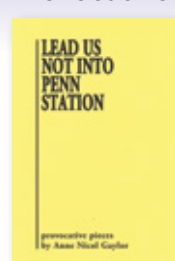
Now, which is the more humble view of oneself?

I often follow up with a concession that religion has been common to almost all societies through recorded history, and as such it is reasonable to conclude that religion has conferred an evolutionary advantage on those societies that have developed it. Religion bound a people together, provided comfort in the face of nature's dealings of death and disaster, and gave citizens a reason to sacrifice their lives in defense of the state, and contribute selflessly in other ways. Conceding this benefit makes two points at the same time — that religion can benefit a society, but also that the benefit doesn't require any supernatural power to be conferred. Religion is a natural result of humans seeking a way of providing comfort and cohesion to a society.

Most societies today lean less on religion because of advances in health care, scientific understanding, governance and the more equitable distribution of wealth. Despite this, the tribal and binding aspects of religion still remain strong in many societies.

I've found that the above argument for atheism, and the concession to reli-

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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](http://we-dissent.org)



gion, is a non-threatening way to a better acceptance of atheists by religious folk, and to a thoughtful reflection on their beliefs by them. If the above arguments spread far and wide enough, perhaps the harmful aspects of religion could be lessened, and the good aspects enhanced.

Oregon

### Christian church missing the point for centuries

We're already familiar with the interconnected foundational moral obscenities of Christian theology: original sin (infants born guilty), hell (infinite punishment for finite crimes as cosmic justice) and vicarious atonement (via human sacrifice). They are the nasty accompaniment, the toilet paper trailing from the heel of John 3:16, so to speak. But, for now, let's just consider the purported suffering and sacrifice of Jesus, the scapegoat offered up as his all-powerful father's payment to . . . Satan? Himself?

This primitive blood offering supposedly saves humankind by erasing all sins of the past, present and future. Not to be bloodthirsty, but can we really say that Jesus, whether divine or not, truly suffered enough to balance that massive equation?

I don't wish to minimize physical abuse and mental agony followed by execution and death, but according to the stories, those of Jesus were only temporary, death included. Did this "passion" of the Christ, leading to his crucifixion, last more than a couple days? Did Jesus even remain dead for as much as 48 hours before springing back from the darkness, in the flesh, good as new, like a semi-divine yo-yo? How can this long weekend, admittedly a pretty awful one with a rumored brief stopover in hell, pay off the debts of every person who will ever exist?

Countless human beings worldwide, in prisons and elsewhere, have endured much greater persecution and pain and are doing so this minute, making God/Jesus look rather tight-fisted by comparison. Even among the relatively fortunate, who hasn't watched a close friend or family member suffer in one agonizing way or another for weeks, months, even years? And was anyone else's death less than permanent?

For example, I might wish that my father's struggle with cancer had only lasted from about Thursday to Saturday of a single week, especially if he had come back Sunday morning feeling much better, capable of fishing and levitation. I would say my dear father (who I can prove existed, by the way) was one among tens of millions who paid a far higher price than Jesus.

But where's Dad's Crusade? His Holy Land? His Inquisition? His bloody Mel Gibson film epic? Whom can I colonize, what can I burn in



**FFRF on the Road**  
 FFRF Co-President Dan Barker (near the center with blue blazer) spoke to the Secular Humanists of Roanoke (SHOR) on Feb. 17 at the South County Library. Also, on Feb. 25, FFRF's Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence gave a presentation via Zoom to Congregation Beth Adam, a Humanistic Jewish Congregation in Ohio, focused on recent state/ church violations, victories and legislative trends in Ohio and surrounding states.

Dad's name? Which of his properties can I declare to be tax-exempt?

And when will the courts grant my dad's followers various special privileges, including the freedom to discriminate against his alleged enemies? Perhaps I'm missing the point.

Arguably, the Christian church seems to have been missing the point for centuries. What did its founders take away from the muddled and adulterated tale of a Jewish reformer persecuted and killed under a Roman Empire resistant to change? Apparently, this: "A Roman Empire . . . persecuting reformers . . . resisting change. Let's do that. Let's be that!"

If the ancient Israelites of legend had escaped Egypt only to begin zealously building pyramids in Canaan with slave labor, it could not be a stranger narrative twist.

Minnesota

### Strict scrutiny should invalidate abortion bans

A Colorado district court judge who is known to oppose abortions seems to have provided a judicial rationale for invalidating abortion restrictions. Here is the story.

In 2023, the Colorado General Assembly passed a bill (SB 190) that sought to ban what is called "abortion reversal" treatment, describing it as an unproven and unsafe medical procedure. The state's board of medicine agreed it constitutes "unprofessional conduct."

"Abortion reversal" refers to a scenario in which a pregnant patient has begun a medication abortion by taking the first abortion drug (mifepristone) but then decides not to complete the abortion with the second drug (misoprostol). At that point, giving the pa-

tient the "reversal" drug progesterone may save the pregnancy. It also poses risks, such as documented cases of severe bleeding that required emergency intervention.

Abortion reversal treatment is very often provided by religiously affiliated pregnancy centers. One of those centers, Bella Health and Wellness, sought and won a preliminary injunction against enforcing SB 190. Bella Health claimed the law burdened their religious exercise because their Catholic faith compels them to assist patients who seek to reverse an abortion. U.S. District Court Judge Daniel Domenico granted the injunction, saying the Legislature "was aware that the burden of this prohibition would primarily fall on religious adherents." In the judge's view, this triggered strict scrutiny of the law's impact on free exercise of religion.

"Strict scrutiny" is the highest standard of judicial review under U.S. constitutional law. It is invoked when a law infringes upon a fundamental constitutional right. Under strict scrutiny, a challenged law is considered presumptively invalid unless the government can demonstrate that the law or regulation is necessary. In short, in this case, Bella Health was presumed to prevail over SB 190 because, in Judge Domenico's eyes, the law infringed on the clinic's constitutional right to exercise its religious belief. He apparently saw no government necessity for the law that was compelling enough to allow such infringement.

But, let's consider that the Constitution's Establishment Clause bestows on all of us a constitutional right to not be legally obligated, or constrained, by religious beliefs. This was, in fact, a fundamental principle embraced by the Constitution's framers. So, isn't strict scrutiny triggered by laws that impose religious anti-abortion beliefs onto the citizenry?

To paraphrase Judge Domenico, legislators who are passing strict anti-abortion bills are aware that the

burden of their prohibitions primarily falls on all of us who do not share their religious beliefs. These religion-driven laws thus infringe on everyone's constitutional right to not be subject to religious beliefs. Government cannot demonstrate these laws are necessary for a bona fide public (i.e., secular) purpose because government cannot constitutionally base such a necessity on religious belief.

Strict scrutiny of this constitutional violation should apply here. Using Judge Domenico's rationale, religiously based anti-abortion laws should be deemed presumptively invalid.

Footnote: The preliminary injunction Judge Domenico initially granted was lifted when the state indicated it would not enforce the "abortion reversal" ban on religiously driven agencies like Bella Health. But, citizens across the nation don't get such an exemption from religiously based laws that prohibit abortion. So, Domenico's strict scrutiny reasoning still applies and should invalidate those laws.

Colorado

### 'Religion-free' is great term for atheists to use

I've been an FFRF member for about 28 years now. I enjoy the conventions we can attend and love reading Freethought Today. A letter to the editor recently struck a perfect chord for me. Rather than using the term "atheist," a term I use for myself, I found the suggestion of saying "religion-free" to be the most suitable. The writer likened it to things like toxin-free, sugar-free, etc. In other words, no toxins or dangerous thinking inside. From the day I read that comment, I started using this exact terminology to describe myself. I'd like to thank that writer [Stephen Walrath] for sending in the comment.

And, in general, thank you to the entire FFRF staff and supporting members for continuing to fight during these very scary political times.

Illinois

**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 392 pages / PB  
**\$15** Item # FB145  
 Buy it from FFRF online [ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop)

**Crossword answers**

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

**Cryptogram answer**

Religion is a byproduct of fear. For much of human history it may have been a necessary evil, but why was it more evil than necessary? Isn't killing people in the name of God a pretty good definition of insanity?  
 — Arthur C. Clarke

**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.





The convention will be held at the Sheraton Denver Downtown.

# FFRF convention, Sept. 27-29 Mile-high meeting!

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation in Denver for its 47th annual convention from Sept. 27-29 at the Sheraton Denver Downtown. For information about the convention speakers, turn to page 3, or go to [ffrf.org/convention2024](http://ffrf.org/convention2024).

## General schedule

There will be a Thursday afternoon Welcome Reception, which is complementary (see registration form). Convention registration will re-open at 8 a.m. Friday morning. The program will begin at 9 a.m. that morning and will run through Saturday evening.

On Sunday morning, the membership and State Representatives meetings will take place, ending by noon.

## Registration

Registration for the convention is \$100 per FFRF member, \$105 for a companion accompanying a member, \$160 for nonmembers (or, you can save money by becoming a member for just \$40). High school students or younger are free and the college student rate is \$25.

Return the registration form on the right, or sign up at [ffrf.org/convention2024](http://ffrf.org/convention2024).

## Optional Group Meals

For organized group meals, there will be a Friday dinner buffet, a Saturday "Non-Prayer" breakfast and a Saturday dinner.

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

### Friday dinner

Entree 1: Pan-seared chicken with roasted red pepper sauce and brown butter gnocchi and snap peas.

Entree 2: Pan-seared salmon with charred corn soubise, snap pea and farro succotash and charred tomato beurre blanc.

Entree 3: Veggie/Vegan option.

Starter selection: Boston Bibb wedge salad, pancetta, heirloom tomatoes, Sedona blue cheese with a creamy chive dressing./

Dessert: Carrot cake with mascarpone whip, bourbon caramel sauce, candied pecans

### Saturday breakfast

Scrambled eggs, bacon, potato cubes with parm and green onion). All plated breakfast selections include your choice of a starter, fresh orange juice, array of breakfast pastries, Starbucks regular and decaffeinated coffee, selection of Tazo teas, sugar three ways, milk and cream.

Starter choice: Yogurt, berry compote, granola

### Saturday dinner

Entree 1: Beef

Entree 2: Seared steel head trout, green onion beurre blanc, snap peas, and vegetable medley farro.

Entree 3: Veggie/Vegan

Includes: Your selection of starter, entree and dessert, includes oven baked rustic rolls and sweet creamy butter, freshly brewed Starbucks regular and decaffeinated coffee and specialty Bigelow teas. No soda/juice.

Starter selection: Colossal shrimp cocktail with house poached prawns, cucumber, mango, and Jicama salad with pineapple sweet chili dressing.

Dessert: Chocolate cheesecake with raspberry sauce, chocolate decoration and vanilla cream.

## Hotel

We encourage you to register and book your hotel room as soon as possible. If you need an accessible room, please state your needs when making the reservation.

### The Sheraton Denver Downtown

1550 Court Place, Denver, CO 80202  
Phone: 303-893-3333. State that you are with the "Freedom From Religion" room block.

<https://ffrf.us/hotelFFRFCon2024>

Rates are \$249 for a standard guest room.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION **2024**  
**NATIONAL CONVENTION**  
**DENVER** SEPTEMBER 26-29

## CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: [ffrf.us/convention2024](http://ffrf.us/convention2024)

### 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

Please specify your dietary requirements below, under ADA or food allergy accommodations. FFRF does not make money on convention meals. Prices include the 8% sales tax and 27% service charge.

#### Thursday, September 26th

Welcome Reception [Must register to attend] \_\_\_ Free  
Check box if attending  Registrant 1  Registrant 2

#### Friday, September 27th

Friday Night Plated Dinner \_\_\_ \$95 \$ \_\_\_  
Registrant 1  Chicken  Fish  Vegetarian  Vegan  
Registrant 2  Chicken  Fish  Vegetarian  Vegan

#### Saturday, September 28th

Non-Prayer Breakfast \_\_\_ \$55 \$ \_\_\_  
Registrant 1  Regular  Vegetarian  Vegan  Gluten Free  
Registrant 2  Regular  Vegetarian  Vegan  Gluten Free

Saturday Night Plated Dinner \_\_\_ \$100 \$ \_\_\_  
Registrant 1  Beef  Fish  Vegetarian  Vegan  
Registrant 2  Beef  Fish  Vegetarian  Vegan

▶ Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please describe your ADA or food allergy accommodations needed in order to fully participate:

Registrant 1  None  Vegetarian  Vegan  Gluten Free  
 Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_  
Registrant 2  None  Vegetarian  Vegan  Gluten Free  
 Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

(Make check 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 9/12/24.

I attest that I have a physician's order against my Covid-19 vaccination.

Name of Registrant 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Pronouns (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Registrant 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Pronouns (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

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 and cancellation deadline is September 13th, 2024.  
Registration cancellations received after September 13th, 2024 will not be refunded.