

# FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**The consequences  
of secularization**

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Reception brings  
humor, heat**

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**'Equal rights  
and secularism  
will win out'**

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Vol. 42 No. 5

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June-July 2025

## Commandment disenchantment

FFRF takes on legal fights over controversial Decalogue issues

### FFRF, others representing plaintiffs in monument lawsuit

A group of multifaith and nonreligious Jefferson County, Ill., taxpayers and residents filed suit in state court June 5 seeking to remove a nearly 7-foot-tall Ten Commandments monument from the lawn of the Jefferson County Courthouse. Represented by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the ACLU of Illinois, and the ACLU, the plaintiffs assert that the monument violates the Illinois Constitution's protections for the separation of church and state.

Originally placed in the courthouse lobby last year by Jefferson County Sheriff Jeff Bullard, the monument was later moved to the lawn immediately outside the courthouse entrance. While Bullard claimed that the original display was funded by private donations, the lawsuit alleges that he used public dollars



to relocate the monument to its current outdoor location, where it is unavoidable for anyone who enters or passes by the courthouse. The monument enumerates a Protestant version of the Ten Commandments.

"With [this] lawsuit, Jefferson County taxpayers are standing up for the fundamental constitutional principle that the government must remain neutral when it comes to matters of faith," notes FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Erecting a Ten

Commandments monument on public property, whether in the courthouse lobby or just outside the entryway, blatantly violates Illinois law."

Filed in Illinois' 2nd Judicial Circuit Court as a Petition for Writ of Mandamus, the lawsuit comes after the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners voted to retain the monument on county property, ignoring warnings from FFRF and the county's

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### FFRF, groups to sue Texas over decree for classrooms

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Americans United for Separation of Church and State announced May 29 that they will sue over Texas Senate Bill 10, which requires public schools to display the Ten Commandments in every classroom.

Having received final legislative approval on May 28, the bill has been sent to Gov. Greg Abbott and is expected to be signed into law. Under SB 10, every public elementary and secondary school in Texas must display a poster or framed copy of the Ten Commandments "in a conspicuous place in each classroom." The bill mandates that the display be no smaller than 16 inches wide and 20 inches tall and that the commandments be set forth "in a size and typeface that is legible to a person with average vision from anywhere in the classroom." The bill also requires that a specific version of the Ten Commandments, selected by lawmakers and associated with Protestant faiths, be used for every display.

SB 10 is prohibited by longstanding U.S. Supreme Court precedent. Nearly 50 years ago, in *Stone v. Graham*, the Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment forbids public

See Texas on page 10

## Coalition, including FFRF, suing to stop saint statues

A multifaith group of Quincy, Mass., residents and taxpayers filed a lawsuit on May 28 in the Norfolk Superior Court to halt the planned installation of two large religious statues of Catholic saints at the entrance of the city's new public safety building.

The plaintiffs are residents of diverse faiths who do not want their government officials and publicly owned property to promote specific religious beliefs. Their lawsuit explains that the plan — conceived and spearheaded by Mayor Thomas Koch — promotes one religion over others, and religion over nonreligion, violating the Massachusetts Constitution. The plaintiffs are seeking a preliminary injunction that would prevent the city from proceeding with its unconstitutional plan during the pendency of the lawsuit. They are represented by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the American Civil Liberties Union

of Massachusetts, the ACLU and Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

"This isn't about opposing anyone's faith — it's about keeping government neutral so that everyone, regardless of what they believe, feels equally welcome and protected," says plaintiff Gilly Rosenthol. "No one should have to walk past giant religious monuments just to access a public safety building. That sends the wrong message about who our city serves — and who it doesn't."

In early February, the Patriot Ledger published the first report about Koch's plan to display two 10-foot-tall bronze statues of Catholic saints, which would flank the entrance of the Quincy Police Department's new headquarters. According to the lawsuit, the mayor had already commissioned the statues — with a

See Statues on page 4



Two statues of Catholic saints have been scheduled for installation at the entrance of the Quincy, Mass., new public safety building.

100th anniversary conference — last call!

Scopes event celebrates historic ‘monkey’ trial

FFRF and the Center for Inquiry are hosting a celebratory conference in July to mark the centennial of the trial of teacher John Scopes, which kicked off the evolution revolution.

The Scopes trial was a landmark legal case that pitted biblical literalism against evolutionary science and argued whether American schools would be places of science education or religious indoctrination. The special event to mark its 100 years will be held Friday, July 18, through Sunday, July 20, at the Chattanooga Hotel in Chattanooga, Tenn. It will explore the trial’s history and its lasting impact on science, education and the law. Attendees will hear from renowned speakers from the fields of evolutionary biology, law and history, and will have the opportunity to visit the site of the famous trial, the historic Rhea County Courthouse in Dayton, Tenn., as well as the statue of Clarence Darrow created by Zenos Frudakis and installed by FFRF several years ago.

The Chattanooga ballroom capacity is limited, so only 250 seats are available. Please register right away to avoid disappointment. Go to [ffrf.org/scopes-con](http://ffrf.org/scopes-con).

The Scopes Trial Centennial conference will feature talks by **Judge John Edward Jones III**, who presided over the landmark 2005 Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District case in which teaching “intelligent design”



The Rhea County Courthouse in Dayton, Tenn.

in public school science classes was ruled unconstitutional; actor **John de Lancie**, who will present live and on stage his acclaimed audio play “The Dover Intelligent Design Trial”; and author **Brenda Wineapple**, whose recent book “Keeping the Faith: God, Democracy and the Trial that Riveted a Nation” offers a magnificent historical exploration of the Scopes Trial.

**Edward Larson**, who wrote the 1998 Pulitzer Prize-winning “Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion,” will be presented with the “Clarence Darrow Award,” and Judge Jones will receive the “Defender of the Constitution Award.”

Additional featured speakers include **Richard Katskee** of Duke’s Appellate Litigation Clinic and former vice president and legal director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, who helped argue against intelligent design in the Dover case; **Katherine Stewart**, award-winning journalist and author who has covered religious nationalism for over 15 years; **Bertha Vazquez**, the award-winning science educator who heads the Teacher Institute for Evolutionary Science (TIES); **Susan Jacoby**, New York Times bestselling author and secularist; and **Chris Cameron**, history professor and author of “Black Freethinkers.” The marvelously funny **Leighann Lord** will entertain and also emcee the event. Other entertainment will include internationally known jazz singer **Tahira Clayton** singing popular songs from 1925, accompanied on the piano by FFRF Co-President **Dan Barker**.

Full event details, speaker information and a link to register can be found at: [ffrf.org/scopes-con](http://ffrf.org/scopes-con).

Hotel information

**July 18 – 20 (Friday – Monday)**  
The Chattanooga Hotel,  
Curio Collection by Hilton  
1201 Broad Street  
Chattanooga, TN 37402  
\$189/night: Standard King,  
Standard Double, King Bed  
Mountain View Suite, or King Bed  
Courtyard View Suite

Reserve your room

Attendees can call the hotel directly at (423) 756-3400. Provide the front desk the arrival date and group name: “FFRF/CFI SCOPES TRIAL” or group code: “GSCOPE.”  
Or, go to [ffrf.org/scopes-con](http://ffrf.org/scopes-con) and click on “Hotel reservations.”  
Guests are responsible for making their own reservations with the correct arrival and departure dates.

Reservation cut-off date

The cut-off date is Friday, June 27. Reservations must be made prior to the cut-off date and/or before the block is full, whichever comes first, in order to guarantee the availability of the rooms and discounted group rate that was contracted. Reservations made after the cutoff date will be accommodated based on availability, at the best available rate, and at the discretion of the hotel.

Spike and Sherry

Lifetime members cultivate their goodwill

**Names:** Spike Wadsworth and Sherry Sheng.

**Where we live:** West Linn, Ore.

**Where and when we were born:** Spike — 1938 in Hubbard, Ore.; Sherry — 1950 in Taiwan.

**Education:** Sherry — Earned a B.S. in zoology from National Taiwan University and an M.S. in fisheries biology from the University of Washington.

Spike — Graduated with a B.S. in business from Oregon State University, M.S.W. from Portland State University and Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin.

**Occupations:** Sherry was executive director of the Seattle Aquarium, followed by executive director of the Oregon Zoo, followed by deputy director of the Oregon Department of Economic Development.

Retired.

Spike was involved in commercial banking, psychiatric and school social work, real estate investing and managing. Retired.

**How I got where I am today:**  
Sherry — Striving for better and serving the greater good were ideas Sherry learned while growing up in Taiwan to Chinese parents. Sherry completed university education in Taiwan, then came to the United States for graduate school. She believes in hard work, excellence and helping organizations and people achieve their potential. Sherry has received many awards over the years, including for her leadership while employed in the Seattle Aquarium and Oregon Zoo (1979–1997).

MEET A MEMBER

After retiring in 2003, she became a Master Gardener in 2005 and initiated a gardening education program called 10-Minute University the following year. The program offers science-based gardening content through handouts, classes, workshops, webinars. She was named Oregon Master Gardener of the Year twice (2013 and 2022). Sherry’s commitment to offering science-based gardening information led to Spike and Sherry’s support of garden research at the Oregon State University Garden Ecology Lab (2017 to present). Spike and Sherry were selected into the Hall of Fame of the OSU College of Agricultural Sciences (2018). Sherry was awarded Outstanding Philanthropist by Oregon’s Association of Fundraising Professionals in 2024.

Spike — The luck of the draw. Great parents and grandparents, my physical and social environment, and my spouses — especially Sherry.

Where I’m headed: Sherry — Leading the best, free gardening education program run by volunteers.

Spike — I will continue as stardust.

**Person in history I admire and why:**  
Sherry — Sun Yat-sen, a revolutionary who helped end the Qing dynasty. He was a man of science who sought to bring China out of the dark ages. Charles Darwin, for his vast travels and brilliant deductions that led to the theory of evolution.

Spike — Benjamin Franklin, a fantastic scientist, writer, inventor, statesman, a believer in reason vs. religion.

**Things I like:**  
Sherry — Gardening, teaching, learn-



Spike Wadsworth and Sherry Sheng pose for a selfie outside the Louvre Museum in Paris.

ing, cooking, time with family and friends.

Spike — Our traveling history. Supporting charities under the rubric of social services, environment, and science. Cooking. Healthy food. Nonfiction reading. Family. I remain smitten with Sherry and we just celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary on April 1 (along with signing the FFRF endowment)!

**My doubts about religion started:**  
Sherry — Never believed in supernatural stuff.

Spike — I was very religious (within mainstream Protestantism) as a child to age 27. Then I went to graduate school and almost immediately realized that religion made no sense. There was no evidence supporting supernatural beings or anything supernatural.

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TODAY

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States.

# 2025 FFRF national convention

## Zimmerman, Stroop join convention lineup!



The Freedom From Religion Foundation has added two more voices to its exciting lineup for its annual convention later this year in Myrtle Beach, S.C.!

Singer/songwriter **Roy Zimmerman** and ex-evangelical writer, speaker and advocate **Chrissy Stroop** will take to the stage at FFRF's 48th national convention at the Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort, 10000 Beach Club Dr., Myrtle Beach, S.C., which runs from Oct. 16-19.

Zimmerman will perform his signature blend of heart and hilarity. In a career spanning more than 30 years, Roy's songs have been heard on HBO and Showtime, and his videos have garnered hundreds of millions of views. He's just released a new album — his 11th as a solo artist. "Roadmap" is a collection of classic social justice songs re-imagined for this fraught moment in our history. Tributes include from Joni Mitchell ("Roy's lyrics move beyond poetry and achieve perfection") and Tom Lehrer ("I congratulate Roy on reintroducing literacy to comedy songs").

Stroop will receive FFRF's 2025 "Freethought Heroine" award. Raised evangelical, Chrissy Stroop was sent to culture-warring Christian schools that demonized queerness, abortion and anything viewed as "liberal." She earned a Ph.D. in modern Russian history from Stanford University, which she put to use as both a classroom instructor and a senior research associate with the University of Innsbruck's Post-secular Conflicts project that investigated international right-wing networks. Stroop is now a full-time writer and speaker with bylines in Foreign Policy, Playboy, The Boston Globe, Political Research Associates and other outlets.

Her newsletter, The Bugbear Dispatch, explores American politics and society through the lens of an ongoing moral panic of which Stroop, as an out transgender woman, is a primary target.

Joining Zimmerman and Stroop at the convention are these other confirmed speakers:

- **Mary L. Trump**, niece of President Trump and a sharp critic of the current administration, will receive FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award, reserved for public figures who make known their dissent from religion.
- **John Fugelsang** is an actor, comedian and broadcaster and host of "Tell Me Everything" weekdays on SiriusXM. His new film "Dream On," examining the American Dream, features 200 interviews in 55 cities. His new book is "Separate Church and Hate: A Sane Person's Guide to Taking Back the Bible from Fundamentalists, Fascists, and Flock-Fleecing Frauds."
- **Katherine Stewart**, last year's "Freethought Heroine" honoree, returns to talk about her chilling tour de force, a new exposé, "Money, Lies and God: Inside the Movement to Destroy American Democracy."
- **Dr. Maggie Carpenter**, a brave abortion rights activist under prosecution by Louisiana and Texas for dispensing medication abortion pills to patients there, will receive FFRF's "Forward" Award.
- **Jamelle Bouie**, the distinguished New York Times columnist, will be given FFRF's "Clarence Darrow" Award.
- **Mubarak Bala**, the Nigerian atheist and human rights activist recently released from prison in Nigeria after five years' detention for committing "blasphemy," will get FFRF's "Avijit Roy Courage Award."

- **Nancy Northup** is president of the cutting-edge Reproductive Rights Center, which is receiving FFRF's Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism award of \$50,000.
- FFRF's new Regional State Manager **Mickey Dollens**, a seated state representative in the Oklahoma Legislature, will be speaking directly on the convention theme with his talk, "F.O.R.W.A.R.D.: Your Blueprint for Effective Citizen Lobbying." With real-world stories and actionable tips, Mickey will offer hope and a clear path to influence policy at the grassroots level.
- Speaking of secular state legislators, the convention also will host FFRF's third annual panel made up of such representatives. **Rep. Monique Priestley** is a member of the Vermont House of Representatives (Orange-2 District). **Rep. Heather Meyer** is a member of the Kansas House of Representatives. **Rep. Andy Smith** is in his second term in the Minnesota House.
- **Dr. Herb Silverman**, who overturned South Carolina's unconstitutional religious test to run for office, will give a short welcoming address.
- Two student activists: **Bailey Harris**, 19, who is receiving the Diane and Stephen Uhl Out of God's Closet Scholarship of \$5,000, and **Eli Frost**, 18, who is receiving the Beverly and Richard Hermesen Student Activist Award of \$5,000.
- Other presenters include students winning FFRF 2025 essay competitions, and reports on the year's highlights by FFRF Co-Presidents **Dan Barker** and **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, by FFRF's legal team led by FFRF Legal Director **Patrick Elliott** and Deputy Legal Director **Liz Cavell**, and by the legislative team, led by Director of Governmental Affairs **Mark Dann**

and State Policy Counsel **Ryan Jayne**.

Other speakers will be announced in subsequent issues and online at [ffrf.org/convention2025](http://ffrf.org/convention2025).

Five ticketed meals, including FFRF's popular "NonPrayer Breakfast," will be offered this year, more than usual, in part because — aside from two in-house restaurants — meal choices outside the resort will be limited, unless you have a car or use Uber. A small-capacity shuttle that can be ordered ahead can take some participants to nearby restaurant strips in Myrtle Beach.

Early birds can check-in on the afternoon of Thursday, Oct. 16, and enjoy light appetizers and a cash bar before relaxing on their own. The convention opens formally at 9 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 17, following a complimentary continental breakfast. Friday evening ends with the traditional complimentary dessert reception and cash bar. The convention runs through Saturday evening, with FFRF's annual membership and state representatives' meetings taking place on Sunday morning, Oct. 19, ending by noon.

Book your own rooms at the Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort, 800-876-0010 (option 3 for Hilton Myrtle Beach) identifying yourself as an attendee of the "Freedom From Religion Foundation Annual Convention" using the code "FFR." Or find the online direct link under "Hotel" at [ffrf.org/convention2025](http://ffrf.org/convention2025). The favorable off-season rate is \$165/night plus tax for a standard room, reserved on or before Monday, Sept. 22.

Please turn to the back page for more details, menus and the registration form. Or register online at [ffrf.org/convention2025](http://ffrf.org/convention2025).

### 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](http://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."

## Illinois

Continued from page 1

own attorney that the display raised serious legal concerns.

"In Illinois, we do not permit local politicians to use the power and authority of their office to promote their religious views," adds Kevin Fee, legal director for the ACLU of Illinois. "Our organization has always worked to ensure that everyone's religious freedom is respected. This monument — which must be removed immediately — attempts to undermine that freedom for many residents. We are pleased to represent these clients in seeking fairness in Jefferson County."

Heather L. Weaver, senior counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, says: "The separation of church and state guarantees that we all have the right to decide, for our-

selves, which religious beliefs, if any, people should follow. By sending the message that Jefferson County favors some faiths over others, the Ten Commandments monument intrudes on deeply personal matters. We'll see Jefferson County in court."

"Everyone should be made to feel welcome in Jefferson County, including the nonreligious" says plaintiff Roberta Evans. "The Ten Commandments monument in front of the courthouse accomplishes the opposite, and turns the Commandments into a political statement that cheapens their value."

Plaintiff Calvin McClintock adds: "Jefferson County government officials used the people's money, time, resources, and land to promote a particular religious message, at the exclusion of others. Government officials have no business endorsing any religion."

Across

1. “Hey there!”

5. Paper or plastic?

8. Truth alternative

12. “ \_\_\_\_ no evil...”

13. Raise the roof

14. Fire engine sound

15. Hero place

16. Eyeball rudely

17. Sore spot

18. \*”Congress shall make no law respecting establishment of \_\_\_\_”

20. J.E.K. or Dulles postings

21. Not sharp

22. Acronym, abbr.

23. \*Dan Barker’s song “Nothing Fails Like \_\_\_\_”

26. One from inner circle

30. Poetic “ever”

31. Maximum

34. Al Capone, e.g.

35. Keeps nose to the grindstone

37. Moray, e.g.

38. Pulsating pain

39. \*Freethinking Alan Alda’s movie “Same \_\_\_\_, Next Year”

40. Late actress Graves

42. Old name for Tokyo

43. \*Freethinking Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The \_\_\_\_ Letter”

45. Like default settings

47. New Zealand’s bygone bird

48. Tetanus symptom

50. H.S. math class

52. \* \_\_\_\_ Atheists, U.S. non-profit organization

55. Endangered odd-toed ungulate

56. Swimmer’s measure, pl.

57. Distinctive flair

59. Posthumous donation

60. Elmer’s, e.g.

61. Grammy of sports

62. Like Jekyll and Hyde’s personality

63. Any high mountain

64. Recommendation on medicine bottle

Down

1. Third degree

2. Soothsayer

3. Shopaholic’s delight

4. Narrow-brimmed hat

5. Launch

6. Divvy up

7. Hidden valley

8. \*Freethinking “Shanghai Express” actress Marlene \_\_\_\_

9. Equals length times width

10. RPMs

11. Compass point between NE and E

13. Fermented milk product

14. Glasses, for short

19. Intestinal obstruction

22. Aardvark’s crumb

23. Mice in the house, e.g.

24. Indiana Jones’ find, e.g.

25. Wafting entity

26. Capri, e.g.

27. #8 Across, pl.

28. Lyric poem

29. \*Atheist author Isaac Asimov’s “I, \_\_\_\_”

32. Track gathering

33. Poetic “over”

36. \*Atheist ...mile Zola’s famous novel

38. Tarsus, pl.

40. High affair

41. Meager

44. Get ready to surf (2 words)

46. Hosted

48. Not big

49. Spur on (2 words)

50. By way of, for short

51. Capital of Latvia

52. Aquarium scum

53. Additionally

54. Midday slumbers

55. \*Proverbs 23:13-14: “strike them [children] with a \_\_\_\_”

58. \*Freethinker known as America’s Stand-up Scientist

Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15					16				17			
	18			19					20			
			21					22				
23	24	25					26			27	28	29
30				31		32	33			34		
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39					40			41			42	
43				44				45		46		
			47			48	49					
	50	51				52				53	54	
55						56				57		58
59						60				61		
62						63				64		

Answers on page 21

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

Freethought Today Cryptogram

HM RX OGX FKAXZQ — OAE ZUHXAQHZQZ FONX

QK TX — RX CJZQ OECHQ QFOQ GXBHYHKA HZ O

LJCTBX KM MOBZX OZZXGQHKAZ, RHQF AK TOZHZ

HA GXOBHQD. QFX NXGD HEXO KM YKE HZ O

IGKEJUQ KM QFX FJCOA HCOYHAOQHKA.

—IOJB EHGOU

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: R => W. Answer is on page 21.

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

Statues

Continued from page 1

cost to taxpayers of at least \$850,000 — by the time the plans were uncovered by local media. Although the City Council voted numerous times to approve funding for the new public safety building, Koch’s plan was never presented or discussed at those meetings, and the public was never given an opportunity to weigh in on it. At a council meeting later that month, the mayor’s staff dismissed all concerns about the cost, transparency and legality of his plan.

In the weeks following news of the religious statues, multiple groups — including FFRF, the ACLU of Massachusetts and Americans United — wrote letters to the mayor and City Council raising serious constitutional concerns. In addition, a group of local faith leaders from the Quincy Interfaith Network issued a statement objecting to the plan.

“This is a clear breach of the constitutional wall of separation,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Quincy taxpayers should not have to foot the bill for an ostentatiously Catholic religious display.”

Rachel Davidson, staff attorney at the ACLU of Massachusetts, says: “Mayor Koch has made the costly decision to proceed with the unlawful plan to install two larger-than-life statues of Catholic saints at the entrance to a public building in Quincy. This plan was conceived and implemented without public input and with total disregard for the concerns raised by constituents and local faith leaders. The statues

send a message that the Quincy government favors one faith above all others. This flagrantly violates our state Constitution.”

“The city has abandoned its constitutional duty to remain neutral on matters of faith,” says Heather L. Weaver, senior counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union. “The new public safety building will be home to many critical government services, but the moment they walk in the door, Quincy residents who do not share the city’s favored religious beliefs will get the message that they are not welcome.”

“Mayor Koch is abusing the power of his government office to impose religious beliefs on all Quincy residents,” says Rachel Laser, president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. “The core principles of church/state separation and religious freedom promised in the Massachusetts Constitution require government buildings and other public spaces to be inclusive of people of all religions and none. By installing religious statues in front of the government building dedicated to public safety, Koch and the city are violating that promise and sending a message to all who rely on city police and fire services that one faith is favored over all others.”

The lawsuit alleges that the planned religious statues violate Article 3 of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights by imposing religious symbols upon all who work in, visit or pass by the public safety building; by conveying the message that Quincy is exclusively a Catholic community and that non-Catholics do not belong or are less valued; and by excessively entangling the city with religion.

What are you missing? Check out our other offerings!

FFRF offers much more than just **Freethought Today** for news, information and lively banter about freethought and state/church separation.

Ask an Atheist online weekly show  
[ffrf.org/ask-an-atheist](https://ffrf.org/ask-an-atheist)

Freethought Matters TV weekly show  
[ffrf.org/freethought-matters](https://ffrf.org/freethought-matters)

Freethought Now blogs  
[freethoughtnow.org](https://freethoughtnow.org)

Freethought Radio weekly show  
[ffrf.org/radio](https://ffrf.org/radio)

Freethought of the Day  
Daily online calendar of famous freethinkers  
[ffrf.org/day](https://ffrf.org/day)

FFRF press releases  
[ffrf.org/releases](https://ffrf.org/releases)

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[ffrfactionfund.org](https://ffrfactionfund.org)

We Dissent monthly podcast  
[wedissent.org](https://wedissent.org)

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Create a Freethought Legacy Today.  
[ffrf.us/freewill](https://ffrf.us/freewill)

FFRF FOREVER!

# IN THE NEWS

## White evangelicals are Trump’s top supporters

Almost three-quarters (72 percent) of white evangelicals indicated they approve of Trump’s job performance, as well as his actions on DEI programs (75 percent) and cuts to federal agencies (75 percent), according to a survey released April 28 by the Pew Research Center.

“White evangelicals clearly stand out on Trump’s approval rating on various issues,” said Chip Rotolo, a research associate on Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life team. “Clear majorities of white evangelicals approve of what Trump and his administration are doing.”

Other faith groups appeared more skeptical. Seventy-three percent of Hispanic Catholics, 85 percent of Black Protestants and only 74 percent of the religiously unaffiliated (Nones) said they disapproved of Trump’s performance.

Pew Research also found Trump’s approval rating has declined by about 7 percentage points among several religious groups since his inauguration.

## SBC membership at its lowest level in 50 years

The number of Southern Baptists in the United States is the lowest it has been in 50 years, but more of them seem to be showing up in church.

And the number of baptisms in the nation’s largest Protestant denomination continues to rebound from the lows of the pandemic.

The Southern Baptist Convention lost 259,090 members in 2024, with its total membership now at 12.7 million, according to the denomination’s Annual Church Profile report, released April 30.

That’s a 50-year low — in 1975, the SBC reported 12.5 million members. It’s also the 18th consecutive year of membership decline. In 2006, the SBC hit a peak membership of 16.3 million, and over the past two decades it has lost 3.6 million members.

## Catholic bishops sue to protect sex predators

Roman Catholic bishops from the state of Washington have filed a lawsuit challenging a new law that no longer exempts them from failing to report suspected abuse learned about during confession.

The bishops of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle and the Dioceses of Spokane and Yakima, along with Catholic priests in the state, filed a complaint in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington at Tacoma on May 29.

The lawsuit alleges that Senate Bill 5375 is unconstitutional. The measure, signed into law earlier in May, adds members of the clergy to a list of professionals who are required to report instances of child abuse or neglect to law enforcement. Under the legislation, clergy are singled out as the one group that must report child abuse to law enforcement even if the information is obtained “solely as a result of privileged communication.”

According to the bishops’ complaint, “Knowing that the inviolability of the sacramental seal is threatened by a temporal legal obligation to report sus-

### Denver discussion



Photo by Craig Stilen

**FFRF Attorney Chris Line (front center) spoke to members of the Metro Denver Chapter of FFRF on April 26 about the growing impact of Christian nationalism and its dangerous push to dismantle the separation of church and state and how FFRF is fighting back through litigation, advocacy, and public education. Following the talk, board members of the Denver chapter — including, from left to right, Becky Greben, Claudette StPierre, Pat Brodbent, Hunter Cobb and Michael Weber —met with Chris and took him out for dinner.**

pected abuse or neglect learned in the confessional, penitents may refuse to confess all their sins in confession or refuse to seek the sacrament of confession at all. Under either circumstance, the penitent will remain separated from Christ’s Church and from God, risking their eternal damnation to Hell.”

## Freethought Caucus adds 4 members to get to 30

The Congressional Freethought Caucus has just added four more members — Reps. Suzanne Bonamici (D-Ore.), Judy Chu (D-Calif.), Chris Deluzio (D-Pa.) and Delia Ramirez (D-Ill.) — to increase the total number of members to 30. (All are Democrats and religious.)

Bonomici was first elected to Congress in a special election in 2012. She’s the chair of the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services and a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Chu is the first Chinese American woman in Congress and has served since 2009. She is also a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus and the former chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus.

Deluzio is in his second term, having been elected in 2022, and sits on the committees for Transportation and Infrastructure and also Armed Services.

Ramirez, a former state legislator who was elected to Congress in 2022, is also a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

## Wis. seeing increase in voucher schools/money

An analysis by the Capital Times in Madison, Wis., shows that there is a startling year-over-year increase across the board in the numbers of voucher schools, students attending voucher schools and money distributed from the state to voucher schools.

There are 58,000 state students attend-

ing private schools using vouchers, about 3,800 more than last year. There are now over 400 private schools in the state that intend to participate in one of Wisconsin’s three school choice programs next fall, up from 344 this year. There are more than 500 students using vouchers to attend private schools in Madison (compared to more than 25,000 enrolled in the city’s public schools).

Also, the cap on how many students in each school district can participate in statewide voucher program has risen by one percentage point each year since 2017-18 and, by 2026-27, there will be no limit.

A Marquette University poll show about half of Wisconsin residents consider the program “a complete success” or “mostly a success.”

## Justice Dept. asks to drop abortion pill case

The Trump administration asked a federal judge on May 5 to dismiss a lawsuit that seeks to sharply restrict access to the abortion pill mifepristone — taking the same position as the Biden administration in a closely watched case that has major implications for abortion access.

The court filing by the Justice Department is striking, given that President Trump and a number of officials in his administration have forcefully opposed abortion rights. The filing is the first time the Trump administration has weighed in on the lawsuit, which seeks to reverse numerous regulatory changes that the Food and Drug Administration made over the past decade that greatly expanded access to mifepristone.

The Trump administration’s request makes no mention of the merits of the case, which have not yet been considered by the courts.

Mary Ziegler, a law professor and abortion law expert at the University of California, Davis, said that the Trump administration’s support of the Biden administration’s earlier request to dismiss the case “is surprising, but I think

the best way to read it is that they’re just buying time to figure out what to do about mifepristone.”

## Hospital policies matter in abortion-ban states

An investigative analysis by ProPublica has shown that there is a significant difference in how medical institutions handle abortion services in a state where abortion is illegal and how those differences impact the health of women who receive those services.

In a study of hospitals in Houston and Dallas, it found that major Dallas hospitals allow doctors to provide abortions to patients with high-risk miscarriages while most in Houston do not.

The result, according to ProPublica analysis of state hospital discharge data, is that while the rates of dangerous infections spiked across Texas after it banned abortion in 2021, women in Houston were far more likely to get gravely ill than those in Dallas.

As ProPublica reported earlier this year, the statewide rate of sepsis — a life-threatening reaction to infection — shot up more than 50 percent for women hospitalized when they lost a second-trimester pregnancy.

In the region surrounding Dallas-Fort Worth, it rose 29 percent. In the Houston area, it surged 63 percent.

## Poll: Jews reject Trump, antisemitism policies

A poll released May 14 shows American Jewish voters are not impressed with President Trump, even after he stated prior to the election that “I will be the best friend Jewish Americans have ever had in the White House.”

The poll by GBAO Strategies, a long-time pollster of Jewish public opinion, shows that three-quarters of Jewish voters (74 percent) disapprove of Trump’s job performance. Most American Jews think Trump is “dangerous” (72 percent), “racist” (69 percent) and “fascist” (69 percent), “antisemitic” (52 percent).

“The intensity of the opposition is extraordinary,” said Jim Gerstein, GBAO’s founding partner who summarized the poll’s results. “This very high level of disapproval far exceeds what you see in the national population.”

## Okla.’s Walters: Bibles will be in rooms in fall

Oklahoma state Superintendent Ryan Walters says all state public school classrooms will receive bibles this fall, even though lawmakers declined to fund the initiative in the proposed 2026 state budget.

Walters originally requested approximately \$3 million to provide bibles for schools, but the legislature did not allocate the funds. Despite that, he says the plan is moving forward.

“We’ve already been exhausting multiple avenues to do that,” Walters said. “We’re going to make sure that Oklahoma children understand the role the bible played in American history, and that will happen this fall.”

Walters has launched a donation campaign to collect bibles for classroom distribution. His department has not yet disclosed how many donations have been received.

# FFRF VICTORIES

By Greg Fletcher

## Colorado

FFRF urged the Front Range Community College in Colorado not to allow a philosophy professor to make statements misleading students about Darwin’s theory of evolution.

A student informed FFRF that the Introduction to Philosophy course recently cited institutions and authors that promote intelligent design, including the Discovery Institute and the books “Darwin’s Black Box” and “Signature in the Cell.” Reportedly, the professor claimed that there is an active scientific debate over whether the origins of life are rooted in evolution or intelligent design. The student added that the professor was encouraging students to consider the books and look into intelligent design more if they were interested, and the student felt that the professor’s comments and promotion of intelligent design breached the separation of state and church.

“Teaching or promoting creationism or any of its offshoots, such as intelligent design, in a public university is unconstitutional because creationism is not based in fact,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote. “Courts have routinely found that such teachings are religious, despite many new and imaginative labels given to the alternatives.”

After FFRF’s letter, the college’s Director of Employee Relations and Human Resources Bob Gregory emailed FFRF, acknowledging the concern regarding the philosophy professor. Gregory assured that the college is committed to upholding the rights of all students and employees, including the constitutional freedoms of speech and the separation of church and state.

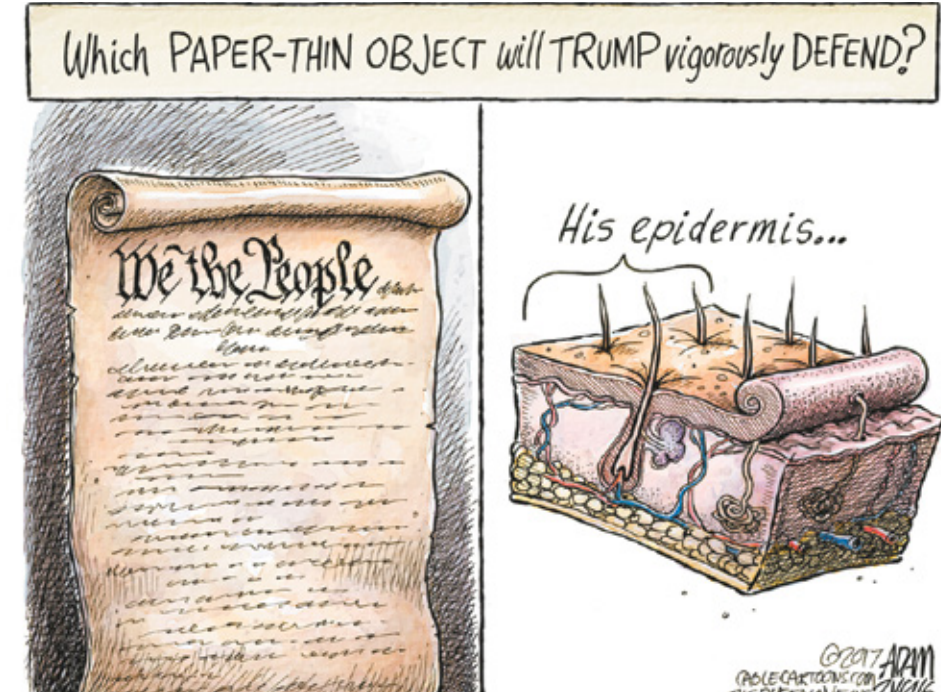
## Colorado

FFRF stopped a chaplain program from being forced onto employees in the South Metro Fire/Rescue department in Centennial, Colo.

An SMFR employee reported that the department had several official chaplains, including a head chaplain who was allowed to send out quarterly newsletters to all employees. FFRF learned that the newsletter, called “Chaplain’s Corner,” was being sent to all personnel via official communication channels, and that employees had no way to opt-out of receiving it.

FFRF’s complainant reported that the newsletter promotes religion and specifically encourages personnel to believe in Christianity. An example provided came from the Jan. 1 newsletter, which promoted attendance at a Christian first responder’s retreat that included “strong biblical teaching” and “spirited worship.” The complainant expressed frustration with the quarterly newsletter and chaplain program, stating that they are “strongly agnostic” and believe that “moments of crises should be handled by professionals trained in peer support or crisis intervention.”

“There is no reason to think a non-Christian or nonreligious employee or citizen would be comfortable dealing with a person who provides comfort from a religious viewpoint,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote. “Chaplains cannot simply set aside their religion in order to assist a



non-Christian or nonbeliever and are often unwilling to attempt to do so.”

After FFRF’s letter, Fire Chief Bob Baker addressed the concerns, and communicated changes that took place to correct the situation.

“First and specifically related to your expressed concerns for the ‘Chaplain’s Corner’ newsletter, we will begin with our next edition to provide an opt-out feature that can be selected before opening the content of the email. This will provide employees with the ability to no longer receive any communication regarding the chaplaincy program, if they so opt out,” Baker wrote. “Second, we are refocusing our efforts to provide chaplain services as a part of our Peer Support program, which provides a large variety of resources based on the specific needs of the employee.”

## Florida

FFRF ensured that students will not encounter religious displays in the Orange County Public Schools system in Orlando, Fla.

FFRF received notification that an office staff member at Glenridge Middle School was displaying multiple Latin crosses and religious messages on and around her desk, including the wall behind the desk that faced students and passersby. Some of the messages on and around the front office area included references to prayer, being blessed, and a printout of the poem, “Footprints in the Sand,” which directly referenced God and Jesus Christ. FFRF’s complainant provided photographs that showed many of the religious symbols and messages were clearly visible to anyone visiting the front desk, including students.

“Glenridge Middle School’s front office’s religious display needlessly marginalizes those 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.

After FFRF’s letter, the school’s principal spoke with the district’s legal representative, who affirmed FFRF’s letter. “We can require the move of the ‘Footprints’ poem and crosses from displays that can be seen by children from the work area of [the employee],” District General Counsel John C. Palmerini wrote. “The other displays can stay up as they are not overtly religious. The ‘Footprints’ poem and crosses should be moved to only where [the employee] can see them and not students.” FFRF was forwarded the email exchange in

which the principal confirmed that they would take care of the situation.

## Georgia

FFRF reminded the Jackson County (Ga.) School System that student religious clubs cannot be led by staff members.

FFRF received a report that JCSS staff was organizing and promoting a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) club for students at East Jackson Elementary School. A March 13 post on X by the head football coach for East Jackson High School showed the coach was leading the East Jackson Elementary School FCA club. Additionally, a March 14 post from the official elementary school Facebook page indicated that high school FCA members were asked to present to the elementary school FCA, suggesting that the elementary school’s FCA was being run by adults rather than students.

“JCSS cannot allow its schools to be used as recruiting grounds for religious missions,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district.

FFRF learned of the district’s corrective actions from legal counsel Cory O. Kirby.

“Assistant Superintendent Kameran Todd has already met with administrators to discuss the various issues that were brought forth in your letter,” Kirby wrote. “During the meeting it was emphasized that if these clubs continue for next year, they must be student-led and governed. The district is confident that the elementary school has and will continue to make good faith effort [sic] to fully comply with the requirements of the constitution to protect the rights of all students.”

## Georgia

A Wayne County (Ga.) School System teacher will no longer have a teacher leading students in prayer before mealtime after FFRF got involved.

A district employee reported that a Pre-K teacher at Screven Elementary Schools led students in a prayer every school day before lunch. FFRF learned that the teacher had been leading students in daily mealtime prayers for several years.

“The school environment is inherently ripe for coercion due to the power imbalance between staff and students,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district. “Further, Pre-K students are quite literally a captive audience.”

After FFRF’s letter, the district’s legal representative, Cory O. Kirby, informed FFRF that the district would be taking action to realign with the Constitution.

“The superintendent intends to meet with all personnel to discuss issues related to the Establishment and Free Exercise Clause,” Kirby wrote. “The district is confident that all its schools make good faith efforts to fully comply with the requirements of the Constitution and protect the rights of all parties.”

## Kentucky

After learning of an explicitly religious club taking place in an elementary school in the Madison County Schools system in Richmond, Ky., FFRF contacted the district.

FFRF received a report that Kit Carson Elementary was organizing and promoting a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) club for students. Per a March 13 Facebook post, teachers at the school had been running the club and teaching students about Jesus. The post suggested that staff, not students, were organizing and leading the religious club.

“Religious clubs for students at elementary schools cannot genuinely be student-initiated and student-run, and as such are unconstitutional,” FFRF Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote.

After receiving FFRF’s letter, Director of Human Resources Dustin Brumbaugh wrote on behalf of the district to acknowledge the violation.

“Please be assured that we are committed to upholding all expectations outlined in the Constitution,” Brumbaugh wrote. “We take these responsibilities seriously and strive to ensure that our actions, policies, and decisions align with both the letter and the spirit of the law.”

### Freethought Matters

An antidote to religion on the airwaves and Sunday morning sermonizing

Watch Freethought Matters anytime on FFRF’s YouTube channel!



Watch our show every Sunday!

Freethought Matters TV talk show airs in:

Chicago	WPWR-CW	(Ch. 50)	9 am
Los Angeles	KCOP-MY	(Ch. 13)	8:30 am
Madison, Wis.	WISC-TV	(Ch. 3)	11 pm
New York City	WPIX-IND	(Ch. 11)	10 am
San Francisco	KICU-IND	(Ch. 36, Cable 6)	10 am
Washington, D.C.	WDCW-CW	(Ch. 50, 23, 3)	8 am

Go to: [ffrf.org/freethought-matters](http://ffrf.org/freethought-matters) for more information

Minnesota

FFRF is pleased to see a religious shrine removed from a counselor’s office in Minnesota’s Mankato Area Public Schools system.

A concerned district employee reported that a school counselor at Mankato West High School had been using his position to promote his personal religious beliefs to students. FFRF’s complainant reported that the counselor displayed religious iconography in his office, including a basket of crosses for students to take. FFRF also learned that the counselor had previously displayed a religious shrine in his office that was taken down at the district’s request, but the shrine had been set up again, along with other religious items.

FFRF Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow Kyle J. Steinberg wrote to Mankato Area Public Schools Superintendent Paul Peterson. “Offering crosses to students is highly coercive in such a personal environment.” After FFRF’s letter, the district took action.

“Immediately upon receiving your letter, I met with the principal of West High School to review the situation and ensure that appropriate corrective action was taken,” Peterson responded. “The display in question has been removed, and I have full confidence that this matter has been resolved in a manner consistent with our obligation to maintain religious neutrality.”

Mississippi

After FFRF reached out, the Eupora Police Department in Mississippi ended social media posts that showed unconstitutional favoritism toward Christianity.

FFRF was informed that the department routinely posted bible quotes and proselytized on its official Facebook page. On Oct. 21, 2024, the police department posted an image saying, “God is keeping you. The same God who kept you then, is keeping you again. And the God who prospered you before, shall prosper you once more. He will perfect that which concerns you and finish every good work he began in your life.”

“Government religious speech which promotes Christian viewpoints marginalizes and excludes non-Christian residents whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with the message being promoted by EPD staff,” FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Hirsh M. Joshi wrote.

Despite FFRF’s letter, no direct response came from police department. However, as FFRF mon-



itored the situation, the religious posts came to a stop, signaling that the department ceased the unconstitutional promotion of religion in response to being informed of the issue.

Texas

FFRF worked tirelessly over the course of two years to ensure that the Liberty Hill Independent School District in Dallas put a stop to multiple actions of religious favoritism.

In September 2023, FFRF learned that the Santa Rita Elementary School’s principal had been inviting parents and students to a prayer gathering that took place in August 2023. FFRF’s complainant believed the school’s involvement in organizing and advertising the prayer gathering indicated that the school officially supported a particular religious viewpoint, making the complainant and their family feel marginalized in the school community.

In October 2023, FFRF again learned that the district was promoting religious events through official school media. A parent reported that the official Santa Rita Middle School Facebook page shared a post promoting and advertising See You at the Pole, a “global day of student prayer.”

Finally, in May 2024, while still having neglected to respond to the initial letters of complaint, Santa Rita Elementary hosted a religious service on the so-called National Day of prayer, promoting a service on the official Facebook page.

“Public school students have a First Amendment right to be free from religious indoctrination in their public schools, including when participating in school-sponsored activities,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence and Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Hirsh M. Joshi wrote to the district.

Despite the district’s silence over the course of 2023 and 2024, FFRF continued to contact the district to urge them to respect the Constitution. Finally, in April of this year, Amber King, legal representative from the district, got in contact with FFRF. “We have advised the district’s administration on the legal issues and district’s responsibilities regarding events such as ‘See You At the Pole’ or ‘National Day of Prayer’ and more generally on the issues of prayer at school and allowing equal access to its facilities,” King concluded.

Virginia

FFRF gave the Rockingham County (Va.) Public Schools a lesson on constitutional compliance after the district posted fliers advocating for participation in an explicitly religious event.

A district parent reported that on March 18, 2024, Elkton Elementary school posted to its official Facebook page a photo from a Weekday Religious Education (WRE) student choral event hosted the previous weekend at James Madison University. The caption included quotes referencing God, such as “You can’t say God is not present in our schools and with our students . . . Thank you to Dr. Larry Shiflett and the School Board for allowing the children to have pull out time to attend WRE and learn about God and all he does for us.”

“A public school violates the Constitution when it promotes religion and encourages students to participate in religious release time activities,” FFRF Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler wrote to the district.

FFRF received word from legal representative Daniel P. Rose that the district would no longer promote religious events on social media.

“RCPS has looked into this matter, and, as you acknowledge in your letter, the posts have been removed,” Rose wrote. “Further, measures have been taken to ensure that posts like this do not occur in the future.”

THE SAID WHAT?

They say separation between church and state. I said, “All right, let’s forget about that for one time.” . . . They said, “Really, there’s separation?” I don’t know. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? I’m not sure, but whether there’s separation or not, you guys are in the White House where you should be, and you’re representing our country, and we’re bringing religion back to our country, and it’s a big deal.

**President Trump, after signing an executive order establishing a presidential commission on religious liberty.**  
*Politico, 5-1-25*

A lack of faith is often tragically accompanied by the loss of meaning in life, the neglect of mercy, appalling violations of human dignity, the crisis of the family and so many other wounds that afflict our society.

**Pope Leo XIV, in his first Mass (speaking in Italian) at the Vatican as the newly elected pope.**  
*BBC, 5-9-25*

[Thank you] for your partnering with the Department of State and God bless America.

**Message from U.S. State Department to organizers of a conference at the University of Southern Denmark that a \$10,000 grant was “being terminated**

**for the convenience of the U.S. government,” because Danish organizers had signed a statement saying they were in compliance with a U.S. executive order by President Biden saying they were in compliance with diversity, equity and inclusion. President Trump’s executive order requires compliance with bans on diversity, equity and inclusion.**  
*New York Times, 5-15-25*



**Robert F. Kennedy Jr., secretary of Health and Human Services, ducking questions during a congressional hearing, about whether children should be vaccinated for measles, chickenpox or polio.**  
*New York Times, 5-14-25*

SB 5375 demands that Catholic priests violate their deeply held faith in order to obey the law, a violation of the Constitution and a breach of the free exercise of religion cannot stand under our constitutional system of government.

**Harmeet K. Dhillon, assistant attor-**

**ney general of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, in response to a new Washington law that requires clergy members to report all suspected child abuse without special exemptions. Dhillon was named FFRF Action Fund’s “Theocrat of the Week” for her actions.**  
*The Friendly Atheist, 5-7-25*

Do we want to believe that humans are, that life is a miracle, this universe is a miracle, our bodies are miracles, and we want to connect with God in this lifetime and we want to build and respect these temples that are interconnected with the Earth to do that, or do we not? That’s the choice we have right now.

**Dr. Casey Means, President Trump’s new surgeon general nominee, in an interview with podcaster Joe Rogan last October.**  
*Associated Press, 5-21-25*

We’re not doing that climate change, you know, crud, anymore.

**Agriculture Secretary Brook Rollins to Fox Business on May 8, about embracing climate change denial and science cuts.**  
*New York Times, 5-21-25*

I missed that four years [when Biden was in office] and now look what I have. I have everything. Amazing the way things

work out. God did that. I believe that.

**President Trump, delivering remarks at Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day, acknowledging that he will be president during America’s 250th anniversary celebration and the United States hosting both the World Cup and the Olympics.**  
*HuffPost.com, 5-26-25*

What does God say is the answer, is the solution, for the homosexual in 2022, here in the New Testament, here in the Book of Romans? That they are worthy of death! These people should be put to death! . . . They should be lined up against the wall and shot in the back of the head.

**From a recently discovered 2022 sermon by Dillon Awes, a former church leader and an Oklahoma City IT employee.**  
*USA Today, 5-29-25*

For those that would like to see eternal and everlasting life, I encourage you to embrace my Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

**Sen. Joni Ernst, in a snarky rebuttal the day after she told an audience at a town hall event in Iowa, “Well, we all are going to die,” which was in response to a member of the crowd shouting that cuts to Medicaid would kill people.**  
*Washington Post, 6-1-25*

# The consequences of secularization

*This is an edited and condensed version of the speech given by Ryan T. Cragun at FFRF's national convention in Denver on Sept. 27, 2024. It has been reworked by Cragun for ease of reading since the live presentation was difficult to portray in written form because of the numerous graphs and charts he references. To watch the speech, go to [ffrf.us/con-24](https://ffrf.us/con-24).*

Cragun is a University of Tampa professor of sociology who focuses on Mormonism and nonreligion. He was born and raised in Utah as a Mormon and served as a Mormon missionary. He's author or co-author of many books, including "Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society," "What You Don't Know About Religion (But Should)," "Christianity and the Limits of Minority Acceptance," "How to Defeat Religion in 10 Easy Steps," and "From One Missionary to Another."

By Ryan T. Cragun

At the heart of my new book, "Goodbye Religion: The Causes and Consequences of Secularization" (coauthored with Jesse M. Smith), is a question many of you have already answered in your own lives: Why are people leaving religion? But one of the most fascinating — and controversial — questions we tackle comes later in the book: What happens when people leave? Are they worse off without religion? Are they less happy? Less civic-minded? Meaner?

Spoiler alert: No.

You've probably heard some version of these worries. That nonreligious people are sadder. Or meaner. Or selfish. Or don't care about family. Or have no meaning in their lives. This is fear-mongering by religious individuals to try to scare people away from leaving religion and to frame religion as superior to nonreligion. My goal here is to take away the fear and replace it with data that illustrate these claims are fallacious.

We used large, representative samples of Americans from multiple sources. In the General Social Survey we compare three groups: the religious, the formerly religious (exiters), and the never religious. In the World Values Survey, we compare three slightly different groups: the religious, the not religious, and atheists. (And, yes, we know, most atheists are also not religious. We didn't create the question. We're just analyzing it.)

We'll look at a few common claims — and what the data actually show.

**Claim 1:** Have you ever heard that religious people are happier than nonreligious people? Pew Research has pushed this idea, and it's everywhere in the media. Turns out it's bullshit!

The figures we show in this essay were created using a statistical technique called average marginal effects. What that means is we're controlling for key demographic information, including age, race, sex, income, and education, and then examining differences that remain.

In Figure 6.15, we see the results to the question, "How happy are you?" It's a three-point scale. One is very happy, two is pretty happy, and three is not too happy. While a self-reported measure of happiness, it is believed that it does a pretty good job reflecting how happy people are. Look closely at Figure 6.15. Are there big differences? There is a difference, but it's 0.1 on a 3-point scale. For those who care about statistical significance, it's not statistically significant, but we're not going to focus on that. What we're focusing on throughout this presentation is just if there are meaningful or practical differences (a.k.a. effect sizes).



Photo by Steve Solomon

Sociology Professor Ryan T. Cragun spoke at FFRF's national convention in Denver on Sept. 27, 2024.

Figure 6.15 illustrates that there are not meaningful differences between these groups. In fact, I co-authored with David Speed a book chapter that focuses just on whether religious people are happier than nonreligious people looking at over 50 different countries around the world. In the vast majority of those countries, there are no differences between the religious and the nonreligious on how happy they are. Literally no difference at all. And in the small number of countries where there were differences, they were so small as to be meaningless.

Occasionally, people will find ways to massage data to try to defend this claim, but it's just not true.

**Claim 2:** Have you ever heard that religious people are more civically engaged?

I'm going to give you an illustration of this from a very well-known book that came out about a decade ago. The book is called "American Grace" by Harvard professor Robert Putnam, the author of "Bowling Alone" and his co-author, David Campbell, who is at the University of Notre Dame.

Here is a direct quote from their book: "In this chapter, we discover, first, that religious Americans are, in fact, more generous neighbors and more conscientious

citizens than their secular counterparts. On the other hand, they are also less tolerant of dissent than secular Americans, an important civic deficiency. Nevertheless, for the most part, the evidence we review suggests that religiously observant Americans are more civic and, in some respects, simply 'nicer.'"

I'm not making this stuff up. These are big-name professors and this was a best-selling book. It turns out this is not true, either.

Let's look at what the data say on this in Figure 6.4 (on next page). This is the predicted probability of someone being engaged or involved in an organization after controlling for the demographic variables noted earlier. We're comparing three groups of individuals — religious, not religious and atheists. The values range from 0 to 1. A zero would mean that no one in that group is involved with one of these civic organizations. A one means they are all involved in the specific organization. You'll notice none of the predicted probabilities is above 0.7, so none of them is so high as to suggest that everyone is involved with that type of organization.

Not surprisingly, there is a difference in civic engagement when it comes to . . . religion!

Religious people are statistically more likely to be involved in religions. Shocker! That makes sense. It also illustrates that the statistical models are working.

Do you see any other differences? There are no differences for sports organizations, arts or educational institutions, labor unions or political party memberships. Additional analyses not shown in Figure 6.4 demonstrate that there are no differences in civic engagement in: environmental, professional, charitable, consumer advocacy, self-help or women's organizations either. Literally, no differences.

Putnam and Campbell were full of shit. They massaged their data to make nonreligious people look as bad as possible by combining religiously unaffiliated individuals (including atheists) with people who have a religious affiliation but never attend. Hmmm . . . Why might they have done that?

When you actually make fair and accurate comparisons, you see a completely different story. I sometimes wonder how long it will take to undo all of the damage Putnam and Campbell did with their pro-religious propaganda.

**Claim 3:** Have you ever heard someone say that nonreligious people aren't as nice as religious people?

Jesse and I struggled with the best way to really test this? How do you measure "niceness"? What we decided was that it shouldn't focus on how nice people are to people like themselves. It's pretty easy to be nice to someone who's just like you. A better test is to be nice to strangers. It's much harder to be nice to people you don't know, or people who are very different from you.

Let's turn to the data and see who's actually nicer.

Figure 6.11 (on next page) is similar to Figure 6.4 in that it shows predicted probabilities. In this figure, what we are examining is the predicted probability of people in each of the three groups selecting that they don't want those people to be their neighbors. Basically, they were asked, "Would you want people in this group to be your neighbor?" and they could say yes or no.

Not surprisingly, drug addicts and heavy drinkers aren't popular. But, people are generally fine with the other groups. However, the key finding here is that there are, once again, no differences between the religious, the nonreligious and atheists. They all come out basically the same on their likelihood of selecting people of a different race, people who have AIDS,

Figure 6.15. Self-Reported Happiness Among Never Religious, Exiters, and Religious (Average Marginal Effects).

(Source: General Social Survey, 2010-2021.)

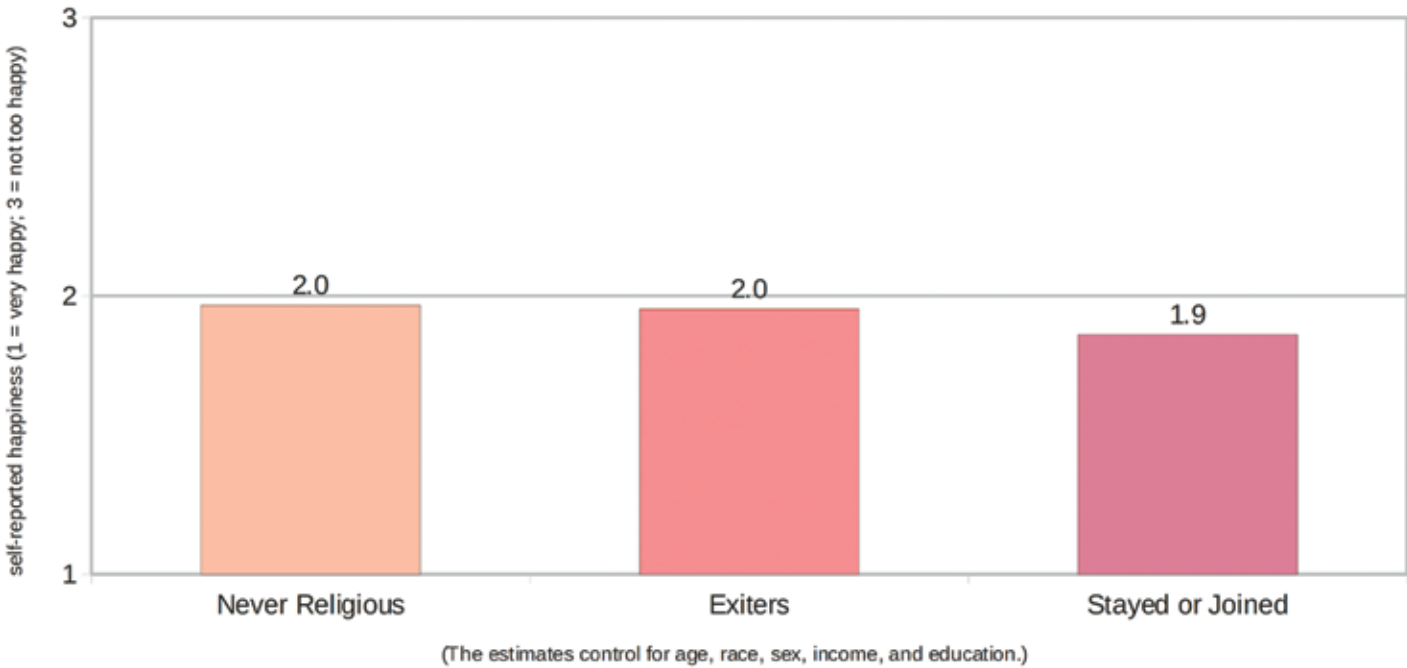
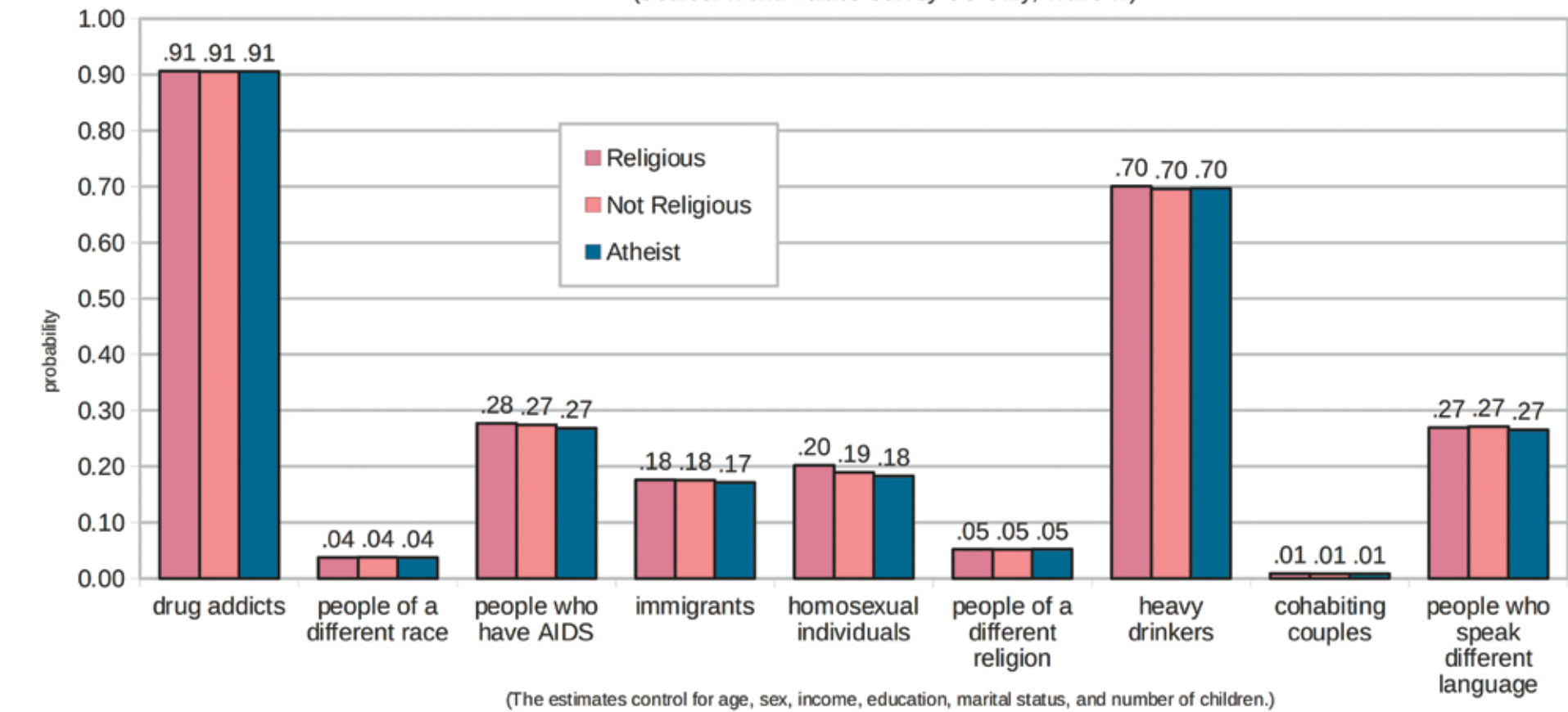


Figure 6.11. Probability of Mentioning Don't Want Various Groups as Neighbors Among Religious, Not Religious, and Atheists (Average Marginal Effects).

(Source: World Values Survey-US Only, Wave 7.)



immigrants, homosexual individuals, people of a different religion, cohabiting couples and people who speak a different language. There are no differences here.

So, when Putnam and Campbell claim that religious people are nicer, the evidence, when properly analyzed, does not back that up. They had to try pretty hard to be that wrong.

**Claim 4:** Have you ever heard people claim that non-religious individuals are less moral than religious individuals? This is a pretty common claim. I will admit that this one is a bit more complicated than a lot of the other ones. Why is this complicated? It turns out even among the religious, they can't agree on what is moral and what isn't.

Who drinks coffee in here? Sinners! According to the LDS church, you're all going to hell. Well, their version of hell. I don't believe in hell, but it's kind of weird, right? The idea is, amongst the religious, they have very specific things that they believe.

If we use the values and the morals of religious people to judge nonreligious people, certainly they're going to be able to say, "Oh, you're less moral than I am. You guys drink coffee." That's absurd. It's stupid. Right? What we have to do is look for areas where we could find universal agreement and then look to see where people actually fall.

Who's most accepting of homosexuality? Not sur-

prisingly, it's atheists and the nonreligious. So, we do know that there are differences.

Let's try another one — prostitution. Nonreligious and atheists are more accepting of this. There are actual differences.

We cover lots of additional questions in the book, like: Are nonreligious people more materialistic in the pro-consumption sense? Nope. (See: Joel Osteen and many other megachurch pastors for examples). Are nonreligious people raising more poorly adjusted kids? Nope, we just have fewer of them. Are nonreligious people less likely to think there is inherent meaning in life? Yes. But we are also more likely to believe that we can create meaning for ourselves and we do.

So, we do see meaningful differences between religious and nonreligious individuals. But, it's because they have a different perception of what is moral and what is not. These claims that nonreligious people and atheists are immoral just don't stand up to scrutiny. It doesn't make any sense. So, what's the takeaway?

When Jesse and I finished writing this chapter, we realized it might disappoint people. Both the religious and nonreligious want to believe they're better. That's not what the data show.

The real answer? We're just . . . people. Religious and

nonreligious people aren't that different in a lot of ways.

To anyone panicking about the decline of religiosity in America, we say: Relax. Stop worrying. Everything is going to be fine.

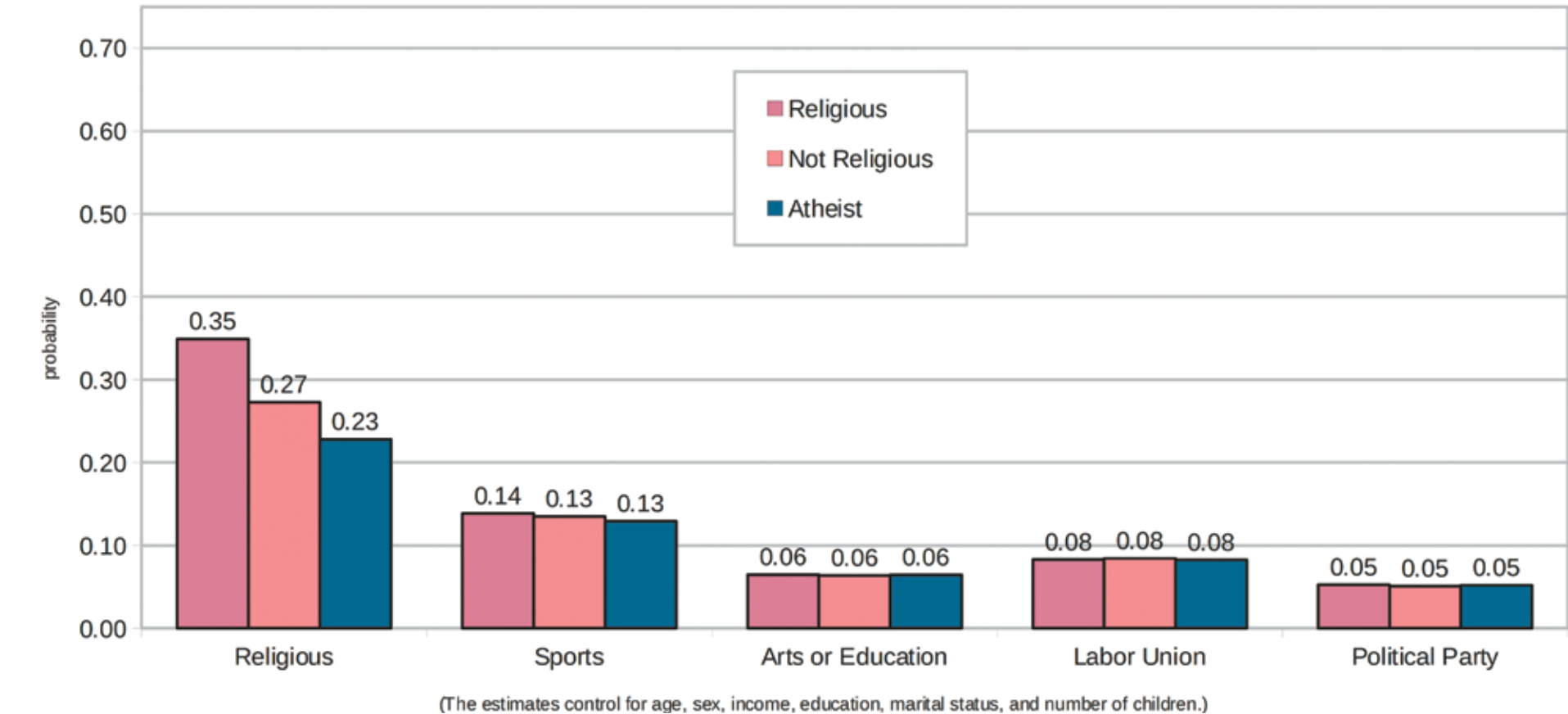


Photo by Chris Line

Following his talk, Ryan T. Cragun chats with a convention attendee during his book-signing event.

Figure 6.4. Predicted Probability of Active Involvement in Organizations Among Religious, Not Religious, and Atheists (Average Marginal Effects).

(Source: World Values Survey, Wave 7.)



# Carlin’s ‘Commandments’ bit still relevant

George Carlin was an influential stand-up comedian and social critic who often discussed taboo topics, including (and especially) religion. The following is from Carlin’s 2001 HBO special, “Complaints and Grievances,” which was taped live at the Beacon Theater in New York City on Nov. 17, 2001, just 10 weeks after 9/11. Nearly a quarter century after performing this monologue, and with several states currently contemplating forcing public schools to display the Decalogue in every classroom, Carlin’s take on the Ten Commandments is still funny and, unfortunately, relevant. (Carlin died in 2008.)

By George Carlin

The Ten Commandments. Here’s my problem. Why are there 10? You don’t need 10. I think the list of commandments was deliberately and artificially inflated to get it up to 10. It’s a padded list. Here’s what they did. About 5,000 years ago, a bunch of religious and political hustlers got together to try to figure out how to control people, how to keep them in line. They knew people were basically stupid and would believe anything they were told, so they announced that God had given them some commandments — up on a mountain, where no one was around. God had given them the Ten Commandments. But let me ask you this. When they were sitting around making this shit up, why did they pick 10? Why 10? Why not nine? Or 11? I’ll tell you why. Because 10 sounds official. Ten sounds important. They knew if it was 11, people wouldn’t take it seriously. “What, are you kidding me? The 11 Commandments? Get the fuck out of here!” But 10 — 10 sounds important. Ten is the basis for the decimal system. It’s a decade. It’s a psychologically satisfying number. The top 10. The 10 most wanted. The 10 best dressed. So having 10 commandments was really a marketing decision. And, to me, it’s clearly a bullshit list. It’s a political document artificially inflated to sell better. I’m gonna show you how you could reduce the number of commandments and come up with a list that’s a little more workable and logical. We’re going to start with the first three,



Screenshot from video  
George Carlin performs his “Complaints and Grievances” stand-up act in 2001.

and I’ll use the Roman Catholic version because those are the ones I was taught as a little boy. “I am the Lord thy god; you shalt not have strange gods before me.” “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” “Thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath.” Right off the bat, the first three, pure bullshit. Sabbath day, Lord’s name, strange gods. Spooky language. Spooky language, designed to scare and control primitive people. In no way does superstitious nonsense like this apply to the lives of intelligent civilized humans in the 21st century. You throw out the first three commandments, you’re down to seven. Next, “Honor thy father and thy mother.” Obedience, respect for authority. Just another name for controlling people. The truth is, obedience and respect should not be automatic. They should be earned. They should be based on the parents’ performance. Parents’ performance. Some parents deserve respect, most of them don’t. Period. You’re down to six.

Now, in the interest of logic, something religion is very uncomfortable with, we’re going to jump around the list a little bit. “Thou shalt not steal.” “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” Stealing and lying. Well, actually, these two both prohibit the same kind of behavior — dishonesty. Stealing and lying. So, we don’t need two of them. Instead, we combine these two and call it “Thou shalt not be dishonest.” Suddenly we’re down to five. And, as long as we’re combining commandments, I have two others that belong together: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.” Once again, these two prohibit the same kind of behavior; in this case, marital infidelity. The difference between them is that coveting takes place in the mind. I don’t think you should outlaw fantasizing about someone else’s wife, otherwise, what’s a guy gonna think about when he’s waxing his carrot? But, marital fidelity is a good idea, so I suggest we keep the idea and call this one:

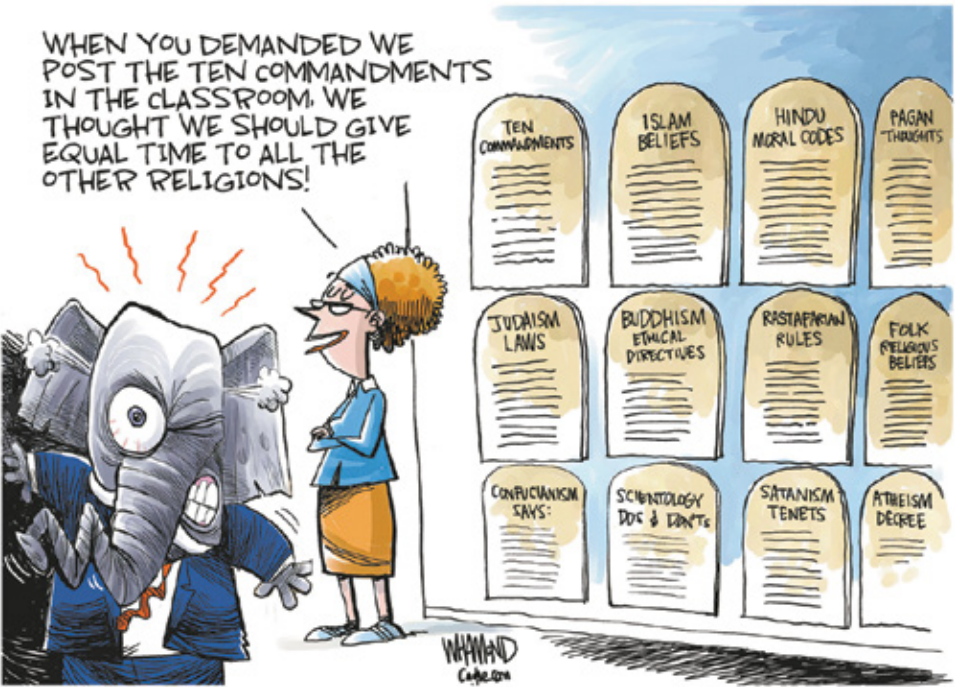
“Thou shalt not be unfaithful.” Suddenly, we’re down to four. But, when you think about it further, honesty and fidelity are actually parts of the same overall value. So, in truth, we could combine the two honesty commandments with the two fidelity commandments and give them simpler language, positive language instead of negative, and call the whole thing, “Thou shalt always be honest and faithful.” And we’re down to three. “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods.” This one is just plain fucking stupid. Coveting your neighbor’s goods is what keeps the economy going. Your neighbor gets a vibrator that plays “O Come All Ye Faithful,” and you want to get one, too. Coveting creates jobs. Leave it alone. You throw out coveting and you’re down to two now — the big honesty/fidelity commandment, and the one we haven’t mentioned yet: “Thou shalt not kill.” Murder. The Fifth Commandment. But, when you think about it, religion has never really had a problem with murder. Not really. More people have been killed in the name of God than for any other reason. All you have to do is look at Northern Ireland, the Middle East, Kashmir, the Crusades, the Inquisition and the World Trade Center to see how seriously religious people take “Thou shalt not kill.” The more devout they are, the more they see murder as being negotiable. It’s negotiable. It depends. It depends on who’s doing the killing and who’s getting killed. And, so, with all of this in mind, I leave you with my revised list of the Two Commandments: First: “Thou shall always be honest and faithful to the provider of thy nookie.” And second: “Thou shall try real hard not to kill anyone, unless, of course, they pray to a different invisible man than the one you pray to.” Two is all you need. Moses could have carried them down the hill in his fucking pocket. And, if we had a list like that, I wouldn’t mind those folks in Alabama putting it up on the courthouse wall — as long they included one additional commandment: “Keep thy religion to thyself.”

Want to see more comedy acts like this? Go to [freethoughtnow.org](http://freethoughtnow.org) to view ‘28 secular comedians you should know.’

## Texas

Continued from page 1

schools from posting the Ten Commandments in classrooms. Following this precedent, a federal district court recently held in Roake v. Brumley that a Louisiana law similar to SB 10 violates the rights of parents and students under the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses of the First Amendment. The court ruled that the displays will religiously coerce students, who are legally required to attend school and are thus a captive audience for school-sponsored religious messages, and will usurp the right of families to direct the religious education of their children. That case, in which the plaintiffs are represented by FFRF, the ACLU, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the ACLU of Louisiana, is currently on appeal in the 5th Circuit. In response to the passage of SB 10, the groups intending to challenge the law issued the following joint statement: “SB 10 is blatantly unconstitutional. We will be working with Texas pub-



lic school families to prepare a lawsuit to stop this violation of students’ and parents’ First Amendment rights. “We all have the right to decide what religious beliefs, if any, to hold and practice. Government officials have no business intruding on these deeply personal religious matters. SB 10 will subject students to state-sponsored displays of the Ten Commandments for nearly every hour of their public education. It is religiously coercive and interferes with families’ right to direct children’s religious education. “Texas communities and public

schools are religiously diverse. Many public school families do not practice any religion at all, while many others practice religions that do not consider the Ten Commandments to be part of their faith traditions. Even among those who may believe in some version of the Ten Commandments, the particular text they adhere to can differ by religious denomination. The version of scripture set forth in SB 10, however, is associated only with Protestant faiths, and does not reflect the beliefs of most Jewish and Catholic families. “SB 10 will co-opt the faith of millions of Texans and marginalize students and families who do not subscribe to the state’s favored scripture. We will not allow Texas lawmakers to divide communities along religious lines and attempt to turn public schools into Sunday schools. If Gov. Abbott signs this measure into law, we will file suit to defend the fundamental religious freedom rights of all Texas students and parents. We encourage all concerned public school parents to contact us at [intake@ffrf.org](mailto:intake@ffrf.org).”

# Replacing education with indoctrination

By Caitlin Berray

As most state legislative sessions conclude across the country, the FFRF Action Fund reflects on the work it has achieved so far in 2025 and the national trends that have taken shape. With the help of our advocates, FFRF Action Fund has worked tirelessly to ensure that non-religious Americans are represented in all state legislatures.

Perhaps the most startling development this year has been the degree to which our secular public school system is under attack. A consolidated Christian nationalist movement targeting public schools to proselytize and indoctrinate students has only gained momentum under the second Trump administration, but FFRF Action Fund is working to counter its theocratic attacks.



Caitlin Berray

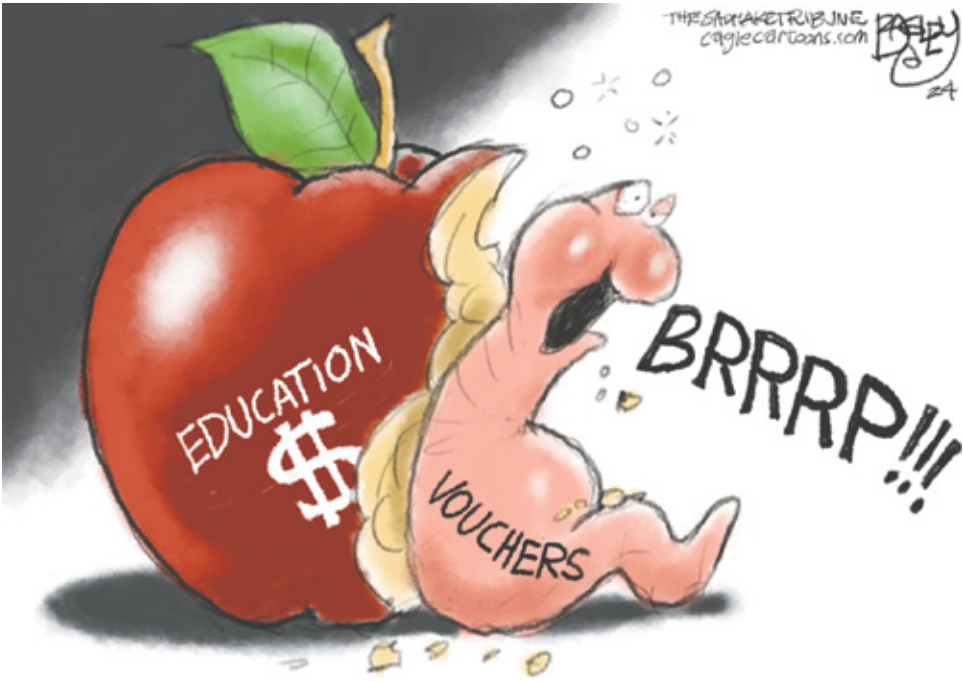
Texas is perhaps the most overt example of the religious right working to deteriorate the public school system in 2025. Gov. Greg Abbott, after six years of failed attempts, successfully pushed his \$1 billion private voucher scheme through the Texas Legislature, diverting taxpayer funds to predominantly religious schools. Abbott signed the voucher legislation into law in early May, and it stands to increase to more than \$4 billion by 2030.

FFRF Action Fund believes that public dollars should fund public education, not private religious schooling, which is not beholden to state curricula standards and can openly discriminate based on gender, sexual orientation or other criteria that conflict with personal religious ideology. In opposition, FFRF Action Fund testified against the voucher bill, published an op-ed in the San Antonio Express-News and called upon Texas advocates to oppose it.

Tennessee similarly pushed a half-a-billion-dollar voucher privatization scheme through its legislature, but meanwhile, thankfully, two attempts to introduce a voucher plan in North Dakota were blocked by state legislators and the governor. North Dakota lawmakers have already indicated plans to introduce even more widespread voucher legislation during the 2027 legislative session, but FFRF Action Fund is ready to oppose their efforts.

Turning back to Texas, its Legislature has passed a broad slate of other Christian nationalist bills that reflect the state body's embrace of Christianity. One bill would require all public school classrooms to prominently display the Ten Commandments, and another would alienate all non-Christian students by requiring schools to provide a period of prayer and bible readings. The Legislature also approved a bill allowing public employees to proselytize and pray to students while on official school duty, and another requiring public schools to excuse students for "release time" courses on religious instruction, enabling evangelical groups to proselytize students during regular school hours. With vetoes unlikely from Abbott, Texas is aimed at inserting religious indoctrination in place of secular education, inviting court challenges when student rights are violated.

As many are aware, Louisiana became the first state to enact legislation



**ffrf ACTION FUND**

This article is from the FFRF Action Fund, a 501(c)(4) lobbying entity which reimburses FFRF for the space in Freethought Today. For more information about the FFRF Action Fund, go to [ffrfaction.org](https://ffrfaction.org).

mandating the display of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms in 2024; however, the law is currently on hold pending court decisions. Arkansas followed suit in April, signing its Ten Commandments bill. Across the country, more than 30 Ten Commandment bills in over 20 states were introduced in legislatures this year, but, thankfully, most efforts stalled.

Whether in the form of religious displays, chaplains replacing school counselors or forced prayer, Christian nationalists want to place their religious dogma in public classrooms. Staggeringly, an Alabama bill sought to require all K-12 public schools to recite "a prayer consistent with Judeo-Christian values" alongside the Pledge of Allegiance every school morning. The bill died in committee.

Lastly, "parental rights" have been a focus for Christian nationalists, arguing that parents should have absolute veto power over the books offered in public libraries and state-mandated curricula, primarily with instruction on sexuality and gender. This is currently an issue before the U.S. Supreme Court with *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, but many states are also considering the question. West Virginia has signed a new law that grants parents sweeping power to interfere with the work of public schools and threatens schools that attempt to push back with severe legal sanctions. Distressingly, this may allow zealous parents to censor school libraries based on their personal religious beliefs.

From everything we have seen through 2025's legislative season, public schools are certainly a major objective for Christian nationalists, so it must remain a chief priority for those of us who care about preserving the bedrock of our democracy — our public, secular education system.

FFRF Action Fund remains committed to fighting for students across the country and their right to a secular education void of proselytizing and indoctrination.

### Attacks on reproductive rights and the LGBTQ community

The rise of granting excessive, special privileges for personal religious beliefs not only occurred in legislation concerning public schools this season. Troubling,

we also saw religiously motivated attacks on reproductive rights and the LGBTQ community across the country.

Of course, attacks on the LGBTQ community were rampant in legislation concerning public school curricula and book bans. Additionally, a bill passed through the Missouri House that would require public colleges to recognize religiously affiliated student organizations, even if they openly discriminate against other students, doubtlessly referring to the LGBTQ community. FFRF Action Fund submitted testimony opposing this harmful bill.

Outside of schools, Tennessee signed a bill into law allowing health care providers to discriminate against LGBTQ patients due to their personal religious beliefs. The Kentucky Legislature overrode a veto from Gov. Andy Beshear lifting a ban on conversion therapy, while prohibiting Medicaid funds from being used to pay for gender-affirming care. Meanwhile, an Arkansas attempt to prohibit conversion therapy failed.

With reproductive rights, Missouri is attempting to override the people's will. In 2024, Missouri voters approved a ballot initiative that would undo the state's extremist, total abortion ban triggered after the fall of *Roe v. Wade* by enshrining abortion rights in the state constitution. FFRF Action Fund endorsed and funded a grant to the abortion fund running the 2024 initiative's campaign. Now, a House resolution will send a new state question back to the people to eliminate these hard-earned abortion rights while also logrolling it with a provision to ban gender-affirming care for minors, a tactic to boost the chances of repealing the right to abortion in Missouri. FFRF Action Fund stands firm in its conviction that Missouri should respect its democracy by honoring the votes of its citizens.

### Christian nationalist resolutions indicate an (attempted) cultural shift

Christian nationalist resolutions popped up in nationwide legislatures across the first half of 2025. While symbolic resolutions have no legal or legislative effect, they are part of a deeper strategy to erode the separation between state and church, even if not all were successful.

There were attempts in Oklahoma, North Dakota and Montana to pass resolutions deeming that "Christ is King" by their respective state legislatures. They would have been clear examples of governmental bodies exclusively endorsing a religion and undoubtedly would have propped up Christian nationalism. Thankfully, all attempts failed, though

more attempts to pass similar resolutions are likely to occur in the future.

A Tennessee resolution designating July as a time for "prayer and fasting" was signed by the governor, and a Texas resolution marking April as "Promise Month," referring to God's faithfulness in keeping promises, passed through the Texas House. An Indiana resolution aimed at declaring the Indiana House of Representatives a Christian body didn't move forward through the legislature. The bill did have almost two dozen sponsors, however, indicating a troubling level of support for the sentiment in the state. On all fronts, FFRF Action Fund facilitated opposition to these unconstitutional resolutions, whether through Action Alerts, submitted testimony or press releases.

Resolutions like these may seem harmless because they have no legal bearing, but they indicate something troubling. The plethora of Christian nationalist resolutions shows just how much religious legislators are pushing to create a culture dominated by Christianity.

### Positive legislative efforts supported by the FFRF Action Fund

Despite the attacks on our secular democracy, the FFRF Action Fund is pleased to celebrate major 2025 victories. After a lengthy battle, Delaware legislators ensured a medical aid in dying (MAID) bill was signed into law, allowing terminally ill patients to determine their own end-of-life care. MAID is now legal in 11 states. FFRF Action Fund will continue to support legislative efforts in other states that need compassionate care, opposing religious backlash and claims of legislators "playing God."

In a huge win for victims of abuse, Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson signed a law that was hard-fought in the Legislature — clergy members are now mandated reporters of abuse, closing a confessional loophole. The Catholic Church strongly opposed the legislation, and has since filed suit to challenge it, while FFRF Action Fund testified in support twice. We applaud Washington for protecting abuse victims.

Child marriage is also now officially outlawed without exception in 15 states. Oregon was the latest state to enact legislation raising the marriage age to 18 with no exceptions. A similar bill was sent to the governor in Missouri. FFRF Action Fund has worked alongside allies to advocate for this reform nationwide, and we look forward to supporting future legislative efforts.

FFRF Action Fund's advocates took action with real impact in legislative sessions throughout the country. Out of the 40 bad bills from Missouri that FFRF Action Fund tracked this session, only three made it to the governor's desk. As of early June, only a few of the 44 bad bills in Texas are likely to be signed into law, and just three of the 14 bad bills in Kentucky have been signed by the governor. In Alabama, a slate of bad bills were stopped entirely. Contacting your state legislators through our Action Alerts can greatly influence which bills are passed out of committees and legislative chambers. Sign up at [ffrfaction.org](https://ffrfaction.org).

FFRF Action Fund's state policy work stands up for our secular government. We could not do our work without our advocates in every state. Thank you for our victories this session and for helping us withstand the onslaught of Christian nationalism across the country.

*Caitlin Berray is FFRF Action Fund's government affairs coordinator.*

# 2025 Reason Reception brings humor, heat

In a standing-room-only event, leading lawmakers, advocates and a nationally known comedian gathered for the second annual Congressional Reason Reception — a celebration of reason, science, wit, humor and the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

Hosted by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, American Humanist Association, and Secular Coalition for America, the reception served as the freethought community’s counterweight to the National Prayer Breakfast. Co-chairs of the Congressional Freethought Caucus — **Reps. Jared Huffman** and **Jamie Raskin** — honored individuals who have advanced First Amendment freedoms and held the line against Christian nationalism. The evening’s highlights included former **Rep. Susan Wild**’s keynote speech, in which she publicly identified as a secular humanist.

“I am the granddaughter of a Methodist preacher, and I have Quaker lineage going back many generations on my maternal side of the family,” Wild said. “And, I eventually converted to secular Judaism and ultimately embraced secular humanism.” (Read her whole speech on Page 14.)

Rep. Huffman joked, “[The Reason Reception is our] boozy counterweight to the Congressional Prayer Breakfast.” And he remarked that “when Republicans talk about religious liberty, you have to read the fine print. Stuff like



FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker and FFRF Events Coordinator Sadie Pattinson on April 29.

‘terms and conditions apply’ or ‘offer valid only for certain denominations.’”

Rep. Raskin reflected on the growth of the caucus: “It used to be just Jared and me sitting together on the House floor. I would tell him jokes, and he would get up to object whenever anything religious happened from the rostrum. Now we’ve got 26 people who can be embarrassed together.”

Comedian **Leighann Lord**, who emceed the evening, brought humor to the often weighty topic of religion and politics: “As a stand-up comedian, it’s very hard to make jokes about religion because everybody believes different things. I have a friend who believes in aliens. He says, ‘Leighann, we don’t really know who built the pyramids, so aliens must have done it.’ I’m like,

‘Dude, I don’t know who put the shingles on my house — it doesn’t mean the Klingons did it.’”

News anchor **Joy Reid** accepted in absentia the 2025 Common Sense Award and praised the caucus for its courage and clarity: “I love that there is a Congressional Freethought Caucus. How great is it to get an award for something so fundamental, so basic and so important as common sense in this era that we are living in.”

**Rep. Laura Friedman** commented in her remarks, “I have for a long time believed that we do not need to have established religion or religion at all to be moral people.”

The “Uncommon Nonsense Award” — recognizing the most laughable attempt to undermine church-state separation — came back this year. It was given to **Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene** and Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction **Ryan Walters**.

Also present at the gathering were **Reps. Sean Casten, Judy Chu** (the newest member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus), **Bill Foster** and **Bobby Scott**.

“This event reminds us that defending reason and secular values can be joyful, powerful and unifying,” says **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, FFRF co-president. “The growing number of secular voices in Congress gives us hope that reason and our constitutional separation between state and church will ultimately prevail.”



Americans United President Rachel Laser, center, who accepted the Uncommon Sense award on behalf of AU, speaks with reception attendees.



U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman speaks at the second annual Congressional Reason Reception on April 29 in Washington, D.C.



Leighann Lord, left, talks with several reception attendees following the program.



Attendees laugh during a performance by Leighann Lord.



Leighann Lord, Annie Laurie Gaylor, U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman, former U.S. Rep. Susan Wild and Dan Barker.



American Humanist Association Executive Director Fish Stark, sculptor Zenos Frudakis and Dan Barker chat during a break in the program.



U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin spoke to the standing-room only crowd.



Margaret Downey converses with Rep. Sean Carsten, a member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus.



FFRF Governmental Affairs Director Mark Dann shares a laugh with comedian Leighann Lord during Rep. Laura Friedman’s speech.



FFRF Video Producer Bruce Johnson recorded the entirety of the Reason Reception. It can be viewed at [ffrf.us/reason2025](https://ffrf.us/reason2025).



Guests mingle following the Reason Reception program.

Congressional Reason Reception

‘Equal rights and secularism will win out’

*This is the keynote speech given by Susan Wild, a former U.S. representative from Pennsylvania, at the 2025 Congressional Reason Reception in Washington, D.C., on April 29.*

By Susan Wild

Thank you all so much. It’s a pleasure to join so many friends in celebrating the ideals that have always led our world toward greater things — democracy, pluralism, scientific inquiry and reason. I was asked to stand in for God, who wanted to be here tonight, but he’s simply too busy keeping our world so peaceful and just.

I want to especially thank and recognize Reps. Jared Huffman and Jamie Raskin — along with every member of the Freethought Caucus — for their courage, their leadership under ever-increasing pressure, and their willingness to stand up and fight back. And I want to thank Reps. Huffman and retired member Jerry McNerney for recognizing my not-so-subtle hint that I was inclined to be a freethinker, and inviting me to join their caucus. The Freethought Caucus is dedicated to a politics without influence from organized religion — a fiercely bipartisan group from members of both sides — no, I’m kidding.

I am the granddaughter of a Methodist preacher, with Quaker lineage going back many generations on the maternal side of my family. I eventually converted to secular Judaism and ultimately embraced secular humanism. I need to give my own daughter, Adrienne, full credit for my embrace of who I really am and what I really believe. Because, when she was 6 years old, we were driving somewhere, and she asked from the backseat of the car, “Mommy, do you believe in God?”

Now, this parenting thing can be pretty dicey, and newer parents tend to live in fear of a misstep that will ruin their child’s life forever. Or, at least a misstep that will one day become its own itemized line on their therapist’s monthly Superbill. For context, by this point our older child, Clay, had already been enrolled in the Jewish Community Center preschool, and then JCC kindergarten, and he had started talking about wanting to go to Hebrew school and to be bar mitzvah’d — something we’d planned on. (Ironically, it was me, the convert, who wanted him to be bar mitzvah’d and encouraged it. Russell, his father, had what basically amounted to a drive-through bar mitzvah, and was fine with Clay having one, but I was the one who really ensured we had him attending classes in preparation.)

Anyway, there I was, in the driver’s seat, stuck at a red light with my inquisitive daughter, trying to figure out an appropriate response. By this point, I had already learned that avoidance of difficult subjects absolutely never worked with either of my kids.

Adrienne: “Mommy, do you believe in God?”

Me: “Oh, I don’t really know, honey.”

Adrienne: “Well, I don’t.”

I heaved a big sigh of relief that my biblical knowledge and religious beliefs were not about to be tested. But, more than anything, I remember rushing home to have a conversation with her dad. We were so proud of her independent way of thinking.

(Another brag, sorry. When she was in second grade, her teacher sent home a paper that had been given to each kid,



Photo by Chris Line

Former U.S. Rep. Susan Wild gives her keynote speech at the Congressional Reason Reception on April 29.

asking “When you grow up, who do you want to be?” Of course, most kids had said Brittany Spears or Michael Jordan, but not my kid. She answered, “I want to be me.”)

Without question, Adrienne’s declaration of her atheism was the thing that freed me up to be honest about my beliefs. She has continued to be the one in our family who fiercely and often uncomfortably challenges any of us who express anything short of pure secularism, and is especially critical of people in politics who talk about their religious beliefs as though they ought to be those that govern the whole country.

Now, I don’t need to remind anyone in this room about the tragic times we are living through for all those who believe in protecting freedom of conscience, or in upholding civil rights, or in democracy itself. But, if we continue to fight back, much like many of the leaders of this caucus are doing every single day, the most lasting impact of the architects of Project 2025 — who have taken control of our government at every branch — may just be, ironically, to forcefully remind the American people of how critical the separation of church and state really is.

They may actually awaken the majority of Americans who, regardless of religious beliefs (or lack thereof), recognize that our country was founded in opposition to the idea of a monarchy claimed to be directly descended from God. Donald Trump may claim that he was “saved by God” in order to be sent to the White House. He may claim that he IS God. Actually, it would be great if he were, just in case the atheists are right!

But, in this country, as our founding documents — flawed as they may sometimes be — proclaim: Sovereignty comes from the people.

We live in an era far removed from that understanding. An era when the speaker of the House and a Supreme Court justice brazenly fly Christian nationalist flags. When cabinet officials are selected based on their fealty to Donald Trump and their credentials within the ranks of a far-right ecosphere in which Christian nationalism is the binding ideological fabric. When an anti-vaccine, anti-science professional conspiracy theorist is put at the helm of Health and Human Services.

Fully assessing where we are today

requires looking at how we got here. Ultraconservative religious organizations gained unprecedented influence during the years of the Reagan Coalition. In exchange for campaign contributions and grassroots manpower, religious organizations demanded to set policy and personnel. And their influence grew.

In the early 2000s, George W. Bush was catapulted to the White House by an outpouring of support from religious conservatives (not to mention a poorly designed ballot and some old Floridians who got confused). He banned federal funding for stem cell research, cast doubt on the teaching of evolution in public schools, and supported a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage, all averred to be in the honor of and according to the virtues of Jesus Christ. The 2000s, accordingly, featured an unprecedented assault on the very idea of keeping church and state separate.

And, of course, just because Republicans have handed over their keys to religious zealots, does not mean Democrats don’t share any blame. Far too many leaders, even in the Democratic Party, are willing to make appeals to organized religion while refusing to provide any semblance of recognition or representation to their agnostic, atheist or nonpracticing constituents, including the nearly one-third of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated.

Today, religious influence on public policy has reached epic proportions. Religious reactionaries are no longer merely a powerful interest group within the Republican coalition; they have organized themselves to become an integral part of every element of it.

We have a collective responsibility to resist these illiberal forces, which have become increasingly explicit in their rejection of democracy and its basic tenets. That responsibility is all the more essential because our last major barrier against theocracy, the Johnson Amendment, stands — after years of lacking effective enforcement — at risk of being repealed altogether.

Friends, let’s be clear on this: If this administration and their acolytes get their way, far-right churches and religious institutions will be free to directly and openly bankroll campaigns for elected officials

at every level. They will be emboldened and encouraged to direct their massive organizational infrastructure toward the completion of a wholesale transformation of our society — from school boards to state capitols. Courts to boardrooms. City governments to universities. Our government will become even more beholden to the most dangerous elements of organized religion.

The road ahead will be long, and we have our work cut out. There aren’t nearly enough members of Congress who have the courage of their convictions to join the Freethought Caucus, although I am happily still a member of their Signal thread, and I was encouraged to see more new names this Congress than in the past. (I’m also confident that thread is more secure than others you may have heard about recently, as I think it’s highly unlikely that Pete Hegseth will become involved with our group.)

Before I finish, let me say that at a time when good news is in short supply, the good news is this: There is another way out of the situation we find ourselves in today. Amid the darkness of obscurantism, we can still collectively organize to ensure a secular, humanist future in which everyone is free to believe or not to believe. A future in which the rights and dignity of our LGBTQ friends are never sacrificed on the altar of theocratic conviction by those who claim to value human life above all else, but whose actions could not be in starker contrast. A future where no American must pass a religious purity test or forgo their belief in the separation of church and state in order to run for office.

The far-right and its allies can deride those of us who refuse to buy into their tyrannical cult of personality as much as they want, but I know in my bones that our vision of solidarity, equal rights and secularism will win out against their vision of fear, prejudice, and oppression.

So, as difficult as these days may continue to get, let us continue to march. Let us continue to mobilize. Let us continue to proudly carry the banners — of anti-fascism, anti-racism, LGBTQ pride, women’s rights, and that of working men and women — the banners that immortalize our values and help make our country what we know in our hearts it can be and must be.

I thought about closing with a quote from Proverbs, but I thought it’d be better to remind us of some wise words from one of our country’s great humanists. In response to all those who would like us to believe that to be a good American we must be God-fearing, let us remember Thomas Paine: “The world is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion.”

Thank you all so much.

The image shows the front cover of the book 'The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible'. The cover is primarily brown and white. At the top, it says 'HOLY BIBLE' in small letters. The main title is 'The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible' in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Below the title, it says 'By Ruth Hurmence Green'. At the bottom, there is a red banner that says 'Published by FFRF'.

**The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible**

A Missouri grandmother debunks the bible as no one has debunked it since Thomas Paine.

By Ruth Hurmence Green

— 440 pages / PB  
\$15 Item #FB12

Buy it from FFRF online  
@ ffrf.org/shop

# We should all live ‘practical atheism’

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

This column first appeared on FFRF’s blog site, *FreethoughtNow.org*.

Robert Prevost, aka Pope Leo XIV, decided to take potshots at nonbelievers during his very first incense-waving Mass, condemning those of us who live “in a state of practical atheism.”

The new pope complained, “Even today, there are many settings in which the Christian faith is considered absurd,



Annie Laurie Gaylor

meant for the weak and unintelligent.” In these settings, “a lack of faith is often tragically accompanied by the loss of meaning in life, the neglect of mercy, appalling violations of human dignity, the crisis of the

family and so many other wounds that afflict our society.” This, he admonished, “is true not only among nonbelievers but also among many baptized Christians, who thus end up living, at this level, in a state of practical atheism.”

The pope is right about one thing. Many, probably most, of us, even the devout, live life as practical atheists. And that’s a good thing. Practical atheism is and should be the default. Most of us go about our days and our lives trying to make the best of them, circumnavigating our practical and very terrestrial challenges sans supernaturalism.

If heaven is so great, why don’t we all “drink the Kool-Aid,” like Rev. Jim Jones’ victims in Guyana, so we can get to paradise quicker? Why do we mourn when loved ones die? After all, they’re “going to a better place.” Although I’ve met atheists in foxholes who literally witnessed compatriots blown to pieces be-



cause they stopped to pray, most soldiers who are under enemy fire skedaddle, or duck. The drive to survive makes most of us “practical atheists.”

The pope indicted nonbelief in his Mass, saying “a lack of faith is often tragically accompanied by the loss of meaning in life, the neglect of mercy, appalling violations of human dignity, the crisis of the family and so many other wounds that afflict our society.” We atheists know we are responsible for our own meaning of life, thank you. That’s also a good thing. Confronting natural challenges is precisely what gives life meaning. The pope’s blindness to the history of terrorism and bigotry by his church is startling. Think of the “neglect of mercy” during the Inquisition. Consider the “appalling violations of

human dignity” at the Magdalene Laundries and the Catholic boarding schools for Native American children. So many family crises have been exacerbated by the Church’s irrational and sexist teachings against contraception and abortion.

The pope equated atheism with worldliness, acquisition and hedonism, listing “technology, money, success, power or pleasure” as its evils. Let’s take these one at a time. Does the pope contend he’s never partaken of any of these pursuits? Maybe he personally eschews technology (or maybe not). But the Vatican itself embraces technology. Ironically (thanks in part to the fawning media coverage — a powerful technology), he’s now become one of the most “successful” and influential men on the planet. His every thought,

however predictable or full of cant, will be considered newsworthy. Whatever his favored lifestyle, he’ll live amid luxurious trappings, art and gold, heading one of the wealthiest religions in the world. He will never go hungry, unless by choice.

Now take pleasure. Would Robert Prevost deny the good of pleasure? If so, that’s truly twisted. We need more, not less, pleasure. Of course, he’s undoubtedly referring to sexual pleasure, so let’s go there. As a priest and now pope, he’s taken a famous vow of celibacy — for all that means in real life. Now he’s heading a church that critic Father Thomas Doyle long ago warned appears to be “an organization preaching morality and providing sanctuary to perverts.” Novelist Alice Walker, in a piece hilariously titled “The only reason you want to go to heaven is that you have been driven out of your mind,” has wisely written, “What a burden to think one is conceived in sin rather than in pleasure.” One of the core teachings of Christianity is that we are conceived in sin precisely because it involves pleasure (we hope for both parties, but that’s sadly not always the case). And such a belief, that pleasure is sinful, is truly perverted.

I much prefer the creed of the “Great Agnostic” Robert G. Ingersoll, who wrote, in a poem set to music by Dan Barker:

*Justice is the only worship.  
Love is the only priest.  
Ignorance is the only slavery.  
Happiness is the only good.  
The time to be happy is now,  
The place to be happy is here,  
The way to be happy is to make others so.*

The pope could learn a thing or two about how to live and how to govern from Ingersoll and the host of other thoughtful and moral “practical atheist” philosophers, thinkers, scientists and activists who make up the venerable freethought pantheon that the pope so ignorantly despises.

Annie Laurie Gaylor is co-president of FFRF.

## Composer Charles Strouse, friend of FFRF, dies

FFRF is very saddened to hear of the death of composer Charles Strouse, 96. The writer of many Broadway musicals, including “Annie,” “Bye Bye Birdie,” “Applause,” and “Golden Boy,” Strouse worked with many lyricists, including Alan Jay Lerner and Lee Adams. He also composed for television, including the theme song, “Those Were the Days,” for “All in the Family.”

As he describes in his 2008 book “Put on a Happy Face: A Broadway Memoir,” Strouse

He traveled as an accompanist with actress Butterfly McQueen, experiencing firsthand the racial discrimination she faced in the South. He marched with Sammy Davis Jr. in Selma, Ala., in 1965, illustrating his commitment to equality.

Strouse became a friend of the Freedom From Religion Foundation in 2009. FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor spoke

with him on Freethought Radio in 2009 about his career and proud lack of religious faith.

“Though my father wasn’t an atheist, I am,” he said on that show. “I understand why people do believe [in God] and frankly, I’m a little puzzled, though a little pleased, that there is a radio program like yours that talks about it, because as an atheist, at least my kind of it, I don’t need any persuasion. I’ve been persuaded for a great number of years now, by the wars, the calamities, the religious antagonism among people and their stupid rules.”

When asked what prompted his lack of faith, Strouse replied: “My sister died in ’41 of breast cancer, and I remember a rabbi saying that ‘God in his infinite wisdom has chosen to take this young girl.’ That was a point



Photo by Jeff Yardis

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker presents the “Emperor Has No Clothes” award, given to individuals who have made significant contributions to the secular movement, to composer Charles Strouse in 2011.

in my life that I said there couldn’t be any God.”

Strouse received FFRF’s “Emperor Has No Clothes” award at its 34th annual convention in Hartford, Conn., in 2011, where he spoke and entertained us with some of his music, including “Tomorrow” (from “Annie”) and “Once Upon a Time” (from “Golden Boy”).

In 2012, Charles Strouse and Dan Barker wrote a song about religion

called “Poor Little Me.” That song is on FFRF’s “Adrift on a Star” album, also available on Spotify and other music providers.

Charles and his wife, Barbara Simon, who died in 2023, were married for 61 years. Even though he wrote “It’s a Hard Knock Life” for “Annie,” Charles Strouse always said he was very lucky to have lived a long and fulfilling life. As a nonbeliever, he could always “Put on a Happy Face.”

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.

# Supreme Court deadlock

# Religious public charter school denied

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is celebrating a significant victory for Oklahoma families and the separation of state and church after the U.S. Supreme Court on May 22 deadlocked 4-4 on a case involving the nation’s first religious public charter school.

The tie leaves in place an Oklahoma Supreme Court ruling that blocks the state from sponsoring and funding St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School, a publicly funded charter school that intended to indoctrinate students in Catholic doctrine.

“This is a crucial, if narrow, win for constitutional principles,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “A publicly funded religious charter school would have obliterated the wall of separation between state and church. We’re relieved that, at least for now, the First Amendment still means what it says.”

The state’s charter school board approved St. Isidore in 2023, marking the first time a state had authorized a religious charter school. However, the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled in June of last year that the school’s religious characteristics



Image by Shutterstock

disqualified it from operating as a public charter, a ruling that has now been left intact by the Supreme Court’s tie.

Had the nation’s highest court ruled differently, it would have greenlit the use of taxpayer dollars to fund religious instruction — a fundamental violation of the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause.

Director Patrick Elliott. “Taxpayers should never be forced to fund religious indoctrination, especially through schools that are supposed to be open to all students.”

The implications of this case extend far beyond Oklahoma. Christian nationalist legal groups such as Alliance Defending Freedom and the Religious Liberty Clinic at Notre Dame have made no secret of their plan to replicate religious charter schools nationwide. If successful, their efforts would radically reshape public education and funnel public resources to religious institutions with little oversight or regard for civil liberties.

The Supreme Court’s split ruling underscores what’s at stake in future cases and highlights this case as a near miss. Because Justice Amy Coney Barrett recused herself, the resulting deadlock prevented a potentially disastrous precedent.

“The fight isn’t over,” said Gaylor. “The forces trying to undermine our public schools and constitutional freedoms are already regrouping. FFRF will continue to defend secular education and the rights of all Americans to be free from government-imposed religion.”

FFRF and its coalition partners submitted an amicus brief in the case warning that allowing religious charter schools would erode public education and religious freedom.

“This case was never about the free exercise of religion; it was about government-sponsored religion,” says FFRF Legal

## FFRF’s ‘Freethought in Action’ promotes daily activism

FFRF has launched a powerful new initiative encouraging its 42,000 members and everyday people to celebrate their rights and stand up for the separation of church and state — one simple action at a time.

The campaign, called “Freethought in Action,” invites freethinkers and other Americans to engage in daily, bite-sized actions that affirm their commitment to freedom of thought, expression and belief — or nonbelief. Whether it’s reading an independent news source, supporting secular education, or appreciating the right to live

without religious coercion, the campaign highlights how small moments of reflection or action can have a lasting impact.

“We often think of activism as something that happens at protests or in the courts,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. “But freedom is something we protect every day — in the conversations we have, the choices we make, and the rights we exercise. Freethought in Action empowers freethinkers to recognize that our voices and our values matter, even in the smallest of actions.”

The campaign includes a full year’s worth

of daily prompts that range from civic engagement and education to creative expression and community support. Each action encourages participants to reflect on a series of objectives, such as the importance of secular government, the protection of individual liberties, and the celebration of freedom from religious interference.

Participants can access the full list of daily actions by visiting: [ffrf.org/freethought-in-action](http://ffrf.org/freethought-in-action). FFRF will also share each day’s action across its social media platforms using the hashtag #FreethoughtInAction,

inviting followers to take part and share how they’re engaging.

The campaign is designed to meet people where they are — no signs or speeches required, just small, thoughtful, intentional steps that add up to a broader culture of secular advocacy and awareness.

“It’s critical to remind people that their freedoms are not automatic,” adds Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. “They exist because people before us stood up — and now, it’s our turn to do the same, in ways that feel accessible and empowering.”

## Supreme Court decision exempts Catholic groups from unemployment program

The Freedom From Religion Foundation strongly condemns the unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision on June 5 exempting a group of Catholic-affiliated nonprofits from the Wisconsin unemployment insurance program. The ruling could have devastating consequences for workers nationwide and further provide government preference to religious groups.

“This decision is fundamentally wrong,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Treating religiously affiliated nonprofits the same as all other nonprofits is not a violation of the First Amendment.”

Catholic Charities and four subsidiary nonprofits that provide secular services but are affiliated with the Catholic Diocese of Superior sought an exemption from the unemployment insurance program. They argued that they should be allowed to take advantage of a church exemption to state-mandated unemployment insurance simply because their parent entity created them as part of its religious mission. Yet, the organizations provide secular services, do not require their employees or clients to be Catholic, and do not ask employees to minister to clients. By accepting this

specious rationale, the court has done great damage to the social safety net.

The unanimous opinion, authored by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, overturns the Wisconsin Supreme Court’s decision and finds that it violated the First Amendment by showing “state-sponsored denominational preference” against Catholic Charities. The U.S. Supreme Court concluded that the Wisconsin court failed to apply the state’s religious unemployment exemption in a neutral manner.

During oral arguments, the justices focused heavily on hypotheticals, suggesting that Catholic Charities might have qualified for the exemption if its subsidiaries had explicitly proselytized. According to the court, such distinctions based on “theological practices,” such as whether the groups proselytize, amounts to unconstitutional favoritism toward certain sects. While the ruling is arguably narrow in scope, it is nonetheless troubling.

FFRF filed a friend-of-the-court brief contending that expanding a narrow church exemption to include all entities with religious motivations behind their work is unfounded. It pointed out that if the nation’s highest court overturned



Image from Wikimedia Commons

Cathedral of Christ the King in Superior, Wis.

the Wisconsin Supreme Court’s decision, it could have harmful consequences for workers all over the country. Hundreds of thousands of employees, including those at Catholic-affiliated hospitals, could potentially lose the benefit of unemployment insurance.

Sotomayor’s opinion includes broader Establishment Clause themes, which are consistent with a proper interpretation of the First Amendment. Quoting prior precedent, the opinion says the “clearest command of the Establishment Clause” is that the government may not officially prefer one religious denomination.

However, the opinion stretched the

neutrality principles of the First Amendment in this case. The opinion says, “When the government distinguishes among religions based on theological differences in their provision of services, it imposes a denominational preference that must satisfy the highest level of judicial scrutiny.”

The Wisconsin Supreme Court’s opinion had maintained neutrality by taking a common sense approach to deciding whether a religiously affiliated nonprofit’s activities are religious or secular. The U.S. Supreme Court’s opinion signals that it has accepted a religious organization’s claims about its work no matter what, even if that work is clearly nonreligious.

# FFRF files motion to have Okla. suit dropped

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has filed a motion to dismiss an Oklahoma State Department of Education lawsuit against it.

FFRF sent letters to public schools in Oklahoma objecting to religious activities, prompting State Superintendent Ryan Walters and the Oklahoma State Department of Education to file a “SLAPP” suit seeking to punish its constitutionally protected speech. The state’s Department of Education has failed to identify any actual violation of law. This “Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation” (SLAPP) seeks to chill the free speech and petition rights of FFRF. SLAPP suits are used to weaponize the legal system to punish and silence constitutionally protected speech.

“We are proud of the work we are doing to protect the rights of conscience of public school children in Oklahoma,” says FFRF Co-President



Annie Laurie Gaylor. “This frivolous lawsuit by Ryan Walters seeks to silence FFRF, and we are not going to allow that to happen.”

FFRF is represented by the American Civil Liberties Union and the

ACLU of Oklahoma.

“Advocacy organizations have the right to criticize government policy and push for change,” says Megan Lambert, legal director of the ACLU of Oklahoma. “This lawsuit is just an-

other in a long line of political stunts by the Oklahoma State Department of Education as it seeks to silence and punish dissent. We will vigorously defend FFRF’s First Amendment rights against the department’s abuse of the legal process.”

“Our client has not violated any law by speaking out against religious activities in Oklahoma public schools,” says Vera Eidelman, senior staff attorney with the ACLU’s Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project. “This lawsuit has one goal: to chill our client’s ability to petition the government. This is an abusive legal tactic intended to punish people and organizations for speaking out and fighting back against government policies.”

The lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma.

## OVERHEARD

The Senate Education Committee has already rejected an amendment that would restrict school chaplains from proselytizing students. So much for religious neutrality in our schools! Such neutrality is dead when these school chaplains have been given the go-ahead to use their positions to promote their faith among the students. It should go without saying that doing so makes every non-Christian student in Iowa’s public schools — Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Shinto, Sikhs, atheists, and so on — vulnerable to the evangelizing efforts of these chaplains. That is simply not acceptable.

**Henry Jay Karp, rabbi emeritus of Temple Emanuel in Davenport, Iowa, in a column decrying a school chaplain bill moving through the Iowa Legislature.**  
*BleedingHeartland.com, 4-24-25*

[It is] difficult to overstate the magnitude of the case for our constitutional order. . . The goal posts in this constitutional area have moved incredibly far, incredibly fast. Even a decade ago, the notion that states would be required to recognize religious charter schools was not at all a mainstream view. . . There is a certain sense of constitutional whiplash here.

**Justin Driver, a professor at Yale Law School and an expert on education law, discussing the case before the Supreme Court on whether public tax dollars can be used to pay for private religious charter schools.**  
*Washington Post, 4-28-25*

Trump has not called a council or penned a creed — he hardly needs to. Yet he has elevated a particular expression of Christianity — nationalist, triumphalist, often exclusionary — that serves his political interests.

**Michael DeLashmutt, in his column, “The emperor’s gospel: Donald Trump and the power of Christianity.”**  
*Religion News Service, 5-2-25*

Religious liberty is a positive good; it is a fundamental American precept. So, too, is the separation of church and state, and that is where the problem with the current [Supreme] Court’s approach arises. “Religion flourishes in

greater purity, without than with the aid of government,” James Madison wrote in 1822. Two centuries later, the incredible shrinking Establishment Clause would have worried him. It should trouble us as well.

**Ruth Marcus, in her column, “Is this the end of separation of church and state?”**  
*The New Yorker, 5-5-25*



**Shannon Fleck, executive director of Faithful America, an online Christian social justice community, regarding President Trump’s executive order establishing a new national Religious Liberty Commission.**  
*Religion News Service, 5-4-25*

Make no mistake, this new commission will do more to increase bullying in schools, workplace conflict and religious discrimination than it will to protect our constitutional rights or our churches.

Frankly, we are not in the business of faith or religion. That’s not what we do! . . . How much prayer do you need? How much God do you need? . . . How is this good for kids? How is this good for our school district? How is this being a good steward of taxpayer dollars? It’s not!

**Pam Escobar, a member of the Cabarrus County (N.C.) School Board, in a discussion over the idea of adding a prayer to their meetings. Escobar was named FFRF Action Fund’s “Secularist of the Week” on May 16 for her outspokenness on the topic.**  
*The Friendly Atheist, 5-8-25*

I tell law students if you’re not used to fighting losing battles, don’t become a lawyer. Our job is to stand up for people who can’t do it themselves. Our job is to be the champion of lost causes. To fight, to be there to represent those who can’t artfully represent themselves. So, you have to stand tall and strong and ethically and civilly and professionally as you put yourself forth before the courts in representing your clients. But, right now, we can’t lose the battles we are facing. We need trained and passionate and committed lawyers to fight this

fight. With all the uncertainty that exists at this moment, this is our time to stand up and be heard. For me, being here with you is an act of solidarity.

**Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, speaking on May 8 at the American Bar Association’s TIPS 10th Annual Section Conference in Washington, D.C.**  
*American Bar Association, 5-9-25*

I am sorry if there is, as she says, an “epidemic of loneliness.” But the remedy for loneliness is human fellowship, the warmth of real, live, flesh-and-blood companions and loved-ones; not prating in a vacuum to an imaginary friend for whose existence there is no vestige of serious evidence.

**Richard Dawkins, in response to the New York Times article by Lauren Jackson titled “Americans haven’t found a satisfying alternative to religion.”**  
*Substack, 4-23-25*

We look forward to protecting Washington kids from sexual abuse in the face of this ‘investigation’ from the Trump Administration.

**Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson, reacting to the Department of Justice’s investigation into so-called “free exercise violations” involved in passage of a new law requiring clergy of all stripes to report suspected child abuse or neglect to authorities, even if discovered during confession. Ferguson, a Catholic, supported the bill. The DOJ branded it as anti-Catholic, but the bill started because of Jehovah’s Witnesses.**  
*New York Times, 5-10-25*



**David H. Souter**

An ignorant people can never remain a free people. Democracy cannot survive too much ignorance. What I worry about is that when problems are not addressed, people will not know who is responsible. And when the problems get bad enough . . . someone will come forward and say, ‘Give me total power and I will solve this problem.’ That is how the Roman republic fell . . . That is the way democracy dies.

**Former Supreme Court Justice David H. Souter, who died on May 8 at age 85, during remarks at a 2012 live forum on “PBS Newshour” in Concord, N.H. Souter wrote a dissent in the 2007 Hein v. FFRF lawsuit, disagreeing with the majority’s 5–4 decision against granting the Freedom From Religion Foundation the right to sue (standing) over the creation by George W. Bush of faith-based offices in the White House and cabinet levels.**  
*Associated Press, 5-10-25*

This isn’t just about what we’re against, it’s what we’re for. Not just that we are against forcing people to pay with their tax dollars for private education that they might not subscribe to agree with. We are for using those tax dollars for excellent, first-rate public education.

**Pete Buttigieg, in a town hall meeting discussing, among other things, the St. Isadore Catholic School case (which had yet to be decided) before the Supreme Court that would allow public funding of a religious charter school. Buttigieg was named FFRF Action Fund’s “Secularist of the Week” on May 23.**  
*YouTube, 5-20-25*

At times, I think that was the great breakthrough of the America Constitution. Our Founders were enlightened liberals who broke from centuries of religious warfare between the Protestants and the Christians in Europe and the holy crusades and inquisitions and witchcraft trials. They wanted to put all of that behind us. And to say the decision of belief and worship would be left to each person and his or her god. Government would be a place where we base things on facts and empirical inquiry and reason.

**U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin, in remarks delivered at the National Constitution Center.**  
*ConstitutionCenter.org, 5-12-25*

The religious right has divorced itself from historical Christian theology, but still holds its partisan beliefs with religious intensity. The religious fervor is there. Christian virtues are not.

**David French, in his column, “The Christian right is dead. The religious right killed it.”**  
*New York Times, 4-29-25*

# Trump a perfect tool for evangelicals

By Daniel Dossey

People keep asking if Donald Trump actually believes in God. Honestly? No one really knows. Maybe he doesn't. Maybe he genuinely believes he's been chosen for some divine mission. Either way, it makes little difference. Because, belief or not, the effect is the same: Trump became the perfect tool for a religious movement already committed to reshaping the country according to what they believe is God's law. He didn't have to be righteous. He just had to be useful.

This dynamic isn't rooted in hypocrisy — it's rooted in consistency.



Daniel Dossey

For decades, large swaths of the evangelical movement have pushed the idea that the United States should reflect biblical morality in its laws. And they've done so not out of political cynicism, but out of sincere, fervent devotion. The same way we legislate against murder and theft, they believe we should legislate against what they see as sin. It is, to them, the logical and righteous path.

From that framework, abortion isn't a health care issue — it's legalized murder. LGBTQ rights aren't a matter of civil equality — they're a rebellion against divine design. The left isn't just politically misguided — it's morally bankrupt. To evangelical



Instagram

Faith leaders pray over Donald J. Trump at the Faith Town Hall in Georgia in this undated photo.

believers, the growing secularization of America isn't just unfortunate; it's dangerous. It's a rejection of God's authority. And so, even a man as flawed as Trump can become, in their eyes, a necessary instrument.

This is the part that too often gets lost in media narratives. Trump didn't hoodwink evangelicals. He didn't fool them into compromising their values. He aligned himself — strategically and loudly — with their ultimate goal: establishing what they believe is God's authority through American governance. And they, in turn, aligned with him not because he embodied their values, but because he advanced their mission.

What's terrifying is not that Trump distorted Christianity. It's that Christianity — at least the deeply politicized, evangelical form — was already

poised to accept him. Trump didn't corrupt evangelicalism. He revealed it. And he amplified its influence with full force.

At the Freedom From Religion Foundation, we see the results every day. Public school officials pushing prayer. Lawmakers using God to justify discrimination. Entire communities acting as if secular Americans are second-class citizens. These aren't isolated incidents. They're symptoms of a broader movement that wants American law to reflect religious dogma.

That's what makes this so urgent. The religious right isn't simply misguided — it's actively working to erode the wall between church and state. And it's doing so with unwavering confidence, because its members believe they're serving a higher power. That

certainty is difficult to argue with, let alone legislate against. But it must be challenged.

I know the internal logic of this movement because I grew up in it. But, I don't write this to vent or to vilify. I write it because I'm angry — not just at what's happening now, but at how long it's been allowed to happen. And I'm not angry in spite of understanding the other side — I'm angry because I understand it.

That's why I work at FFRF (as a legal intake assistant). Not out of spite, but out of resolve. To push back. To protect the freedom not to believe. To draw the line where religion ends and government begins.

Let's be honest: Trump doesn't care about God. He cares about power. And the evangelical movement — so desperate to see their version of morality encoded into law — gave it to him. Not because they admire him, but because he delivers. He says what they want said. He passes what they want passed. He fights the enemies they believe are fighting God.

If evangelicals ever walk away from Trump, his platform collapses. He knows it. They know it. That mutual dependence is what makes this moment so dangerous. It's no longer about belief. It's about control. And we are watching, in real time, what happens when a president is controlled by a religion. This is a theocracy.

Whether Trump believes in God is irrelevant. Because the people who do are reshaping the country in his image — believing they're doing it in God's.

Daniel Dossey is FFRF's legal intake assistant.

## Too many have Evidence Avoidance Syndrome

By Brian Myres

I believe there is a link — from the ridiculous to the dangerous — between various groups of people who suffer from what I call Evidence Avoidance Syndrome.

At the ridiculous end, we have the flat-Earthers, who can't seem to see the evidence before their eyes, and the young-Earth creationists, who accept every word in the bible without question, even the obvious children's story of the Great Flood and Noah's ark. Another example would be Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis (where there are no answers). I guess they never heard of parables or metaphor.



Brian Myres

In a more serious vein are the Holocaust deniers, who ignore the overwhelming evidence, including eyewitnesses and older Jewish people with tattoos on their arms from the death camps. Racial bigots deny the evidence that skin color is a biological adaptation to various climatic conditions — more melanin in tropical areas and less in temperate zones.

Another group with Evidence Avoidance Syndrome are the very religious scientists of the Discovery Institute,

who just can't stand the overwhelming evidence of evolutionary theory, and whose wish is to install religious instruction into America's classrooms. They argue constantly against the evidence (having none of their own) with ideas like intelligent design, something that has been refuted many times over.

Stephen Meyer of the Discovery Institute has a degree in scientific philosophy, but must have missed class the day that they discussed that religious explanations have no place in science. He likes to compare computers and DNA, making the claim that any change in programming is detrimental. That may be true for computer programs, but alterations in DNA (mutations) are the source for natural selection. We know that not all mutations are harmful. The newer science of evolutionary development (evo-devo) has laid waste to many creationist ideas, as have studies in molecular genetics. Unfortunately, the Hoover Institute at Stanford University regularly invites these frauds on some of their programs, which should be an embarrassment to the university.

Mathematician and Christian apologist John Lennox loves to talk about the mathematical impossibility of hereditary molecules like DNA and RNA or the odds against randomly forming long chains of amino acids to form proteins. His ideas have recently been debunked by Jason Rosenhouse, author of the book, "The Failures of Mathematical Anti-Evolutionism." In

the book, he states, "You wonder why anti-evolutionists insist on padding their work with so much irrelevant and erroneous mathematical formalism. The answer is that their literature has far more to do with propaganda than it does with serious argument."

And, finally, we have the ultra-religious, whose belief in God and Jesus (or Allah and Muhammad) is not shaken by the evidence. They are stuck in their dogma, the enemy of reason. Of course, the evidence in this case is that they have no evidence of these deities.

For example, where was any god when the plague swept through the world, killing millions of people, or the Holocaust, where the "chosen people" were almost annihilated? Where was God during the Crusades, where the "truth" on each side was considered blasphemy by the opposite side and millions died? And, as the late Christopher Hitchens generally stated, Why did this god pay little attention to humanity for 100,000 years and then 2,000 years ago sent his son to save the world? Meanwhile, during those 100,000 years, humanity suffered and died from a dreary assortment of diseases and conditions that any god could have helped with. Why didn't God make teeth out of the same material we now make false teeth out of, to eliminate tooth decay that killed many humans in their youth? Why wait until the 20th century to give us decent health care? If God ignored all these

things, why call them a god? Then again, as Woody Allen stated, maybe God is just an underachiever!

Of course, not everyone has been consumed by Evidence Avoidance Syndrome. An obvious example is FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, who was once a fundamentalist preacher.

Astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson has made much of the importance of acceptance of evidence in one's life, but Carl Sagan rightly warned that he's never seen much change happen in politics or religion.

Unfortunately, we are seeing that first-hand with the present climate emergency being dismissed by recalcitrant deniers of the evidence, many of them in positions of power, including the ignorant President Trump, who calls the crisis a sham or "fake news." He has now inserted people with no knowledge of the problem, and deniers like him, to positions that are supposed to deal with the problem. The Republican Senate and Congress are also filled with climate change deniers. We have been warned by the scientific community of the seriousness of this situation, and the absolute need for the evidence to be paid attention to. It's difficult to be optimistic.

FFRF Member Brian Myres taught biology at Cypress College in California from 1968–1999, and has written and spoken about evolution and science methodology since his college days at Cal State Fullerton.

# FFRF CHAPTER UPDATES

## FFRF East Tennessee

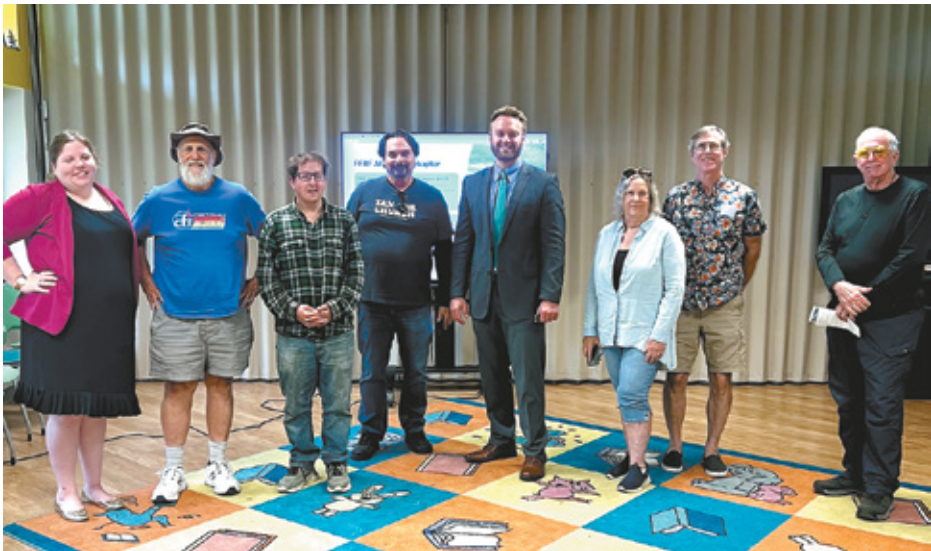
The FFRF East Tennessee Chapter arranged with the Rhea County, Tenn., Mayor's Office to clean and polish the Clarence Darrow statue on June 10 to have it ready for the Scopes Trial Centennial Celebration in July. With the newly installed lighting, it will look all spiffed up for the attendees.

After Katherine Stewart speaks at the Scopes event in Chattanooga, she will be traveling to Knoxville to give her presentation hosted by FFRF East Tennessee Chapter, The Rationalists of East Tennessee and the AU Knoxville, Branch of the Nashville Chapter. Her presentation will be at 7 p.m. on July 20 at the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church. Her two most recent books will be available with a signing during a light reception after the talk. For more information visit [ffrf-etc.org](http://ffrf-etc.org) or call (865) 724-5273.



In this photo from 2024, the FFRF East Tennessee Chapter cleans and polishes the Clarence Darrow statue.

## Austin Area Chapter



FFRF Regional Governmental Affairs Manager Mickey Dollens, center, gave a presentation to the Austin Area Chapter of FFRF recently.

FFRF Regional Governmental Affairs Manager Mickey Dollens gave a talk to the Austin Area Chapter of FFRF, teaching chapter members how to effectively lobby as citizens. "Chapter President Andrew Bushard was a great host and the venue was setup nicely with our materials, snacks and all the tech equipment I needed," Dollens said. "The presentation went really well! Several people who just happened to be at the library dropped in, too. One told me they're going to become a member and sign up for our Texas Action Alerts."

## Ozarks Chapter of FFRF



Members of the Ozarks Chapter of FFRF hosted a table at the Fayetteville Farmers Market on April 26.

The Ozarks Chapter of FFRF has been busy this spring, as both the Bentonville and Fayetteville Farmers Markets are in full swing. Our group represented in a BIG way on April 26 at the Fayetteville Farmers Market, bringing out nearly a dozen FFRF members. And, in Bentonville, despite new restrictions on information tables, we made our grand entrance on May 10 with our new advertising backpacks. Drawing a lot of attention, we had an opportunity to speak with market attendees and discuss the differing viewpoints on the Establishment Clause. Our members find that these conversations are empowering, fulfilling and

provide the sense that we are making an impact in our community. Rounding out the calendar was Ozark FFRF's speech to the Democratic Party of Benton County on May 12. The presentation highlighted the importance of separation between church and state, and touched on religious issues that captivated the audience. There was a lively conversation that followed showing how religion and politics are still very sensitive topics. Our summer is loaded with activities and we hope to connect with new FFRF members! Please visit [ozarksffrf.org](http://ozarksffrf.org) for more information!

## Upstate New York Freethinkers

Upstate New York Freethinkers invites you to our 2nd Annual Chapter Gathering on Aug. 24! Join us for a day of stimulating discussion, community and free-thought celebration. Following the resounding success of last year's inaugural event, this year's gathering promises an even richer experience with a stellar line-up of speakers and engaging activities. We are honored to host a distinguished roster of freethought leaders: **Annie Laurie Gaylor** and **Dan Barker**: FFRF co-presidents, delivering inspiring keynotes. **Kate Cohen**: Renowned author ("We of Little Faith") and former Washington Post columnist. **Danielle Nagle**: Executive director of the Matilda Joslyn Gage Center, will discuss this freethinking feminist before museum tours highlighting women's rights and religious freedom. So, mark your calendar for Aug. 24 at the Craftsman Inn & Conference Center in Fayetteville, N.Y. Doors open at 9:40 a.m. for a full day of presentations and networking, celebrating our shared secular values. This exclusive event is for FFRF members and their ticketed guests. Your comprehensive ticket includes: Coffee/tea service, hot buffet luncheon including salad and dessert, Matilda Joslyn Gage Museum tour and piano music by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. Additional information: 

- Opportunities for book signings and engaging with speakers will be available.
- An optional Saturday evening dinner (Aug. 23, at participant's expense) is available for attendees who reserve seats during the ticketing process. Please note that a limited number of seats are available.
- Discounted hotel rates are offered for out-of-



Members of the Upstate New York Freethinkers are excited to host the 2nd Annual Chapter Gathering on Aug. 24, where they will visit the Matilda Joslyn Gage Museum and hear from several speakers, including FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker.

town guests at The Craftsman Inn & Suites (mention "NYFREE"). Find all the details and order your tickets now at [unyft.org/go](http://unyft.org/go).

Support the chapter from wherever you are! Donate, join, or volunteer at [unyft.org](http://unyft.org). For any inquiries about the event or the chapter, please call (585) 454-9921 or email [info@unyft.org](mailto:info@unyft.org).

# LETTERBOX

## FFRF’s donation helps fight against deportation

I am writing to express my deepest gratitude, on behalf of my family, for your generous support in our fight against deportation. Unfortunately, many immigrants in this country, including numerous international students, are facing an incredibly challenging situation. Immigration judges who are deemed unfit are being dismissed, while many immigration lawyers are under intense pressure. Thousands of asylum cases are unjustly closed by USCIS and sent directly to deportation proceedings. Sadly, my family has also become a victim of this injustice.

In my academic work and dissertation, I explore the process of deconversion from religion, how it transforms people’s lives, and the challenges individuals face when transitioning from a religious to a secular worldview.

Please rest assured that your donation will be used wisely to support our case. I have already retained a highly respected and experienced attorney in the field, and I remain hopeful that justice will prevail.

Once again, thank you for your generosity. Your support means the world to me, to my family, and to the many students whose voices you help uplift and protect.

Sincerely,  
**University of California**

**Editor’s note:** FFRF donated to Alex through its Nonbelief Relief program.

## Thanks to FFRF for fighting in Oklahoma

Thank you for your work in Oklahoma! With two religious buildings on every corner around here, they have no shortage of places to worship. There is zero need to force us into prayer to a deity we do not worship at the onset of every assembly, concert or game. Why is a “moment of silence” that allows people to have a personal relationship with the god(s)

## Hegseth’s tattoo was war cry of the Crusaders



This is the tattoo on Pete Hegseth’s arm. It was the war cry of the Crusaders, as they tuned up by killing Jews in Europe. And it’s been revived by modern-day Crusaders — Christian nationalists — who are apparently eager to kill for the faith. It’s really no different from “Allahu Akbar.” Both have the perverse audacity to invoke God while doing ungodly things.

Religion does a poor job of improving people’s moral character, and the more intensely people believe, the worse they are apt to get.

**Stephen Van Eck**  
**Pennsylvania**

of their choosing in their own heads not reasonable? Directly outside of our high school, there are multiple church billboards. I have longed for a “Good without God” sentiment to offset the message. Thanks again for what you do! We appreciate it.

**Oklahoma**

## Research grant from FFRF will help me pursue goals

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone at the Freedom From Religion Foundation for the financial support you have provided so generously for my dissertation research. With your funding, I’ll be able to advance academically and hopefully contribute meaningfully to the study of atheism. Your tireless advocacy

for secularism and reproductive rights has had a profound influence on me, both personally and professionally. Your leadership and activism have inspired me endlessly.

Thank you so much for being a trailblazer and for continuing to support the next generation of activists and scholars. Your example is a reminder of the power of conviction and compassion.

I hope my dissertation and future work will empower women to embrace atheism and join the beautiful communities FFRF has built. I look forward to sharing my findings with you and am incredibly grateful for your encouragement and support.

**Nebraska**

**Editor’s note:** Millie earned a grant from FFRF to study atheism.

## Crucifix as governmental fashion statement

More and more, women in the Trump regime are wearing crucifixes, with the phenomenon also increasing among other women in the public eye, mostly of the conservative stripe. “A hot accessory at the intersection of faith and culture” reads the headline in the New York Times, picturing women — such as the present excuses for White House press secretary and attorney general — featuring their crucifixes, as if to say, “You’d better believe this is a Christian nationalist country.”

This is not a condemnation in general of wearing such religious accoutrements. I don’t begrudge anyone advertising his or her religion in nongovernmental arenas, but in the extant endeavors to crumble the church/state division, I see this almost jingoistic display by public servants — servile, that is, to the head thug — as an offensive reminder of that injury to democratic principles.

**Maine**

## Which pope candidate would you vote for?

Many people believe that the pope is a successor to St. Peter. Each pope achieves his status by vote of the cardinals.

If you had to vote, would you vote for one who told you to cut off your hand or gouge out your eye? [Matthew 9:25-30]

Would you vote for someone who said to hate your father, mother and family and life itself? [Luke 14:25-26]

Would you vote for someone who wants you to eat their flesh and drink their blood? [John 53-58]

Would you vote for someone who condemns anyone who does not believe in a certain ghost? [Mark 3:29].

Would you vote for someone who claims to live from the beginning of time to the end of time with no proof? [Rev. 22: 13]

I would write “none of the above” or “not worth my vote” on my ballot.

**Indiana**

# CRANKMAIL

*Welcome to another installment of Crankmail, where we publish the emailed (and voice-mailed) rantings and ravings of our detractors. Printed as received.*

**Atheists:** Why can you spot an atheist just looking at him. This sadness in his eyes.

**Die already:** One day the skies will glow with the heat of the ovens we use to incinerate you degenerate homosexuals and Satan worshippers.

**Constitution:** It’s Freedom Of Religion, not Freedom From Religion. This proves you don’t know what the Constitution says. You should have done your homework. How can you have credibility with your followers? At least you have Freedom of believing anything you want. That is not legislated, in case you didn’t know.

**Stop it:** Stop your ads on liberal media. Fuck ya’ll.

**God is real:** How could you not believe in religion? I’m appalled by your stance in not believing that god created the world, or that it was created by a higher power. You have a problem. Go away.

**Contradiction:** I’ve been seeing Ron Reagan’s ads on tv. He contradicts himself. If he’s not afraid of burning in hell, that means he believes in hell. That means he believes in heaven. You can’t believe in

one without believing in the other. He’s totally contradicting himself.

**Atheism:** I hate to tell you guys this, but you are a religion.

**Stop the ads:** Im bloody well tired of your commercials. Stop worrying about the freedom from religion.

**Not so smart, actually:** I understand. You believe you share a grandpa with a chimp and you believe that makes you smart.

**Prayer works!:** Nothing fails like prayer? LOL! Well not in my case. My husband had a severe aortic dissection. Less than five percent survive. I was running from doctors with DNR in their hand telling me to sign it because they personally have never seen someone survive! Well they are right almost no one survives. I said Jesus is coming! My husband better be alive when he gets here! Oh and most doctors were Muslim or Atheist so they looked at me like I grew two heads and walked away shaking their heads! Six months later Jesus healed him! The nurses wouldn’t even come to his room and said oh honey your just imagining it! I came back to his room to three shocked doctors that they were having a conversation with their patient and he was doing the impossible! It wasn’t until a few weeks ago my

pain doctors who work weekends at the big Mercy hospital and say they have seen many come into their operating room with aortic dissection but none left alive! So yes Prayer and Jesus still work! If you believe in hell or not it still burns hot and is still a hole of total darkness you will wish you could get out of!

**Do research:** You’ll really be alone once your family is raptured. Please go back and find Jesus. do research, look up dying and going to heaven and Or hell. Why lose your soul for this belief. So sad.

**Religion and God:** Our country was founded in Judeo-Christian principles. If you don’t like, then move to a different country. The Constitution separates church and state but it still embraces religion and God as part of society. It will never be removed or completely separated from society and people like you and your despicable organization will never defeat change this premise. It’s people like you who make have ruined our culture in this country and opened the door to a dark and perverted part of society that has no place here. You’re shameful

**Praise God:** FFFF days are numbered, but God’s Kingdom will last forever. Praying for you all to see the real light.

**FFRF:** Lol freedom from religion? Sounds like

y’all are obsessed with it - how edgy and cool

**Founders prayed:** See how stupid your thinking level is founders have no problem and they even asked for prayer and you saying it’s violation of first amendment you have no knowledge about amendments, illiterate and dumb organization

**Christianity is true:** Why do you only hate christianity? I guess because it’s the true religion and you only hate it.

**Idiots:** You are a blooming idiot...separated from church and state.. Your a uneducated skunk..Leave America..go to another country..where you are welcome.. This country was built and founded on Godly and Biblical principles.



## The afterlife is tied to our personal legacy

Ever wonder about the afterlife? In my world, the afterlife is created with every action I take while alive. The human spirit — that is will, emotion, intelligence and feeling — coalesce into the outcome of that action. It may be planting a flower, a chance smile, cooking a meal, or building a house. All these things join into the web of life and evolve there forever. My body may leave this existence, but my personal legacy will live on forever. Over 100 billion humans have walked this planet and every one of their personal legacies is living among us, right here, today.

Colorado

## Islamic terrorists are sincere in convictions

Islamic terrorists are willing to die not just for a political cause, but for religious motives with the promise of paradise as the reward.

This religious conviction was reinforced in a 2016 article in the ISIS publication Dabiq, titled “Why we hate you, why we fight you,” in which six reasons are enumerated:

- (1) We hate you, first and foremost, because you are disbelievers; you reject the oneness of Allah by making partners for him in worship, you blaspheme against him, claiming that he has a son.
- (2) We hate you because your secular, liberal societies permit the very things that Allah has prohibited while banning many of the things he has permitted.
- (3) In the case of the atheist fringe, we hate you and wage war against you because you disbelieve in the existence of lord and creator.
- (4) We hate you for your crimes against Islam and wage war against you to punish you for your transgressions against our religion.
- (5) We hate you for your crimes against the Muslims; your drones and fighter jets bomb, kill and maim our people around the world.
- (6) We hate you for invading our lands and fight you to repeal you and drive you out.

A paradigmatic statement of this belief comes from the 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta, whose suicide note (found in the luggage that he left in his rental car that morning before flying American Airlines Flight 11 into the World Trade Center building) included the following passage: “When the confrontation begins, strike like champions who do not want to go back to this world. Shout, ‘Allahu Akbar,’ because this strikes fear in the hearts of nonbelievers. Know that the gardens of paradise are waiting for you in all their beauty, and the women of paradise are waiting, calling out, ‘Come hither, friend of God.’ They have dressed in

### Reason is always in season



Photo by Craig Stilen

**Patrick Elliott, legal director for the Freedom From Religion Foundation, was among the featured speakers at the Rally for Secular Government and National Day of Reason at the Minnesota Capitol on April 30. The rally featured remarks from Minnesota legislators and representatives from several advocacy organizations, including FFRF, Minnesota Atheists, HumanistsMN, OutFront Minnesota and the Minnesotans Against Christian Nationalism Coalition. The event highlighted the importance of maintaining a clear separation between religion and government, and promoted inclusive, evidence-based policymaking.**

their most beautiful clothing.”

Whatever other motives these suicide terrorists may have for committing violence, anyone who doubts the sincerity of their deep religious conviction that they will be rewarded in heaven for their murderous martyrdom is living in denial. As Mark Twain said: “Go to heaven for the climate and hell for the company.”

Ohio

## Too bad the U.K. doesn’t have FFRF or similar

I would like to compliment everyone for their contribution to this worthy organization. I really wish we had something similar in the United Kingdom. I have included your details on my Facebook page for my American friends. Long may you continue. Kind regards from Wales.

United Kingdom

## Pope Francis didn’t bring any meaningful change

In retrospect of the recent death of Pope Francis, I was both dismayed and somewhat taken aback as I witnessed the nearly endless news coverage on television highlighting the throngs of people who lined up to pay him homage, as well as those who long-windedly eulogized him. In fact, he brought no truly meaningful change to the Church of Rome and did little else than further mess up its finances. And, like all of his many predecessors, he continually called aloud for peace while praying for it (so,

in essence, he did virtually nothing).

Admittedly, he did kiss and hug a lot of babies and young children that were presented to him for that particular purpose. In retrospect, this is all par for the course when one considers the parade of interchangeable popes that have come and gone over endless decades, with one pope being much like the one before him, as well as the one who follows him. After a while, they all morph into one enormous singular pope.

Furthermore, to add to this mass adoration pervading not only Vatican City but the world-at-large, here in the United States, the American flag was ordered to be flown at half-staff on all government buildings, schools, etc. Why? Are government buildings and public schools not separate from any and all religions? Oh wait, they’re supposed to be, but in reality they are often not separate at all, and it was both a welcome and convenient stage for President Trump to project his stance on Christianity, displaying to the world how much he respected the pope. (Insert snickering here.)

Then again, Trump once proclaimed himself “The Messiah,” so I guess he had no choice but to call for flags to be lowered. It has now come to the point that flying the flag at half-staff seems to have lost all its meaning, especially when it’s done for some religious figure from another country, who, in my opinion, has always ruled his ever-faithful, blindly worshipping cult members with an iron hand: “Administration through intimidation,” so to speak. In some ways this is more than a subtle message of: Bow your head, bend your knee and

kiss my, um . . . ring, or else, because if you don’t, the wrath of God will surely descend upon you! (If you read all of the Crankmail that FFRF prints in Free-thought Today, you will know that God will get his revenge. Wink, wink.)

By the way, as a supporting member here, I think FFRF does a great ongoing job of pushing back against mind-numbing religion, after seeing the masses of individuals who trance-like, worshipped the late Pope Francis, I fear we are woefully in the minority and always will be. I hope I’m wrong.

Illinois

## Metaphysics allows us to make up nonsense

The question “Why doesn’t god reveal itself to humans?” discussed in PJ Slinger’s essay of that title in the April issue prompts my thumbnail history of the aberration known as metaphysics — the confusion of mental images and thoughts with physical reality.

First, of course, as was pointed out at least 4,000 years ago, the various gods did not create anything; people created the gods. The Greeks had their gods, the Egyptians had theirs, Persians, Ethiopians, Scythians, Hebrews — on and on, any and every tribe had gods or god which they created.

Here’s where the metaphysics of our Judeo-Christian-Muslim world gets rather twisted and quite dangerous. The barbaric god of the Old Testament is a despot, a fierce warrior who’s been kicked upstairs out of the palace on the hill into the sky and declared despot of the entire universe, Lord of Hosts, King of Kings: “Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair.” This supernatural despot has all the attributes of any other tyrant or king, shah or czar, emperor or mob boss: He’s paranoid, jealous, wrathful, murderous, arbitrary and sadistic. He also suffers from a crippling inferiority complex, which is why he demands constant flattery from his chosen ones.

Why would anyone believe such nonsense, literally and fervently, and be not just willing but eager to murder anyone who questions their beliefs? As far as we can tell, we are the only creatures capable of such metaphysics.

When 5,000, 50,000, 100,000 years ago and still today, people feared “things that go bump in the night,” some immediately went metaphysical and claimed a supernatural cause. Others wondered if they could figure this out; they were the proto-scientists who discovered that, oh, it was just a bear knocking over a dead tree. That ululation? Not a demon, just an owl. That storm? Not a warning or punishment from god, just a weather system.

I agree with the unattributed quotes that “the trouble with stupidity is that there’s nothing you can do about it” and “the difference between genius and stupidity is that genius has its limits.” I know that jeremiads have been around since — well, since Jeremiah was a bull-frog — but it’s looking more and more like the end, for us, anyway, is nigh.

Georgia

Your weekly antidote to the Religious Right

# FREETHOUGHT RADIO

## PODCASTS AND BROADCASTS

FIND OUT MORE: [ffrf.org/radio](http://ffrf.org/radio)

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

FFRF.ORG

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

### Crossword answers

P	S	S	T		B	A	G		D	A	R	E					
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### Cryptogram answer

If we are honest — and scientists have to be — we must admit that religion is a jumble of false assertions, with no basis in reality. The very idea of God is a product of the human imagination.

— Paul Dirac

# FFRF convention, Oct. 16-19

## Myrtle Beach awaits!

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation for its 48th annual convention from Thursday Oct. 16 to Sunday Oct. 19 at the Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort at 10000 Beach Club Dr., Myrtle Beach, S.C. 29572.

### General Schedule

Convention registration will open during a complimentary Thursday Early Bird Welcome Reception in the afternoon. Registration will re-open the following morning at 8 a.m. The convention programming will begin in the Palisades Ballroom at 9 a.m. and will run through Saturday evening. On Sunday morning, the membership and state representatives meeting will take place, ending by noon.

### Registration

Registration for the convention is \$100 for an FFRF member, \$105 for an accompanying non-member, \$160 for non-members (or save money by joining FFRF as a member when registering). High school students and younger can register for free, and college students can register for the discounted price of only \$25. To register, complete and return the registration on the right, or register online at [ffrf.org/convention2025](https://ffrf.org/convention2025).

### Optional Group Meals

Five ticketed meals, including FFRF’s popular “NonPrayer Breakfast,” will be offered this year, more than usual, in part because — aside from two in-house restaurants — meal choices outside the resort will be limited, unless you have a car or use Uber. A small-capacity shuttle that can be ordered ahead can take some participants to nearby restaurant strips in Myrtle Beach. The ticketed meals are: Friday lunch and dinner and Saturday breakfast, lunch and dinner. The complimentary Thursday Reception will offer light hors d’oeuvres and a cash bar. There will also be a complimentary continental breakfast on Friday morning and dessert reception Friday night. Vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options are available for the ticketed meals. Please specify your ADA needs on the registration form.

#### Friday Buffet Lunch

Flamed broiled beef on bun with toppings, grilled kielbasa with caramelized onions and local beer, marinated grilled zucchini and portobellos, buttered corn on the cob, Southern egg potato salad, housemade barbeque chips, classic garden salad & dessert.

#### Friday Plated Dinner

Your choice of three main dishes:  
Chicken: Grilled Marinated Chicken Breast (GF).  
Fish: Pan Seared Mahi.  
Vegan: Marinated Grilled Portobello Steak.  
Beverage options include sweet and unsweet tea, water and augua fresca.

#### Saturday Plated Breakfast

Buttermilk biscuits and gravy, scrambled eggs, applewood smoked bacon, and roasted red skin potatoes. Served with fruit juice, regular and decaf coffee and hot tea.



This is the design for the convention T-shirts.

#### Saturday Buffet Lunch

Grilled center cut boneless pork chops with melted onion and mushroom gravy. Buttermilk fried chicken, sour cream mashed potatoes, bacon brown sugar green beans, roasted buttered corn, tossed garden salad, sweet and spice slaw, mini cornbread loaves with whipped butter & desserts. Served with sweet and unsweet tea, water and augua fresca.

#### Saturday Plated Dinner

Your choice of three main dishes:  
Chicken: Cast Iron Airline Chicken Breast (GF).  
Fish: Pasta con Pesce with Halibut, Salmon & Local Shrimp.  
Vegan/Vegetarian: Roasted Acorn Squash Stuffed with Quinoa.  
Beverage options include sweet and unsweet tea, water and augua fresca.

### Hotel Amenities & Dining Options

The oceanside Hilton Myrtle Beach hotel houses a heated pool, spa, gym, golf simulators and access to the Myrtle Beach boardwalk. The hotel also boasts two in-house restaurants: Cafe Amalfi — open for breakfast, lunch and dinner; Black Drum Brewing — open for lunch and dinner; a cafe: The Shores Marketplace Cafe — open all day; and two cocktail bars: The Wet Whistle and the Veranda Bar, open in the evenings.

**Note: There are no readily walkable restaurant alternatives from the resort.**

### Hotel Booking

FFRF offers a discounted room block at the Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort. We encourage you to book your hotel room soon. Reservations must be made on or before Monday, Sept. 22, to receive FFRF’s discounted room rate of \$165/night plus tax. If you need an ADA accessible room, state your needs when making the reservation. Check-in time is 4 p.m., and check-out time is 11 a.m. You can book your hotel room online or over the phone. Online: visit [ffrf.us/hotel2025](https://ffrf.us/hotel2025) Phone: call reservations at (800) 876-0010 and Select Option 3 for Hilton Myrtle Beach. To receive FFRF’s room discount, you must **identify yourself as attendees of ‘Freedom From Religion Foundation Annual Convention’** and use the following code: **‘FFR’**

ffrf

2025

National Convention

MYRTLE BEACH

October 16–19, 2025

CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: [ffrf.org/convention2025](https://ffrf.org/convention2025)

REGISTRATION FEES

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

OPTIONAL MEALS / EVENTS

No programming will occur during group meals. Meals are offered for socializing and convenience. FFRF does not make any money on the meals, and charges the hotel's prices which includes a 35% service and tax fee. Please specify your ADA needs and dietary requirements below.

Thursday, October 16th

Evening Welcome Reception [must register to attend]

Check box if attending ☐ Registrant 1 ☐ Registrant 2

\_\_\_ Free

Friday, October 17th

Friday Buffet Lunch

Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

\_\_\_ \$65

\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_

Friday Dinner (plated)

Registrant 1 ☐ Chicken ☐ Fish ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 2 ☐ Chicken ☐ Fish ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

\_\_\_ \$75

\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_

Saturday, October 18th

Saturday Nonprayer Breakfast (plated)

Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

\_\_\_ \$35

\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_

Saturday Buffet Lunch

Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

\_\_\_ \$65

\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_

Saturday Dinner (plated)

Registrant 1 ☐ Chicken ☐ Fish ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 2 ☐ Chicken ☐ Fish ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

\_\_\_ \$75

\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_

Optional Commemorative 2025 Convention Logo T-shirt (Black)

S-XL \$25, XXL-XXXL \$30 (Pick up at convention)

Size(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Quantity \_\_\_\_\_

Cost \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_

► Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

(Make check payable to FFRF) Return with payment to:

FFRF, Attn: Convention | P.O. Box 750 | Madison, WI 53701

Name of Registrant 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Pronouns (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Registrant 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Pronouns (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State / ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone\* \_\_\_\_\_

Email\* \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date / Security Code \_\_\_\_\_

Billing Name / Signature \_\_\_\_\_

\*Contact information for in-house use only

Registration Deadline is on or before Tuesday, September 30th (unless the event is sold out)