

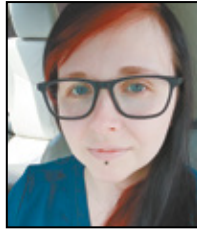
FREETHOUGHT

TODAY



FFRF's Mark Dann
named 2024 NILE
top lobbyist

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Grad student
essay winners
announced

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FFRF goes
on the road
to Nigeria

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Ten Commandments law blocked in Louisiana

In a victory for a religious freedom coalition that includes the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a federal district court issued a preliminary injunction Nov. 12 prohibiting implementation of a Louisiana law requiring all public schools to permanently display a government-approved, Protestant version of the Ten Commandments in every classroom.

In the *Rev. Roake v. Brumley* ruling, Judge John W. DeGravelles determined that Louisiana's HB 71, enacted in June, violates the First Amendment

and longstanding Supreme Court precedent. More than 40 years ago, in *Stone v. Graham*, the Supreme Court overturned a similar state statute, holding that the First Amendment bars public schools from posting such displays. The defendants conceded during oral argument that *Stone* remains good law and is binding on lower courts.

"We are pleased that the First Amendment rights of students and families are protected by this vital court decision," says FFRF Legal Director Patrick Elliott.

Represented by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the ACLU, ACLU of Louisiana and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the plaintiffs in *Roake v. Brumley* are a multi-faith group of nine Louisiana families with children in public schools.

Because the court denied the defendants' request to pause (or "stay") the preliminary injunction while they seek relief from the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, it immediately takes effect.

In his 177-page opinion, Judge De-

Gravelles explained: "These displays must be posted in every 'classroom in each school,' all year round, regardless of subject matter, and regardless of the age of the student. Thus, the question is not whether the biblical laws can ever be put on a poster; the issue is whether, as a matter of law, there is any constitutional way to display the Ten Commandments in accordance with the minimum requirements of the act. In short, the court finds

See Louisiana on page 5



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF staff gather in front of Freethought Hall the morning after the election to show that our fight for freedom and democracy will continue unabated.

FFRF leads a secular resistance

Following the November election, the Freedom From Religion Foundation knows that most of our you, our members, are disheartened, dismayed, upset and perhaps even numb.

But, rest assured, FFRF will continue its battle not only for state and church separation, but also for the secular "soul" of our democracy. FFRF, with our team of constitutional attorneys and legislative experts, is prepared and ready to lead the "secular resistance" on your behalf.

Here's a rundown of the threats and why FFRF needs your support

more than ever.

Declaring that "people tell me that God spared my life for a reason," President-elect Trump announced: "That reason was to save our country." Trump added, "America has given us an unprecedented and powerful mandate. I will govern by a simple motto: promises made, promises kept."

What are those promises? And what do they mean for the work of the Freedom From Religion Foundation? Whether Trump favors the lesser-known playbook of the America First Policy Institute, "poised to be more influential

than Project 2025," according to the *New York Times*, or the 900-plus page playbook created by the Heritage Foundation & Co., we know Trump will be working with extremists and Christian nationalists ready to undermine America's democratic principles — including the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

Below is a quick review of Trump's "promises" and how they affect our work:

- "Make America pray again."

Trump has promised that one of his first acts as president will be to

See Resistance on page 2

Convention speech The past is gone, the present is now up to us

This is the (edited) speech given by Ron Reagan at FFRF's 47th annual convention in Denver on Sept. 27. He was introduced by FFRF Board Member and filmmaker Jeremiah Camara. You can watch the video of the speech (and all convention speeches) at ffrf.us/con24. (This speech was given prior to the 2024 general election.)

Jeremiah Camara: Ron Reagan, as you know, has some pretty famous parents. But he dances to his own drumbeat. Literally. He left Yale to become a ballet dancer with the Joffrey Ballet Company. Then became an actor and a TV and radio personality. He does commentary for MSNBC and "Both Sides Now" podcast. He is the author of "My Father at 100." For many years, Ron Reagan has served as an honorary director of FFRF.

FFRF first offered him its Emperor Has No Clothes Award in 2004 for publicly identifying as an atheist when it was brave to do so.

Since 2014, you've been seeing a lot of Ron in the TV ad that he so generously recorded for FFRF that year, which was refreshed two years ago, and which has become iconic for his improvised remark that he's "an unabashed atheist, not afraid of burning

in hell." I have stolen that remark and used it quite often. In 2019, when the ad ran during the Democratic primary debate on CNN, many said that Ron won the debate! Since the ad started running in 2014, FFRF's membership has almost doubled.

On behalf of the FFRF Board, Ron, we thank you. Please welcome Ron Reagan.

By Ron Reagan

"M ay you live in interesting times," cursed the ancient Chinese. And why not? Interesting times sound like the way to go. I mean, who wants to live in boring times, right? Like a lifetime of nothing good on TV. But think about it! Ask the dinosaurs how interesting things got 65 million years ago. The fall of the Roman Empire — that was interesting. How about Europe during the Black Death? Pretty interesting.

Sure, the Renaissance and Enlightenment were

See Reagan on page 18



Photo by Chris Line

Ron Reagan

OVERHEARD

If you're running a Christian nationalist state, where white Christians of European descent have pride of place over everyone else in the country, well, then you can run an authoritarian regime that gives preference to that group and everyone else just kind of gets what they can get, as second- or third-class citizens.

Robert P. Jones, president and founder of Public Religion Research Institute.
Religion Dispatches, 10-21-24

I'm marching. I'm putting my money where my mouth is and steam where the engine is. I'm going all out because we need to feed the positive because they feed the negative. And in the war against women, it's just begun on their side, and it looks bad and it looks nasty. And we're not taking it.

Actress Lynda "Wonder Woman" Carter.

New York Times, 10-27-24

I spent decades in that pew seething with rage and suppressing it.

Designer Daniel Roseberry, who finally came out to his parents at age 23 and stopped attending church.

New York Times, 10-27-24



Photo by Chris Line
Steven Pinker

The best explanation for the good old days is a bad memory. When we take an objective look at how the country is doing and which way it has been going, we see that American life is not a hellscape of carnage and decline. What stands out is a resilient democracy that tends to recover from setbacks and make halting progress.

Harvard professor and FFRF Honorary President Steven Pinker, in his column, "Trump says the country is 'dying.' The data say otherwise."

New York Times, 10-28-24

I hate to say we use God, but I think God is often used as a means of people getting what they want.

Rev. Jason Genest, who was quoted in the article, "We tried Christian nationalism in America. It went badly."

Religion News Service, 10-31-24

The use of taxpayer dollars to subsidize the expansions of private and

religious schools is unprecedented. . . . That might worry us if we are concerned about the separation of church and state. Some of the previous research indicates that many students who use vouchers suffer some negative effects in the short term.

Paul Bruno, a professor of education policy, organization and leadership at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

University of Illinois News Bureau, 10-28-24

They may be breaking the law, [but church leaders know that the government] going after a church is not going to be well received.

Eric McDaniel, a government professor at the University of Texas at Austin, speaking about why some churches aren't worried about their blatant politicking from the pulpit.

Texas Standard, 10-29-24

The people in the room are already thinking about Christian nationalism as a problem. What they seem to be most grateful for is that they're in a room full of people like themselves, where often

they might feel like they're the only person that thinks that way.

Rev. Jennifer Copeland, executive director of the North Carolina Council of Churches, at a church event to confront Christian nationalism's adherents "who have so distorted their faith."

Religion News Service, 11-5-24

This bible mandate is a blatant power grab that violates state law and tramples the separation of church and state.

Daniel Mach, director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, after Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters announced that more than 500 bibles had been purchased to be placed in AP government classrooms across the state.

Conservative Review, 11-15-24

Abuse in churches, in marriages, in families, under clergy, is part and parcel of this movement. It's undergirded by the patriarchal submission, authority, obedience.

Peter Bell, host of the podcast, "The Sons of Patriarchy," speaking about Christian nationalism.

Religion News Service, 10-28-24

Resistance

Continued from page 1

set up a task force to root out "anti-Christian bias" and protect "pro-God context and content."

• **"We don't worship government, we worship God."** Trump's remarks, previously as president and then as candidate, have repeatedly undermined the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

• **Ten Commandments and bibles in public schools.** Trump has endorsed posting the Ten Commandments in public schools, something FFRF is in court fighting in Louisiana. FFRF is also suing with a coalition in Oklahoma over Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters' bid to spend \$6 million buying Trump bibles to distribute to all classrooms there.

• **A universal voucher system.** As a candidate Trump has not only promised to eliminate the Department of Education, but has also proposed up to \$10,000 a year per child in taxpayer money on private education or homeschooling. He also supports Education Savings Accounts, or ESAs, allowing families to divert a designated amount of per-student spending to pay for religious schooling or homeschooling. "If Trump wins, count

on continued culture wars, school vouchers and a fixation on ending the federal Department of Education," warns education scholar Josh Cowen, who recently addressed FFRF's national convention.

• **Trump may target nonbelievers.** He announced last year: "Together, we're warriors in a righteous crusade to stop the arsonists, the atheists, globalists and the Marxists — and that's what they are — and we will restore our republic as one nation under God with liberty and justice for all." We already know he has promised to restore bans on Muslims traveling here, which FFRF opposed in amicus briefs after he imposed this unconstitutional religious test during his first presidency.

• **Attacking the Johnson Amendment.** Trump will resume his promulgation of "alternative facts" against the Johnson Amendment, which bars tax-exempt donations from being used for partisan electioneering by churches and other nonprofits. We expect him to continue signing executive orders, such as his prior "Religious Liberty Executive Order" and many other mandates intended to dismantle the Establishment Clause's prohibitions on uniting religion and government, particularly mandates allowing religious exemptions against discrimination.

• **Christian nationalist cabinet and judicial appointments.** FFRF's legislative team

is prepared to vet and oppose Trump's expected cabinet appointments of "foxes" to guard the chicken coop as well as extremist judicial appointments, as he did in his past presidency.

• **Abolishing abortion.** Trump's prevarications on abortion notwithstanding, FFRF is expecting his Christian nationalist handlers to push hard to abolish abortion nationally. As this is written, we await word on whether Democrats will lose the House and if Trump will control Congress, where his supporters seek to ban medication abortion nationally and enforce the zombie Comstock Act of 1873 to close abortion clinics. We know one of Trump's opening acts, as it was in his first presidency, will be to reimpose the Gag Rule barring foreign entities receiving U.S. funds from using their own funds to provide information on abortion care.

• **Erasing trans individuals.** Trump campaigned on promises on day one to "revoke" existing policies supporting health care for transgender people, including signing an executive order instructing federal agencies to stop all programs promoting the concept of sex and gender transition at any age. He would terminate federal funding for any hospitals and medical personnel providing health care to transgender youth. He also vowed to pass a bill establishing that the United States only recognizes "male and female" as assigned at birth, thereby erasing transgender and nonbinary people out of existence. He told believers at the Faith & Freedom 2024 convention: "I will take historic action to defeat the poison of left-wing gender ideol-

ogy and restore the timeless truth that God created two genders, male and female."

• **Extremist playbooks.** Among the almost 300 executive orders the America First Policy Institute has already drafted for Trump's signature are orders defunding Planned Parenthood, requiring mandatory ultrasounds before abortions — including medication abortions, and establishing legally that there are only two genders.

If the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 prevails, we already know its proposals would unite church and state by:

• Infusing "the pursuit of Blessedness" into every level of government. (Page 13)

• Dismantling nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ Americans. (Pages 333, 375 and 548)

• Mandating a "biblically based" definition of marriage and family. (Pages 477–482)

• Dismantling civil rights protections in the name of "religious liberty," providing a license to discriminate. (Page 494)

• Allowing religious employers to discriminate against employees based on beliefs. (Page 586)

• Turning the Department of Health and Human Services into the "Department of Life." (Page 489)

• Gutting overtime laws while establishing Sunday as "the Sabbath" and forcing employers to pay overtime on Sunday because "God ordained the Sabbath as a day of rest." (Page 589)

FFRF, with 40,000 paid members, is well positioned to lead in defending our First Amendment's first freedom on your behalf.

ffrf
FREETHOUGHT
TODAY


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at Noon (Central)***

On Facebook Live

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

*Except the last Wednesday of the month

National Institute for Lobbying & Ethics

FFRF's Mark Dann named a top lobbyist for 2024

The Freedom From Religion Foundation proudly announces that Mark Dann, the organization's D.C.-based governmental affairs director, has been named one of the National Institute for Lobbying & Ethics (NILE) Top Lobbyists for 2024. This prestigious award highlights Mark's ethical leadership, advocacy and commitment to advancing the separation of state and church through strategic lobbying and coalition-building.

The award was bestowed on Mark at NILE's annual dinner on Nov. 7 at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Since joining FFRF, Mark has played a pivotal role in expanding the organization's presence and influence in Washington, D.C., guiding key legislative efforts that have significantly advanced FFRF's mission. Under Mark's leadership, FFRF's lobbying efforts have grown in scope and impact, helping to ensure that secular governance remains a top priority in legislative conversations.

"Mark's work has transformed FFRF's presence on Capitol Hill. His leadership and strategic vision have helped us achieve critical legislative victories and positioned FFRF as a key player in advocating for secularism," says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president and co-founder. "Mark's ability to build bipartisan coalitions, drive legislative initiatives, and foster meaningful relationships with lawmakers reflects his unwavering commitment to promoting the separation of state and church."

This year, he oversaw the implementation of FFRF Action Fund's Dynamic Scorecard (with thanks also to Senior Policy Counsel Ryan Jayne), finalized our endorsement process, developed an Express Endorsement Process for candidates who are incumbents or endorsed by key partners, rolled out key endorsements for federal, state, local and school board candidates, elevated and led on critical bills such as the Health Share



FFRF's Governmental Affairs Director Mark Dann, second from left, was named one of the National Institute for Lobbying & Ethics (NILE) Top Lobbyists for 2024. He is shown standing with his mother Carol Dann, Valerie Ploumpis and Karim Fadli.

Transparency Act, judicial reform bills, and repealing the Comstock Act. He advanced bipartisan bills and secured an enhanced placement of a memorial honoring Thomas Paine in a highly coveted place in the nation's capital. He helped to develop focus groups on Gen-Z non-religious voters in the key swing state of Wisconsin, paved the way for FFRF to underwrite campaign fellows at critical universities in Wisconsin to focus on voter registration and pledges to vote, and celebrated our community and victories by establishing the first Congressional Reason Reception on Capitol Hill with

the Congressional Freethought Caucus and is working to expand it.

Beyond his work with FFRF, Mark has volunteered his time with the Council for Global Equality and the LGBTQ-plus Victory Fund, where he has used his skills to advance human rights and promote greater LGBTQ-plus representation in government. Through his work with the Council for Global Equality, Mark built a coalition of LGBTQ-plus survivors from authoritarian regimes, helping them share their powerful stories with members of Congress. His advanced Russian language skills

and his deep connections with the Russian-speaking LGBTQ-plus community allowed him to empower survivors who had never previously told their stories. His work helped stop a trade deal that would have rewarded a regime notorious for its brutal treatment of LGBTQ-plus citizens.

FFRF congratulates Mark Dann on this well-earned recognition and looks forward to continuing its mission of upholding the constitutional principle of separation of state and church with Mark leading the charge in Washington, D.C.

PAYS TO COMPLAIN

Church sign didn't belong on town's traffic sign

By Dan Bailey

Religious groups are pretty crafty at affixing themselves to taxpayer-funded government infrastructure. Sometimes you don't really notice it until one day you see something that you've looked at many times, but never realized it. That was the case when, sitting at a familiar traffic light, I noticed several traffic signs guiding traffic in multiple directions. Affixed to one of those signs was a directional sign for the local Lutheran church. I wondered why a church was allowed to piggyback on a municipal signpost. That's when I started to take a much closer look at the signage in my town and those towns around me.

Looking around my local area, I found that the church had three of these signs sharing space on municipal signposts. I made a call to the local police traffic division to determine who managed traffic-control signs. My first question to the officer in charge was how I could access mu-



nicipal signposts to advertise my business. He responded that I would not be allowed to do that. When I told him I have evidence of other entities doing it, he told me that those were "grandfathered in."

Determined to find out what the municipal code says about signs and if the township had considered and granted any requests for an exception

to it, I submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). I found out that local code does not permit any entity other than the municipality to erect or affix traffic control signs to township property. It also forbids anyone from attaching signs to utility poles or structures. The FOIA response did not show that any exceptions or requests for exceptions to the code having been considered by the township.

I contacted the township to report the violations I had discovered, which also included two restaurants. After submitting the location and pictures of the violations, every sign was removed by the township the next day!

Since that day, I have found violations in several of the towns around me. Using the same process, I again have embarked on challenging each church-related sign in these towns.

This is something we can and should do. Churches are often granted the undue privileges to use taxpayer-funded resources to promote themselves. I encourage people to keep their eyes open and be on the lookout for in-

stances of this in their own area and to hold local governments accountable to their taxpayers.

It's not a hard thing to do: Identify improper signage on municipal signposts along your highways and streets. Make note of the location and take pictures. Check your local codes for the law. If the code does not permit any signs to be affixed to government and utility poles and posts, submit a FOIA or Open Public Record Request on the township website, asking for all documents relative to requests, consideration, granting or denying of an exception to the specific code. Be sure to cite the specific code number in the request.

Depending on the response you receive, you can go directly to your mayor to report the violation, noting that there is not any legal reason or purpose to allow the violation. So far, this has worked well and I am working toward reporting violations in the towns around mine.

Dan Bailey is an FFRF member from New Jersey.

- Across**
- Chowder ingredient
 - Swerve
 - Tint
 - Heave, past tense
 - In ill humor
 - Tetanus symptom
 - Starbucks option
 - Shrek, e.g.
 - Spy name
 - *John Adams: "...the Government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the _____ Religion..."
 - . Surf's partner
 - This and desist
 - Fugitive's get-away
 - Hemingway's partner
 - Route marking sign
 - Campfire leftover
 - Like infection-caused shock
 - D'Artagnan's weapon of choice
 - *Advice from Deuteronomy 21:18-21: _____ rebellious son to death
 - Acorn dropper
 - Type of yoga
 - Inconclusive
 - Drink
 - *Freethinking Kurt Vonnegut's "_____'s Cradle"
 - "Rock-a-bye baby on the _____"
 - Hells _____ Motorcycle Corporation
 - Local area network, acr.
 - Type of comedy
 - America's WWII ally
 - *President Thomas _____, promoted "a wall of separation between church and state"
 - Theater greeter
 - Like Cruella de Vil
 - Moderate
 - Like a sea urchin
 - Fear-inspiring
 - *Atheist Jon Krakauer's book "_____ the Wild"
 - Nile viper
 - Before, prefix
 - Kings of _____ band
 - Sound of Music" actor Christopher _____
 - *Freethinking Julian Barnes' "The _____ of an Ending"
 - Lake, in France
 - Lacks
 - Up and about
 - Who, possessive
 - _____pedia or _____Leaks
 - Speedily
 - Pertaining to kidneys
 - *Irreverent "Ode to Nightingale" poet John _____
 - *Freethinking composer Edward Elgar's "_____ and Circumstance"
 - Jump key
 - *Irreverent "Naked Gun" actor Leslie _____
 - One hundredth of a pound
 - Charged particle
 - Drinking establishment habitué
 - Waste time
 - Small rodent
 - Flu symptom
 - Like Bananas Foster
 - UPS competitor
 - "Edmund Fitzgerald," e.g.
 - Safari ride
 - Of sound mind
 - "The Simpsons" palindrome
 - Vegas light
 - *The first country to separate church & state, acr.
- Down**
- "Le freak, c'est _____"
 - Ness, e.g.
 - Say it's so
 - Renaissance's noble Italian family
 - Bear and Berra
 - *Subtle sensory stimuli, not saintly glows
 - Small songbird
 - *Progressive "American Tribal Love-Rock Musical"
 - Defender of skies
 - Emergency helper, acr.
 - Consequence of old age
 - Thai restaurant chicken staple
 - *Freethinking "The

Freethought Today Crossword

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	50	51				52				53	54	55
56						57				58		
59						60				61		
62						63				64		

Answers on page 25 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.

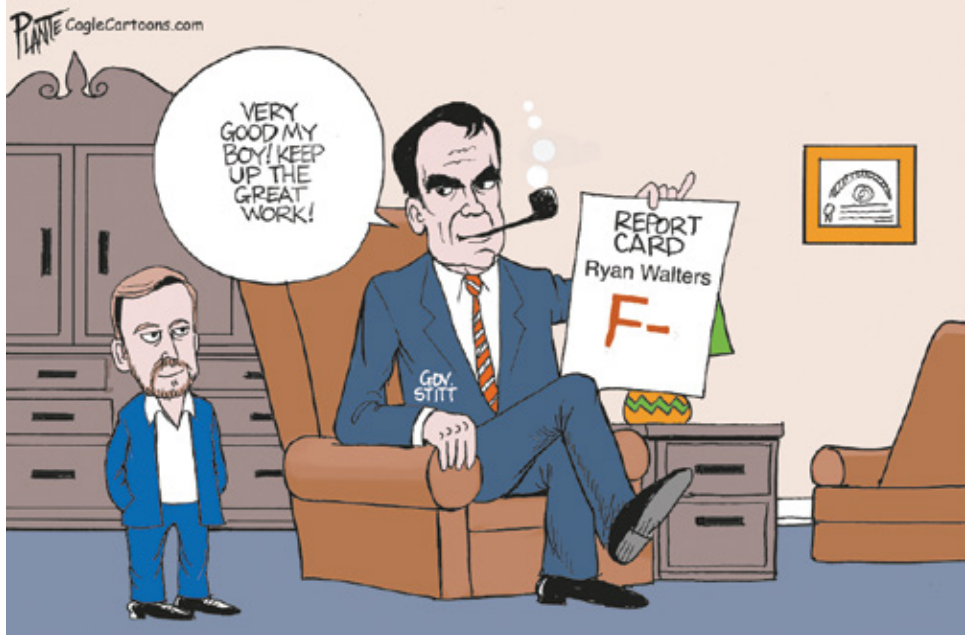
Because of privacy concerns — the PDF can be easily forwarded to non-members — FFRF has stopped including in the PDF version the Black Collar Crime report, names of new Lifetime members, and the names of the Letterbox contributors.

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."



FFRF, others oppose push for religion in Okla. schools

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma, and the Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law & Justice are uniting to challenge Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters' latest attempt to impose religion on students in the state's public school system.

On Nov. 14, to promote his new "Office of Religious Liberty and Patriotism," Walters emailed all superintendents with in the state a "mandatory announcement" that linked to a video entitled "Prayer for the Nation." Additionally, the email asserted that all Oklahoma schools must play the video for all their students and send it to their parents. In the video, Walters blames the "radical left" and "woke teachers unions" for "attacking" religious liberty and then delivers a lengthy prayer supporting President-elect Donald Trump. Walters encourages students to join in his prayer.

On Nov. 15, the coalition sent a letter to every superintendent in Oklahoma urging them not to show or disseminate Walters' prayer video. The letter emphasizes the constitutional requirement for public schools to remain secular and warns that promoting the video to students and parents would violate both the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and Article I, Section 2 of the Oklahoma Constitution. The letter also points out that Walters lacks the authority to require local school districts to play the video (or any other video) to their students.

"Requiring students to watch a prayer video violates students' religious freedom, including their Establishment Clause rights," the letter warns. "It is beyond dispute that, at a minimum, the Constitution guarantees that government may not coerce anyone to support or participate in religion or its exercise."

The coalition encourages parents and students to report any incidents where the video has been shown or used in schools.

"Public schools are not pulpits, and it is unconstitutional for school officials to subject students to religious propaganda," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "Ryan Walters' prayer video is a blatant attempt to abuse his office to impose his personal religious beliefs on Oklahoma students."

Freethought Today Cryptogram

AFDYPLGD YCCLODG SAYS NQHNUQ RYP GHUTQ

SAQLO NOHIUQDG JLSAHFS LDYWLPLPW

GFNQOPYSFOYU IQLPWG; SAQ YOSG YPM GRLQPRQG

CUHFOLGA JAQP LWPHOYPRQ YPM GFNQOGSLSLHP

YOQ SAFG HTQOSAOHJP. — EHO PLRBOU

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

Example:
 UOG RLQTM HYVBF DVP SLACN VWGY UOG KJEZ XVI.
 THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG.
 This month's clue: C => F. Answer is on page 25.

This puzzle is from *Freethinking Cryptograms* by FFRF member Brooks Rimes, available on Amazon.com for \$13.95.

IN THE NEWS

Oakland diocese to pay \$200M for abuse claims

The Diocese of Oakland, Calif., will pay up to \$200 million to settle hundreds of abuse claims filed against it.

The diocese said that it had filed a proposal in bankruptcy court that would create a survivors' trust "to provide compensation of between approximately \$160 million and \$198 million or more for approximately 345 claims."

Just over \$100 million will be provided by the diocese directly, while up to \$81 million would come from property in the diocesan real estate portfolio.

An additional \$14.25 million would be contributed by "Roman Catholic Welfare Corporation/Schools" (RCWC) along with "possible contributions of cash from other entities."

The diocese filed for bankruptcy in May of last year after hundreds of child sexual abuse lawsuits were brought amid a three-year legal window implemented by the California state government.

Texas OKs bible-infused curriculum in schools

Texas' education board voted Nov. 15 to allow bible-infused teachings in elementary schools under optional new curriculum that could test boundaries between religion and public classrooms.

The material adopted by the Texas State Board of Education, which is controlled by elected Republicans, passed in an 8-7 final vote over criticism that the lessons would proselytize young learners and alienate students of faiths other than Christianity.

FFRF and a coalition of groups will be urging all 1,200 school districts to reject the curriculum.

The vote allows schools in Texas, which has more than 5 million public school students, to begin using the material in kindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms as early as next year.

Schools are not required to use the material, but those that do would receive extra funding from the state.

Belgians demand removal from baptismal registry

More than 500 Belgians have demanded to be removed from the baptismal registry in reaction to controversial statements by Pope Francis during his



apostolic journey to Luxembourg and Belgium about abortion and the role of women in the Church.

After the pope's visit to both countries in late September, 524 people have signed a declaration published Oct. 16 in Brussels, according to local media.

In their open letter addressed to the apostolic nuncio in Brussels, Franco Coppola; Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels Luc Terlinden, the primate of the Catholic Church in Belgium; and the seven Catholic dioceses in the country, the signers condemned certain comments made by the pope and called for themselves to be removed from the baptismal registry.

Suit seeks recognition for secular celebrants

The Center for Inquiry (CFI) is going back to court to challenge the privileged status granted religious organizations and individuals under Texas marriage law. In a new lawsuit filed Oct. 28 in United States District Court, CFI is demanding legal recognition of marriage officiants who are trained and certified through its groundbreaking Secular Celebrant program.

Texas Family Code Section 2.202 limits the ability to legally solemnize marriages to "officiants associated with organized religion" and state or federal judges — thus denying nonreligious Texans the opportunity to have their unions formalized by a secular celebrant in accordance with their values.

3 states remove marriage definition amendments

California and Colorado voted to repeal amendments that defined marriage as between a man and a woman, while Hawaii is on track to repeal its traditional definition of marriage, though it has not yet been called.

The state constitutions of California, Colorado and Hawaii defined marriage as a union between one man and one woman, but the results of these measures on the 2024 election ballots are set to remove this traditional definition.

The removal of the longstanding language on marriage is largely symbolic since the U.S. Supreme Court already legalized same-sex marriage in all U.S. jurisdictions in its 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges decision. Nonetheless, in 2020, Nevada became the first state to repeal its constitutional provision defining marriage as between a man and a woman. California, Colorado and Hawaii joined the ranks this year, removing the definition.

Iraq to lower 'age of consent' for girls to 9

Iraq is poised to slash the legal age of consent from 18 to 9, allowing men to marry young children. The proposed legal change also deprives women of rights to divorce, child custody and inheritance.

Iraq's parliament, which is dominated by a coalition of conservative Shiite Muslim parties, is preparing to vote through an amendment that would overturn the

country's "personal status law."

Iraq already has high rates of child marriage. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), 28 percent of women in Iraq are married by 18. This is because of a loophole in the personal status law which allows religious leaders, instead of the courts, to officiate thousands of marriages each year — including those involving girls as young as 15, with permission from the father.

Ill. campaigns gave \$650K to churches in past 2 years

According to a Chicago Sun-Times analysis of Illinois State Board of Elections records, political candidates and campaign committees have routinely given money to churches and other religious charities — totaling about \$650,000 collectively this year and in 2023 in the form of donations, event sponsorships and other payments.

Roughly two-thirds of that total — about \$420,000 — went to schools, churches and other charitable endeavors and causes identifying as Catholic.

Archbishop of Canterbury resigns over lack of probe

The archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Justin Welby, resigned Nov. 12 as head of the Church of England after an independent report concluded he failed to properly investigate the widespread abuse of boys and young men starting decades ago at Christian summer camps and colleges.

As spiritual leader of 85 million Anglicans worldwide, he presided over the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II and the coronation of King Charles III. Welby, 68, failed to take sufficient action after complaints were lodged about "abhorrent" abuse by John Smyth, a senior British lawyer born in Canada, as far back as the 1970s.

The report said Smyth became "arguably, the most prolific serial abuser to be associated with the Church of England," operating in three countries where he inflicted physical, sexual and psychological attacks on as many as 130 victims. He died in 2018 at age 77 in Cape Town, South Africa.

"It is very clear that I must take personal and institutional responsibility for the long and retraumatizing period between 2013 and 2024," Welby said.

Louisiana

Continued from page 1

that there is not. First, Stone remains good law and is directly on point, and

this court is bound to follow it. Second, even putting Stone aside . . . plaintiffs have adequately alleged that HB 71 fails to comply with the Establishment Clause analysis laid out in Kennedy and 5th Circuit precedent."

The judge also recognized that HB

71 would lead to unconstitutional religious coercion of the children-plaintiffs in the case by imposing religious doctrine on them for nearly every hour of the school day, throughout their entire public school education. And, pointing to the testimony of plaintiffs' expert, Dr. Steven K. Green, the court found that there is no historical support for permanently displaying the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms and that doing so would be at odds with our Founders' understanding of the separation of church and state.

The court's opinion concludes: "Each of the plaintiffs' minor children will be forced 'in every practical sense,' through Louisiana's required attendance policy, to be a 'captive audience' and to participate in a religious exercise: reading and considering a specific version of the Ten Commandments, one posted in every single classroom,

for the entire school year, regardless of the age of the student or subject matter of the course. And, despite the differences among the plaintiffs' religious beliefs (be they Unitarian Universalist, Reform Jewish, Presbyterian, or atheist/agnostic), the common threads are (1) that the required posting of the Decalogue conflicts with specific parts of their faith, and (2) that one of those articles of faith, shared by nearly all plaintiff parents, is raising their children in accordance with their own beliefs and values. Considering the totality of the circumstances, the court finds that the act and its requirements are coercive and inconsistent with the history of First Amendment and public education."

The court further ruled that HB 71 also violates the plaintiffs' rights under the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment.

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FFRF VICTORIES

By Greg Fletcher

California

After hearing from FFRF, the Ceres Unified School District had the Whitmore Charter School of Arts and Technology perform the secular play “Peter Pan Junior” rather than a play that promotes Christianity.

A district parent reported that their child’s drama class at the school would be performing “The Best Christmas Pageant Ever,” which promotes the Christian nativity story as literal fact. In the book version of the play, the narrator refers to Mary and Joseph as “the real holy family,” and says: “That was the whole point of Jesus — that he didn’t come down on a cloud like something out of ‘Amazing Comics,’ but that he was born and lived . . . a real person.”

“Public school curricula should not include performances that advance religious messages, including the suggestion that religious stories are historically true,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the district.

The district reached out to Roman J. Muñoz, an attorney with the Lozano Smith law firm, who responded to FFRF’s letter. While Muñoz and the district disagreed with pieces of FFRF’s argument, they nonetheless complied, writing, “despite our disagreement with your depiction of ‘The Best Christmas Pageant Ever,’ the Whitmore Charter School of Arts and Technology has decided to perform “Peter Pan Junior.”

• • •

FFRF fought to protect the First Amendment rights of prisoners at the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility (RJD) in California.

A concerned spouse of an inmate at the facility reported that RJD was allowing a Christian prison ministry to forcibly segregate inmates based on whether the inmates adhered to the ministry’s approved brand of Christianity. The head of the Christian Prison Fellowship program, a pastor, was granted the authority to take over one of RJD’s housing pod units. Reportedly, in or around early July 2024, the pastor submitted paperwork to administrators to remove all non-Christian inmates from that pod. The warden and RJD’s administration appeared to allow the head of the program to forcibly remove all non-Christian inmates from the pod. The complainant further reported that many inmates of different religious beliefs and backgrounds who resided in the pod were “vehemently opposed to the takeover,” and “submitted signed petitions stating their protected constitutional rights” to the warden.

Furthermore, the pastor received a copy of the signed petitions and met with specific inmates who signed it. He informed these inmates that they were “undesirable” and were not “children of God” for opposing the Fellowship’s takeover of the unit. The pastor also pressured many of the LGBTQ-plus inmates residing in the pod to move out because the pastor and the prison fellowship did not fit the criteria of a “true Christian.” Due to the takeover of the pod, tensions at the facility have risen, heightening the threat of violence breaking out among inmates being overtly segregated against, and publicly ostracized based on religion.

“It is blatantly unconstitutional for RJD to segregate inmates along religious lines,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the California De-



partment of Corrections and Rehabilitation Director Ron Broomfield. “RJD’s warden and administration are allowing [the pastor] to force inmates currently housed in pod E25-C to leave that housing unit unless they agree to submit to the pastor’s and the Prison Fellowship’s particular Christian doctrine.”

Broomfield wrote back to address the complaint. “RJD management staff reviewed the concerns mentioned, specifically related to the Prison Fellowship Program on their Facility E,” he wrote. “Management met with stakeholders from the Prison Fellowship Program to provide the expectation that the incarcerated population will be afforded the opportunity to practice their respective religions on Facility E and will not be housed based on their religious affiliation.”

• • •

FFRF successfully convinced the Los Angeles Department of General Services to remove from the office a display that included a cross.

A community member contacted FFRF to report that the B&M Operations Manager for the city of Los Angeles prominently displayed an image of a Latin cross with the phrase “God Bless America” inside the Department of General Services.

“The Los Angeles Department of General Services serves a diverse population that consists of not only Christians, but also minority religious and nonreligious citizens,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the general manager. “Prominently displaying Christian messages and iconography in a government office needlessly alienates community members who are part of the 37 percent of Americans who are non-Christian.”

In response to FFRF’s letter, the Personnel Division of the Department of General Services investigated the matter. After a discussion with the supervisor, the cross was voluntarily removed.

Florida

The Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., will no longer allow outside representatives to preach to a district football team.

FFRF learned that Oak Ridge High School was permitting an outside representative of the Central Florida Fellowship of Christian Athletes to lead the football team in religious worship.

“Oak Ridge HS, and thus the district, has violated students’ First Amendment rights by allowing [an FCA representative] to evangelize students and inter-

twine the school’s football program with Christianity,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district.

The district’s general counsel, John C. Palmerini, informed FFRF that he had emailed the district guidance on the situation. In his response to FFRF, he included the email he sent referencing the practice of an outside representative leading students in prayer.

“To the extent the coaches of the Oak Ridge High football team allowed such practice, it needs to cease immediately as it is in violation of the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause,” Palmerini wrote.

Kansas

FFRF made sure to keep lunch menus in the Plainville USD 270 school system free from bible verses.

A school district parent reported that the monthly lunch menus for the schools occasionally contained bible verses and religious imagery. The November 2023 menu featured the quote, “1 Thessalonians 5:18 - Give thanks with a grateful heart,” and the December 2023 lunch menu included images of the biblical manger scene depicting the Christian story of the birth of Jesus Christ.

“In recognition of the district’s constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion and protect students’ First Amendment rights, we ask that the district ensure that its monthly lunch menus no longer include religious imagery or messages,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district in 2023.

Despite not initially hearing back, FFRF followed up with the district in October of this year, which prompted a response. “I personally visited with the food service director and have addressed the matter with her in great detail,” Superintendent Lisa Gehring wrote to FFRF. “All menus are now reviewed by the district office prior to them being distributed to assure this does not happen in the future.”

Nevada

FFRF recently worked with the Washoe County School District in Nevada to ensure that the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) is not entangled with a high school football team.

A concerned parent reported that Reno High School has intertwined the FCA club with the school’s football program. For instance, FFRF learned that the head football coach and a local youth pastor both spoke at a recent Reno High School FCA club meeting. Per the school

football program’s official website, FCA is listed as a part of what makes the program “Bigger than football,” along with the team’s core values and culture.

“To comply with the First Amendment and the Equal Access Act, the district must ensure that Reno High School ceases entangling FCA with the official football program, and all school employees, including coaching staff, must refrain from participating in FCA meetings in a nonsupervisory capacity,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district.

Sara Montalvo, the deputy chief general counsel for Washoe County School District, contacted FFRF after concerns had been raised. “The link to FCA has been removed from the Reno High School website (which was an old website),” Montalvo emailed. “Additionally, all relevant staff have been counseled and guidance has been issued to refrain from any unlawful entanglement between Reno High School football and FCA.”

North Carolina

FFRF was informed that the Macon County Public Health Center in Franklin, N.C., had displayed Christian crosses at the patient intake window. The state/church watchdog took action to ensure that citizens would not be exposed to religion on state property.

“Our Constitution’s Establishment Clause — which protects Americans’ religious freedom by ensuring the continued separation of religion and government — dictates that the government cannot in any way show favoritism toward religion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Director Kathy McGaha.

Soon after FFRF’s letter was sent, McGaha reached out to FFRF via email to report that the situation had been investigated, and the cross had been removed.

• • •

FFRF is pleased to state that the Iredell-Statesville Schools Board of Education in North Carolina will not be considering displaying the Ten Commandments in all school buildings.

A district parent reported that the district was considering a proposal to require all schools to display the Ten Commandments as part of a display of “Founding Documents.” FFRF learned that the posters would be placed in each school’s entrance foyer or library, and that a board member believed the religious display was “within the letter of the

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law” due to a recently passed North Carolina state law allowing Ten Commandments to be displayed in public schools under certain circumstances.

“Any student will view a Ten Commandments display in school as favoring one particular set of religious beliefs,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the district.

Thankfully, shortly after FFRF’s letter was sent out, FFRF learned that the board derailed the effort. A board member stated, “This is a legal question here to me. It’s not a question of religion,” and that displaying a poster with the Ten Commandments on it would violate federal law based on previous court cases.

Oklahoma

Two Oklahoma school districts will not allow outside religious presenters to hold school assemblies

The Ada City Schools system and the Byng Public Schools system have both learned their lesson about allowing outside religious groups to proselytize students.

FFRF was informed that religious assemblies were given to students at middle and high schools in the districts. Students were told about the power of prayer and finding hope in God. Additionally, the presenters wore T-shirts promoting their religiously themed book, “#butGod: The Power of Hope When Catastrophe Crashes In,” and copies were even given away to students. Students were also invited to attend a religious revival event at Trinity Baptist Church later in the day.

“It is unconstitutional to take away instructional time from students to expose them to Christian preachers,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the districts.

The districts both reached out to the law firm Rosenstein, Fist & Ringold for guidance, which, in turn, responded to FFRF’s letter. John E. Priddy wrote to FFRF: “The districts conducted an investigation into the issues raised in your previous letter. I have also discussed this matter with the superintendents.” Priddy wrote that both superintendents assured him that the administration understands their legal obligations to the Constitution moving forward.

Pennsylvania

A concerned patron of the Meadville Post Office informed FFRF that there was a crucifix hanging on the wall behind the main counter of the post office. The display violated post office regulations and the U.S. Constitution, and FFRF asserted that it must be removed at once.

“United States postal regulations prohibit the display of religious materials, other than stamp art, on postal property,” FFRF Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler wrote to Postmaster Keila Orr.

In FFRF’s email correspondence with Orr after the complaint letter was sent, Orr informed FFRF that the display had been removed, and all employees were aware of the post office regulations.



Texas

FFRF brought home a state/church victory from Mission, Texas, after the Sharyland ISD platformed Christian prayers at the 2023 commencement.

FFRF learned that in 2023, commencement ceremonies for Sharyland Advanced Academic Academy, Sharyland High School and Sharyland Pioneer High School each included student-led Christian invocations per their official programs for each ceremony. Further, all three schools failed to provide a disclaimer either during the ceremony or on the ceremony program stating that the views of student speakers were not endorsed or promoted by the district.

Finally, per the commencement program, Sharyland Advanced Academic Academy’s commencement ceremony took place at Palm Valley Church. However, both Sharyland High School and Sharyland Pioneer High School appear to have held their graduation ceremonies at the Bert Ogden Area, suggesting that Sharyland Advanced Academic Academy could have chosen to host its commencement ceremony at a secular venue as opposed to using the church.

“By scheduling prayers at their graduation ceremonies and holding the ceremony in a church, these three high schools, and thus the district, abridge that duty and needlessly exclude students who are a part of the 49 percent of Generation Z who are religiously unaffiliated,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district in September 2023.

FFRF stayed persistent and contacted the district again this past September, which finally prompted a response on Oct. 7. Ivan F. Perez, the district’s legal counsel, wrote back to inform FFRF that action had been taken.

“The district received your correspondence last school year and educated its staff with regard to the law,” Perez wrote, additionally stating that FFRF was welcome to reach back out if it believed that the district had once again pushed religion at graduation.

FFRF’s work ended the distribution of bibles in the Eustace ISD in Texas.

A concerned parent reported that in October 2023, the district allowed representatives of Gideons International to personally distribute bibles to students on school property during the school day. Additionally, students were reportedly taken out of their normal classes to attend an assembly on school property, during which the Gideons representatives proselytized students to convert them to Christianity. FFRF’s complainant “lost trust” in their child’s school after the school allowed for their

child’s education to be interrupted in order for outside adults to preach to and attempt to indoctrinate their child.

“The district should not create a policy whereby any private organization may take advantage of school resources to further its personal goals,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote.

John C. Hardy, of Hardy Cook & Hardy, represented the district in correspondence about the violation. Hardy spoke with the acting superintendent and learned that one of the district campuses had truly allowed Gideons’ representatives to hand out bibles. “Students were told to bring back the bibles if their parents did not want them to have them,” Hardy wrote. “This has been corrected and will not be a problem in the future. There should not be any more bible distributions on the school campus and no religious organizations will be given special access to students.”

FFRF ensured the removal of crosses from a main office in the Texarkana Independent School District.

A community member reported that when they visited the Texas Middle School 6th Grade Center, they witnessed a large Latin cross hung on the wall of the main office. The cross had biblical scripture written on it.

“Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district in 2023.

Despite the silence, FFRF persisted, writing to the district again in 2024. Finally, the district acknowledged its mistake, and the legal representative for the district, Ross Mitchell, wrote, “My client has confirmed that both Latin crosses have been removed from the office.”

Virginia

The Rockingham County School Board in Harrisonburg, Va., stopped imposing prayer at school board meetings after FFRF’s intervention.

FFRF learned from district parents that the board had previously held a moment of silence to begin meetings for more than a decade, but the newly elected board chair changed the practice to impose prayer on students, parents and community members. A January meeting began with the chairman explaining that he had unilaterally decided to resume beginning meetings with prayer because “we need God’s help.”

“It is coercive, insensitive and intimidating to force nonreligious citizens, such as our many complainants, to choose between making a public showing of their nonbelief by refusing to participate in the prayer or else display deference to-

ward a religious sentiment in which they do not believe, but which their school board members clearly do,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the district.

FFRF kept in close contact with the complainant, despite the school refusing to communicate with the state/church watchdog. The primary complainant vigilantly continued to email the board chair about the violation as it continued. While FFRF never heard back from the school board directly, it is thanks to the complainant that it was confirmed the board finally stopped opening meetings with prayer.

FFRF fought to keep students in the Clarke County Public Schools system safe from a program that would have allowed a church to proselytize students under the guise of offering mentorship.

A district parent informed FFRF that the district was considering a proposal to establish a “Community Mentorship Program” with Fellowship Bible Church.

The proposal was presented in August, when the pastor of the church claimed that the intent of the partnership was not to proselytize, despite the church’s website making it clear that this was not the case. The church’s mentoring partnership website included a list of “Resources to help you share Jesus,” and explained that “a mentor from Fellowship Bible Church is an ambassador of Christ in an increasingly difficult world.”

“This partnership with Fellowship Bible Church would put Clarke County Public Schools in the dubious position of entangling itself with a church, in violation of the Establishment Clause,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote.

The district sought guidance from the Timberlake Smith law firm, where G. Rodney Young II ensured that FFRF received a response. “The board took no action to approve the proposed program, and it has not been implemented in any division school,” Young wrote.

Washington

The Franklin County Sheriff’s Office in Pasco, Wash., took FFRF’s guidance to follow the Constitution by ensuring equal treatment of both religious and nonreligious inmates.

A former inmate of the Franklin County Corrections Center reported that policies and practice of the center incentivize religious practice and proselytize inmates. Inmates sent to segregated facilities were only allowed to have two books in their possession; however, religious inmates were allowed an extra third religious book. Through a book distribution program, an inmate was repeatedly given religiously themed books despite specific and repeated requests not to be given religious materials. FFRF’s complainant also reported that throughout the various housing units they resided in, every cell had a preexisting copy of the King James Bible.

“While it is commendable for the Franklin County Corrections Center to facilitate inmates freely exercising their chosen religious beliefs, it is inappropriate for it to organize, incentivize or reward worship,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote Sheriff Jim Raymond.

Raymond thanked FFRF for the letter and the guidance. “The religious writings (bibles, etc.) will become incorporated into the book count, each inmate receives at one time,” he wrote. He additionally reassured FFRF that no inmate was being forced to attend any religious services or receive religious reading material.

Save the date!

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Looking at the election and its impact

FFRF honorary board members speak out

FFRF asked some of its honorary board members to write a few words about the results of the November election and what it means going forward, especially from a nonreligious perspective. The following are their responses.

Susan Jacoby

To my fellow members at the Freedom From Religion Foundation:

I wish that I could, in good conscience, derive a ray of sunshine from the 2024 election, but I can't. Right-wing religion (not all religion) and the misogyny and rejection of science associated with right-wing religion were major issues throughout the campaign.

People did not vote for Donald Trump because of the "kitchen table issues" the media loves to tout. Food cost a lot more during the pandemic than it has this year. One thing I noticed constantly was that no one running against Trump and other Republicans dared to omit obligatory mentions of their faith. I think cultural issues, ranging from all the nonsensical attacks on trans people to book banning, were what really decided this election.

As secular people, our most important task during the next four years must be to put forward the importance of secular morality in our cultural and political life. We don't try to impose our secular convictions in political life (when was the last time you were invited to a secular version of a prayer breakfast?), but the primary aim of the Trumpists is to impose their beliefs on the rest of America. An examination of Trump's proposals for his cabinet tells you every-

thing you need to know.

We must see that our point of view — one which draws a bright line between church and state — is, as it always has been, the only way to maintain a decent government. We have to work much harder than we ever have at this vital task. We must realize the peril of the situation in which we find ourselves.

Susan Jacoby is an author of numerous books, including "Strange Gods: A Secular History of Conversion" (2016) and "Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism" (2004).

Robin Morgan

What does the election mean for us as nonreligious Americans? Draconic changes to our legal and social systems, already well entrenched with the attacks

on women's reproductive human rights; wide book banning; detentions on faked charges, growing to prison sentences; "voluntary" conversions widely televised (they have the media, remember) combined with "Deity Deniers" being (fill in the blanks:) ostracized, fired, harassed, arrested, imprisoned, killed. A drastic turn to the right on all issues, social, moral, political. A retrenchment and ultimately erasure (again) of feminism's gains and of women's rights as an organized movement (although small underground cells will struggle to stay afloat), and the rise of a new worldwide "Age of Manhood."

I realize my comments sound like science fiction, but everything feels very dark right now. The only scintilla glint of ironic silver I can spy would reside with hubris as my one hope: an overreaching arrogance among the oligarchical male fascists now in charge of our country, turning their egos against each other: Musk vs. Trump, Murdoch vs. Bezos, etc. Hubris, a virus common among hu-

mans, is usually pretty reliable. It usually ends in war.

Robin Morgan is a poet, writer, activist, journalist, lecturer and former child actor. She has received numerous awards for her activism on women's rights.

Robert Sapolsky

I used to do field work, studying baboons in a national park in East Africa. One day, I was chatting with a fellow zoologist who had just had a close call with

a particularly poisonous snake. Naturally, this led to a discussion about all the truly scary snakes in the vicinity. "You know," he mused, "If I'm going to get killed by some sort of organism here, I hope at least that it's a mammal. That would just be more dignified." I agreed.

Now Trump is back for four more years, something unimaginable when Jan. 6 should have logically consigned him to ignominy and jail. Even though he is slothful by nature and has been made cognitively doddering by time, his reach will still be far and wide with his appointments. And we now must muster the energy and ingenuity to fuel a resistance.

Amid this, I am having a deeply irrational thought which feels, nonetheless, galling. Here is a faux, posturing bible salesman, someone who has soiled so many of the Ten Commandments that evangelicals should have consigned him to hell rather than proclaimed him a messiah, someone who is disinterested in the traditional debate as to whether human decency comes from humans or is gifted to us by a deity — because he is contemptuous of human decency. Somehow it seems preferable, more dignified, if the person who will be laying siege to our values at least believed in some of his intolerant shit.

Robert Sapolsky is an academic, neuroscientist and primatologist. He is the John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn Professor at Stanford University, and is a professor of biology, neurology and neurosurgery.

Edward Sorel

In the days and weeks that followed Trump's election triumph, every pundit on cable news, and every journalist with an op-ed page column, poured forth

their different explanations of why Kamala Harris lost. Their reasons varied wildly, but not one of them suggested that religion played a major role in that outcome.

I believe it did. I believe that religious Christians and Jews voted for Trump in greater numbers than before. Zionist Jews (and even a few secular ones) were so alarmed by Biden's threat to cut off armaments to Israel unless Netanyahu eased bombing civilians in Gaza, that many Jews voted for Trump.

The Catholic Church in 1933 was so outraged by the language used in books and movies, that they formed the National Legion of Decency to decree which were to be avoided. But, in 2024, Catholic priests implored their flock to vote for Trump, a twice-divorced womanizer who uses profanity to flaunt his masculinity. The Church has chosen to overlook Trump's shortcomings because of the godly work he has done in outlawing abortion.

H.L. Mencken wrote something that seems to fit this moment: "Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard."

Edward Sorel is an illustrator, caricaturist, cartoonist, graphic designer and author. His work is known for its left-liberal social commentary, its criticism of right-wing politics and organized religion.

'Nones' voted for Harris over Trump by nearly 3-1

A shrinking demographic of white evangelical Christians elevated Donald Trump to power even as a growing demographic of atheists and the nonreligious rejected his Christian nationalist agenda.

White evangelical Christians were key to Trump's victory, just as they were in 2016, with the religiously unaffiliated overwhelmingly supporting Kamala Harris. According to NBC News, 82 percent of white evangelicals, who made up only 22 percent of the electorate, voted for Trump. Four years ago, white evangelicals represented 28 percent of voters, showing that this voting bloc is on the downswing. Most of the 78 percent of the public who aren't white evangelicals voted for Kamala Harris.

The "Nones" (religiously unaffiliated), representing 24 percent of voters, broke for Harris over Trump 71 percent to 26 percent. While atheists and the religiously unaffiliated are an influential, growing demographic, their numbers and turnout ultimately fell short of swinging the election outcome away from Trump and his Christian nationalist agenda. In 2020, 65 percent of nonreligious voters voted for Joe Biden over Trump and represented just 22 percent of voters.

One surprise this year was the movement of Latino Catholics and Catholics in general toward Trump, in part possibly due to the rise of Catholic Christian nationalism. In 2020, the Catholic electorate was evenly split, with 50 percent backing Trump and 49 percent favoring Biden, a faithful Catholic. This year, according to AP's VoteCast, a larger percentage of Catholics, 58 percent, supported Trump, while 40 percent backed Harris.

According to Fox exit polling, Trump won Catholics in North Carolina by 17 points, Wisconsin by 16 points and Pennsylvania by 14 points. This analysis put the None vote as the most-anti-Trump, with 69 percent going for Harris. The NBC News poll showed Jews at 78 percent for Harris as the largest anti-Trump bloc, compared to 71 percent of unaffiliated. However, nearly three in 10 adults today identify as having no religious affiliation, making the Nones a far more significant voting bloc compared to adult Jews at about 2.4 percent.

The Fox poll also found that those who never attend religious service favored Harris 61-36 while those who attend once a week or more favored Trump

64-34. Trump also led with all others who attend religious services.

Harris received 46 percent of the vote in heavily Muslim Hamtramck, Mich., a significant decrease from Biden's 85 percent four years ago due to a complex variety of domestic and foreign-policy reasons. In comparison, Trump got almost 43 percent, according to results provided to the Free Press by City Clerk Rana Faraj.

"These exit polls show what FFRF has been saying for nearly two decades — that nonreligious Americans, the largest single U.S. segment by religious identification, should be positioned to cancel out the white Christian evangelical/nationalist vote in favor of secular values," points out Annie Laurie

Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "Christian adherence has dropped precipitately, which is why the Christian nationalist movement is fighting so desperately to take over."

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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.

7 states vote to protect abortion rights

On Nov. 5, seven states succeeded in enshrining the right to abortion and reproductive choice in their state constitutions. These seven states joined the previous seven-out-of-seven ballot measures shielding abortion rights that prevailed after the fall of *Roe v. Wade*. A full 14 states have now successfully taken action against attacks on abortion rights through ballot initiatives, showing the overwhelming support for abortion rights.

However, three state abortion rights referenda did fall short. While over 57 percent of Floridians voted yes on Amendment 4, the constitutional amendment failed to reach the 60 percent threshold necessary. Amendment 4 would have enshrined abortion rights in the state Constitution, repealing the draconian six-week abortion ban Florida enacted in May. That provision effectively eliminated abortion care in the state because most women do not know they are pregnant before six weeks. This was a serious blow to the entire South, because until May, Florida had been an abortion rights beacon relied on by individuals in nearby states with abortion bans. Florida providers will still face penalties of up to five years in prison and fines of up to \$5,000 for violating the ban.

Florida activists must still be proud that an unmistakable majority of Florida's voters supported Amendment 4, and that Amendment 4 got 1 million more votes than Gov. Ron DeSantis did in 2022. DeSantis funneled millions in taxpayer dollars to spread misinformation. DeSantis and the Heritage Foundation (yes, the same group that gave us Project 2025) teamed up to add misleading language to the ballot measure. DeSantis also ordered a Health Department lawyer to send cease-and-desist letters to television stations airing ads supporting Amendment 4.

Nebraska and South Dakota failed to pass their ballot measures, too. In Nebraska's case, competing measures on abortion confused voters. The initiative to enshrine in Nebraska's Constitution the state's current abortion ban after 12 weeks of pregnancy prevailed with 55 percent of the vote. Tragically, in South Dakota, 58 percent of South Dakotans, where abortion is completely banned, voted down a measure that would have barred restrictions on abortion during the first trimester.

Here is a short recap of the good news in seven states:

Arizona

Prop 139 enshrines the "fundamental right" to abortion care in the state Constitution until viability and prevents



the state from penalizing anyone who assists a pregnant person in getting an abortion. Effectively it repeals Arizona's current abortion law. After the state Supreme Court created outrage this year by approving a draconian, pre-statehood abortion ban dating to 1864, the legislature repealed the statute, but abortions were still barred after 15 weeks.

An overwhelming 61 percent of Arizona voters, or more than 1.9 million, voted yes!

Colorado

Amendment 79 places abortion rights in the state Constitution and prohibits the state or local governments from denying or impeding the right to an abortion. Colorado is one of the few states that does not restrict abortion based on gestational age, but, importantly, the amendment will also allow the use of public funds to cover abortion for Medicaid recipients.

With an estimated 75 percent of votes in, 62 percent of Colorado voters, or more than 1.9 million, voted yes on Amendment 79, far surpassing the 55 percent needed to pass.

Maryland

Question 1 amended Maryland's state Constitution to ensure a "fundamental right" to reproductive freedom, including the right to abortion access and birth control. It will also protect abortion patients and providers from any criminal, civil and administrative penalties relating to abortion bans or restrictions in other states. Maryland is one of the few states that does not restrict abortion based on gestational age. But Question 1 will protect residents from future attacks on abortion rights. An overwhelm-

ing majority of Maryland voters, 75.5 percent, voted yes on Question 1.

Missouri

Amendment 3 undoes Missouri's extremist abortion ban triggered after the fall of *Roe v. Wade* by preserving abortion rights in the state Constitution. The abortion ban has no exceptions for rape and incest and only includes a vague exception for life endangerment. An abortion provider can face up to 15 years in prison, with a minimum sentence of five years, if found guilty of performing an illegal abortion in Missouri. After the fall of *Roe*, Missouri was the first state to make nearly all abortions illegal. Now Missouri is the first state to overturn a near-total abortion ban by the vote of the people.

Amendment 3 establishes a "fundamental right" to make decisions about reproductive health care, including abortion and contraceptives. When the amendment goes into effect in 30 days, it will overturn the state's draconian abortion ban by protecting abortion rights up to the point of fetal viability. It will also regulate restrictions by ensuring a pregnant person's life and health are prioritized after fetal viability. Fifty-one percent of Missourians, or 1.5 million, voted yes on Amendment 3.

Montana

Constitutional Initiative 128 prohibits the government from intruding on personal decisions about pregnancy, including abortion, by enshrining abortion rights in the state Constitution. CI-128 will "expressly provide a right to make and carry out decisions about one's own pregnancy, including the right to abortion." CI-128 will bar the government from denying abortion access before fetal viability and safeguard abortion later in pregnancy when it is

"medically indicated" to protect a pregnant person's health. It will also protect patients, health care providers and anyone assisting in obtaining an abortion from penalty. Although abortion is currently legal in Montana until viability, this amendment ensures Montana will remain an abortion safe haven in the largely conservative and rural region between Minnesota and the Pacific Northwest. Among Montana voters, 57 percent, or more than 320,000 voters, said yes.

Nevada

Question 6 protects Nevada residents from future attacks on abortion and birth control rights. While abortion is legal in Nevada until 24 weeks, Question 6 will amend the state Constitution to permanently protect the right to abortion until viability or when needed to safeguard the health of the pregnant person. Voters will need to approve Question 6 for a second time in 2026 before the state Constitution is formally amended. With an estimated 85 percent of votes in, 63 percent of Nevadans voted yes on Question 6, with 783,675 votes.

New York

Proposal 1, dubbed the "Equal Rights Amendment," will explicitly in the state Constitution prohibit government discrimination based on a person's ethnicity, national origin, age, disability and sex, including sexual orientation, pregnancy and abortion. Alongside abortion rights, the constitutional amendment includes expansive language pledging protections for the LGBTQ-plus community.

Prop 1 will implement constitutional protections for "pregnancy outcomes" — solidifying reproductive freedom. The state will not be able to curtail reproductive autonomy or access to reproductive health care and is barred from implementing an abortion ban or halting state funding for abortion via Medicaid. Although abortion is currently legal in New York until fetal viability, Prop 1 will protect abortion rights from future political attacks. About 61 percent of New York voters, or more than 4.4 million, voted yes on Prop 1.

...

In other referenda news, West Virginia unfortunately approved a constitutional amendment that will ban patients from medically assisted suicide. The amendment was only narrowly approved, by about 6,000 votes. In better news, 64 percent of Kentucky voters rejected a constitutional amendment that would have allowed state funding for nonpublic schools, effectively rejecting school choice.

Donate to FFRF through CFC

If you are a federal employee, you may make donations to FFRF through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) until Jan. 15, 2025. If you wish to help FFRF through this campaign, the CFC code to designate your contribution to FFRF is 32519. Federal employees can donate through an Online Giving System, a Paper Pledge Form, Text-to-Donate, or on the CFC Giving App. Visit givecfc.org/donors/how-to-give.

It is recommended that all CFC donors check the box to include their name, mailing address and

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Photo by Chris Line

How secular candidates fared in the 2024 election

Victory (or not up for re-election) █ Loss █ Not called yet █

Members of the Congressional Freethought Caucus

D-CA (District 2)	Rep. Jared Huffman	2013 - Current	Humanist
D-CA (District 14)	Rep. Eric Swalwell	2013 - Current	Protestant
D-CA (District 15)	Rep. Kevin Mullin	2023 - Current	Catholic
D-CA (District 19)	Rep. Zoe Lofgren	1995 - Current	Lutheran
D-CA (District 26)	Rep. Julia Brownley	2013 - Current	Episcopalian
D-CA (District 34)	Rep. Jimmy Gomez	2017 - Current	Catholic
D-CA (District 42)	Rep. Robert Garcia	2023 - Current	Catholic
D-FL (District 10)	Rep. Maxwell Frost	2023 - Current	Baptist
D-GA (District 4)	Rep. Hank Johnson	2007 - Current	Buddhist
D-IL (District 6)	Rep. Sean Casten	2019 - Current	N/A
D-IL (District 9)	Rep. Jan Schakowsky	1999 - Current	Jewish
D-MD (District 8)	Rep. Jamie Raskin	2017 - Current	Jewish & humanist
D-MI (District 12)	Rep. Rashida Tlaib	2019 - Current	Muslim
D-PA (District 7)	Rep. Susan Wild	2019 - Current	Jewish
D-TN (District 9)	Rep. Steve Cohen	2007 - Current	Jewish
D-TX (District 7)	Rep. Lizzie Fletcher	2019 - Current	Methodist
D-TX (District 35)	Rep. Greg Casar	2023 - Current	Catholic
D-VA (District 8)	Rep. Don Beyer	2015 - Current	Episcopalian
D-VA (At large)	Rep. Becca Balint	2023 - Current	Jewish
D-WA (District 7)	Rep. Pramila Jayapal	2017 - Current	N/A
D-WI (District 2)	Rep. Mark Pocan	2013 - Current	N/A
D-D.C.	Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton	1991 - Current	N/A

U.S House

D-IN (District 8)	Erik Hurt	Challenger	Atheist
D-LA (District 1)	Mel Manuel	Challenger	Apatheist
D-LA (District 3)	Priscilla Gonzalez	Challenger	Agnostic
D-OH (District 4)	Tamie Wilson	Challenger	None
D-OH (District 12)	Jerrad Christian	Challenger	Agnostic
D-TX (District 36)	Dayna Steele	Challenger	Spiritual atheist
D-WI (District 7)	Kyle Kilbourn	Challenger	Nonreligious

State Legislatures

AZ Senate District 7	Haley Creighton	Challenger	Atheist & secular humanist
AZ Senate District 24	Analise Ortiz	Challenger	Agnostic
AR House District 50	Robin McCray	Challenger	Spiritual/Secular/Agnostic
AR House District 69	Kwami Abdul-Bey	Challenger	Unitarian Universalist/Agnostic
CA House District 24	Rep. Alex Lee	2022 - Current	Agnostic
CA House District 72	Dom Jones	Challenger	Humanist
CO House District 11	Rep. Karen McCormick	2021 - Current	Spiritual, not religious
CO House District 16	Rep. Stephanie Vigil	2023 - Current	Secular humanist, atheist
House District 27	Rep. Brianna Titone	2019 - Current	Spiritual but not religious
CO House District 35	Rep. Lorena Garcia	2023 - Current	Nonreligious
CO House District 51	Sarah McKeen	Challenger	Nonreligious
CO House District 64	Rep. Ryan Armagost	2023 - Current	Agnostic
CO Senate District 14	Rep. Cathy Kipp	Challenger	None
CO Senate District 18	Rep. Judy Amabile	Challenger	Recovering Catholic & atheist

CT House District 88	Rep. Joshua Elliott	2017 - Current	Agnostic atheist
CT House District 96	Rep. Rol and J. Lemar	2017 - Current	Agnostic & humanist
DE House District 21	Frank Burns	Challenger	Humanist
DE House District 27	Rep. Eric Morrison	2020 - Current	Atheist & humanist
FL House District 19	Adam Morley	Challenger	Agnostic
FL House District 38	Sarah Henry	Challenger	Nonreligious
FL House District 42	Rep. Anna Eskamani	2018 - Current	Secular
FL House District 65	Ashley Brundage	Challenger	Non-practicing Jewish
FL House District 119	Marcos Reyes	Challenger	Non-practicing Catholic
FL House District 120	Michael "Erika Rose" Travis	Challenger	Other
FL Senate District 11	Marilyn Holleran	Challenger	Against organized religion
FL Senate District 17	Sen. Carlos Guillermo Smith	Challenger	Agnostic
FL Senate District 19	Vance Ahrens	Challenger	Atheist
FL Senate District 21	Doris Carroll	Challenger	Humanist
FL Senate District 23	Ben Braver	Challenger	Jewish & secular
GA House District 131	Heather Rose White	Challenger	Agnostic
GA Senate District 56	JD Jordan	Challenger	Atheist
HI House District 45	Desiré De Soto	Challenger	Spiritual, not religious
HI Senate District 9	Sen. Stanley Chang	2016 - Current	None
IL House District 47	Jackie Williamson	Challenger	Agnostic
IL House District 52	Maria Peterson	Challenger	Nonreligious
IL House District 70	Randi Olson	Challenger	Agnostic
IN House District 50	Joe Swisher	Challenger	Spiritual, not religious
IA Senate District 16	Sen. Claire Celsi	2023 - Current	Non-practicing Catholic
IA House District 9	Christian "He-Man" Schlaerth	Challenger	Atheist
IA House District 89	Rep. Elinor Levin	2023 - Current	Culturally Jewish
IA House District 94	Tracy Jones	Challenger	Agnostic
KS House District 29	Rep. Heather Meyer	2021 - Current	Nonreligious
KS House District 111	Joseph Lantz IV	Challenger	Atheist
KS Senate District 16	Sasha Islam	Challenger	Spiritual & agnostic
ME Senate District 12	Sen. Anne Beebe-Center	2022 - Current	Unitarian Universalist
MD House District 17	Rep. Julie Palakovich Carr	2019 - Current	Nonreligious
MD House District 20	Rep. David Moon	2015 - Current	Nonreligious
MA House Bristol 2	Rep. Jim Hawkins	2018 - Current	Religiously unaffiliated
MA House Essex 18	Rep. Tram Nguyen	2019 - Current	Spiritual but not religious
MA Senate Suffolk Dist.	Sen. William Brownsberger	2012 - Current	Nontheist
MI House District 34	John E. Dahlgren	Challenger	Unitarian Universalist, atheist
MI House District 38	Rep. Joey Andrews	Challenger	Religiously unaffiliated
MI House District 49	Andy Wood	Challenger	Atheist
MI Senate District 15	Sen. Jeff Irwin	2019 - Current	Nonbeliever
MN House District 43B	Rep. Mike Freiberg	2013 - Current	Agnostic
MN House District 66B	Rep. Athena Hollins	2021 - Current	Agnostic
MN Senate District 8	Sen. Jen McEwen	2021 - Current	Secular Humanist
MT House District 23	Sandor Hopkins	Challenger	Religiously unaffiliated
MT House District 65	Brian Close	Challenger	Atheist & materialist
MT House District 96	Rep. Bob Carter	2023 - Current	Atheist
MT Senate District 27	Kathleen Gilluly	Challenger	Atheist
MT Senate District 45	Devin Jackson	Challenger	Atheist
NE Senate District 8	Sen. Megan Hunt	2019 - Current	Atheist

Resistance

Continued from page 1

his first acts as president will be to set up a task force to root out "anti-Christian bias" and protect "pro-God context and content."

- **"We don't worship government, we worship God."** Trump's remarks, previously as president and then as candidate, have repeatedly undermined the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

- **Ten Commandments and bibles in public schools.** Trump has endorsed posting the Ten Commandments in public schools, something FFRF is in court fighting in Louisiana. FFRF is also suing with a coalition in Oklahoma over Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters' bid to spend \$6 million buying Trump bibles to distribute to all classrooms there.

- **A universal voucher system.** As a candidate Trump has not only promised to eliminate the Department of Education, but has also proposed up to \$10,000 a year per child in taxpayer money on private education or homeschooling. He also supports Education Savings Accounts, or ESAs, allowing families to divert a designated amount of per-student spending to pay for religious schooling or homeschooling. "If Trump wins, count on continued culture wars, school vouchers and a fixation on

ending the federal Department of Education," warns education scholar Josh Cowen, who recently addressed FFRF's national convention.

- **Trump may target nonbelievers.** He announced last year: "Together, we're warriors in a righteous crusade to stop the arsonists, the atheists, globalists and the Marxists — and that's what they are — and we will restore our republic as one nation under God with liberty and justice for all." We already know he has promised to restore bans on Muslims traveling here, which FFRF opposed in amicus briefs after he imposed this unconstitutional religious test during his first presidency.

- **Attacking the Johnson Amendment.** Trump will resume his promulgation of "alternative facts" against the Johnson Amendment, which bars tax-exempt donations from being used for partisan electioneering by churches and other nonprofits. We expect him to continue signing executive orders, such as his prior "Religious Liberty Executive Order" and many other mandates intended to dismantle the Establishment Clause's prohibitions on uniting religion and government, particularly mandates allowing religious exemptions against discrimination.

- **Christian nationalist cabinet and judicial appointments.** FFRF's legislative team is prepared to vet and oppose Trump's expected cabinet appointments of "foxes" to guard the chicken coop as well as extremist judicial appointments, as he did in his past presidency.

- **Abolishing abortion.** Trump's pre-

varications on abortion notwithstanding, FFRF is expecting his Christian nationalist handlers to push hard to abolish abortion nationally. As this is written, we await word on whether Democrats will lose the House and if Trump will control Congress, where his supporters seek to ban medication abortion nationally and enforce the zombie Comstock Act of 1873 to close abortion clinics. We know one of Trump's opening acts, as it was in his first presidency, will be to reimpose the Gag Rule barring foreign entities receiving U.S. funds from using their own funds to provide information on abortion care.

- **Erasing trans individuals.** Trump campaigned on promises on day one to "revoke" existing policies supporting health care for transgender people, including signing an executive order instructing federal agencies to stop all programs promoting the concept of sex and gender transition at any age. He would terminate federal funding for any hospitals and medical personnel providing health care to transgender youth. He also vowed to pass a bill establishing that the United States only recognizes "male and female" as assigned at birth, thereby erasing transgender and nonbinary people out of existence. He told believers at the Faith & Freedom 2024 convention: "I will take historic action to defeat the poison of left-wing gender ideology and restore the timeless truth that God created two genders, male and female."

Extremist playbooks. Among the almost 300 executive orders the America

First Policy Institute has already drafted for Trump's signature are orders defunding Planned Parenthood, requiring mandatory ultrasounds before abortions — including medication abortions, and establishing legally that there are only two genders.

If the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 prevails, we already know its proposals would unite church and state by:

- Infusing "the pursuit of Blessedness" into every level of government. (Page 13)
- Dismantling nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ Americans. (Pages 333, 375 and 548)
- Mandating a "biblically based" definition of marriage and family. (Pages 477–482)
- Dismantling civil rights protections in the name of "religious liberty," providing a license to discriminate. (Page 494)
- Allowing religious employers to discriminate against employees based on beliefs. (Page 586)
- Turning the Department of Health and Human Services into the "Department of Life." (Page 489)
- Gutting overtime laws while establishing Sunday as "the Sabbath" and forcing employers to pay overtime on Sunday. Because "God ordained the Sabbath as a day of rest." (Page 589)

FFRF, with 40,000 paid members, is well positioned to lead in defending our First Amendment's first freedom on your behalf.

NE Senate District 39	Allison Heimes	Challenger	Agnostic	PA House District 106	Anju Singh	Challenger	Does not practice any religion
NV House District 15	Rep. Howard Watts III	2018 - Current	Agnostic	PA House District 120	Fern Leard	Challenger	Agnostic
NV House District 27	Heather Goulding	Challenger	Humanist	PA House District 176	Hope Christman	Challenger	Spiritual
NV Senate District 3	Sen. Rochelle Nguyen	2022 - Current	Not religious	PA House District 200	Rep. Chris Rabb	2016 - Current	Nonreligious
NH House Belknap 8	Don House	Challenger	Spiritual humanist	SC House District 33	Clemson Turregano	Challenger	Unitarian Universalist
NH House Grafton 5	Rachael T. Booth	Challenger	Atheist	SC House District 38	J.R. Taylor	Challenger	Nonreligious
NH House Grafton 18	Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban	Challenger	No religious affiliation	SC House District 114	Adrienne Lett	Challenger	Nonreligious
NH House Hillsborough 6	Rep. Carry Spier	2022 - Current	Culturally Jewish	TN House District 16	Lauren Carver	Challenger	No religious affiliation
NH House Hillsborough 11	Rep. Will Darby	2022 - Current	Agnostic	TN House District 44	Brian Robertson	Challenger	Humanist a skeptic & agnostic
NH House Hillsborough 12	Rep. Wendy Thomas	2022 - Current	Spiritual but not religious	TN Senate District 12	Curtis Kelly	Challenger	Atheist
NH House Hillsborough 12	Marc Nozell	Challenger	Secular	TX House District 32	Cathy McAuliffe	Challenger	No religious affiliation
NH House Hillsborough 29	Melanie Renfrew-Hebert	Challenger	Agnostic	TX House District 45	Rep. Erin Zwiener	2019 - Current	Agnostic
NH House Hillsborough 35	Rep. Kat McGhee	2022 - Current	Does not practice any religion	TX House District 94	Kevin Geary	Challenger	Humanist
NH House Hillsborough 40	Erin Kerwin	Challenger	Atheist	TX House District 127	John Lehr	Challenger	Atheist
NH House Hillsborough 41	Lily M. Foss	Challenger	Agnostic Unitarian Universalist	TX House District 128	Chuck Crews	Challenger	Atheist
NH House Hillsborough 42	Andrew Stokinger	Challenger	Atheist	TX House District 135	Rep. Jon Rosenthal	2019 - Current	Agnostic
NH House Merrimack 3	Scott Burns	Challenger	Religiously unaffiliated	UT House District 18	Steve Hartwick	Challenger	Religious skeptic
NH House Rockingham 10	Rep. Ellen Read	2016 - Current	Agnostic	UT House District 27	Dawn Stevenson	Challenger	Agnostic
NH House Rockingham 13	Jamie Carreau	Challenger	Non-religious	UT House District 37	Rep. Ashlee Matthews	2021 - Current	Agnostic
NH House Rockingham 17	David Martsof	Challenger	Not affiliated with a religion	UT House District 44	Greg Green	Challenger	Atheist
NH House Rockingham 18	Michael Boucher	Challenger	Atheist	UT House District 45	Sara Cimmers	Challenger	Spiritual but not religious
NH House Strafford 4	Rep. Heath Howard	2022 - Current	Atheist	UT Senate District 13	Sen. Nate Blouin	2023 - Current	No religious affiliation
NH House Strafford 9	Rep. Brandon Phinney	2022 - Current	Atheist	VT House Addison-1	Rep. Robin Scheu	2017 - Current	Humanist
NJ Senate District 16	Sen. Andrew Zwicker	2022 - Current	Atheist	VT House Bennington-4	Rep. Kathleen James	2019 - Current	Spiritual but not religious
NM House District 37	Rep. Joanne Ferrary	2017 - Current	Not religious	VT House Ben-Rutland	Rep. Mike Rice	2023 - Current	No religious affiliation
NM Senate District 37	Sen. William Peter Soules	2013 - Current	Spiritual but not religious	VT House Chittenden-14	Rep. Barbara Rachelson	2013 - Current	Nonreligious Jew
NM Senate District 38	Sen. Carrie Hamblen	2021 - Current	Not religious	VT House Chittenden-21	Rep. Daisy Berbeco	2023 - Current	Agnostic & humanist
NY House District 74	Rep. Harvey Epstein	2018 - Current	Agnostic	VT House Grand Isle-Chitt	Rep. Josie Leavitt	2023 - Current	No religious affiliation
NY Senate District 2	Craig Herskowitz	Challenger	Atheist	VT House Orange-2	Rep. Monique Priestley	2023 - Current	Atheist & a humanist
NY Senate District 25	Sen. Jabari Brisport	2021 - Current	Secular Buddhist	VT House Wash.-Addison	Rep. Larry Satcowitz	2021 - Current	Secular
NC House District 19	Jill Brown	Challenger	Atheist	VT Senate Windsor District	Rep. Rebecca White	2023 - Current	Atheist
NC House District 26	Matthew Wood	Challenger	Humanist	WA House District 6-2	Michaela Kelso	Challenger	Atheist
NC House District 75	Caroline Warren	Challenger	Atheist	WA House District 18-1	Deken Letinich	Challenger	Does not practice any religion
NC House District 79	Mary Beedle	Challenger	Agnostic	WA House District 18-2	John Zingale	Challenger	Not affiliated with a religion
NC House District 115	Rep. Lindsey Prather	2023 - Current	Agnostic	WA House District 21-1	Rep. Strom Peterson	2015 - Current	Agnostic
NC Senate District 49	Sen. Julie Mayfield	2021 - Current	Agnostic spiritual	WA House District 22-1	Rep. Beth Doglio	2023 - Current	Agnostic
ND Senate District 10	Sen. Ryan Braunberger	2022 - Current	Atheist	WA Senate District 25	Kenneth King	Challenger	Scientific-driven pantheist
ND House District 10	Alexandra Deufel	Challenger	Humanist	WA Senate District 39	John Snow	Challenger	Pagan
OH House District 80	Melissa Vandyke	Challenger	Pagan	WI House District 19	Rep. Ryan Clancy	2023 - Current	Atheist & secular humanist
OH House District 84	Arienne Childrey	Challenger	Secular Humanist & atheist	WI House District 28	Danielle Johnson	Challenger	Agnostic atheist
OK House District 95	Tegan Malone	Challenger	Spiritual humanist	WI House District 73	Angela Stroud	Challenger	Unitarian Universalist
OR House District 5	Rep. Pam Marsh	2017 - Current	Religiously unaffiliated	WI House District 76	Rep. Francesca Hong	2021 - Current	Humanist
OR House District 14	Rep. Julie Fahey	2017 - Current	Religiously unaffiliated	WI House District 80	Rep. Mike Bare	2023 - Current	Not religious
OR House District 26	Rep. Courtney Neron	2019 - Current	Unitarian Universalist	WI Senate District 14	Sarah Keyeski	Challenger	Agnostic
OR House District 31	Jordan Gutierrez	Challenger	Nonreligious	WI Senate District 26	Sen. Kelda Roys	2021 - Current	Atheist & Secular Humanist
OR House District 35	Rep. Farrah Chaichi	2023 - Current	Atheist	WY House District 41	Jen Solis	Challenger	Secular humanist
OR House District 49	Rep. Zach Hudson	2021 - Current	Atheist	WY House District 46	Chris Lowry	Challenger	Atheist
PA House District 5	Heather Hanna	Challenger	Religiously unaffiliated	WY Senate District 10	"Mike Selmer, Jr."	Challenger	Agnostic
PA House District 20	Rep. Emily Kinkead	2020 - Current	Culturally Christian				
PA House District 81	Sean Steeg	Challenger	No religious affiliation				
PA House District 87	John Flood	Challenger	Agnostic				

Total on the ballots:	38 State Senate candidates	21 State Senate WINNERS
	126 State House candidates	56 State House WINNERS

Special thanks to the Center for Freethought Equality and "The Friendly Atheist" Hemant Mehta.

Did religion matter in the 2024 election?

This article first appeared on Religion News Service site on Nov. 7 and is reprinted with permission.

By Mark Silk

Last April, Donald Trump said that any Jew who votes for a Democrat or Joe Biden "should have their head examined."

Word is, the Jews didn't take the warning to heart. According to exit polls, 78 percent of them voted for Kamala Harris, up 10 percentage points from their vote for Biden in 2020. How come they bucked the national trend toward Trump?

Mark Silk

Maybe it was because they appreciated Biden's support for Israel after what happened on Oct. 7 a year ago and appreciated Harris' support for that support. Or, maybe concern for the state of democracy, pre-eminent among Harris voters, weighed particularly heavily with them.

Or, maybe because twice as many Jews have college degrees as other Americans, and most Americans with college degrees voted for Harris. Maybe because Harris' husband is Jewish, or because they've been reading about the rise of

Christian nationalism. It may be a combination of some or all of the above.

The only other religious grouping to buck the trend was the Nones — atheists, agnostics and nothing-in-particulars — who went from 65 percent for Biden to 71 percent for Harris. They're closer to the average on the college-degree front, and therefore the perceived rise of Christian nationalism likely did much to shift them — up 2 points to 24 percent of the electorate since 2020 — toward the Democratic candidate.

On the other side of the ledger, Protestants (plus other non-Catholic Christians) shifted toward Trump by only a few points, from 60 percent in 2020 to 63 percent in 2024. More notably, non-Judeo-Christians, now constituting 10 percent of the voting population, lowered their support for the Democratic candidate from 69 percent in 2020 to 59 percent in 2024.

A significant portion of that decrease appears to have come from Muslims upset at the Biden administration's support for Israel in the Gaza war. (Trump, for his part, actively sought Muslim support, in striking contrast to his 2016 campaign call for and subsequent creation of a "Muslim ban" on immigration.)

Most consequential was the Catholic shift toward Trump, from 52 percent in 2020 to 58 percent. In recent elections, the Catholic vote was kept in rough

balance between increasingly Republican whites and staunchly Democratic Latinos. This election's overwhelming shift of Latino men in favor of Trump and modest shift of Latino women away from the Democrats clearly destroyed that balance.

Apart from religious demographics, we can ask how religious values fared. The answers depend, of course, on what values are deemed to be religious.

If opposition to abortion is a religious value, then that one didn't fare well. In seven states, including red Missouri and Montana and purple Arizona and Nevada, referendums guaranteeing a state constitutional right to abortion passed, mostly by overwhelming margins. To be sure, for the first time since the Dobbs decision overturning Roe v. Wade, such referendums were voted down — in Nebraska, Florida and South Dakota. But in Florida, which requires 60 percent of the vote for passage, fully 57 percent voted in favor.

If welcoming the stranger is a religious value, then that one didn't fare well either — at least if you consider it violated by a policy of returning most undocumented immigrants to their country of origin. Eight-seven percent of Trump voters said they support that policy.

If you see increasing benefits for workers as a religious value, then there's positive news from Alaska, which raised the minimum wage and required em-

ployers to provide sick leave; from Arizona, which declined to reduce the minimum wage for tipped workers; from Massachusetts, which increased the minimum wage for tipped workers; and from Missouri, which increased the minimum wage and required employers to pay sick leave.

If you see it as a religious value not to get high, then there's positive news from Florida, North Dakota and South Dakota, all of which declined to legalize recreational marijuana.

But there's bad news for those who see seeking common ground as a religious value. In Alaska, where political compromise gained a substantial foothold in the state Legislature since ranked choice voting was established two years ago, newfound GOP opposition may have persuaded voters to do away with it (the result is still too close to call). And in Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, South Dakota and probably in Colorado, ranked choice went down to defeat.

It did, however, prevail in the District of Columbia. Praise the Lord, and make it a state.

Finally, there's the religious value of having a moral person leading your country. This time around in America, not so much.

Mark Silk is professor of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College, and contributing editor at Religion News Service.

FFRF awards \$16,450!

2024 grad student essay winners announced

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the 10 top winners and five honorable mentions in the 2024 Cornelius Vander Broek Graduate/Older Student Essay Competition.

FFRF has paid out a total of \$16,450 in award money for this contest.

This year's topic is, "How is Christian nationalism imperiling democracy?" Students were asked to write an essay focused on how Christian nationalism presents threats to our democracy and how it adversely affects the country.

Winners, their ages, colleges or universities they are attending and the award amount are listed below.

FIRST PLACE

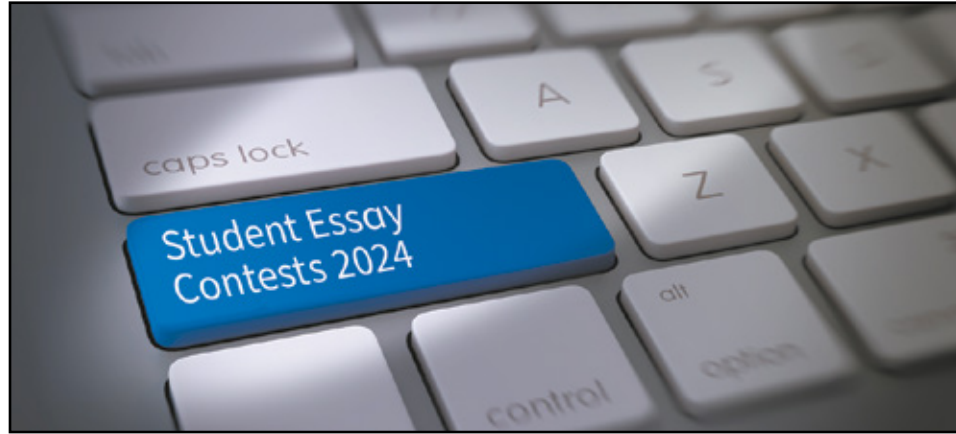
Ashley Wojcik, 30, Arizona State University, \$3,500.

SECOND PLACE

Austin Link, 27, University of Oklahoma, \$3,000.

THIRD PLACE

Claire Miller, 22, Purdue University, \$2,500.



FOURTH PLACE

Ashley McManus, 30, Antioch University, \$2,000.

FIFTH PLACE

Asha Ivey, 24, DePaul University, \$1,500.

SIXTH PLACE

Bradley Koberg, 29, Cardozo School of Law, \$1,000.

SEVENTH PLACE

Ellie Henry, 25, University of Washington, \$750.

EIGHTH PLACE

Vivianna Lindley, 28, Dartmouth University, \$500.

NINTH PLACE

Joie Lew, 23, Columbia University, \$400.

TENTH PLACE

Oz Paszkiewicz, 27, Champlain College, \$300.

HONORABLE MENTIONS (\$200 each)

Sandra Adams, 29, Chandler Gilbert Community College.

Kaitlyn Guinn, 27, Crafton Hills College.

Karissa Page, 28, Oakland University.
Lillian Poole, 26, University of South Carolina.

Tate Young, 25, Washington State University.

FFRF thanks Lisa Treu for managing the details of this and FFRF's other student essay competitions. FFRF would also like to thank its volunteers for reading and judging the essays, including Linda Aten, David Chiver, Tim Hatcher, Dan Kettner, Sammi Lawrence, David Malcolm, Tori Mizerak, Kurt Mohnsam, Chris O'Connell, Don Onnen, PJ Slinger and Karen Lee Weidig.

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994, grad students since 2010, one geared explicitly for students of color since 2016, and a fifth contest for law students since 2019.

FIRST PLACE

The Christian nationalist problem

FFRF awarded Ashley \$3,500.

By Ashley M. Wojcik

The first time I was exposed to the idea of Christianity being the perceived norm in my country, I was 10 years old. In my fifth-grade social studies class, we had a group discussion regarding differences in culture. The topic of discussion turned to Africa. One of my classmates' older siblings had gone on a mission trip of some kind to an African country to preach the gospel and spread the "truth" as they saw it. My classmate spoke of how proud she was of her brother saving those poor souls in Africa who didn't know Jesus as their savior — and therefore saving them.

My naive 10-year-old self asked how it was that the others were not "saved" if they do not know the alternative, and what happens if they are not told about Jesus? Did they really deserve to go to hell? My classmate's answer was clear. "Yes. They are wrong and they should be punished."

Of course, my classmate also spoke from a place of childhood naivete, but the programming involved is very clear. Somehow, by the age of 10, a child had been convinced that anyone who was not of her family's religion deserved to be doomed to eternal suffering. This is the insidious message of American Christian nationalism: You are with us or you deserve to suffer. I find this viewpoint deeply morally repugnant.

At its core, Christian nationalism represents warped ideology intertwining Christian faith with national identity and divine governance. It asserts that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and that its laws should reflect this absolutely. This perspective undermines the principles of secularism, personal freedom and personal identity and choices that may not fall in line with these "laws." These



Ashley M. Wojcik

imposed beliefs go far beyond uncomfortable interactions with peers. They threaten our fundamental rights regardless of religious affiliation.

Christian viewpoints are given privileged status in the United States whether we acknowledge it or not. When we as a nation shape legislation and public policy in accordance with religious doctrine, we are giving deference to one belief over all others. The effects of this conditioning that affects a large percentage of our population is clear.

We see it every day during political debates, proposed legislative actions and statements explicitly focusing on Christian values. We see this when we consider the abortion debate and the loss of Roe v. Wade, gay rights and the controversy surrounding the repeal of the so-called Defense of Marriage Act, and the somewhat vilified concept of leadership arising from a culture that is not based in Christianity.

During President Obama's terms as president, one only had to turn on any given talking head station to see discussions of his theorized Islamic beliefs. To them, the fact that their

president might not be Christian was not just a difference in belief, but tantamount to evil itself.

One of the most pressing concerns that I have is the nationalist impact on reproductive rights. Conservative public officials and lawmakers have pushed agendas openly protecting "Christian values" and have enacted increasingly restrictive abortion laws, infringing upon the reproductive autonomy of individuals. Such legislation undermines the personal choice that is completely elective abortion and also threatens

ease of access in unfortunate situations such as devastating and fatal fetal genetic anomalies. To twist the debate into a black-and-white argument about "sin" is to refuse to acknowledge the reality of the issue entirely. We see similar advancement of nationalist agendas with regards to LGBTQ-plus rights. Conservative preachers and politicians frequently espouse homophobic and transphobic rhetoric, seeking to justify discriminatory policies under the guise of religious freedom.

By holding Christianity over the rights of not only marginalized communities but our nation as a whole, Christian nationalism perpetuates systemic inequality, destroys our nation's most cherished principles of equality and justice for all, and increases suffering and alienation of many who do not wish to participate or live our lives by that belief system. Therefore, Christian nationalism poses not only a grave threat to our personal freedoms, but to the future of our democracy. There are many of us who have come to grips with the idea that while we love our country, our country does not love us.

When Christianity is regarded as the

"default" and a prerequisite for being a moral individual, there is no room for freedom. For these reasons, Christian nationalism is not only wrong but explicitly unAmerican.

Ashley Wojcik, 30, attends Arizona State University as a pre-med student.

"After graduating high school, I worked as a medical transcriptionist for 10 years," Ashley writes. "I am the first in my immediate family to go to college. Eventually, I decided that I wanted to pursue becoming a medical doctor to further my interests in science and aiding others.

For the last year and a half, I have been working as a certified clinical medical assistant in a local medical center, where I have learned the true value of health care workers and our impact on people's lives."

“When Christianity is regarded as the “default” and a prerequisite for being a moral individual, there is no room for freedom.”

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SECOND PLACE

The dangers of Christian nationalism

FFRF awarded Austin \$3,000.

By Austin Link

After winning his second gubernatorial bid in 2022, Kevin Stitt claimed Oklahoma as dominion of the Christian god on the steps of the state Capitol. With his eyes closed in prayer, he said, “Father, we just claim Oklahoma for you. Every square inch, we claim it for you in the name of Jesus. . . With the authority that I have as governor, and the spiritual authority and the physical authority that you give me, I claim Oklahoma for you, and we will be a light to our country and to the world, right here.”

Stitt’s statement at the Capitol is a blatant display of Christian nationalist ideology in action. Christian nationalism is a framework that seeks to integrate the Christian faith with the culture, public policies and identity of our nation. Much like other nationalist regimes that have blighted history, it pursues these ends in an exclusive, zealous manner. This impacts those that do not belong to the in-group in a profoundly detrimental way, making it an inherently dangerous ideology that marginalizes people from the out-group.

I am an Oklahoman. Over the course of my life, I have witnessed the war that people like Stitt have waged on the public, but the last few years have been alarming. Along with Stitt’s bigotry toward marginalized communities and asinine statements regarding Oklahoma belonging to the Christian god, policies regard-



Austin Link

ing education have been particularly concerning to me.

Ryan Walters is Oklahoma’s current superintendent of public instruction. Walters has claimed that there is no such thing as the separation of church and state within America’s founding documents, has regularly advocated for “putting God back in school” and rails against policies and curriculum involving diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

In September 2023, Walters announced that his department will work with the alt-right organization PragerU to develop Oklahoma-specific educational materials that would encourage American exceptionalism and Christian nationalist ideals. Knowledge is power, and instilling extremist values within children is the key to what Christian nation-

alists want to achieve. They will do this by banning books, invading school boards, erecting the Ten Commandments in classrooms, forcing students to engage in prayer and denying scientific realities like evolution and climate change.

All these things are being attempted by Oklahoman officials right now. This is not a phenomenon restricted to my home state, however. These changes are being enacted across the entirety of America. This harms and squanders the potential of children belonging to marginalized communities, such as nonbelievers, people of color and LGBTQ-plus individuals. Indeed, it also woefully fails all children being raised under this oppressive umbrella, even those belonging to the in-group.

Christian nationalism, and theocratic nationalism in general, is dangerous even for those who hold the power within this system. This is due to the nature of culture itself. Much like the natural history of life on this planet, culture and religion are rife with evolution. Religions come into being, often providing a framework for social cohesion and control which benefits the in-group in a naturally selective manner. They are then enshrined in holy scriptures or dogmas that are analogous to biological genotypes, which then speciate into denominations with their own interpretations of scripture (and determinisms of which scriptures are canon) that are like divergent alleles. These genomic elements then get transcribed and translated into the proteinaceous machinery that affects the overall phenotype of the believer’s worldview and behaviors.

Over time, the “genes” that construct religions change in co-evolutionary patterns alongside religious adherents and society.

This poses a pertinent question: Even if current Christian nationalist leaders were to fully ensnare America within theocratic rule, what happens in 50 years when they are outnumbered by theocrats who have a different idea of what it means to be a Christian? Similarly to how current Christian nationalists desire to strip away the rights of the out-group, they will become victim to their own methodology in time, having their human rights stripped from them in the same fashion.

Under the framework of Christian nationalism, those who hold the power at one point in time will always be under the thumb of the next oppressive theocracy that results from the inherent evolutionary properties of culture. This is why secular, humanistic ideals are paramount to securing the rights and prosperity of people from every background, religious or not. Consequently, it is of the utmost importance that we fight against oppression imposed on us by those who stand against freedom of, and from, religion.

Austin, 27, attends the University of Oklahoma, working on a degree in biology.

“I am an Indigenous student who volunteers with a program called YESOK (Youth Enjoy Science Oklahoma) that does science outreach for Indigenous students within the Central Oklahoma/Oklahoma City/Norman region,” Austin writes. “When I finish my master’s degree, I plan on entering a doctorate program within the same biology lab and department.”

THIRD PLACE

My body, God’s choice?

FFRF awarded Claire \$2,500.

By Claire Miller

Christian nationalism is the strongly held belief that the United States is a Christian nation, and the government can, and should, take steps to align legal values with those practicing Christianity. Christianity is a broad religion with a multitude of sects that often disagree on core tenets of the faith, so it is unclear exactly whose values the government should be aligned with. There are a multitude of frightening implications of this religious and moral extremism.

In the U.S. Constitution, the main structural foundation for the United States, it is written that there should remain a separation of church and state, meaning that the government can neither persecute the people for their varying religious views nor force religious values on the people of this country.

Ironically, many of those who tout the ideas of Christian nationalism strongly support the Constitution and its amendments (specifically the First and Second Amendments), but turn a blind eye to the clearly defined separation of church and state held within.

I consider myself somewhere between

agnostic and atheistic; in other words, religion really isn’t for me. However, I never disrespect those who are religious, as I understand it brings many people comfort, structure and community. Generally, other people having religious values doesn’t harm others, so there is no reason for it to be any of my business. This is most certainly not the case with Christian nationalism.

Not all people within the United States follow the varying moral rules put forth by the bible in its many translations and interpretations, and you cannot force all people to follow them. I have always appreciated the following analogy: Just because you are on a diet doesn’t mean

I am not allowed to enjoy a donut.

I am not a Christian, therefore I see no issue with many legal rights opposed by extreme Christian groups, such as gay marriage, premarital sex and abortion. Simply put, these topics are really none of my business as they do not impact me or others outside of the individuals involved.

The issue of abortion highlights just how dangerous to others Christian nationalism can become. After the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the Supreme Court, states can now dictate how accessible abortion and other reproductive services may be. I am a cisgender female in my prime



Claire Miller

reproductive years who does not have the desire, finances or other resources to support a child at the moment. I take all the necessary precautions as such, but nature takes its course as it will, and there is always a chance that sex (or even horrors like rape) could lead to conception. Should I not want to continue the pregnancy, or should it be nonviable or even an ectopic pregnancy, I would have to hope that my state government is not operating under Christian nationalist ideals.

Many Christians vehemently oppose the idea of abortion, even if medically necessary or in cases of rape or incest, based on their religious beliefs, despite the bible’s stance on abortion being largely neutral to even positive in certain stories.

I would have no qualms on removing cellular material from my uterus if it is causing me harm or distress. Why should Christian values overrule mine, especially regarding my own personal, very private medical care? I live in Ohio, a state where immediate trigger bans limit abortion access to six weeks post-conception, a measurement that itself is heavily flawed. Even though voters chose to support expanded abortion rights, the state government is still fighting the will of the majority while citing morals from Christian religious values rather than any legal source.

If I do not believe in the Christian God, why are human government officials or voters able to make medical choices for my body on its behalf? Why do some people believe that it may be my body, but it is God’s choice, despite my agnosticism? And why should the Christian God take precedence, rather than Allah, Yahweh, Odin, Zeus, Gaia or any of the hundreds of deities from human history? Answer: No god has a place in government, and the Constitution is clear on that.

Christian nationalism cannot be allowed to mold legal proceedings to fit a religion that does not define the people of this country. This is when religion does harm others and must be checked.

Claire, 22, attends Purdue University and is working toward a degree in psychology.

“I love to be involved in a wide range of activities outside of education, such as art (digital, traditional, acrylic painting, embroidery), gardening and exotic pet care,” Claire writes.

FOURTH PLACE

My escape from Christian nationalism

FFRF awarded Ashley \$2,000.

By Ashley McManus

For the first 17 years of my life, I was raised in what some refer to as a “little blue dot in a sea of red” — Fayetteville, Ark. Even in this liberal bubble of the state, I was viscerally impacted by shades of Christian nationalism.

Christian nationalism is the belief that Christianity is a central part of America’s identity, and that the government should work to keep those roots and identity intact. During my developmental years, I was sent to an evangelist Christian summer camp, which actively preached that Christianity was a foundation of America. This camp prominently featured a live “Crucifixion Night,” where I watched my summer counselors reenact the crucifixion of Jesus, complete with screaming, crying and the sound of nails going through flesh. As you can imagine, it left quite the impression.

It was made clear to me at a young age that there were Christians and “others,” and it was in our best interest to evangelize or isolate non-Christians in order not only to save our own souls, but the soul of our country. For my personal journey, I was able to claw my way out of that mindset thanks to the friends who surrounded



Ashley McManus

me in high school. I know in my heart, however, that if my parents had been more religious, or if I had a different set of friends, I would have likely been negatively impacted for life.

Still, the Christian nationalism that I experienced as a young person pales in comparison to the militant, violent and extreme statements and legislative actions that we are seeing today.

Obvious milestone threats that represent how dangerous this movement has become include the Jan. 6 insurrection, the introduction of 513 anti-LGBTQ bills this year alone and the

overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

One of the greatest threats to our secular democracy is the continued narrative to combat “anti-white racism,” a vow that former President Trump made in May. As a part of this plan, Trump says, if he regains the presidency, he will reverse the Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through Federal Government. This is a frightening example of how Christian nationalism has evolved and contorted to represent not necessarily “Christian ideals,” but rather the ideals of the extreme right. Christianity is a mask for the movement, which rips as many out-of-context scriptures as it can in order to support legislation that actively harms oppressed populations. The rise of white nationalism alongside Christian nationalism is particularly horrifying, and has the roots to spark violence and death in our communities.

Perhaps the most concerning, and least paid attention to part of the Christian nationalism movement is the number of seats it is filling on the judiciary system. As president, Trump made appointments for three Supreme Court judges, 53 appellate court judges and 170 district court judges. As these are lifetime appointments, even if as a country we quell Christian nationalism, these are the

people that are going to be interpreting the Constitution and federal law over the next 30 years or more. For decades, the extreme right has been quietly stacking local, state and federal judicial seats as these roles are so often ignored by the vast majority of the public, but have an abundance of power.

Not only is Christian nationalism obviously an attack on religious freedom at its core, but the particular version of it that we are experiencing today is also a direct attack on non-white Americans, LGBTQ-plus Americans, lower-income Americans and women.

If Christian nationalism continues to gain power in this country, we can expect personal violence against these populations and generational losses as protective legislation is rolled back. As a queer woman with a disability, I’m terrified. I’m even more terrified for my Black, Latino and trans friends and families.

Ashley, 30, attends Antioch University, and is working toward a degree in clinical psychology. “As a queer woman who personally wrestles with PTSD, my goal is to become a marriage and family therapist, specializing in the intersection of sexual and mental health,” Ashley writes. “I’ve experienced the transformative power of honest and informed therapeutic spaces, and I hope to promote that healing in others.”

FIFTH PLACE

The propensity for ethnic cleansing

FFRF awarded Asha \$1,500.

By Asha Ivey

Christian nationalism in America is directly tied to hate and intolerance. Christian nationalism is the belief that this is a Christian nation and that laws and societal expectations should be built on Christian values. I oppose the idea of one group’s opinions dictating the rest of society when they are justified by hypocritically cherry-picked rules that happen to be convenient for the historically oppressive majority. Christian nationalist beliefs are not truly rooted in morality, but instead aim to exert control on religious, racial and sexual minorities, as well as on women in ways that mainly benefit white Christians.

Christian nationalism is dangerous because it centers on a Western and white-centric perspective. Even though Christian nationalism looks like a religious issue on the surface, Americans have a history of racializing religious groups, resulting in dehumanizing and racist treatment. For example, after 9/11, Muslim Americans, people who spoke Arabic and people with brown skin who were perceived as Muslim faced harassment and prejudice.

Even though religion is not associated with any skin color or appearance, Christianity upholds Western ideals and played a part in white colonialism, whereas Islam,

Buddhism, Hinduism and so many other religions are associated with racial minorities. By excluding the desires of people with differing religious beliefs, or rejecting them as wrong or misguided, Christian nationalists are also rejecting the values and beliefs of racial and ethnic minorities.

America is a melting pot of languages, religions and cultures, so to enforce laws based on Christian beliefs is to further marginalize and even criminalize people who just want the freedom to live as they are without persecution.

Christian nationalism opposes the existence of LGBTQ people, insisting that same-sex attraction is immoral and reprehensible, despite studies backing the validity of same-sex attraction and the existence of same-sex-attracted animals in nature. Even though people are born with their sexuality and know from a young age whom they are attracted to, Christian nationalists reject the idea of two consenting adults of the same gender happily living together and receiving the same social and financial benefits that heterosexual couples receive. They want to deny people the right to inherit from their same-sex partners, receive Social Security or health care benefits in relation to their spouse, and receive tax benefits and lower insurance premiums, all in the name of moral good.

This is not an issue of the past either. In 2022, there were still many politicians



Asha Ivey

against the legalization of same-sex marriage, an issue that is often tied to Christianity. When *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022 and the Respect for Marriage Act was proposed to codify same-sex and interracial marriage, 36 members of the Senate and 169 members of the House of Representatives voted against it. The LGBTQ community, especially the trans community, still faces many threats to its freedoms as a result of Republican Christian nationalism.

Another danger of Christian nationalism is the censoring of diverse and educational material and the opposition to sexual education. Christian parents have complained about world religion classes and Disney movies featuring LGBTQ characters, claiming schools are trying to indoctrinate their children. If Christian nationalists were to succeed in transforming America into a Christian nation, schools would be restricted from teaching kids about other cultures and LGBTQ identi-

ties, regardless of whether some of those kids belong to those communities. And to oppose sex ed in schools — when Republican politicians push back against sex to contraception, birth control and abortions — will only create an increase in unsafe and traumatic experiences for women and assigned-female-at-birth individuals.

Enforcing beliefs on people who don’t or can’t adhere to them causes real harm. Where would Christian nationalism stop? Would LGBTQ people be encouraged to undergo conversion therapy or face criminal charges? Would religious minorities be forced to reject their beliefs? Will women be forced to carry unwanted children or face the death penalty, even in cases involving minors, incest or sexual assault?

All of those are possibilities in a Christian nationalist society. A complete rejection and censoring of differing religious views can easily become a case of ethnic cleansing. The characteristics resemble that of the Native American boarding schools, the forced detention of Uyghurs and Muslims in Chinese internment camps, and the Holocaust.

I do not want to find out how far Christian nationalists are willing to go to exert their control because, at the heart of it, Christian nationalism is all about controlling and oppressing racial, religious and sexual minorities to the benefit of a white, Christian majority.

Asha Ivey, 24, attends DePaul University and is working toward a degree in computer science.

“I am a software developer from the Chicago suburbs,” Asha writes. “My bachelor’s degree is in linguistics, as I also have a passion for language. I studied five years of Japanese throughout school and hope to one day become fluent in another language, whether that be Spanish, Mandarin or ASL.”

SIXTH PLACE

An appeal to humanity

FFRF awarded Bradley \$1,000.

By Bradley Koberg

For decades, a small group of religious extremists, wealthy plutocrats and right-wing politicians has been stealthily organizing an enormous political infrastructure to exert influence and consolidate power in the United States government. Once a fringe movement operating largely in the shadows, it has since gone mainstream, with millions of Americans now subscribing to its extreme tenets and GOP politicians openly preaching its false and dangerous doctrines.

It is known as Christian nationalism, and it is well-funded, anti-democratic, and thus far, wildly successful.

Christian nationalism is not a religious movement, but a radical political ideology that foments and exploits religious fervor among its base to acquire power. Its believers promote the obvious falsehood that America was founded as a “Christian nation” and their ultimate goal is to replace our secular democracy with an authoritarian Christian theocracy in which a fundamentalist interpretation of the bible is the supreme law of the land. The movement is fiercely opposed to LGBTQ+ rights and reproductive freedom, wants biblical literalism taught in public schools, and is inextricably linked with white supremacy. Its foot soldiers — millions of churchgoers who are highly susceptible to conspiracy theories — are fed carefully drafted talking points meant to



Bradley Koberg

trigger emotional responses (particularly regarding abortion) via church leadership and right-wing media outlets.

Agents and allies of Christian nationalism now occupy some of the most powerful positions in U.S. government. The Supreme Court has been packed with a majority of conservative Catholic justices who openly belittle the “so-called” separation of church and state, and who have been rapidly undoing decades worth of social progress (most notably revoking constitutional protections for reproductive rights) while simultaneously strengthening protections for religious groups (predominantly conservative Christians).

And, of course, there’s Donald Trump, who could not even name a bible verse in 2015, yet who now sells a

“God Bless the USA” bible for \$59.99. Trump more than anybody highlights how Christian nationalism is not about following Christian values, but about pandering to the Christian right for political gain. Aware that this group was largely responsible for his first term, he now campaigns for reelection on the promise to “make America pray again.”

While Trump is the most visible agent of Christian nationalism, the movement’s most powerful (and dangerous) operative is Mike Johnson, the Speaker of the House. Despite his muted, bookish persona, he has spent his entire career fiercely opposing civil liberties in the name of religion and undermining the constitutional separation of church and state. Most concerning, Johnson played a central role in the legal battle to overturn the 2020 election results, and he has many close ties to known Christian nationalist extremists who were involved in the Jan. 6 insurrection. He currently hangs an “Appeal to Heaven” flag outside of his office, a Revolutionary War-era banner that has been co-opted by right-wing Christians as a symbol of spiritual warfare. This religious extremist has demonstrated a total willingness, even eagerness, to subvert democratic institutions to achieve his vision of a “biblically sanctioned government,” and he is now second in line to the presidency.

Christian nationalists are waging a holy war on our pluralist democracy, and they are poised for a major, perhaps decisive, victory. If Trump is reelected in 2024, agents of Christian nationalism will

occupy key positions in all three branches of government, and they intend to implement a radical policy plan to erode our system of checks and balances and greatly expand executive authority (called Project 2025). This should alarm anyone who is not a white Christian nationalist. The best we can do in the short term is vote against Trump to prevent this key win for the movement. We must raise awareness and educate ourselves, as we must understand the beast in order to defeat it.

On Dec. 5, 2023, Mike Johnson gave a keynote address at the National Association of Christian Lawmakers’ Annual Gala. In the speech, he compared himself to Moses, the biblical prophet called on by God to lead an enslaved religious minority through the “roiling sea” toward salvation. In reality, he is more like Abraham: an unyielding patriarch willing to sacrifice anything, even his own son, in the name of faith, that black hole that defies understanding. Fortunately, unlike Abraham’s son, we do not have to march obediently toward our demise. But the knife is plunging toward our neck and we know God isn’t around to save us. Humanity must save itself.

Bradley Koberg, 29, attends the Cardozo School of Law.

“I attended Columbia University for undergrad, where I studied film and economics while working at some of the most cursed independent film companies of that era,” Bradley writes. “I plan to practice entertainment and media law, but will continue studying the intersection of religion and law and advocating for religious pluralism.”

SEVENTH PLACE

A survivor’s lens on Christian nationalism

FFRF awarded Ellie \$750.

By Ellie Henry

At my Catholic middle school, we were required to write a “Right to Life Essay” yearly in religion class. The activity culminated in attending the anti-abortion rally at our state Capitol.

We were indoctrinated to advocate for policies that were harmful to ourselves and the greater society. I never bought into the rhetoric and phoned in the essays.

To counter the vitriol fed to me at school, I devoured Friendly Atheist’s YouTube videos and podcasts in my free time. It didn’t make me popular, but it did start my fire to advocate for reproductive freedom. Through my alternative studies, I learned that Christian nationalism is the practice of imposing Christian doctrine on a secular world, violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. As a future social worker, I believe the integration of Christian ideology in the public sphere is the greatest impediment to our country’s democracy, health and well-being.

Since the overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022, conservative states have been

wreaking havoc on the reproductive rights of their citizens. I am now most concerned about cruel laws restricting bodily autonomy based in Christian nationalism. In Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee and Texas, there is no abortion exception for rape survivors. The denial of abortion rights for survivors is especially

“As a future social worker, I believe the integration of Christian ideology in the public sphere is the greatest impediment to our country’s democracy, health and well-being.”

vile, forever tying them to their rapist. Christian nationalists insist that “the gift of new life” is worth the pain of unplanned childbirth, financial ruin and even rape. This belief

is rooted in patriarchal interpretations of Christianity, in which women must submit to God, the church and men. Their aim in enacting abortion bans is maintaining control of people who can get pregnant and limit their agency. Democracy hinges on informed choice. Without the option to protect oneself from pregnancy and the associated financial, physical and emotional risks, true democracy is only afforded to a small few.

As a rape survivor, the overturn of Roe v. Wade was retraumatizing. No one should be forced to continue a pregnancy, especially in the case of assault. People who can get preg-



Ellie Henry

nant should not have to live in fear of pregnancy and rape ruining their lives. Those experiencing unintended pregnancies are at higher risk of poverty, mental illness and further trauma without the option of abortion. While Christian nationalists use “the right to life” as a talking point, they do very little to improve pregnant people’s quality of life with their policies. Pro-life politicians seldom address access to

affordable prenatal and mental health care, child care or food security. The hypocrisy is enraging, and the attempts to erode religious freedom are blatant. It can be hard to keep hopeful in the face such a powerful and immoral opponent.

The antidote to despair is action. To combat Christian nationalism, it is important to donate to Planned Parenthood and other local reproductive rights organizations. There are also many places to give mutual aid for those needing travel and health care funding, especially in states with bans. Lastly, voting for pro-choice, secular politicians who advocate for the separation of church and state is essential. From my place as a future social worker, I will advocate for an expansion of reproductive freedom and further funding for social services.

Bodily autonomy is a human right, and we must organize as freethinkers to protect our laws from the Christian nationalist influence.

Ellie, 25, attends the University of Washington, working toward a degree in social work. “I have been engaging in secular activism since I was 13,” Ellie writes. “I co-founded a feminist interest group in high school and worked to create survivor support programming in undergrad. For two years, I was an advocate/mentor for students with neurodevelopmental disabilities. My current passions are LGBTQ+ rights, disability advocacy and trauma-informed care for survivors of religious abuse.”

EIGHTH PLACE

The holy war on American freedoms

FFRF awarded Vivianna \$500.

By Vivianna Lindley

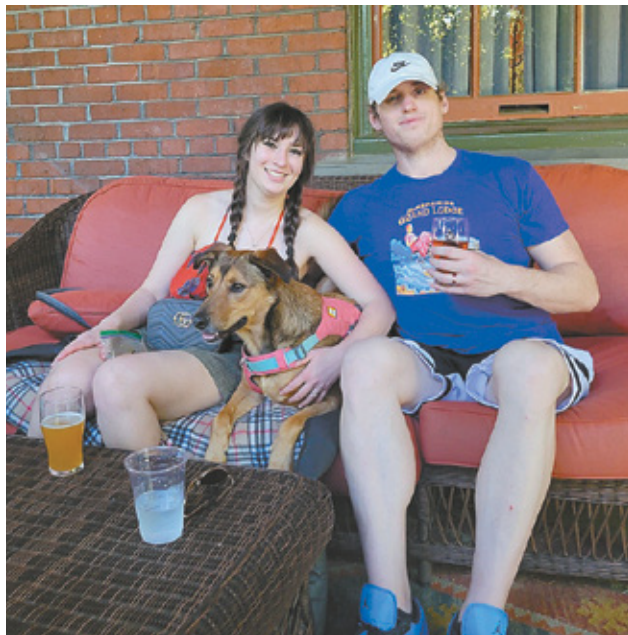
Christian nationalism is inherently unconstitutional, as its main purpose is to infuse “church” into “state.” This prevents the proper functioning of democracy by influencing our laws with the personal values and beliefs of a certain religion.

In a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, Founding Father Thomas Jefferson wrote that religion is a matter between a person and their god, that the freedom of religion enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution should build a wall to separate church and state, and had previously written that government should reach only actions, not opinions.

This wall that Jefferson envisioned is crumbling in our present time. The country is divided between 49 percent of adults who think the bible should have a great deal or some influence on U.S. laws, and 51 percent who think it should have not much or no influence at all, according to the Pew Research Center. These statistics are tragic and a dangerous threat to our freedoms.

If U.S. laws were influenced by the bible, our citizens would be plagued with restrictions of life based on fear and hate. LGBTQ+ communities would be unwelcome to live their lives freely, women would lose control of their bodies (many already have due to Christian nationalism), the freedoms of other religions would be suffocated by Christianity and the freedom to be without religion would be impossible in a country governed by and through it. In direct conflict with our Founding Fathers’ intentions, a United States influenced by Christian nationalism would be a government of opinions, and thus not one of freedom.

In these statistics lives a reality in which Christian nationalism has already caused the bible to influence U.S. laws. On Feb. 16, the Alabama Supreme Court issued a decision that was reached through the direct application of



Vivianna Lindley

“I fear when one group wants to erase the uniqueness, differences and diversity of everyone else.”

the bible’s values. Chief Justice Tom Parker declared frozen embryos to have “personhood” and the destruction of one, purposefully or accidentally, would be applicable under Alabama’s Wrongful Death of a Minor Act. This decision was reached through the interpretation of “personhood” under Christian scripture, including the writings of a medieval theologian, and applied to a law written in 1872 when frozen embryos wouldn’t have existed. This decision has caused grief for many

families undergoing in-vitro fertilization (IVF) as clinics in Alabama have paused all operations for fear of legal repercussions (accidental destruction of embryos is a risk in IVF procedures). With Alabama also enforcing a total abortion ban, those who do not want to continue a pregnancy have no safe option to terminate it.

This influence of Christian nationalism on our laws and thus on our lives is harmful for many reasons: It al-

lows religious morals and beliefs to influence medical and scientific functioning; it creates a noose around the physical freedoms of women and pregnant people; and it is creating a country that is by the bible for the Christians instead of by the people for the people.

Most concerning to me is the present siege on abortion rights across the country. Out of 50 states, 14 have total abortion bans and 11 have requirements or limitations that make abortion difficult or nearly impossible. That is half our country in which citizens who can become pregnant are in danger of being forced to have an unwanted pregnancy, pushed into unsafe methods of abortion, forced to strain finances and employment to travel out of state for abortion, and burdened with the incredible stressors of these situations, thus negatively impacting their health.

Our country’s history of freedom is consistent with our current political climate, proudly claiming ourselves as the land of the free while we crush the freedoms of our people.

As a woman and a Humanistic Jew, I fear to live in a country where 44 percent of Americans say the federal government should promote Christian moral values. I fear when nearly half of the people I share a country with say the government should promote values that take away my freedoms and that in being myself, I am “immoral.”

I fear when one group wants to erase the uniqueness, differences and diversity of everyone else. I fear the threat Christian nationalism poses and is currently carrying out upon our country is only growing and unless stopped, our freedoms will continue to be taken away until that wall has crumbled, and our State becomes the Church.

Vivianna Lindley, 28, attends Dartmouth University, working toward a degree in public health.

“I am a survivor of childhood abuse and neglect, but that trauma has informed and influenced my passion for public health and public service,” Vivianna writes. “I was humbled to be part of the emergency response to Covid-19 at my local public health department and this allowed me to be part of the incredible community engagement that made our response successful, an approach that I believe is the future of public health.”

NINTH PLACE

The dangers of Christian nationalism

FFRF awarded Joie \$400.

By Jo Lew

In 1797, John Adams stated, “the government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.” Christian nationalism, at its core, is the belief that the United States is fundamentally a Christian nation, with certain Christian beliefs and values being privileged above others, and that our laws and policies should reflect this supposed divine mandate.

Our Founding Fathers wanted to avoid the entanglement of church and state because they recognized the harm that could arise if the two were intertwined, regardless of whether those beliefs were based on Christianity. Less than 250 years later, we are seeing the unfurling of an extreme wave of Christian nationalism taking over the country.

As a Texan who grew up in the public education system, I have seen how Texas legislators’ success at passing Senate Bill 763 in September 2023 undermined the very vision our forefathers had for our country. This law, among other things, prohibits public schools from teaching about critical race theory and the 1619 Project, while simultaneously mandating the teaching of “the moral, philosophical, and intellectual foundations of the United States and Texas.” By restricting the teaching of critical race theory and the



Jo Lew

1619 Project, which examines the historical legacy of slavery and systemic racism in the United States, the law effectively whitewashes our nation’s history and perpetuates a sanitized version of the past.

Additionally, by mandating the teaching of “moral, philosophical, and intellectual foundations,” the law opens the door for the promotion of Judeo-Christian values and principles in public schools, at the expense of secularism and religious pluralism. This intrinsically marginalizes non-Christian students while reinforcing the notion that Christianity is the default faith of American society.

In addition, SB 763 also allows Texas schools to use funds to pay for unlicensed

or volunteer chaplains to work in public school mental health roles. Many public schools already struggle to provide quality, secular mental health support for their students, and placing religion in schools is dangerous to the freedom and safety of America’s youth.

Employing predominantly white Christian beliefs to address diverse, secular, intersectional issues will violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and create an environment where non-Christian students and citizens feel like second-class citizens in their own country. Extending the use of Christian nationalism in all spheres of American life will only isolate and disparage non-Christians and create more turmoil for those who don’t subscribe to extreme Christian nationalist beliefs.

Moreover, the intertwining of Christian nationalism with political power can lead to discriminatory policies that harm marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ individuals like myself. So-called “religious freedom” laws effectively permit discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals under the moniker of individual religious freedom. For instance, businesses have cited religious beliefs as justification for refusing to provide goods or services for same-sex weddings or LGBTQ+ events in some states. Adoption agencies have also sought to refuse services to LGBTQ+ couples, prioritizing their organization’s religious beliefs

over the interests of homeless children in need of loving families. This is not only a denial of LGBTQ+ individuals access to essential services but also a denial of their worthiness and humanity.

I, as a queer atheist Texan, oppose Christian nationalism because it undermines the values of inclusivity, diversity and secularism that are an essential part of a thriving, modern democracy. The privileging of specific religious beliefs in the public sphere not only marginalizes non-Christian individuals but also erodes the foundations of our pluralistic society.

It is imperative that we resist the encroachment of Christian nationalism into our politics and actively work toward a society where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their religious beliefs (or lack thereof). If we are going to recite the Pledge of Allegiance with the line “with liberty and justice for all,” then we must reject Christian nationalism and ensure that we embrace the diversity and equality that embodies the American people.

Jo, 23, attends Columbia University and is working toward a degree in human rights studies. “As a SMU graduate with degrees in human rights, political science and public policy, I have dedicated my life to advocacy work and activism through work and education,” Jo writes. “I served in multiple leadership positions at SMU and created the ‘Queer Collective,’ a collection of projects aimed at increasing the well-being of LGBTQ+ students.”

TENTH PLACE

There is always an enemy

FFRF awarded Oz \$300.

By Oz Paszkiewicz

Christian nationalism is many things. It is manifest destiny, it is a strictness of thought that denies curiosity, but perhaps most importantly, it is the belief that Christianity, above all else, is the supreme and sovereign power over all people.

Pro football player Harrison Butker, in his hate-filled speech at Benedictine College, said, "Our Catholic faith has always been counter-cultural. Our lord, along with countless followers, were all put to death for their adherence to [his] teachings. The world around us says that we should keep our beliefs to ourselves whenever they go against the tyranny of diversity, equity and inclusion."

This is the fundamental dogma of Christianity, that they are the ones being prosecuted, that they are the minority.

Because of the Christian nationalist belief that it must stand up for what's "right," Christian conviction has slipped surreptitiously into politics, redefining personal choices and experiences such as sexuality, abortion and race in the public debate.

As a queer, disabled person who was assigned female at birth, I feel particularly threatened. It is apparent through anti-abortion legislation, attacks on trans



Oz Paszkiewicz

health care and the words of people like Butker that female bodies, trans bodies and bodies of color are the target. To Christian nationalists, there is nothing holier than the white, male body — that which was created in God's image.

I've worked as a librarian for three years, and I've seen firsthand the attacks on freedom of thought and uncensored access to knowledge. The only books that are ever challenged are the ones that express queerness and BIPOC interests in a positive light, such as "Gender Queer" and "The Hate U Give." By challenging our free access to information,

Christian nationalists attempt to limit our ability to think freely. They want us (specifically, children who are still easy to mold and manipulate) to think like them. If the church does anything well, it's scapegoating. To them, there is always an enemy, and, in this moment, the enemy is critical thinking.

South Carolina state Sen. Josh Kimbrell stood in front of a public library and decried books that attempted to "indoctrinate" children. I see this theme often with protesters, that they want to ban books that express "prurient" interest to children. But when we dig deeper into what their idea of "prurient" and "children" is, we see that they mean anyone under the age of 17 and anything that discusses sexuality in any way. Similar to abstinence-only education, their views turn sex into the ultimate sin. Their unspoken message is that you should not think about sex, you should not think about your body, you should not explore yourself, you should only submit.

In a democracy, we have to rely on our politicians to speak for us, but politicians who exploit their religion for

votes become not just the mouthpiece of their people, but the mouthpiece of God. Meaning, Christians look to them like prophets. When Trump says, "they want to tear down crosses where they can, and cover them up with social justice flags," he creates an enemy of progress. He makes a god out of fear and hatred.

Christians conveniently forget that everything is already theirs, that white, cis, heterosexual men have the most power, as we can see just by looking at the makeup of the Senate and House. But, their power is being threatened and they are thrash-

ing like caged animals, trying desperately to keep what was once theirs. To combat their loss of power, they are attempting to pit the people against one another. That's what makes them truly dangerous.

Oz, 27, attends Champlain College, working toward a degree in software development.

"I am a librarian with a love of technology," Oz writes. "My goal is to expand my knowledge of coding to make software for libraries that increase access and inclusivity. In my free time, I crochet and volunteer with the local LGBTQ Youth Center."

“In a democracy, we have to rely on our politicians to speak for us, but politicians who exploit their religion for votes become not just the mouthpiece of their people, but the mouthpiece of God.”

Excerpts from the grad student honorable mentions

Reflections of courage

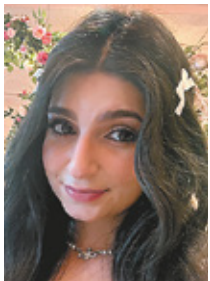
By Sandra Adams

"We will kill you and your family if you do not wear the hijab or study Islam!" my teacher threatened my 8-year-old self. This was not my first encounter with religious dogma in my home country of Iraq. Shortly after this incident, since my teacher was part of the Iranian-backed militia, they knocked at our door, threatening my father and mother with death and the kidnapping of their three children.

After my family's escape, I believed we were stepping into the land of freedom and equality, where the separation of church and state is upheld. However, the more I studied, the more the illusion of this perfect place shattered. In today's political climate, Christian nationalism is on the rise.

Christian nationalist policies imply that women do not have the basic right to choose and control their own bodies. This perpetuates the cycle of control over women, subjecting them to political and human rights violations, as well as literal physical harm and even death. In some states, health care providers are unable to intervene and save a woman's life due to the restrictive abortion laws and their consequences. This reinforces the notion a woman is merely a vessel and a second-class citizen whose life comes second to religious dogma.

Sandra, 29, attends Chandler Gilbert Community College, working toward a degree in aerospace engineering.



Sandra Adams

Destroyer of democracy

By Karissa Page

The Christian nationalist's assertion that U.S. laws should be based on biblical teachings is alarming in an era where the U.S. Supreme Court is controlled by a conservative majority.

By using faith as a weapon, Christian nationalists are contributing to the cultural wars and widening the polarization in this country by creating enemies with people different than themselves.

Christian nationalists use lobbying to gain political power and influence laws that align with Christian values. They

target wealthy conservatives and politicians. Wealth allows Christian nationalists to support elites and vice versa. In our grossly unequal economic system, power teeters towards those who can afford being politically active and fund campaigns. This gap in wealth is an ideal time for those with wealth to support Christian nationalism.

We must confront Christian nationalism because it contributes to the increasing polarization and extremist ideas in U.S. politics. We must oppose it because its intent is to dehumanize, spread hate and end religious pluralism. I urge you to act. Do not be politically apathetic. Participate in our imperfect democracy so that we can continue to transform our democracy by moving forward and not backward. Without separation of church from state, true religious freedom for all is impossible.

Karissa, 28, attends Oakland University, working toward a degree in social work.



Karissa Page

Quoth the snake

By Lillian Poole

There are plenty of things to be afraid of in today's America. Roe v. Wade has been overturned; Speaker of the House Mike Johnson is a radical evangelical; LGBTQ-plus rights and protections are being walked back in favor of making trans people the right's boogeyman. All of these are larger than life, terrifying, front-page news stories.

Yet, fascism is insidious. While your attention is diverted one way, it strikes from the other.

The threats to our secular democracy come not from a chapel, but from the courtroom.

Just because I'm not personally affected doesn't mean that others aren't hurt by this. What matters is that peoples' rights are being wrongfully taken away because of the religion of another.

I oppose Christian nationalism because it's hurting people and stripping people of their rights. It's slow, it's insidious, and it's patient.

It can be given no quarter because every inch given could be a life taken. If the separation of church and state crumbles, then we are not a state that is truly free. People should not be forced to follow the ideals of a religion that they do not ascribe to.

Beware the snake that preaches righteousness while practicing deceit.

Lillian, 26, attends University of South Carolina, working toward a degree in library and information sciences.



Lillian Poole

What makes us free?

By Tate Young

The clearest example of Christian nationalism in America right now is former President Donald Trump's voter base.

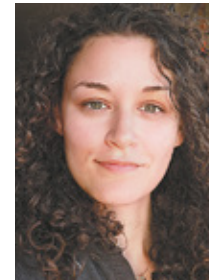
Too often Christian doctrine is twisted to meet the ends of someone who has nothing to do with the bible at all.

In confusion, in fear of an uncertain world, in desperation for simple answers to complicated problems, those vulnerable to Christian nationalism turn to an authority figure who echoes the comfort of their church. A leader who gains enough followers this way can do literally anything and keep their support, because the support

was never based on reason, but rather emotion. Relief from the fear. The leader is the salvation.

But the leader is only a human. I was assigned female at birth. My federal right to reproductive health has already been stripped, and it wasn't done in God's name. It was done because Trump-appointed Supreme Court justices who would strengthen his Christian nationalist hold on the government. Christian nationalism has the potential to entirely transform our government into one where, despite its claims, we have very few rights at all. For all their frustration that the government is restricting their freedom, Christian nationalists would gladly accept a dictator.

Tate, 25, attends Washington State University, working toward degrees in anthropology and multimedia journalism.



Tate Young

Reagan

Continued from page 1

interesting, too. But in a drawing room sort of way. At the time, most people didn't even know they were happening. Floods, fire, famine, death, disease, destruction. Those things tend to get everyone's attention. They're really, really interesting.

Well, lucky us. Today we live in absolutely fascinating times. An unprecedented set of calamities is unfolding around us like some lotus blossom of the apocalypse. Most of these are of our own making. Yet, adding to the drama, there's this quirky little feature of human nature that seems to make us do far too little too late to address most of these issues. That's if we do anything at all.

Just a few highlights: Global warming, of course.

Global warming

Scientists have warned about this, by the way, since the late 19th century. For years, climate researchers have been warning us that breaching the 1.5-degree Fahrenheit boundary would open the door to an increasingly dire catalog of environmental disasters.

Well, according to the most precise satellite measurements, for most of the last year we have been at or beyond that threshold. 2023 had been the hottest year on record. Until this year. And how's that been working out for us?

Phoenix just recorded 110 days in a row above 100 degrees. That's nearly a third of the year. Temps have since dropped into the 90s, which is sweater weather for Phoenix. At least their heads are above water — possibly because there is no water. Their aquifers have been turned into putting greens.

If we're not burning, it seems we're flooding. Places you've never associated with floods pop up in the news: Connecticut?! Cars afloat, people canoeing down Main Street, dogs on rooftops, torrential rain, overflowing rivers, rising sea levels. A number of climate scientists now believe that most of Florida will be underwater by the end of the century. (Some of you may be thinking: So there's an upside!) The highest point in the state is only 345 feet above sea level. Seventy-five years. That's one human lifetime. And we lose an entire state. And Disney World.

Think of the economic repercussions! Real estate gone. Jobs disappeared. Forced migration of millions of people. Habitat and species loss.

If they're under water, are they still a state? What happens to the Electoral College? Will we have to modify the flag? Can we just swap Florida for Puerto Rico?

These are pressing questions and the state's governor, Ron DeSantis, has an answer: Stop using the term "climate change." If we don't say its name, it can't get in.

Sure, we all know about global warming. We're all concerned — unless, of course, we're still denying its existence, like a certain presidential candidate. We try to reduce our personal carbon footprint, but, collectively, we pumped more CO₂ into the atmosphere last year than any year in history. We think our next car might be electric, but American automakers have scaled back their plans for EVs 'cause, y'know, sales weren't as brisk this year as expected. And the U.S. is pumping more oil than ever before. Well, maybe you'll just buy one of those cheaper Chinese EVs, but did you notice that the Chinese have been commissioning more coal-fired plants to build and power those EVs?

Things are getting worse faster than expected. And we're not doing much about that. Kinda depressing.

Microplastics

I guess if it gets too hot, we could decamp to a rapidly melting Antarctica . . . where it's snowing microplastics. Yes, every breath we take, every drop of rain everywhere on Earth, even the very blood coursing through our veins, is now full of plastic. Plastic, you see, has a special property besides making packaging that's impossible to open without sustaining injury. When it degrades — slowly, ever so slowly — it simply breaks down into ever smaller versions of itself. It remains plastic all the way down to the molecular level where it can sneak into our bodies and cause who-knows-what damage. Here's a bonus: As it pollutes our oceans, it contaminates the tiny, filter-feeding creatures at the bottom of the marine food chain. You know, the ones that prop up an entire ecosystem upon which billions of people depend for food.

Now, you'd think the prospect of their own kids stuffed with plastic, if not the utter degradation of our environment, just might spur the good folks in the plastics in-



Photo by Steve Solomon

Ron Reagan listens to a convention attendee's question for him following his keynote speech on Sept. 27 in Denver.

dustry to some concerted action aimed at lessening their industry's impact on the planet, or at least on their children's biome. Well, they do have a plan: Produce even more plastic — they hope much more — in the coming decades. You think we're swimming in plastic now? Wait till individual grapes come in their own shrink wrap!

Presumably the industry will continue blaming us, the consumers, for plastic pollution. Globally, less than 10 percent of plastic is actually recycled. According to the plastic people, that's all our fault.

I know, depressing. It gets worse.

If only plastic was the sole toxin being pumped into our bloodstreams! Perhaps you've heard of phthalates or PFAS, PFCs? Ubiquitous chemicals used in packaging, canned food, fire retardants, non-stick coatings — many domestic and industrial uses. It's everywhere. And quite toxic — linked to cancers, developmental delays, etc. The EPA has declared that there is no safe dose of PFAS for humans. It's also referred to as a "forever" chemical — once in the environment, it will persist for thousands of years. Kinda like plastic.

As reported on the front page of the New York Times, a lot of PFAS ends up in municipal waste, waste that is being used, year after year, as fertilizer on millions of acres of American farms. Now, cows are dying, children are getting sick, farmers are scared — for their family's health and that they'll lose their farms. In Maine, the majority of over 100 farms tested had dangerous levels of PFAS. One farm was so toxic it was taken offline for agriculture forever. That's in, FOREVER.

PFAS has turned up on farmland in Michigan, as well. Naturally, you'd expect the state of Michigan to quickly begin testing its farms to assess the extent of the crisis. They have not. They're concerned, as well they might be, that what they'll find will devastate their agricultural industry. An industry increasingly dependent on a toxic fertilizer that is poisoning the life out of their farms, their livestock, their families.

Imagine this playing out globally! We don't have to imagine that. It is.

Pretty depressing. Better to just look away.

Scary problems

Are you beginning to sense a theme here? Big scary problem is identified, a serious response is required, but said response would gore many oxen and upset apple carts large and small. Besides, big, scary problems are so . . . big and scary. Better we ignore the problem altogether, pretend it doesn't exist, minimize it, maybe acknowledge it . . . but only as a concern for future generations. Or, as a last resort, you can accuse the people raising concerns about the problem as fringy lunatics with malign, probably communist intent.

It's human nature. When threats of monumental proportions arise, especially ones for which we bear responsibility, we stick our anxious heads in a bucket of sand. Thing is, that strategy doesn't make problems go

away. They just fester.

The list is long: homelessness in our cities, income inequality, social media algorithms that divide us while preying on our kids, food that isn't food making us sick, infertility rates spiking, birth rates tanking, leading to the coming population crash (which, admittedly, would be a benefit for every other living thing on the planet), and that old favorite, back by popular demand courtesy of guys like Kim Jong Un and Vladimir Putin, nuclear holocaust. Duck and cover!

But don't worry! Elon Musk is gonna move us all to Mars where there's nothing but volcanic dust to eat and the temperature's a balmy minus 80 degrees.

Truly depressing. But very, very interesting.

Here's where we pull the plane out of its nosedive.

There is another threat just as insidious and perhaps more immediate that speaks directly to the work of the FFRF — the battle between democracy and authoritarianism. Around the world and, crucially, right here in America, authoritarianism — with its usual bedfellows — is gaining ground.

Maintaining democracy

The good news is, here in America, we have something to say about that. We still live in a democratic republic. But that could change faster than you might think.

As he left the Constitutional Convention, having helped draft our constitution, Benjamin Franklin — as you probably know — was asked, "Do we have a monarchy or a republic?" "A republic," he replied, "if you can keep it."

Democracy is both new and terribly difficult to maintain. It is fragile and needs constant tending. We think of ourselves as the world's oldest democracy. But for roughly half our history, women weren't allowed to vote. Never mind the slaves. You can, in fact, make a strong argument that we were not truly a democracy until the civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s, particularly the Voting Rights Act. Pretty new-fangled, this democracy thing. Work in progress. We're still figuring it out. And some folks still don't cotton to the idea of every citizen having the right to vote.

The next months will tell us whether our experiment in representative government that began nearly 240 years ago will continue. Whether ideas like liberty and justice for all will spread around the globe or wither and vanish like Lindsey Graham's spine or Lauren Boebert's cerebral cortex.

Democracy is a conversation — sometimes an unruly argument. It's messy. It requires compromise. You have to accept losing. Much of this does not come naturally to barely evolved apes, including certain unevolved presidential candidates.

Authoritarianism, on the other hand, is easy. It may be the human default setting. We shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that an urge for self-determination is universal, that a yearning for freedom and liberty is baked into everyone's genes. There are many people in the world who long for the dubious comforts of tyranny, who are waiting for the "strongman" to take the reins.

He might ride in on a tall horse. He may have a funny mustache. Or slather his face with pumpkin-hued pancake while sporting a baroque comb-over. Doesn't matter. There will always be gullible victims who clamor for his grift.

Bane of religion

This is where religion — perhaps the original grift — joins the picture.

How many of the current autocrats have linked themselves to a church? Have exploited religious fervor for their own ends?

Vladimir Putin doesn't strike me as a particularly pious fellow — more a poison-my-political-foes-invade-neighboring-countries-threaten-nuclear-war kinda guy. Yet, he's very chummy with the Russian Orthodox Church, promoting himself as a defender of the faith. And they, in turn, not wanting to be poisoned or nuked, and always drawn to power, have bear-hugged him back.

You know who else hearts Putin? Right-wing evangelicals in the U.S. They see him as a warrior for Christendom. Many say they'd rather he was our president than any stinky, squishy, godless Democrat.

Narendra Modi of India has been fanning the flames of Hindu/Muslim animosity — a pool of gasoline that barely needs a match. Like many authoritarians past and present, he has discovered that demonizing a vulnerable minority — in this case, Muslim citizens — boosts your chances of reelection. He's also an example of autocrats forming mutual fan clubs. When Putin invaded the Ukraine and the West responded with sanctions, Modi was eager to lend a hand — to Putin.

In Afghanistan, the ruling Taliban have married governance with the worst impulses of religious zealotry. Afghan women are already deprived of the right to an education, jobs or the simple liberty to leave home without a male chaperone, even while wearing those beekeeper suits. Now, because things in Afghanistan weren't tragic enough already, women are officially barred from speaking in public. Not public speaking, mind you. Just speaking. The Afghan men, as usual, have nothing interesting to say.

What is it with so many religionists that makes them so terrified of women? That makes them want to deprive women of basic rights? That makes them want to do terrible things to women? When the Gazans stormed across the Israeli border on Oct. 7 — opening the latest act in their long-running territorial/religious conflict — they had been told to do as they pleased to the people in the kibbutzim. Apparently, what pleased many of them was to hunt down young girls, gleefully raping, torturing, mutilating and murdering those they didn't drag back to the howling mobs in Gaza as hostages or trophies. Was that a political statement? Religious fervor? Or a particularly perverse, shamelessly sadistic fusion of the two?

Let's not let Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu off the hook. He only clings to power through the good graces of the right-wing religious fanatics in his governing coalition. They embrace violence every bit as much as Hamas. They, too, view the battle through their own religious lens, see a zero-sum conflict with no point in compromise.

Authoritarian rule, whether secular or religious, shares certain features. It's almost invariably bigoted — racist, misogynistic, antisemitic, Islamophobic, homophobic. It rules by fear and seeks out vulnerable groups to victimize — gay people, trans kids, folks of other religions, people with no religion, immigrants, the poor.

It moves quickly to demonize, stifle and finally shutter a free press. It subverts independent courts. Elections become shams with leaders ultimately being "elected" for life. Think Victor Orban in Hungary.

Dictators aren't up for a discussion, which pretty much precludes any real stab at democracy. If they're not claiming to speak to God and for God, they're claiming to be God. Like the Kim family in North Korea — kiss their asses or go straight to a fiery hell.

We're not quite ready for the burqa here in America, not quite living in a "Handmaid's Tale." But don't kid yourself! There are plans afoot — and not just Project 2025 — aiming to create an avowedly Christian nation under the thumb of ideologically vetted white males. Let's call them MAGA-Christians! The folks plotting to take over would purge the government of nonbelievers — in God, in Trump. They'd stack the judiciary and Justice Department with cronies, reward sycophants and use the power of the state to punish their opponents.

And don't forget, girls, they'll want to monitor your menstrual cycles and gynecological visits, the better to punish you for even considering an abortion. If you get pregnant, they'll force you to stay pregnant. It's their call, not yours. Not that they really care about fetuses, they just want to punish you for having sex. One look at Samuel Alito's pinched, angry face tells you it's all about the sex.

The usual caveat: There are plenty of believers who cherish freedom, even for nonbelievers like us, who value the separation of governance and theology just as we do, who carry their faith into the public square quietly and with dignity, who don't try to impose their beliefs on those who don't share them.

But here in the U.S. and elsewhere, their sane voices are increasingly being drowned out by a braying mob of religious extremists bent on bullying their way to power. And, too few people in public life and the media seem willing to stand up to them. Worse, here at home, the candidate for president from one of our two major parties has linked up with Christian nationalists. A once proud party, at least marginally sane, is now in thrall to a gifting sociopath perfectly willing to cater to religious zealots despite his own utter lack of faith.

I mean, is there anything funnier than watching Don-

ald Trump dodge the question, "What's your favorite bible passage?" Sure, he can hawk bibles online, he just hasn't read one. But he's certainly relentless.

As that prophetic poet of the apocalypse, William Butler Yeats, put it: "The best lack all conviction while the worst are full of passionate intensity."

A lot on the line

Well, the best of us had better absorb some of that intensity. There's a lot on the line.

We don't usually wake up in the morning thinking we have to save democracy. Or our nation. Or the world, for that matter. But here we are. History has tracked us down.

Like it or not, this is our moment. And since it's quite likely the only one we'll get, we'll want to make the most of it.

The past is gone. The future is a toss-up. Here we sit, right now, flipping the coin. The present moment. The only moment we will ever know. Our moment to make a difference. Our moment to matter.

We can cut our emissions of CO² and lessen the consequences of climate change. But the carbon we've already pumped into the atmosphere will be heating the planet for centuries.

Microplastics? Maybe we can come up with something that eats the stuff. Most likely, archaeologists a million years from now will identify our era by its layer of plastic.

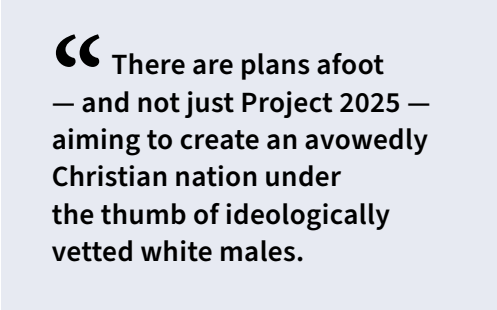
PFAS are here to stay whether we want to think about it or not.

But authoritarianism, particularly the homegrown variety? That's another matter. We can do something about that. It doesn't take a degree in physics or chemistry or engineering. We just have to look the issue squarely in the eye. Don't fall for the false equivalencies! Don't buy the both-sides-ism and what-about-ism!

So, it's pretty simple: Get out and vote! Tell your friends and co-workers to vote! Have them tell their friends and co-workers to vote! Tell your crazy uncle with the "Let's Go Brandon" T-shirt the election already happened and he missed it! Sorry, Uncle Bob!

Vote like the nation depends on your vote, because it does! Vote like your life depends on it, because it does! Vote for your children! Vote for your grandchildren! Not to reclaim a mythic past, but for right here, right now. And all the present moments yet to come.

“ There are plans afoot — and not just Project 2025 — aiming to create an avowedly Christian nation under the thumb of ideologically vetted white males.



The many expressions of Ron Reagan

FFRF's convention photographers captured his various looks as he spoke.



Photo by Steve Solomon

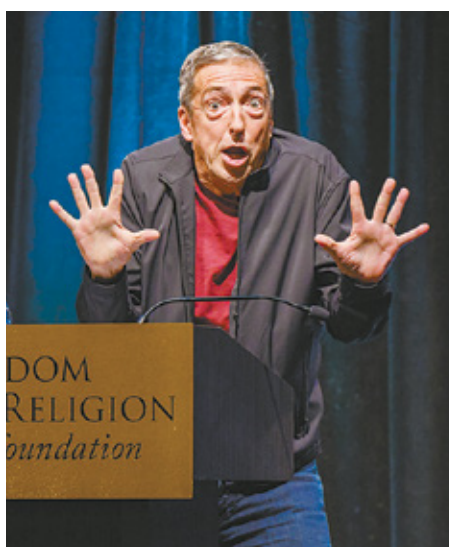


Photo by Chris Line



Photo by Kyle Hilker



Photo by Kyle Hilker

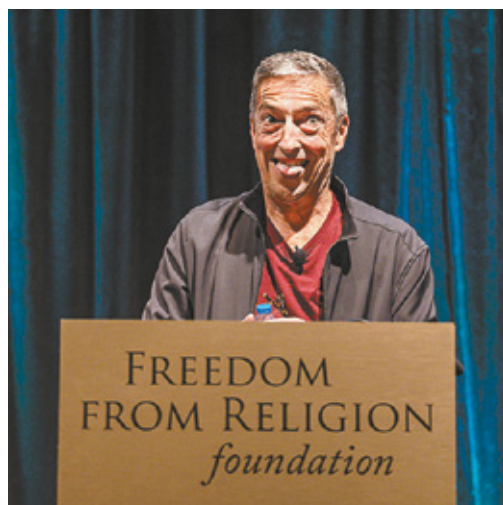


Photo by Kyle Hilker



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF ON THE ROAD (IN NIGERIA)



In October, FFRF Co-President Dan Barker and Black Nonbelievers President Mandisa Thomas visited Nigeria for the first African Freethought Music and Art Festival, co-sponsored by FFRF. Standing at the University of Lagos, where the event took place, are (from left): George Mbuagbaw (president of Humanists of Nigeria), Dooyum Dominic Ingye (a member of Advocacy for Alleged Witches), Dan Barker, Mandisa Thomas, Leo Igwe (main festival organizer and well-known humanist) and humanist activist Bolaji Alonge.



Mandisa and Dan performed some Godless Gospel songs, including, "Let's All Give Thanks," "Life is Good" and "The Natural World."



Mandisa Thomas and Bolaji Alonge, who is wearing a Black Nonbelievers shirt that Mandisa gave him.



While visiting Bodagry, a tour guide (pictured) tells Dan, Mandisa, Bolaji and George of the brutal slave trade in Nigeria.



Dan interacts with students, who wanted to know all about America.



Dan and Mandisa were the judges, along with humanist activist Bolaji Alonge.



The soloists sang with enthusiasm.



The festival included a competition among elementary, high-school and college students.

Trump's cabinet, other picks are dangerous

FFRF has been busy trying to keep up with all of the strange, bizarre and, yes, dangerous nominations and selections by Donald Trump for the incoming administration.

Here's a look at several of the unqualified candidates.

Department of Education

Public school students will be the losers if erstwhile World Wrestling Entertainment CEO and performer Linda McMahon is confirmed to lead the Department of Education.

McMahon was clearly nominated as education secretary not because of any educational expertise, but because she's a loyal member of Trump's inner circle. McMahon will gladly fulfill Trump's oft-repeated goal of dismantling or crippling the Education Department and expanding voucher programs that transfer funding from public to religiously segregated schools.

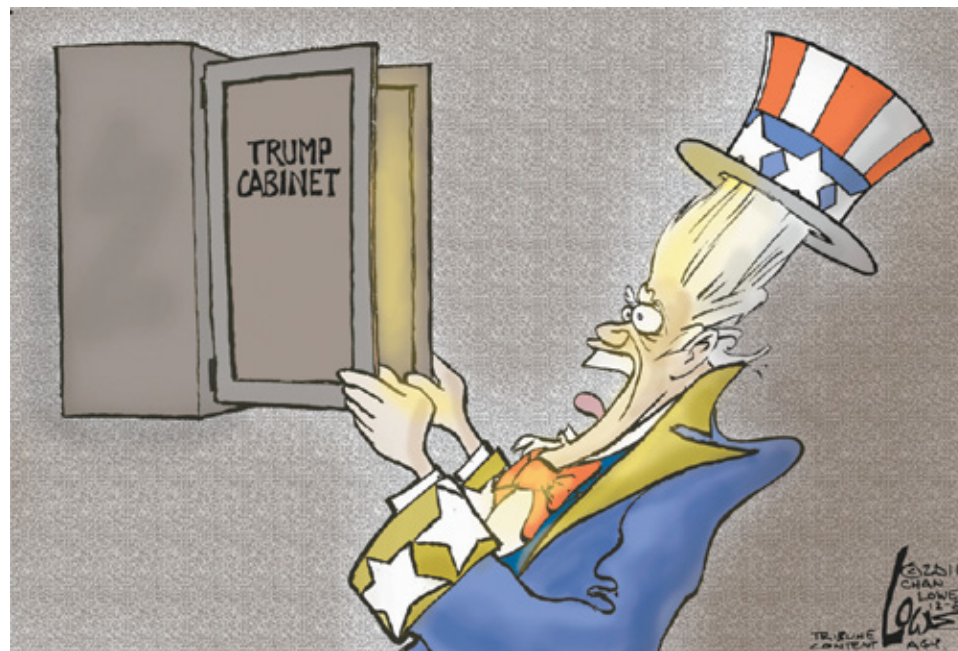
McMahon is chair of the board of the America First Policy Institute, which she helped start with Tim Dunn, the billionaire Christian nationalist pastor seeking to destroy public education, privatize public schools and create a theocracy. The Institute is a nonprofit think tank dedicated to promoting policies aligned with Trump's agenda. The Institute's America First Agenda, which competes with Project 2025 as a playbook for Trump's return to the White House, details the radical transformation it has planned for America's education system in "Pillar IV: Give Parents More Control Over the Education of Their Children."

Department of Defense

Fox News host Peter Hegseth, Trump's shocking choice to head the Department of Defense, has no experience as a lawmaker or in defense policy and the Senate must not approve him.

Hegseth has immersed himself in a culture of right-wing Christianity and political extremism. The department is tasked with protecting our nation, upholding the Constitution, and preserving all Americans' rights — regardless of religious belief or lack thereof. But if Hegseth were to be helming the Pentagon, we could see it weaponized for his Christian crusade.

Hegseth has at least two controversial



tattoos raising concerns, including the Jerusalem Cross (Crusaders' Cross) on his chest, which reportedly prevented him from being part of the security detail for President Biden's inauguration. A fellow National Guard member said Hegseth's "Deus vult" tattoo raised alarms about his motivations. "Deus vult" translates to "God wills it," and Thomas Lecaque, a historian focusing on religion and political violence, describes the phrase as "a First Crusade battle cry. . . There is no other way you can interpret this. This is not some warm and fuzzy 'we should, you know, pray and do acts of service' — this is a call to religious violence."

Ambassador to Israel

Trump has chosen Mike Huckabee, former Arkansas governor and current evangelical End Times fanatic, to be his ambassador to Israel, putting a Christian nationalist who has rejected the existence of the Palestinian people in charge of U.S. diplomacy with Israel amid its ongoing wars on Gaza and Lebanon.

FFRF has had multiple run-ins with Huckabee during his long career as an extremist politician and commentator. Several years ago, from his desk as governor of Arkansas, he even sent out a dubious fundraising letter targeting FFRF. Huckabee said that he was "afraid" of FFRF due to our numerous court victories and lamented, "In just the last few years,

they've won terrible victories that strike at the heart of our values."

Huckabee is a staunch supporter of Israel because of the Old Testament's assurance that the Hebrews are God's chosen people and, therefore, Israel is their rightful homeland. He has criticized the Biden administration's calls for a cease-fire with Hamas and has advocated for Israel to annex parts of the West Bank, which he refers to by the archaic biblical names of Judea and Samaria.

Luis Moreno, a former U.S. ambassador, recently called out Huckabee's extremism on these trips: "I unfortunately was exposed to him during his visits to Israel back in the day. Full blown (and knowledgeable) fanatic of the End of Times, Apocalypse, Israel's destruction, etc. A true and utter nut case. Couldn't be a more dangerous selection."

HHS

It's cause for concern that Robert F. Kennedy Jr. — best known for his outspoken and twisted views on vaccines, public health and other science issues — has been nominated for secretary of the Health and Human Services department.

Kennedy is already saying he will "clear out" entire Food and Drug Administration departments. Kennedy's anti-scientific rhetoric poses serious risks to the American people — affecting public health, scientific trust and the overall quality of

information accessible to the public.

Kennedy would present a clear and present danger to public health. He is an attorney with no degrees in medicine or public health and is notorious for publicizing the discredited theory that childhood vaccines are a cause of autism.

As an independent presidential candidate who then pledged support to Trump, Kennedy opposes many childhood vaccinations, was a leading opponent of immunization during the pandemic and opposes water fluoridation. He insists fluoride, which protects teeth from decay, is "lowering IQ in our children" and causing other ominous medical problems despite decades of studies showing its safety and utility.

OMB

FFRF is also raising the alarm about Russell Vought's return as director of the Office of Management and Budget in the second Trump administration.

Vought's tenure as OMB director from 2020 to 2021 and his actions since make it clear that his leadership would entrench a Christian nationalist agenda in the federal government.

Since leaving office, Vought has continued to promote religious extremism through his organization, the Center for Renewing America, which actively champions policies rooted in Christian nationalist ideology. The Center's mission is "to renew a consensus of America as a nation under God."

Vought's nomination to OMB would signal a major win for the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025. Vought wrote the Project 2025 chapter that covers the "Executive Office of the President," laying the groundwork for a broad expansion of presidential powers. "We are living in a post-constitutional time," Vought wrote in a 2022 essay, arguing that the left has corrupted the nation's laws and institutions.

Vought "plans to deploy the military in response to domestic unrest, defund the Environmental Protection Agency and put career civil servants 'in trauma.'"

"We want the bureaucrats to be traumatically affected," Vought has said. "When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work because they are increasingly viewed as the villains. We want to put them in trauma."

FFRF tells IRS to enforce Johnson Amendment

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has issued a formal request to IRS Commissioner Daniel Werfel urging strict enforcement of the Johnson Amendment, a key legal provision that prohibits tax-exempt organizations, including churches and other religious entities, from engaging in partisan political activity.

FFRF is asking the IRS to take proactive steps to investigate and enforce compliance with the Johnson Amendment and its anti-electioneering provisions, including investigating organizations that have been reported for engaging in illegal electioneering activities and implementing real consequences to address violations. Transparency in the IRS' enforcement actions will bolster public confidence in the organization and its commitment to upholding the law.

"Enforcing the Johnson Amendment is essential to maintaining the integrity of tax regulations," FFRF legal counsel Chris Line writes to Werfel, "but the IRS' failure to consistently enforce the law has given churches and other religious nonprofit organizations the go-ahead to freely vio-

late the law without consequence."

FFRF is a registered 501(c)(3) that takes this designation, along with the accompanying benefits and responsibilities, very seriously, and it's calling attention to the increasing trend of tax-exempt churches overtly participating in political campaigns without facing repercussions. For years, FFRF has reported violative churches to the IRS for making a mockery of their 501(c)(3) status by reaping all of the benefits while openly engaging in politics, endorsing political candidates and intervening in elections. Despite its efforts, FFRF isn't aware of any meaningful action that the IRS has taken to address its complaints, and violations of the Johnson Amendment have only been ramping up as we get closer to Election Day.

In October, FFRF urged the IRS to investigate Lakepointe Church in Texas after its pastor, Josh Howerton, directed congregants on "How to Vote Like Jesus." Howerton has publicly claimed that he wasn't endorsing a candidate, but his sermon made it clear that he opposed the "unrighteous" Harris-Walz ticket and

therefore believed Jesus would have cast his ballot for the "flawed" Trump-Vance campaign to win the election.

FFRF also asked the IRS to look into Lance Wallnau Ministries Inc. and a group called Ziklag after ProPublica reported that the nonprofit groups had invited JD Vance to campaign at one of their "Courage Tour" events.

Multiple churches have allowed Vice President Kamala Harris to address their congregations while clearly endorsing her for president. In October, FFRF informed the IRS that New Birth Missionary Baptist Church invited Harris to speak at a worship service at the church. During her visit, Pastor Jamal Bryant urged his congregants to go out and vote after "likening [Harris] to the biblical Esther who became queen of Persia and rescued her people from a murderous plot to annihilate them."

The disturbing trend of churches freely endorsing candidates without consequence not only undermines the integrity of our electoral process but also poses a significant risk to the principle of equality under the law. When certain organiza-

tions, particularly those who are already given special exemptions from normal 501(c)(3) reporting requirements, are allowed to engage in rampant illegal election intervention, it creates an uneven playing field, putting pressure on those organizations that comply with tax regulations and conscientiously avoid involvement in electoral politics.

FFRF successfully sued the IRS in 2012 to compel it to enforce its own regulations barring tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofits from engaging in partisan political activity. FFRF agreed to voluntary dismissal of the case after the IRS produced evidence that it had hastened to fill a key position enabling it to resume investigations at that time. Despite that lawsuit, the IRS is still failing to adequately enforce the Johnson Amendment and to ensure that 501(c)(3) organizations are following these important IRS guidelines. FFRF also successfully sued the Trump administration in 2017, when President Trump issued an executive order claiming to "repeal" the Johnson Amendment,

FFRF CHAPTER UPDATES

For more information about chapters, visit ffrf.org/outreach/chapters/

Ozarks Chapter



The Ozarks Chapter of FFRF placed this billboard on I-49 in Rogers, Ark. showing off the billboard are, left to right, Gary Berger, Chip Ballew, Gail Naidl, Phil Monroe, Ryan Bradburn, George Naidl, Sarah Nickerson, Chris Sweeny, LaDonna Powell, name withheld, Juli Odum and Seth Andrews.

The Ozarks Chapter of FFRF is headquartered in Northwest Arkansas, and serves the secular community in the Greater Ozarks region. As we wrap up 2024, our group reflects on all that was accomplished and give recognition to those who participated. During the year, our group:

- Volunteered at the NWA Women's Shelter and Elizabeth Richardson Center in Rogers.
- Twice picked up trash along a one-mile stretch of AR-12 as part of the Arkansas Adopt-A-Highway program for nonprofits.
- Conducted 14 tabling events at the Bentonville and Fayetteville Farmers Markets from April through October.
- Sponsored an FFRF billboard along Interstate 49 during the month of April.
- Participated in Pride Events in Fort Smith and Fayetteville.
- Hosted a Summer Speaker series, which included Matthew D. Taylor (Protestant scholar at the Institute for Islamic, Christian & Jewish Studies),

Christopher Line (staff attorney with FFRF) and Seth Andrews (author, activist and host of "The Thinking Atheist").

- Held our third Annual Constitution Day Event on Sept. 17.
- Represented the Ozarks Chapter of FFRF at the 47th Annual FFRF National Convention in Denver.
- Created an official Ozarks Chapter of FFRF logo and began selling merchandise.

The chapter would like to recognize and thank several people who have volunteered their time to this cause, including James Brazeal, LaDonna Powell, Ryan Bradburn, Sarah Nickerson, George & Gail Naidl, Chip Ballew, Juli Odum, Phil Monroe, Bill and Linda Farrell, Linda Laue and all of the other individuals who have given so much to our nascent organization.

For more information on the Ozarks Chapter of FFRF, contact OzarksFFRF@gmail.com.

Central Florida Freethought Community



FREEFLO attendees from last year show their excitement.

On March 14–16, 2025, the Central Florida Freethought Community again will be hosting FREEFLO — the Freethought Florida Conference — the Southeast's premiere freethought event in the Orlando area.

The event, to be held at the Hilton Altamonte Springs, begins with a live-costume party the first night. Immerse

yourself the next two days in engaging presentations on science, public policy, philosophy, social justice, and the vital separation between religion and government.

Saturday night features an optional banquet dinner packed with comedy and pub-style trivia. For more information on this event, visit www.FREEFLO.org.

Grand Rapids Area Freethinkers



Julie Legg, president of Grand Rapids (Minn.) Area Freethinkers, works the chapter's booth at Itasca Pride Fest.

Grand Rapids (Minn.) Area Freethinkers members sold T-shirts and secular books and gave away a variety of FFRF merchandise at the Itasca Pride Fest. It was announced that 800 individuals were predicted to attend, but 2,000 people showed up! A few protesters also attended, but were kept under the watchful eye of an amazing security team.

The day ended with an interfaith service at a community church, with speakers invited from Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopalian, pagan and atheist points of view. Chapter President Julie Legg presented "Frequently Asked Questions About Atheists," which was very well received. The group agreed that the whole day was a warm and welcoming experience for everyone.

For more information about the Grand Rapids Area Freethinkers Chapter of FFRF, contact Chapter President Julie Legg at jnlegg@gmail.com.

East Tennessee Chapter



East Tennessee Chapter member Norm Barrett and President Aleta Ledendecker work at the Pride Fest table in Knoxville.

The FFRF East Tennessee Chapter (FFRF-ETC) focuses on state/church separation issues which are numerous and egregious in Tennessee. Therefore, FFRF-ETC receives a large number of violations, mostly through its Facebook page, which the chapter reviews and forwards to the attorneys at FFRF in Madison, Wis. If action can be taken, Tennessee is a state that requires open records requests to be made by a resident of Tennessee, so a representative from our chapter willingly fills that role.

Annually, FFRF-ETC holds a National Day of Reason event opposite a Day of Prayer event. The chapter is thrilled to report that despite extensive PR and offering a wide array of entertainment, the Day of Prayer event had only a handful of attendees. FFRF-ETC also tables at local pride events, where the pins stating "Keep Your Theology Off My Biology" are a continuing hit.

FFRF-ETC also keeps the statue of Clarence Darrow at the Rhea County Courthouse cleaned and waxed. This year, FFRF-ETC added lighting fixtures to illuminate the statue in preparation for the centennial of the Scopes trial in 2025. The group is coordinating with the Rhea County Historical Society, which is installing identical lighting for the William Jennings Bryan statue.

For more information about the East Tennessee Chapter of FFRF, contact Chapter President Aleta Ledendecker at info@ffrf-etc.org.

San Francisco Bay Chapter



The San Francisco Bay Chapter has a table at the Palo Alto Farmers Market.

On many weekends this year, the San Francisco Bay Chapter tabled at farmers markets in Temescal, Sunnyvale and Palo Alto. The chapter has found that engaging with local communities has been rewarding, energizing and occasionally cathartic.

On the Sunday after the election, the chapter's table had 50 visitors, not counting a few "amens" from a distance, lots of thumbs up, and some who just waved. As anticipated, many were shell-shocked. Those that spoke with us and took materials ranged from the curious to upset/disturbed about the election results and wanting to connect and vent a bit. Two different visitors wondered why we had materials about religion and reproductive rights. Several people asked for examples of what would constitute a church/state separation violation.

In previous weeks, the chapter met a few FFRF members who were not aware there was a local chapter. Some visitors were ecstatic to learn of our existence. Others were supportive and shared various tales while gathering some info about FFRF. One couple's story about leaving the Jehovah's Witnesses was intense, inspiring and heart-wrenching. Two enthusiastic young women were thrilled that we stood with the Satanic Temple on many legal cases. (And it's a real treat when we get to hear ex-priest and longtime FFRF member, Dick Hewetson, discuss the bible with a market-goer.)

For more information about the San Francisco Bay Chapter of FFRF, contact info@sfbayffrf.org.

Valley of the Sun Chapter (Ariz.)



Valley of the Sun President Mars de La Tour, left, moderates a panel on the topic of "Beyond the Vote: The Power of LGBTQ-plus Civic Engagement," which includes, left to right, Joseph Darius Jaafari, Mathew Nevarez, Jeanne Casteen and Maury Nye D'Angelo.

FFRF's Valley of the Sun Chapter recently hosted a powerful and engaging panel discussion, "Beyond the Vote: The Power of LGBTQ-plus Civic Engagement," at The Rock in Phoenix. The event, a collaboration with Melrose Toastmasters, Arizona's first LGBTQ-plus and friends Toastmasters Club, explored the intersection of secularism and LGBTQ-plus advocacy and how these movements can work together to advance equality and rational public policy.

The panel was moderated by FFRF Valley of the Sun Chapter President Mars de La Tour and featured:

Jeanne Casteen, executive director of Secular AZ, who spoke about the importance of protecting the separation of church and state in local government.

Joseph Darius Jaafari, editor-in-chief and founder of LOOKOUT, highlighting the role of media in shaping public opinion and activism.

Mathew Nevarez, governing board member of the Alhambra Elementary School District, who inspired attendees

with his journey as an BIPOC LGBTQ-plus leader in public education.

Cardinal Father Maury Nye D'Angelo of the Grand Canyon Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, who brought a creative and compassionate lens to community-building and activism.

The panel focused on grassroots volunteerism, coalition-building and empowering individuals to advocate for lasting social change. Mars underscored the vital role collaboration plays in amplifying shared goals, such as equality and rational policymaking, and in challenging the religious influence in public life. Through events like this, the Valley of the Sun Chapter is expanding its reach and demonstrating how secularism and LGBTQ-plus advocacy can work hand-in-hand to create a fairer, more inclusive society. To learn more about the FFRF Valley of the Sun Chapter, and to join, contact Mars de La Tour (they/them) at info@ffrfus.org or visit ffrfus.org.

Triangle Freethought Society (N.C)

In September, the Triangle Freethought Society put on two screenings of the documentary "Bad Faith," which outlines the ways in which Christian nationalist leaders have managed to take power over the last few decades. These screenings were in collaboration with the Nontheist Group at the Eno River UU Fellowship and Americans United for Separation of Church and State. We had over 350 attendees across the two screenings, and held a Q&A discussion after each, with knowledgeable speakers to help contextualize the documentary and motivate the attendees to get out and fight against Christian nationalism.

For more information about the Triangle Freethought Society, visit trianglefreethought.org.



Triangle Freethought Society member Helen Wolfson gives an introduction to the movie "Bad Faith."

Metro Denver Chapter



The FFRF Metro Denver Chapter held a pub gathering at Great Divide Brewery with current members and newcomers.

The FFRF Metro Denver chapter started hosting monthly pub social gatherings in September. The pub social gatherings have turned out to be a big hit among members and newcomers. The chapter's first event had 11 attendees and November's post-election gathering had 22! Everyone was excited to have a chance to come together and share stories, emotions and ideas for other events/activism. The chapter's calendar of events is posted on Meetup and social media.

To learn more about the FFRF Metro Denver chapter, contact Chapter President Claudette St. Pierre at ffrfdenver@gmail.com or visit ffrfdenver.org.

Upstate N.Y. Freethinkers



(Inset) Maggie Symington, left, and Linda Stephens of Upstate New York Freethinkers attended the Monroe County (N.Y.) Legislature meeting where Symington requested that pre-meeting prayers be abolished.

On Nov. 12, and for the second time this year, Maggie Symington addressed the Legislature in Monroe County, N.Y., to request that the practice of prayer at the beginning of such meetings be abolished. Symington's first address took place on Aug. 13. A group of Upstate New York Freethinkers attended in support, which included Linda Stephens, who was the atheist plaintiff in the Supreme Court case *Town of Greece v. Galloway*.

Symington pointed out that Monroe County's policy on prayer-givers unfairly limits invocations to only "ordained ministers with congregations," and gave examples of the county's nonconformity to its own rule. She implored the Legislature to stop wasting taxpayer dollars on a new process, but instead to abandon the practice altogether. Additionally, ministers are personally selected by individual legislators, which gives the appearance of a corrupt system of patronage and quid pro quo.

In her address, Symington had pointed out that, in spite of the Supreme Court requirement that the opening prayer be representative of diverse religious views, the vast majority of the prayers have been conducted by Christian ministers. The appearance of collusion between county elected officials and Christianity seems to be in direct opposition to the county's own nondiscrimination policies, leaving an impression that both secular citizens and those outside the preferred religion have no voice in county government, and are perhaps unsafe in the meeting space.

While the county Legislature has made no response to the requests, Symington intends to keep exercising her constitutional rights and speaking at the public forums.

Upstate New York Freethinkers stands on the shoulders of participants like Linda Stephens and Maggie Symington, and the chapter seeks more leaders to organize for a brighter, secular future.

To learn more, or to join or donate, go to unyft.org, email info@unyft.org or phone/text (585) 454-9921.

LETTERBOX

The true meaning behind theological books

A very long time ago, two pan-galactic sibling deities decided to compete with each other by making perplexing religious revelations to humankind on Planet Earth in the Milky Way galaxy.

In deified social circles, the two were known as the Brothers Bo, and were respectively called Jum and Mum. It was agreed upon that each of them would compose not one but two prophetic holy books each, and then “reveal” them to Earthlings at different times for the brothers’ amusement and mankind’s confusion. Those rascals.

Mum’s first baffling book of scripture was called the Jewish bible and then, several hundred years later, he released a bewildering second book which was called the New Testament, which caused a lot of people to consider it a sequel to his first book.

Jum, not to be outdone, composed his own two equally confounding theological books. He revealed them respectively as the Quran and then, centuries later, the Book of Mormon. No sequels there.

Hence, the Brothers Bo each had two theological books composed for human consumption and consternation. These writings were stupendous conundrums and caused much psychological stress and millions of deaths, as they do to this day.

So, after some squabbling and bickering between them, as to which of the revelations was best and most annoyingly baffling, the siblings set their differences aside and compromised by combining all four works and collectively called them by their presently accepted and appropriate name: MumboJumbo.

Illinois

Freethought Today much appreciated after election

My Freethought Today arrived today. It’s the first good thing to look at since the election!

Ohio

Reagan’s ad on MSNBC a pleasant surprise

How pleasantly surprised I was to hear Ron Reagan’s ads on MSNBC in support of FFRF. With the wide audience of MSNBC, the ads should go a long way to promoting the great work of FFRF.

New York

Pro-lifers should ponder this possible scenario

If I were still teaching constitutional law, I would present to my students the following scenario regarding pro-lifers’ “life begins at conception” stance.

A newly married couple from the United States fly to Peru for their honeymoon. Then, 270 days after returning home, the wife gives birth.

If life and all human rights begin at conception, and this child was conceived in a foreign country, is the baby a Peruvian citizen or U.S. citizen or both?

Florida

Where do you read Freethought Today?



Member Tom Drolsum sent us this photo of himself taking a break to read Freethought Today on the Glacial Drumlin State Trail in Jefferson County, Wis., in October. He points out that he is also wearing FFRF’s “Out of the Closet Atheist” cap.

FFRF’s Hirsh Joshi was a wonderful help in Denver

I met FFRF Legal Fellow Hirsh Joshi at FFRF’s national convention in Denver.

I had parked my car in what I thought was a designated place and walked to the hotel where the convention was. Knowing I had to go back to my car at 9 p.m., I asked at the check-in desk if anyone could walk with me to my car. Hirsh immediately volunteered.

At the designated time, Hirsh and I walked the several blocks to the garage where my car was parked. The building was locked, but we could see the cleaning crew through the window. Hirsh found and rang the bell and we were allowed into the empty building and down the elevator to the parking ramp, where I found my car.

Hirsh was kind, smart and most helpful. I was lucky to have his help. My husband and our daughter and my father-in-law are all attorneys. Hirsh is a welcome member of the legal field.

Colorado

NYC schools have too many religious holidays

The New York City public school system, the nation’s largest, was closed on Friday, Nov. 1, for the Hindu holiday of Diwali. The NYC public schools also close for various Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious holidays in addition to the Chinese New Year. It is only a matter of time before the Buddhists, Sikhs, Rastafarians and Wiccans demand that the public schools close for their religious holidays.

As our wretched Mayor Eric Adams famously declared “I don’t want to hear no separation of church and state!” Well, it is clear that the most secular and religiously diverse city in the United States no longer pays any heed to the separation of church and state. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, when I attended NYC public schools, the only religious

holiday on which the system shut down was Christmas, a national holiday.

New York

U.S. theocracy is now a distinct possibility

I awoke early on the morning after the election and learned the news and went from stunned silence to devastating sobs. It just seemed impossible that so many people were willing to confirm the worst of our American character, personified in one disgusting man.

This was driven by the theocrats and, believe me, I have studied history in depth, and there has never been a benevolent theocracy — never. This opens the door for 2025 with a MAGA House and Senate. When people can kill in the name of God, nobody is safe — nobody.

I weep that the future is in their hands, delivered on a silver platter.

North Carolina

It’s past time to starve the government beast

I first offered this idea after the 2016 election. Nobody paid attention to it then. They’d better now.

I am recommending that everyone who can afford to live on their savings give enough of their earnings every year to charity to reduce their tax liability to nothing. Do not feed the monster that the government is becoming.

A simple way to do it would be to start a donor-advised charity, like from Vanguard or Fidelity. That would be a quick solution and would allow you to donate to any 501(c)(3) organization you favor at your leisure. While it is not permitted to donate to expressly political organizations, I recommend giving to resistance-related organizations. There are plenty and the need is greater than ever. (Charitable gift annuities could be a part of an overall plan, but they offer only a partial write-off.)

By starving the government of funds, we can force it to cut back on its agenda, or even hasten its ultimate collapse from an unsustainable debt burden, which is likely anyway, and would be preferable to a theocratic fascist regime that gets ever more entrenched while conniving to be self-perpetuating.

It’s simple. You can give to organizations you support, or to a government you don’t.

Pennsylvania

As a Christian, I support FFRF and its efforts

I just wanted to voice my support for FFRF. I am Christian and proud of my faith. But my belief in Jesus is by choice, not by force from the government. The Puritans came to North America (not the New World — Indigenous people and the Vikings got here first) to escape the Church of England. I appreciate the Founding Fathers’ demand for freedom of religion, including the right not to practice a religion. We need to stand up to a small but powerful group in government legislating “Christian family values.” My friends left forced religion in Nigeria, Iran and Pakistan. We must fight Christian nationalism more than ever since Trump was reelected. I hope my donation helps FFRF blast the airwaves and all modes of communication.

California

Worst presidents for state/church separation

5: Ronald Reagan: Though not a regular churchgoer, Reagan openly encouraged and supported Christianity as president. In a 1982 letter, he wrote: “My daily prayer is that God will help me to use this position so as to serve Him. Teddy Roosevelt once called the presidency a bully pulpit. I intend to use it to the best of my ability to serve the Lord.” That same year, Reagan supported a constitutional amendment to allow voluntary school prayer. A year later he awarded the Rev. Billy Graham the Presidential Medal of Freedom and proclaimed 1983 the “Year of the Bible.”

4: Abraham Lincoln: It was under his watch that, in 1864, Congress passed an act to allow, but not require, the addition of the phrase “In God We Trust” to currency. A work of political theology now known as America’s Sermon, the second Inaugural addresses the nation’s relationship to God in great depth; within 701 words, Lincoln mentions God 14 times, quotes the bible four times, and invokes prayer three times. Widely considered Lincoln’s greatest speech, its weaving of religion into our nation has had a lasting impact.

3: George W. Bush: “I trust God speaks through me. Without that, I



couldn't do my job. A dictatorship would be a lot easier." Bush, one of the most openly religious presidents, seemingly sought to undermine the separation of church and state at every turn during his presidency. He claimed he was on a mission from God when he launched the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. He advocated religious-school vouchers and praised the teaching of intelligent design in public schools.

2: Donald J. Trump: "We're going to protect Christianity, and I can say that. I don't have to be politically correct. We're going to protect it." He also called for the abolishment of a statutory barrier between politics and religion called the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits tax-exempt organizations such as churches and other places of worship, charities and educational institutions from directly or indirectly participating in any political campaign in favor or against a political candidate.

1: Dwight D. Eisenhower: In 1954,



Eisenhower signed a bill to add the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance. Two years later, Eisenhower signed a law officially declaring "In God We Trust" to be the nation's official motto (replacing "E Pluribus Unum") and also mandating that the phrase be printed on all American paper currency.

Ohio

FFRF needs 'attack' mode over religious intrusion

Please accept my donation to fight the meddling of church and state by white evangelicals. I do not know the inner workings of FFRF well enough, but I feel that FFRF has to have an attack mode mentality and must "go after" individuals like Pastor Robert Jeffress of the First Baptist Church of Dallas.

FFRF needs to "attack" all of the sources of this white evangelical Christian movement, not just the school boards wanting prayers in the classrooms or the Ten Commandments in some city hall.

FFRF needs to continue its big push attacking the Christian nationalism movement. Please make that the priority of FFRF's efforts and help bring sanity to this nation's direction.

Washington

THEY SAID WHAT?

Women are of great service as women, not as ministers.

Pope Francis, in a "60 Minutes" interview last May. The Vatican once again has shelved discussion about women becoming priests, or even deacons, as a discussion item at its synod.

New York Times, 10-27-24

You needn't abandon a God-focused relationship toward prayer. It might simply be altered. For me, sometimes prayer looks like this: I am driving and it is raining and the windshield wipers are going back and forth and I am crying and I am asking God for help. Help me Hashem, I whisper over and over. Just please help me. I use the Hebrew name for God because that is the name of God that I know.

Author Sara Sherbill, in her column, "You might consider praying."

New York Times, 11-1-24

We cannot go to church and pray like Christians and turn around and vote like atheists.

Florida Lt. Gov. Jeanette Nuñez, at an event to tell voters to reject Amendment 4,

which would have undone the state's six-week abortion ban.

The Friendly Atheist, 11-4-24

Nuclear weapons are demonic, there's no upside to them at all, and anyone who claims otherwise is either ignorant or doing the bidding of the forces that created nuclear technology in the first place, which were not human forces obviously. . . . It's very clear to me that these [nuclear weapons] are demonic.

Former Fox News host Tucker Carlson, speaking on the "War Room" podcast hosted by right-wing extremist Steve Bannon.

The Guardian, 11-4-24

The numbers we are seeing are eye-popping. Trump and JD Vance scored a historic victory Tuesday night, thanks to the Catholic vote.

CatholicVote President Brian Burch, commenting on how Trump won the national Catholic vote by a margin of 58 percent to 40 percent, a higher level of support from Catholics than he received in 2020.

CatholicVote.org, 11-6-24

Now, we move from campaigning to governing. We bishops look forward to working with the people's elected representatives.



Archbishop Timothy Broglio, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a statement congratulating Trump and other winners of the Nov. 5 elections.

Cruznnow.com, 11-6-24

Turn to religion. Religion is love. I'm not sure how else you do it.

Former President George W. Bush, when asked following the election what his message is to America.

Raw Story, 11-10-24

We need to pray for them, and I just want to say to all you folks who feel that way, don't make politics or identity groups your religion! Only Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Put your faith in Him, not in men, not in man's institutions,

not in human institutions.

Actress Patrica Heaton, commenting about how some women have shaved their heads or said they will cut off sexual relationships with men over the results of the election.

Fox News, 11-11-24

Christians! Head to the polls today. Vote to keep God in America.

NFL kicker Harrison Butker, in a commercial for his Upright PAC. Butker was named the FFRF Action Fund's "Theocrat of the Week" on Nov. 8 for his remarks.

Instagram, 11-3-24

It is no coincidence that the dismantling of faith and family values in public schools directly correlates with declining academic outcomes in our public schools.

Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters, in announcing a new Office of Religious Liberty and Patriotism. Walters was named FFRF Action Fund's "Theocrat of the Week" on Nov. 15.

Oklahoma Department of Education, 11-12-24

CRANKMAIL

Here is the latest installment of Crankmail, where we publish some of the vitriol FFRF receives via mail, email, phone calls or social media. Printed as received.

Pray: The Catholic Church has been at the forefront of all you claim in you mission statement except the culture of death which you unwittingly embrace. There have been far more dearhs in the wake of atheist dictators than all of the religious

wars combined. I pray for your conversion.

Please stop: Not sure why it bothers you all that people love God and encourage others to do so. We don't sit around worried about what you don't believe in, nor does anybody need you to fight for them. "In God we Trust" is what this country was built upon. You are free to leave any time. Your little minority of instagators and haters need to find some peace and joy and leave people to do what they want. Why do we scare you so much?

FFRF is satan: i want my Cristian religion to guide values

Your org: hello, join me in prayer you fucking assholes.

Repent: Stop assaulting Jesus.

Religion: For the past 32 years I have had a wonderful RELATIONSHIP with my Lord and Sav-

ior Jesus Christ. You have it all wrong. We do not have a religion, we have a relationship with Jesus. Now, I know as you read this you are not very happy that a man of God is writing this to you. I make a commitment to all of you from this day forward no matter how much you come against God I will pray for your organization every day. I will tell you this no matter how hard you try you cannot beat God. He will always have the victory. The bible says to love your enemies , do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who persecute you and spitefully use you. That is from the gospel of John , chapter 6. I will do just as Jesus said.

BGEA: I will increase donations to BGEA [Billy Graham Evangelical Association] because of your slanderous and corrupt actions to BGEA by contacting the irs. You are NOT THE JUDGE attorney for ffrf! I forgive your ignorance and hatred of God and love of one's self. However, my donations WILL increase and btw harris is a socialist, look it up ffrf attorney and stop meddling in an organization that if something bad happens;they (God) saves you and feeds you and loves you unconditionally!

Atheism: I just received word that my exhusband's nephew just shot himself. He was in his 20's. I begin to cry but not at the death but not being a better aunt to him. I'm relatively sure he

is in hell. That's why the tears. I will go to heaven and at the great white throne judgement I will stand there knowing he's been suffering in hell and he will go back because I didn't say anything to him about Jesus Christ and what he's done for him. If you die and you used to be a pastor and I have to assume you are saved and you've not told your family about Jesus Christ and Him dying on the cross in our place for our sins and rose the third to go to heaven to intercede for our stupidities, and that anyone you have made contact with and are sending them down the wrong path including your wife and daughter, I wonder how you'll look at these people into their eyes when God says to them, "Depart from me for I never knew you!" They will ALL be sentenced to Hell for Eternity. Do you know how long Eternity is? Eternity burning.

Pst: Be prepared when Jesus comes back to reign as King of Kings & he does not call your name . Abortion is killing Men/women on death row who kill " in the Bible " An eye for an eye " Also in the Bible " obey the laws of the land "

Stop!: Stop this bullshit. People got their own brains. They are followers, not leaders. Grow the fuck up and stop this bullshit. Leave it in God's hands. Stay out of it. Reagan was a bullshit president, too. Believe what you want to believe. Stop it! Mind your own damn business.

Crossword answers

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Cryptogram answer

Humanism affirms that people can solve their problems without imagining supernatural beings; the arts and sciences flourish when ignorance and superstition are thus overthrown.

— Joe Nickell

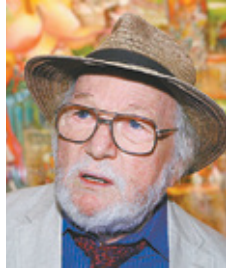
Crucified: Religious censorship of art

By Bob Cenedella

As an artist, I have never been able to free myself from the effects of religion. I thought I had actually become free from religion as the result of an incident at age 6. I remember being dragged to church by my grandmother on many Sundays and even some evening masses.

It was clear from day one that I would become an artist. So, even as a young child, I was very observant about the world around me. As much as I disliked having to go to church, I was rather obsessed with the stone statues of Jesus and other religious figures. While the sermon was in progress, in both English and Latin, for me it was simply boring.

But what I did find mysterious was one life-sized statue of what I was told was God (which really frightened me). I wondered, "Is he real?" I remember quite clearly looking at the statue and focusing on the head to see if it moved. The figure looked real and I was told God was real, but I wanted to catch him moving. It was an obsession every time I went to church.



Bob Cenedella

That is, until one Sunday. The church was crowded and we sat near the sculpture, which allowed me to focus on whether he moved. If God were real, why didn't he move? I was sitting on an aisle seat and wanted to see if I could touch him. I impulsively ran to the statue and climbed up on the pedestal and began pounding on the marble, much to the horror of my grandmother and everyone else.

I mention this early experience because it clearly had a profound effect on how I think about life in general and how I chose to express myself through my art.

I have often found the cross, as well as other Christian symbols, to be of great interest to me as an artist. Over the years, the power of the symbol led me to compose a great number of paintings and drawings that dealt with the subject of religion.

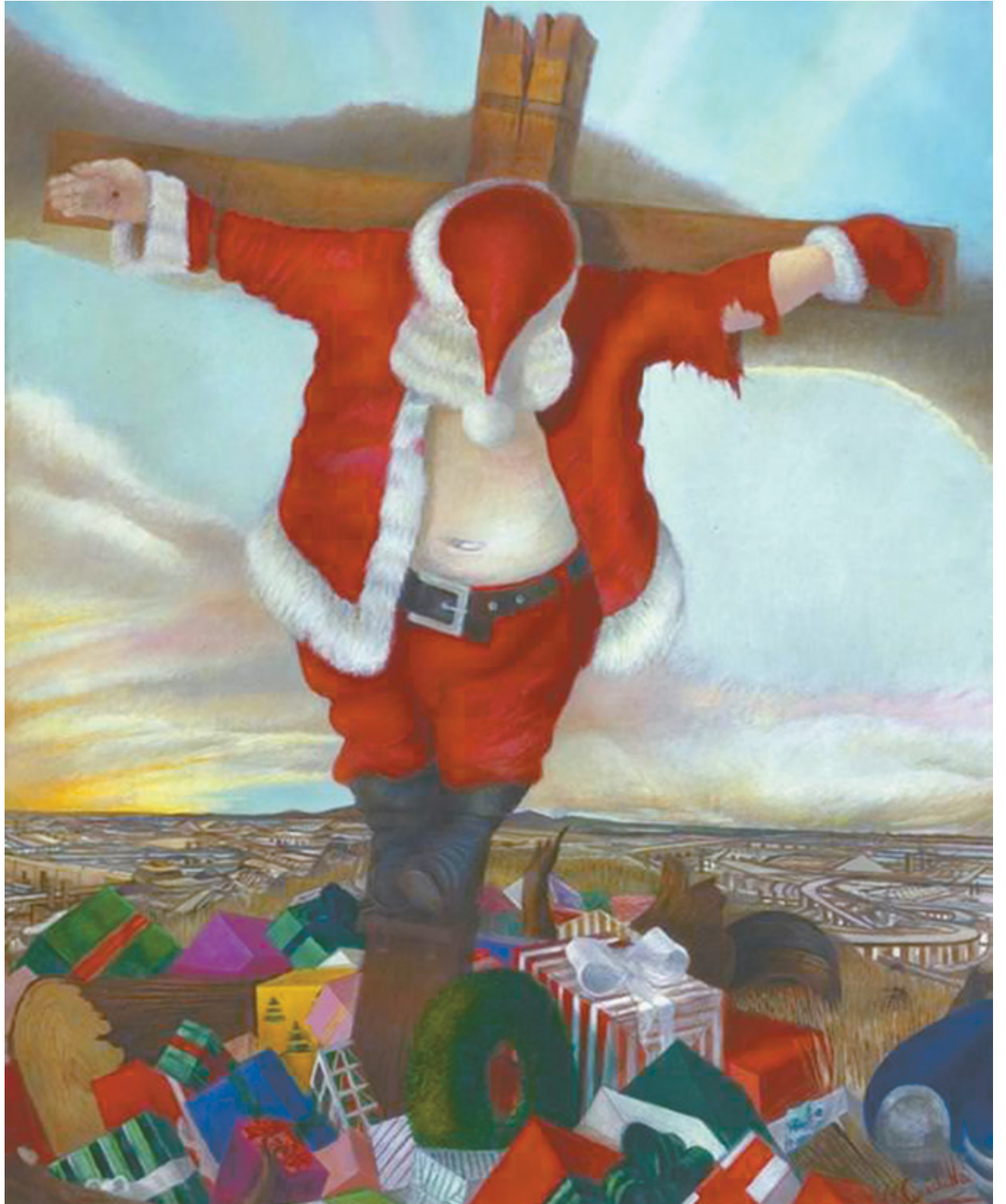
Each of these paintings or drawings incorporates a religious symbol to make a commentary on the role of religion in society in a way that only someone who had freed themselves entirely from indoctrination could. In this way, allegiance to organized religion acts as a form of censorship. An artist who feels an obligation to champion their own personal religion is not free to comment or criticize, at least not in any meaningful way. This dynamic plays out in other aspects of society, as well. The oil company executive is not free to discuss global warming and the politician cannot form an opinion if it contradicts party platform.

The audacity to challenge my grandmother so many years ago allowed me to free myself from religion. Much to my dismay, despite my personal liberation, my art is still not free from religion. Having overcome the first hurdle — developing a free mindset capable of creating unbiased art — a second hurdle arose: being allowed to show the art in public.

My painting of Santa Claus being crucified ("The Presence of Man") is a perfect example. The moment the painting was displayed, Saatchi & Saatchi, known for being one of the most liberal collectors of the most avant-garde art in the world, reduced itself to censorship and pulled the painting from the exhibition without comment.

When, after years of censorship, it was finally displayed publicly on West 57th Street in the window of the oldest and most renowned art school in the world (The Art Students League of New York), the Catholic League of New York demanded the painting be taken out of the window. I ended up having to defend the painting to the media.

To this day, for the most part, the painting is denounced by critics (and ignored by the art community as a whole). I'm hoping that a more reasonable assessment of the painting will have its day in the court of rational public opinion at FFRF.



"The Presence of Man" artwork by Bob Cenedella was pulled from an exhibit for its depiction of Santa Claus being similar to that of Jesus on the cross.

"The Presence of Man" is my interpretation of commercialism, in the form of the mythical Santa Claus usurping the spiritual value of Christmas. In my mind, it could almost be viewed as pro-religion, at least by those who value the actual religious aspect of the holiday, somewhat akin to the beloved holiday cartoon, "A Charlie Brown Christmas."

So why then does it elicit such a vitriolic response from religious and nonreligious authorities? My best guess is that they are opposed to any type of critical thought being turned toward organized religion. Blatant censorship.

If no one ever sees the painting, no one will have the opportunity to entertain the issue of the connection between commercialism, capitalism and religion, which the painting is trying to elicit.

The result for the art world in general is that only art which has no subject matter, or offers only a banal perspective on society, will ever be exhibited on a meaningful scale. The result for me is that I am once again fearful (or at least mindful) of how organized religion will value my unique expression toward the subject of religion: a yoke I thought I had freed myself from as a 6-year-old.

Santa Claus

Bob Cenedella sent along this poem (with permission) to run with his column: "This poem says in words everything my painting says visually."

By Howard Nemerov

Somewhere on his travels the strange child
Picked up with this overstuffed confidence man,
Affection's inverted thief, who climbs at night
Down chimneys into dreams, with this world's goods,
Bringing all the benevolence of money,
He teaches the innocent to want, thus keeps
Our fat world rolling. His prescribed costume,
White flannel beard, red belly of cotton waste,
Conceals the thinness of essential hunger,
An appetite that feeds on satisfaction;
Or, pregnant with possessions, he brings forth
Vanity and the void. His name itself
is corrupted, and even Saint Nicholas, in his turn,
Gives off a faint and reminiscent stench,
The merest soupçon, of brimstone and the pit.
Now, at the season when the Child is born
To suffer for the world, suffer the world,
His bloated Other, jovial satellite
And Sycophant, makes his appearance also
In a glitter of goodies, in a rock candy glare.
Played at the better stores by bums, for money,
This annual savior of the economy
Speaks in the parables of the dollar sign:
Suffer the little children to come to Him.
At Easter, he's anonymous again,
Just one of the crowd lurching on Calvary.

Name: Bob Cenedella.

Where I live: Hancock, Maine

Born: Milford, Mass., in 1940

Family: Liz Dominick (wife), David Cenedella (son), Linda Cenedella (daughter), Hanna Cenedella (granddaughter).

Education: Art Students League of New York.

Occupation: Artist and art instructor.

How I got here today: Following my own set of principles as an artist, never compromising.

Person in history I admire: George Grosz, the great German/American artist/writer/ thinker, also known as one of the anti-Nazi artists of the 20th century.

MEET A MEMBER

Quotation I like: "Line does not exist in nature; it is an invention of man."

— George Grosz

Things I like: Writing, painting and teaching.

Things I smite: All forms of injustice!

My doubts about religion started: Really, as a young child, just exercising my ability to reason, so, around 6 years old.

Ways I promote freethought: I think by assuming what I do as an artist, which is mainly to never compromise what I do for any reason! So, by example would be the best way. It's very different from preaching about compromise, etc.