

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



A citizen's
guide to
political change

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2026 Lorraine
Hansberry
scholarship winners

PAGE 18



Arizona student
ends graduation
prayer

PAGE 19

Vol. 43 No. 6

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FFRF placed this billboard (above) in Boston and this kiosk ad (below) in Washington, D.C.

FFRF billboard campaign a hit

The Freedom From Religion Foundation conducted a billboard advertising campaign in six major U.S. media markets as part of its “America 250: Lighting the Way” initiative that celebrated the nation’s 250th anniversary. The campaign was initiated to counter Christian nationalist organizations that increasingly seek to blur the constitutional line between religion and government.

The advertising blitz ran from mid-June through mid-July, including billboard and other outdoor ad placements in Boston, the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Collectively, the campaign was expected to generate more than 4 million views.

See Billboards page 9



Bible-infused Texas reading list erodes students' rights

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is excoriating the Texas State Board of Education’s decision to move forward with a state-mandated reading list that privileges Christian scripture.

The board has given the green light to the list in accordance with a recent legislative mandate.

House Bill 1605, passed in 2023, required the creation of a K-12 reading list and directed the Texas Education Agency to develop state-owned textbooks.

The board approved those textbooks, known as Bluebonnet Learning, in late 2024, and the state is currently working to correct roughly 4,200 errors in the materials. Meanwhile, Texas public schools will require the bible-infused reading list to be available to students beginning in 2030.

Middle and high school students will be asked to read two main books each year from the approved list, along with other related poems, speeches, historical texts and biblical excerpts. Students would be required to read a bible excerpt at most grade levels, starting in elementary school. The new curriculum would have students as young as 6 interact with biblical stories titled “Noah’s Ark,”

“David and Goliath” — meant to be read aloud from picture books — and “Daniel and the Lion’s Den” in their English classes. One of the required readings for high school English is the second chapter of Genesis, which concerns the creation of Adam and Eve.

“A mandatory public school reading list should never function as a bible lesson,” says FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. “Texas is telling millions of children that

one religion deserves the government’s seal of approval, while everyone else is an afterthought. That’s government-sponsored religious favoritism — and the First Amendment strictly forbids it.”

FFRF stands firmly behind the idea that public schools exist to educate students with diverse faith backgrounds, as well as those who adhere to no faith doctrine. Public schools are not Sunday schools, and elected officials have no business using state power to elevate one religion above all others. A required reading list that overwhelmingly favors Christian texts while excluding the writings and literary traditions of other faiths,

See Texas reading on page 7

“This list is full of Christian texts that are inappropriate for public school classrooms.”

— Rabbi Joshua Bixler

White House pushes for Christian privilege

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is condemning the Trump administration’s newly released Religious Liberty Commission report as a roadmap for dismantling the constitutional separation between church and state and replacing it with government favoritism toward Christianity.

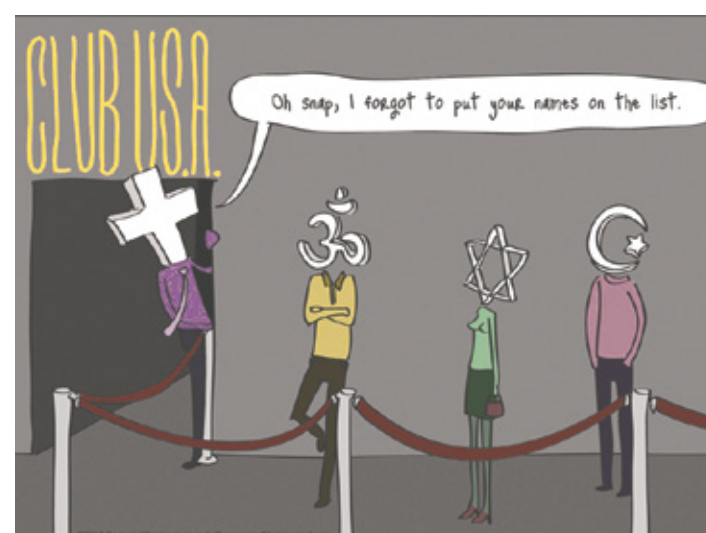
Rather than protecting religious liberty for all Americans, the commission’s 224-page report repeatedly attacks the Establishment Clause, dismisses decades of settled constitutional law and recommends policies that would entangle government with religion on an unprecedented scale.

“This report has almost nothing to do with protecting religious liberty,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “It is a political manifesto that attempts to redefine religious freedom as a special privilege for conservative Christianity.”

The commission was established by President Trump in May 2025 and chaired by Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick. During its hearings, commissioners repeatedly attacked state/church separation and promoted Christian nationalist arguments. The final report simply codifies those views into official recommendations for the federal government.

Among its most troubling recommendations, the commission urges the Department of Justice to reject the longstanding understanding of the Establishment Clause, Congress to repeal the Johnson Amendment, the creation of “religious liberty” hotlines and a Religious Liberty Task Force, judicial appointments aligned with the commission’s ideological vision, and restored military benefits

See White House on page 21



Retired archeologist finds there’s no god

Name: Rita Miraglia.

Where I was born: I was born to American citizens in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. My father was stationed there in the U.S. Army.

Occupation: I’m a retired archeologist and anthropologist who lives in Anchorage, Alaska.

Education: I have a Master of Arts degree in anthropology from the State University of New York.

How I got to where I am today: I spent most of my childhood and all of my college years in New York State. I moved to Alaska in 1987 after finishing my Masters and have lived here ever since.

I spent my career working for the Alaska Native organizations (both for-profit and nonprofit), the state of Alaska and the U.S. government.

Lately, I’ve been obsessed with Hannibal Barca. He’s the one who took elephants over the Alps and invaded Italy in the second century B.C.E. He was brutal, but also brilliant.

A quotation I like: It’s from a book called “The War Hound and the World’s Pain” by Michael Moorcock: “By telling a single lie to oneself or to another, by denying a single fact of the world as it has been created, one adds to the World’s Pain. And pain, lady, creates pain.”

Things I like: I love hiking, gardening and bird watching.

Things I smite: I hate lies. That’s one reason I can’t stand the sound of the orange-faced madman’s voice. He’s continually lying.

My doubts about religion started: My mother committed suicide when I was 16. The Catholic Church at that time declared that suicide victims went to hell. They’ve changed their mind about that since, but that made a dent in my faith. Honestly, though, I always had doubts about some of the church’s teachings. It never seemed fair to me, even as a little kid, that someone could live a good life but go to hell because they had never heard of Christ or his



Rita Miraglia stands inside an excavated pit in 2015.



Rita Miraglia

teachings.

I was an agnostic for a long time. Then I was watching Sen. Mitch McConnell speaking during the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court hearings. I was standing still in my living room and re-

The ‘It’ Girl

By Rita Miraglia

I’ve only been the “It” girl once, for a single weekend many years ago.

I didn’t like it very much.

Why do men and boys do that?

All pursue the same woman or girl all at once, ignoring all others.

When it happens to you, you find out that it’s not really about you.

It’s about them competing with one another, which is not very flattering at all, if you think about it.

Feeling very wicked and not a little cruel,

I messily winnowed the field down to the one I wanted, and went home with him.

My first love, really.

He admonished me for not protecting myself.

I probably should have done the same to him.

Years later,

I was in Prince William Sound, Alaska, advising people on the health risks of eating seafood contaminated with crude oil.

He was eating fire on the streets of Greenwich Village, and occasionally swallowing a mouthful of benzene by accident.

I could have told him, precisely, what a bad idea that was.

He died much too young.

The morning after our only night together, heading home,

I looked out the window of the elevated train, and wondered, for the first time, how the view would look if there were no God.

Trying on that idea,

I looked again.

Everything looked exactly the same.

Everything looked completely different.

MEET A MEMBER

alized I was waiting for McConnell to be struck by lightning because what he was doing was evil. Needless to say, he was not struck by lightning. That was one.

Then a close friend, a good man, died of Covid . . . and Donald J. Trump did not. That was the other shoe for me. Whatever remaining doubts I had were gone. There is no god. God is a man-made invention.

Before I die, I’d like to: I’m planning a trip to Tunis later this year because I want to see the ruins of Carthage (which is where Hannibal was from). I also want to visit my mother’s ancestral village near Naples, Italy. (I’ve already been to my father’s ancestral village in Sicily, where I was also able to follow some of Hannibal’s travels and conquests).

Note to members

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

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

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

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

In order to do that, follow these simple steps:

Log into your FFRF.org account. Click on “Update your contact information.”

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

Click “Submit.”



We Dissent is a monthly podcast by secular women, who also happen to be powerhouse constitutional attorneys at major U.S. secular organizations, including FFRF.

Join us as we discuss developments affecting the separation of church and state in the US Supreme Court and lower federal courts.

Join us @ we-dissent.org



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<i>The only freethought newspaper in the United States</i>	



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists. FFRF has about 42,000 members.

FFRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible for income tax purposes. FFRF’s email address is info@ffrf.org. Please include your name and physical mailing address with all email correspondence.

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

FFRF convention — Milwaukee, Wis., Oct. 15-17

Godless Gospel joins convention line-up

The Godless Gospel has been added to the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s convention line-up!

The singing group, which performs songs with nonreligious and humanistic messages, such as “I Believe in Honesty” and “Let’s All Give Thanks,” began in 2022 as a collaboration between artistic producer **Andre Forbes** and FFRF Co-President **Dan Barker**. This year, the group will include **Cynthia McDonald**, **Mandisa Thomas**, **Aaron Hill**, **Stephen Phelps**, **Heather Kinley**, **Prince Chapelle** and **Candace Gorham**.

FFRF will be hosting its 49th annual convention in downtown Milwaukee at the Baird Convention Center from Thursday, Oct. 15, to Sunday morning, Oct. 18.

Register online at ffrf.us/con26register.

The conference kicks off Thursday, Oct. 15, with “early-bird workshops,” a complimentary reception and an opening-evening speech by **Rep. Jared Huffman**. And, as always, the convention is followed by the annual meetings of the membership and state representatives on Sunday morning, Oct. 18.



Jared Huffman

FFRF offers a discounted room block at the Hilton Milwaukee Hotel, 509 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, of \$229 plus tax per night. Book your room online: ffrf.us/con26reservations or phone 800-774-1500 noting you’re with the Freedom From Religion Foundation and providing the group code “90N.” The back page has more details, including optional group meals.

The powerful line-up of speakers includes:

Rep. Huffman, a U.S. congressman representing California’s 2nd District, who is one of the founders of the Congressional Freethought Caucus and is the only elected official in either house of Congress to admit that he does not believe in God. Huffman previously spoke at FFRF’s 2018 convention in San Francisco, where he accepted FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award. He’ll be speaking about and signing copies of his timely book, coming out in August, called “No Prophets: The Fight to Save Democracy from Christian Nationalism.”



Kate Cohen

Kate Cohen, author of “We of Little Faith: Why I Stopped Pretending to Believe (And Maybe You Should Too),” is a previous recipient of FFRF’s Freethought Heroine Award.



Percival Everett

Percival Everett, author of the powerful book “James,” which won the 2025 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction and is a retelling of “Huck-



leberry Finn” from the point of view of the enslaved James (not “Jim”). The distinguished professor of English at USC will receive FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award, reserved for public figures who make known their dissent from religion. Everett is not only an open atheist, but his protagonist in “James” is highly critical of religion, too. “James” was published in March 2024 to great critical acclaim, and Everett will sign copies of his book.



Jennifer Welch

Jennifer Welch, an atheist who co-hosts the “I’ve Had It” podcast, which reaches over 3 million listeners a month and has 150 million+ monthly views on its YouTube Channel, will speak on “I’ve had it with Christian nationalism.” A New York Times interview noted that she became a “natural ally” with the marginalized after growing up an atheist in Oklahoma. In addition, Welch co-hosts the daily news series IHIP News and is the co-author of “Life Is a Lazy Susan of Sh*t Sandwiches” and a new book out in October, “Not Today, Fascists: The Lies That Got Us Here, and the Truths That Will Reunite Us.” Welch will also receive FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award and sign copies of her books.



Jim Obergefell

Jim Obergefell, the lead plaintiff in Obergefell vs. Hodges — the 2015 Supreme Court decision that legalized marriage equality — and an atheist, will receive FFRF’s Forward Award and statuette reserved for individuals who have moved society forward. He’ll talk about the case and sign copies of his book, “Love Wins: The Lovers and Lawyers Who Fought the Landmark Case for Marriage Equality.”

Other honorees will include two Texas teachers of integrity, who quit their jobs rather than display Ten Commandments posters in their public school classrooms: **Gigi Cervantes**, a high school theatre and acting teacher in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and **Johnny Cotton**, a band leader

and teacher for 42 years in the Carthage ISD. They will receive a First Amendment Heroine Award and First Amendment Hero Award respectively.

The Clarence Darrow Award and statuette will be presented to Milwaukee’s **Peter Isley**, a survivor of childhood sexual assault by a Roman Catholic priest, and co-founder of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP).

The Henry Zumach Freedom From Fundamentalism Religion Award, now at \$75,000, will be awarded to the Secular Coalition for America’s Education Fund and be accepted by SCA Executive Director **Steven Emmert**. The Zumach Award has been solely endowed by a generous Wisconsin state/church activist to recognize and further the work of allies.



Maya Wiley

Maya Wiley will be presented with a Champion of Civil Rights Award for her work directing the Leadership Conference on Human Rights and Civil Rights, and will talk about current threats to civil rights and democracy.

Randi Weingarten, president of the AFT, a union of 1.8 million individuals, will be speaking and signing copies of her new book, “Why Fascists Fear Teachers.”

Other speakers will include **Drew McCoy**, creator of the popular “Genetically Modified Skeptic” YouTube channel, with over 850,000 subscribers. Drew was raised as an Independent Fundamental Baptist but left religion in 2016 and has been a full-time atheist content creator and activist for the past eight years.

Forrest Valkai, an Oklahoma-based biologist science educator and popular content creator known as the Renegade Science Teacher, will also speak. He has over 2 million subscribers and followers.



Betty Lachgar

FFRF is proud to announce it will be bestowing the \$5,000 Avijit Roy Courage Award, memorializing the slain Bangladeshi-American

freethought author and activist, to **Ibtissame (Betty) Lachgar**, a Moroccan freethinker, feminist and civil libertarian who has been imprisoned for “insulting Islam.” Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain activist **Maryam Namazie** will likely accept the award on behalf of Betty.



Ron Reagan

The conference will end with an after-dinner keynote address by **Ron Reagan**, known for his fearless political commentary and his independent views, as well as his generous TV commercial endorsement of FFRF — in which he describes himself as an “unabashed atheist . . . not afraid of burning in hell.”

FFRF is also pleased to announce the convention will be screening filmmaker and FFRF Board Member **Jeremiah Camara**’s latest movie, “Americaste: The Caste Behind the Curtain,” a 75-minute documentary. Camara’s previous films include “Contradiction: A Question of Faith,” examining the saturation of churches in African American communities coexisting with poverty and powerlessness, and director of the documentary film, “Holy Hierarchy: The Religious Roots of Racism in America.”



Jeremiah Camara

FFRF will be offering a variety of “early-bird” workshops on Thursday afternoon, Oct. 15, including the popular “Ask an Attorney” panel where FFRF legal eagles will take your questions on state/church issues and concerns, and an interactive panel to practice lobbying with FFRF Regional Governmental Affairs Manager **Mick-**

ey Dollens, a seated state legislator in Oklahoma, and other FFRF legislative team members. **Drew McCoy**, who is speaking at the conference, will host a workshop, “The True Opposite of Church,” about the value of organizing for secularism, followed by an activity to help attendees get to know each other. In addition, leaders from FFRF’s grassroots chapter program will lead a workshop providing an overview of the benefits of starting an FFRF chapter in your area.



Drew McCoy

The annual conference will include the usual executive, legal and legislative reports, student essay winners or activists, a chance to mingle at book and sales tables, the NonPrayer Breakfast, the drawing for “clean” (pre-“In God We Trust”) currency and several optional group meals and complimentary receptions.

Sign up today at ffrf.us/con26 or turn to the back page, which has a registration form to mail in. More details on the hotel and meals can be found there, too.

Across

1. Boring

5. Sixth sense, for short

8. Friend down under

12. *Freethinking Will Arnett voiced Batman in “The ____ Movie”

13. Highlands hillside

14. Type of renewable energy

15. 20-20, e.g.

16. Aware of

17. Hacienda brick

18. *2026 FFRF convention state

20. In ____ of

21. Make this, not waste

22. Big galoot

23. Brunch beverage

26. *Agnostic “Slouching Towards Bethlehem” author Joan ____

29. ____ day now

30. Relating to shinbone

33. Happily ____ after

35. Slovenly ones

37. Charge carrier

38. *Freethinking Charlize Theron, 2004-2024 face of J’ ____ fragrance

39. VHS, e.g.

40. Superlative of blue

42. *Freethinking songwriter Cole Porter’s “ ____ Got You Under My Skin”

43. It goes pop?

45. Like legumes

47. In the preceding month

48. Dinero

50. ____ Scotia

52. *Atheist Seth MacFarlane’s Emmy-winning show (2 words)

56. Enter user name and password (2 words)

57. Seed coat

58. Like Old Mother Hubbard’s cupboard

59. Serving of rosemary

60. Lice eggs

61. And elsewhere

62. Doe in “Do-Re-Mi” song

63. State of matter

64. “The Farmer in the ____”

Down

1. What the Big Bad Wolf did

2. *Atheist author of “Survival in Auschwitz” Primo ____

3. *Freethinking Joe Elliott’s (of Def Leppard) song “Rock of ____”

4. Boss

5. *Freethinking Surrealism founder Max ____

6. French composer Erik Alfred Leslie ____

7. Lowly laborer

8. *Drew McCoy’s YouTube channel “Genetically ____ Skeptic”

9. Medicinal house plant

10. Taboo, alt. sp.

11. Before, old-fashioned

13. Tiny ornamental tree

14. Tossed dish

19. Hop-drying kilns

22. *Freethinking Upton Sinclair’s novel “ ____!”

23. Sail support

24. Jon Voight to Brad Pitt

25. Nearsited one

26. Copenhagen native

27. Roundish

28. Impulse transmitter

31. *Freethinking TV host Bill ____

32. Debt letters

34. Clarinet or saxophone, e.g.

36. *Atheist “The Second Sex” author Simone de ____

38. Lagoon wall

40. Gamble

41. Loot

44. Subculture language

46. Sofa/bed

48. Callas or Sharapova, e.g.

49. Leaves out

50. *Freethinking Jordan Peele’s 2022 movie

51. Shrek or Fiona, e.g.

52. *Freethinking author Jack London’s “White ____”

53. Part of air terminal

54. Mountain divide between Europe and Asia

55. Raise the roof

56. 1960s altered state inducer

Think for yourself!



FFRF Lifetime member Wanda Shirk sent us this item about her two license plates.

I enjoyed seeing the license plates in the May issue. I have two vehicles and these are the plates from my Subaru and minivan. As you can see, I also have the FFRF “In Reason We Trust” license plate holders on both plates.

I also confess that one time I was

moving faster than the speed limit and was stopped by a police officer. The officer read all the postings on my vehicle and said he understood and aligned with the messages. He kindly gave this kindred spirit a warning rather than a ticket and a fine.

So, there you have it, freethinking friends!

Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4			5	6	7			8	9	10	11
12					13					14				
15					16					17				
18				19						20				
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			47				48	49						
	50	51				52						53	54	55
56						57					58			
59						60					61			
62						63					64			

Answers on page 20

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

Freethought Today Cryptogram

UAG NQNZG PEC UAG VALFVA APOG

NGGE UAG KFGPUGMU MULJNZQEK N

ZYVH QE UAG RPT YW RYJGE'M

GJPEVQBP UQYE.

— GZQXPNGUA VPCT MUPEUYE

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: J => M. Answer is on page 21.

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

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.

FFRF press releases
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Freethought of the Day - *online calendar*
Daily online calendar of famous freethinkers
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Secular Spotlight - *YouTube show*
[ffrf.us/youtube](#)

We Dissent - *monthly legal podcast*
[wedissent.org](#)

IN THE NEWS

S.F. diocese OKs \$395M to clergy abuse survivors

The Archdiocese of San Francisco has agreed to a \$395 million settlement with survivors of clergy sexual abuse, lawyers for the victims announced on June 29.

The settlement addresses about 530 claims brought by survivors, according to Jeff Anderson, a lawyer for the claimants. He said the settlement amount was “less than a full measure of accountability” but was the largest per survivor settlement in any clerical bankruptcy.

The vast majority of documented abuses in Catholic institutional settings took place decades ago, which has made it challenging for victims to seek legal recourse. But some states, including California, have enacted a “look-back window” in recent years that allows victims to bring civil claims that would otherwise be prohibited by statutes of limitations.

In 2023, the Archdiocese of San Francisco filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization to protect itself from more than 500 civil lawsuits that had been filed against it under a 2019 California law. That law extended the statute of limitations for civil claims in child sexual abuse cases.

Christian adoption agency drops LGBTQ couples

Bethany Christian Services, the country’s largest Protestant adoption and foster care agency, will no longer allow LGBTQ couples to foster or adopt.

On June 10, the agency announced that its board voted to “clarify and reinforce” its Christian faith commitments, which require staff and board members to “personally agree and adhere to” a belief statement that recognizes the authority of the Christian bible and affirms the image of God in every person. The belief statement also defines God’s design for marriage as “a covenant between one man and one woman.”

“Beginning June 2027, Bethany will only license and re-license foster families whose Christian faith and beliefs align with our Statement of Faith and Belief,” the group said.

This reversal comes five years after the agency announced it would allow LGBTQ couples to foster and adopt.

Southern Baptists vote to ban women pastors

A proposal by the nation’s largest Protestant denomination to ban churches that have women pastors or let women preach on Sunday mornings passed overwhelmingly on June 10, marking the first step toward enshrining the ban in the Southern Baptist Convention’s constitution.

Three-quarters (75 percent) of local church delegates, known as messengers, voted in favor of the so-called Truth and Unity Amendment during the SBC’s annual meeting.

Under the denomination’s rules, any change to its constitution must be approved by a two-thirds majority in two consecutive years. Two previous attempts to approve the ban had failed.

Al Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, has said the ban will keep the SBC from getting too liberal.

“There’s a great line that divides liberal and biblical evangelicalism, and you can see it on this very issue,” said Mohler, who wrote and proposed the amendment. “The trajectory of liberal denominations is clear.”



Many Americans favor prayer in public schools

Several states recently have passed or proposed legislation to incorporate prayer or display the Ten Commandments in public schools. A new Pew Research Center survey shows that many Americans are receptive to religious expressions at public schools:

- 78 percent of U.S. adults favor allowing students to voluntarily pray in student-led groups.
- 57 percent favor allowing coaches to lead their teams in prayer.
- 50 percent favor displaying the Ten Commandments in classrooms.
- 46 percent favor allowing teachers to lead their classes in prayer.

But the April 2026 survey also shows that relatively few Americans think it should be mandatory for students to participate in teacher-led school prayer. About 6-in-10 Americans support allowing some form of teacher-led school prayer, but the vast majority of them think students’ participation should be optional.

Court blocks censorship from national parks

A U.S. district court has issued an order stopping the Trump administration from censoring American history and science and ordering the restoration of unlawfully censored information displayed in America’s national parks. The preliminary injunction comes in National Parks Conservation Association et al. v. Department of the Interior, et al., a case brought by a coalition of organizations committed to protecting America’s national parks, preserving and sharing history, promoting scientific literacy and access, and providing high-quality interpretive materials.

The coalition filed a challenge earlier this year to a U.S. Department of the Interior policy that is actively erasing history and science from national parks. Democracy Forward represents the coalition in the matter.

In March 2025, President Trump issued an executive order directing the rewriting and sanitization of American history and science at national parks. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum followed suit on May 20, issuing a secretary’s order that launched the implementation of the president’s directive within the National Park Service (NPS). This order has led to the removal and censorship of exhibits that share factually accurate and relevant U.S. history and scientific knowledge.

Vatican blocks women from preaching homilies

A new Vatican decision released on June 23 bars laypeople, including women, from preaching the homily at Mass.

“It is not possible . . . to permit, in exceptional circumstances, a duly commissioned lay member of the faithful to preach in place of the homily during the celebration of the Eucharist,” read the statement published by the Vatican Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which oversees liturgy for the Catholic Church.

The document referred to a letter sent by the president of the German Bishops’ Conference, Bishop Heiner Wilmer, dated June 17, which asked to allow laypeople — including women — to preach the homily at Mass.

The Vatican stated that the homily at Mass is exclusively “entrusted to ordained ministers through the Sacrament of Holy Orders” and is tied to the nature of the liturgy. It also noted that under canon law, laypeople have other avenues for proclaiming the gospel, including catechesis and preaching outside of Mass.

Judge gets \$640K for refusing to marry gays

Texas’ judicial oversight agency must pay \$640,000 to a Waco judge who was disciplined for refusing to marry gay couples, a Travis County court ruled.

Travis County Judge Maya Guerra Gamble ruled June 23 that the State

Commission on Judicial Conduct cannot investigate, sanction or discipline McLennan County Justice of the Peace Dianne Hensley for refusing to officiate same-sex weddings because of her Christian beliefs, regardless of whether she continues performing marriage for opposite-sex couples.

Hensley was awarded \$10,000 in compensatory damages and \$630,000 in attorney’s fees.

Hensley, citing her Christianity, chose not to officiate any weddings but decided to perform weddings again in 2016 for straight couples only.

Hensley told the Waco Tribune-Herald of her decision in a 2017 interview. Once the judicial conduct commission learned of this, it launched an inquiry into Hensley’s policy in 2018 and issued the public warning the next year — the second-most severe form of public sanction the commission issues.

Hensley sued the commission over the discipline instead of pursuing an administrative appeal. She argued her actions were protected by the Texas Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The law prohibits the government from making restrictions that substantially burden someone’s freedom of religion.

New Hampshire has highest share of atheists

New Hampshire has the highest share of adults who identify as atheists in the United States, at about 11 percent, according to a Pew Research Center study.

Nearly half of adults in the Granite State (48 percent) identify as religiously unaffiliated, a group that includes atheists, agnostics and people who describe their religion as “nothing in particular.”

In the U.S. overall, 5 percent of adults identify as atheists, while 29 percent of U.S. adults identify as religiously unaffiliated (including atheists). Among U.S. adults, 62 percent identify as Christians.

Supreme Court: Rastafarian can’t sue over dreadlocks

The Supreme Court on June 23 ruled a Rastafarian can’t pursue a lawsuit against prison officials who forcibly sheared his dreadlocks in violation of a court order while he was incarcerated at a facility in Louisiana.

In a 6-3 ruling along ideological lines, the justices found Damon Landor could not sue prison officials as individuals under a 2000 federal law that requires states to protect the religious rights of prisoners in state institutions.

Justice Neil M. Gorsuch, who wrote the majority opinion, found prison officials could not be held personally liable in most instances for violations of religious rights under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act. The ruling centered on the technicalities of the law.

The ruling came over the objections of the court’s liberals, who said barring a remedy for a violation would render the law toothless.

“Prisoners like Landor who suffer violations of their religious freedom in state prisons — no matter how blatant — will often be left remediless,” Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson wrote. “And encroachments on prisoners’ statutory rights are likely to happen with fair frequency, as state-empowered prison officials will have little incentive to abide by federal law, even if it is handed to them on a piece of paper.”

FFRF VICTORIES

Arkansas

When FFRF voiced concern over a Valley View Public Schools system sports coach using her position to promote her religion onto her student athletes, the Arkansas district took the right steps to remove all religious practices from the team.

A district parent informed the state/church watchdog that the archery coach at Valley View Intermediate School has a pattern and practice of leading students in Christian prayer before tournaments and official archery events, such as a recent awards ceremony. Audio provided to FFRF from this ceremony confirmed that the coach and what appeared to be a coach-selected student led the entire audience, including other students, in an explicitly Christian prayer.

“Here, the archery coach is undeniably pushing her personal religious beliefs onto students by coercing the entire archery team to participate in prayers as part of official school-sponsored activities,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence writes. “The coach is blatantly crossing the constitutional line and violating student-athletes’ First Amendment rights.”

Thankfully, FFRF’s work paid off, and the district took active steps to ensure that participation in the school’s archery team would not cost students their rights.

Rebecca Worsham, the district’s legal representative, wrote back to confirm that the district had conducted an investigation into the situation. This included interviews of the head archery coach, volunteer parent coaches and a number of student participants.

“The investigation confirmed that prayer occurred in connection with certain archery activities during the past season. It also confirmed that this practice long predated the current coach’s involvement as a district employee and was not undertaken with any awareness that it raised constitutional concerns,” Worsham wrote. “Upon being made aware of those concerns, the coach immediately acknowledged them and confirmed that she will not lead, direct or organize prayer for or with students during school-sponsored archery activities going forward.”

Worsham also confirmed that the coach was given the instructions not to lead, initiate, direct, solicit or participate in leading students in prayer via writing, as well as providing the head coach and the program’s volunteer coaches with guidance on the constitutional limits applicable to religious expression by school staff.

Florida

The Seminole County (Fla.) Public Schools system followed up on FFRF’s concerns after being informed of an unconstitutional banner on school property that advertised a local church.

FFRF learned that around the week-end of March 28, Authentic Church had been leaving a large banner on Winter Springs High School’s property. The banner was left up even outside the hours the church was renting school property for services.

FFRF contacted the district in order to have the banner removed.

“Continuing to permit Authentic Church to leave its banners on District property outside of its designated rental hours signals favoritism toward religion over nonreligion, and Christianity over

Just Czech-ing around



FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor stands outside a former monastery in Prague that is now the chic hotel Mandarin Oriental. She is standing near the spa, which is also part of the large former monastery. Annie Laurie writes: “It’s appropriate that this hotel is now being put to better use in Prague because the Czech people are historically indifferent to religion and rejected control by the Roman Catholic Church. Pew Research Center studies show that 72 percent of Czechs do not have a religion and 66 percent do not believe in God. Nevertheless, a 2017 survey showed that only 25 percent actually identify as atheist — even though by definition 66 percent of them are atheist.”

all other faiths,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote.

After receiving FFRF’s letter, Seminole County Public Schools Staff Attorney Kalae Menard reached out to confirm that positive action had been taken.

“The principal addressed the church and advised them to remove the signs on 5/19/26. I have requested for the principal to inform me once they are in fact removed from the property,” Menard wrote. Menard also confirmed that the human resources department of the district will be working with the assistant superintendents of elementary, middle schools and high schools to address engagement with religious groups, in addition to including a principal training during the districtwide HR seminar that is set to occur at the beginning of the 2026-27 school year.

Florida

FFRF made sure that the St. Johns County School District in St. Augustine, Fla., put a stop to the district’s practice of having a school football coach lead students in prayer and other Christian rituals.

A district parent reported that Alan D. Nease High School had a pattern and practice of entangling religion with the school’s athletics programs. The parent stated that organized prayer had become a regular part of the school’s athletics, particularly within the football team. FFRF learned that student football players were participating in school-sponsored prayer sessions before school, as well as at practices and games.

FFRF wrote to the district in order to put a stop to these troubling patterns.

“Even if students and parents know about the school-sponsored athletics program prayer and are able to opt-out — though the parent who contacted us does not allege that an opt-out exists — voluntariness is still no excuse for violating students’ rights,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district’s legal representative, Frank D.

Upchurch, III.

After receiving the letter, Upchurch confirmed that the district investigated the FFRF’s report. As a result of this, the district noted that it did appear that the coach was leading the team in saying grace before team meals.

“The administration counseled the coach and provided appropriate guidance,” Upchurch wrote. “I am told the coach understands and will refrain from leading students in prayer in the future.” Upchurch added that if more reports came in, he and the district would look into them accordingly and respond appropriately in the future.

Georgia

FFRF made sure that the Glynn County (Ga.) Schools system would no longer allow a representative of a Christian club access to students during their lunch periods to ask religious questions.

A concerned district parent reported that on Oct. 2, 2025, Glynn Academy High School allowed Amanda Ashworth, a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) representative, access to the school in order to approach students during lunch and question them about Jesus, their beliefs and biblical stories. Per a video posted to Ashworth’s TikTok account, she asked students religious questions, such as “When Jesus turned one fish into 5,000, was it raw or cooked?” and recorded their answers. Ashworth was seemingly in the cafeteria and was allowed to roam the area, film students and talk to them without supervision. The parent brought this to FFRF’s attention while adding that, as an atheist, they felt very uncomfortable with anyone approaching students during school “to talk about Jesus or any other religion.”

FFRF took action to defend the rights of both parents and students.

“Providing a Christian group preferential access to proselytize students during the school day on school prop-

erty sends an official message that excludes all nonreligious district students and family members, and those religious students who don’t follow the Christian religion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote.

After sending the initial letter in April 2026, FFRF followed up with the district in May, finally getting a response from District Superintendent Mike Blackerby, who confirmed via email that the district had “addressed the situation.”

Montana

FFRF made sure that the Billings (Mont.) Public Schools system was not involved with a mural on school property that gave the impression that prayer was a required value of the district.

FFRF received a report regarding a mural in Skyview High School that promotes prayer. The complainant explained that in the lower floor hallway of the school, there was a mural depicting the school’s mascot, a falcon, pointing at the view, saying “I want YOU to be a Falcon!” Various core traits of being a falcon are listed on the mural, and the first trait is “PRAYER.”

FFRF learned that the mural caused confusion among the student body, as it was unclear if the mural was created by the school itself or a student club. If the mural was created by the school, it would appear that the school was encouraging students to pray and implying that one must believe in and practice prayer to be a SHS Falcon. Further investigation revealed that the mural was allegedly created by a student organization, the All Nations Club. However, there was no signage or disclaimer on or around the mural clarifying that it was created by a student group instead of the school itself. The lack of clarification has led some students to question whether the mural is school sponsored religious promotion.

“If the school continues to claim the mural is student-created, the mural is still problematic if the student club was given special treatment,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote. “Any student-created murals or displays should be erected according to an open forum operated according to neutral rules.”

After receiving FFRF’s letter, Superintendent Erwin Garcia wrote back to clarify the situation, as well as explain the corrective action taken. “The mural at Skyview High School was not created, commissioned or sponsored by the school or the district. It was designed and painted by the student-led All Nations Club, an Indigenous student organization, as part of a student-led initiative,” Garcia wrote. “We recognize that the lack of clear designation has caused confusion regarding school sponsorship. To resolve this and ensure compliance with viewpoint-neutral forum guidelines, the district will ensure that appropriate signage or a disclaimer is promptly placed on or alongside the mural.”

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.

America is not ‘One nation under God’

This column was first published by Progressive Perspectives media service.

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

On July 4, America celebrated the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a document that throws off the yoke of a divinely appointed ruler. But President Trump exploited this occasion to promote a revisionist history of America as “one nation under God.”

These words, importantly, appear nowhere in the declaration. It wasn’t until 1954, during the height of the Cold War, that the words “under God” were added to the Pledge of Allegiance after heavy lobbying of Congress by religious groups and clergy. Similarly, “In God We Trust” was adopted as the nation’s motto



Photo by Chris Line
Annie Laurie Gaylor

in 1956. Those who insist America is “one nation under God” or even a “Christian nation” look to the Declaration of Independence as proof. Presumably, this is because it contains four passing references to deity: “Nature’s God,” “Creator,” “Providence,” and “Supreme Judge of the world.”

Thomas Jefferson’s original draft of this document, archived at the Library of Congress, has only one deistic reference, to “the laws of nature & nature’s god.” This is the vocabulary of a deist of the Enlightenment, as historians classified Jefferson. Years after writing the declaration, he bade his nephew in a let-



Brad Dobson on Upsplash

ter to “question with boldness the very existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason than of blindfolded fear.”

Jefferson was a skeptic who literally cut out references to the supernatural from the New Testament, creating what became known as the Jefferson Bible. As president, he refused to issue any proclamations of prayer or thanksgiving, and coined the phrase “separation between church and state” in reference to the First Amendment, which holds that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.”

It’s absurd to propose, as some do, that Jefferson’s reference to “nature’s god” was intended to suggest that the newly birthed United States of America should become a theocracy. Jefferson’s original draft of the declaration contains just one use of the word “Christian” — a mocking reference to “the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain,” who he blamed for introducing the horrors of slavery to this continent.

The declaration in final form does not reference Christianity, Jesus, the Ten Commandments, a church or a sect, or the bible. Its stated point was “to dissolve

the political bands” and declare independence from a monarchy. It’s a repudiation of the king of England, citing 27 grievances, quite a few of which could be thrown back in Trump’s face, such as: “He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people.”

Jefferson’s most important thought — that governments derive their powers “from consent of the governed” — is profoundly anti-scriptural. There is no democracy in the bible.

It’s also important to remember that the declaration simply is not our governing document. That is the U.S. Constitution, the first constitution in history not to invoke a deity as sovereign but “We the People,” its only references to religion exclusionary. Article VI specifies “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.”

The declaration was tantamount to divorce papers, but the Constitution is like vows for a new marriage. This is especially important today, when almost three in 10 U.S. adults have no religious affiliation and another 7 percent subscribe to non-Christian faiths. They are part of “We the People,” whether the president likes it or not.

So, let’s toast to America’s 250th birthday and to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” by rededicating America to our original motto, “E Pluribus Unum (Out of many, one),” chosen by Jefferson, John Adams and Ben Franklin. “Christian nation” zealots have never understood its wisdom: that unity requires inclusion, pluralism and freedom of conscience.

Annie Laurie Gaylor is FFRF co-president.

Texas reading

Continued from page 1

not to mention the perspectives of millions of nonreligious Americans, sends an unmistakable message about who belongs and who does not.

“The separation of church and state is a valuable one for our country and for the protection of rights of every single member of our community, and I feel that the insistence of including one religion into our curriculum is very troublesome,” commented Gustavo Reveles, a Democrat on the Texas Board of Education.

The U.S. Constitution mandates gov-

Texas Board of Education biblical reading list

Grade	Book
1st grade	Noah’s Ark by Peter Spier
2nd grade	David and Goliath, from “The Children’s Book of Heroes”
3rd grade	Daniel and the Lion’s Den, Christian Broadcasting Network
4th grade	The Necessity of Humility (Luke 14:7-11, New International Reader’s Version)
5th grade	Moses (Exodus 3 and Exodus 14, New International Reader’s Version)
6th grade	Do Not Be Anxious (Matthew 6:25-34, English Standard Version)
7th grade	The Shepherd’s Psalm (Psalms 23, King James Version)
7th grade	The Eight Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12, King James Version)
8th grade	To Everything There is a Season (Ecclesiastes 3, King James Version)
8th grade	Book of Lamentations, Chapter 3 (Tanakh: Jewish Publication Society 1917)
High school	English I: Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32, English Standard Version)
High school	English II: The Book of Job (Job 1-7, 11, 14, 19, 28, 38-42, New International Reader’s Version)
High school	English III: Adam and Eve (Genesis 2-3, New International Reader’s Version)
High school	English IV: The Definition of Love (1 Corinthians 13, English Standard Version)

Graphic courtesy of Texas Tribune

ernment neutrality on matters of religion. Teaching about religion as history or literature can be appropriate when done objectively and without endorsement. However, compelling every student to read a curated selection of bible passages and Christian parables, while giving little or no comparable treatment to other traditions, crosses the line from education into religious promotion. Critics, including Jewish scholars

and clergy, have already warned that the state’s invocation of “Judeo-Christian” values misrepresents Judaism while advancing a distinctly Christian worldview.

“This list is full of Christian texts that are inappropriate for public school classrooms,” Rabbi Joshua Bixler told the board before the vote. “As a rabbi and a parent of Jewish kids, I think it is vital that this board make a distinction between teaching about

religion and teaching religion. This list will force teachers to cross that line.”

The board should be focusing on improving literacy, expanding access to diverse literature and ensuring students receive an appropriate, academically rigorous education. Instead, state officials are inserting themselves into religious questions that belong to families and faith communities, but not the government.

“Conversations about faith — they belong between parents, their children and their faith communities,” said James Halamek of the Texas State Teachers Association. “These conversations should not be dictated by politicians or state education officials. When schools require religious texts and interpretations, it puts teachers in impossible positions of navigating conflicting beliefs among families.”

Antero Garcia, a professor of education at Stanford University, added his take.

“You are going to get substantial exposure to a singular text across your public schooling experience in ways where you aren’t going to get any other kind of religious text anywhere else in that mandated list,” he said. “I could imagine this orienting young people toward particular kinds of dispositions that are rooted in Christianity as a result.”

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and the FFRF Action Fund will continue to oppose efforts that erode students’ and families’ constitutional rights. Religious freedom means that every student is free to practice, or not practice, religion without government pressure or favoritism. That guarantee is fundamental to both public education and American democracy.

A note to FFRF Members

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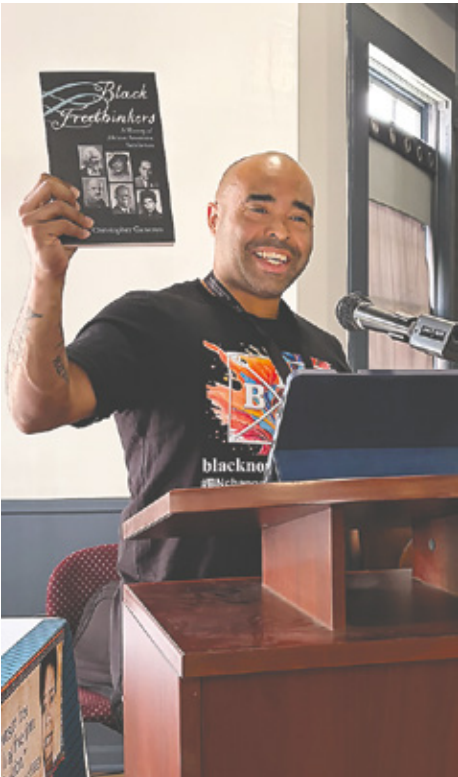
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Revival of Reason!



Professor Chris Cameron, author of “Black Freethinkers,” speaks at the conference.



The Black Nonbelievers’ 2026 Revival of Reason conference was held June 12-14 in Atlanta.



A panel discussion was held on “Christian Nationalism: How to Fight Back as Nonbelievers.” Sharing their thoughts as part of the panel were, from left, seated, activist Cynthia McDonald, FFRF Outreach Manager Charis Hoard, Austell (Ga.) City Council Member Derek Caffee and Leonard Presberg of the Association of Secular Elected Officials. Dominique Huff, standing, was the emcee.



FFRF was a major sponsor of the Revival of Reason conference. Shown here are FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker and Black Nonbelievers founder and president Mandisa Thomas.



Mandisa Thomas, left, and Cynthia McDonald, right, part of the Godless Gospel singers, performed at the event, with composer and producer Dan Barker (in back) handling the music.



Charis Hoard and Annie Laurie Gaylor were often stationed at FFRF’s literature table during the event.

FFRF denounces Auburn baseball’s ‘Jesus’ uniforms

FFRF got into a back-and-forth with Auburn University, Alabama’s attorney general and a U.S. senator from Alabama over the college’s use of Christian themes on its men’s baseball uniforms.

FFRF was informed that the Auburn men’s baseball team has Latin crosses on the backs of their new practice uniforms and “Jesus Won” written on the front. Additionally, both the Auburn baseball team Facebook page and the official Auburn Tigers fan group posted a video and a photo, respectively, of the Auburn men’s baseball team being led in prayer by what appears to be the coach.

FFRF officially requested that Auburn cease the usage of religious symbols and messaging on uniforms, and that the baseball team coach refrain from leading players in prayer.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall then demanded that FFRF withdraw its letter. “Coaches and athletes don’t lose their religious rights just because they attend a public school,”



Marshall wrote in a press release. “The attorney general attacks a straw man complaint, not the one we actually sent,” said FFRF Legal Director Patrick Elliott. “No one is arguing that players lose their religious freedom by attend-

ing a public university. The Constitution protects their right to pray. It equally protects every player from being pressured to participate in religious activity facilitated by university officials or those acting on the university’s behalf.”

Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama also responded when he heard of that FFRF was contesting the unconstitutional issues.

“Our great country was founded on the freedom of religion, not freedom FROM religion,” Tuberville told 1819 News. “It’s no surprise to see woke groups that hate God and America come after Auburn’s baseball team for displaying their faith on practice jerseys.”

FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor replied to Tuberville’s comments in a statement.

“Sen. Tuberville’s comments demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of both the Constitution and FFRF’s mission,” the statement read. “The First Amendment protects every American’s right to practice their religion — or no re-

ligion at all — free from government coercion. It does not permit public university employees to use their official positions to promote Christianity to student-athletes.”

This is not FFRF’s first time contacting Auburn University over unconstitutional entanglement of religion and sports, and this is not the first time Auburn University has prioritized religious practice over students’ rights. In 2015, FFRF published its “Pray to Play” report, which heavily features abuses at Auburn. The report details how universities like Auburn have allowed their football coaches to impose their personal religious beliefs on players via the hiring of Christian chaplains. FFRF wrote to Auburn again in 2018 regarding football Chaplain Chette Williams, a university-employed chaplain who has proselytized and prayed with the football team. Finally, in 2023, FFRF wrote to the university after learning that multiple coaches had promoted a religious event where the head football coach had baptized a player.

THEY SAID WHAT?

At the end of it, when we were just responding totally instinctually, we talked a lot about God. . . We talked a lot about creation and the beauty of the universe and the cosmos.

Astronaut Victor Glover, speaking about the discussion the crew members had following Artemis II’s successful moon mission.

Religion News Service, 6-12-26

I was calling myself an atheist. I had this arrogance about my own reason and rationality, and I just wanted to get the best job, I wanted to go to the best schools, get the most prestigious and best credentials I could. I kind of hit this point in my 20s when I’m like, wait a second, am I actually becoming a better person because of this? And I realized, no, I’m becoming a worse person.

Vice President JD Vance, in an interview with Fox News host Sean Hannity about Vance’s memoir, “Communion: Finding My Way Back to Faith.”

Christian Post, 6-16-26

If the FFRF and similar organizations wish to see these Ten Commandments removed, we echo the words of our Texas

Forefathers to Col. Ugartechea in 1835: “Come and take it.”

First Liberty Institute Associate Counsel William G. Bell, in a letter of response to FFRF which called for the removal of the monument outside the Rockwall (Texas) County Courthouse.

Christian Post, 6-16-26

What you’ll hear in these circles, not just in the SBC, but in the Christian right generally, and in the right more broadly, is that women are the problem here. There’s a sense that if women had less power, then our country and our church would be more on track and more faithful.

Calvin University professor Kristin Kobes Du Mez, speaking about how the Southern Baptist Conference has doubled down on not allowing women positions of authority in the church.

Religion News Service, 6-23-26

Independence, which rejected the divine right of kings, was a product of the Enlightenment.

“For half a century, FFRF has worked to ‘light the way’ by ensuring that every American enjoys the same freedom of conscience guaranteed by our secular and godless Constitution,” Gaylor says. “America’s strength comes from protecting individual liberty and allowing Americans to decide matters of belief for themselves. That’s a principle worth celebrating from coast to coast.”

Additional elements of the “America 250: Lighting the Way” project included digital advertising and a full-page advertisement that appeared in The New York Times Magazine on July 5.

Here were the locations of each billboard or bus kiosk:

- Beacon Street and Market Street, Brighton, Mass.
- Sepulveda Boulevard and Westchester Parkway, Los Angeles.
- Chicago Avenue and Wells Street, Chicago.
- Ellis Street and Larkin Street, San

Under the disastrous Biden administration, this Pentagon waged an unrelenting war on our warriors on many fronts, including when it came to denying them simple medical autonomy and the freedom to express their religious convictions.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, in a video announcing his decision to not mandate flu vaccinations for all troops. That decision was ultimately reversed after the flu swept through Lackland Air Force Base and sickened about 275 people.

New York Times, 6-25-26

The separation of church and state is not in the Constitution. And from this day forward, if anyone says that to you, and they’re in public office or serving in any agency in any capacity, they have to point out exactly where you have violated the Constitution, because you have not. And from this day forward, that phrase should have no power over the people of all faiths ever again in America.

Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, during an Oval Office meeting with President Trump and others.

Houston Chronicle, 6-26-26

We’re going to stop watering down American history. We’re going to teach the truth. Our nation was founded as a Christian nation, and Texas is a Christian state.

Conservative Texas State Board of Education member and pastor Brandon Hall, during a news conference following the board’s approval of a new mandated reading list for all public schools that feature verses and readings from the bible.

Texas Tribune, 6-26-26

They don’t want good. They don’t love God and they don’t want God. They don’t love religion and they don’t want religion and they won’t have it.

President Trump, in a speech in South Dakota on July 3, complaining that communists were taking over America.

Washington Post, 7-4-26

The Founding Fathers called America “God’s noble experiment.” I believe all three words to this day. We are one nation under God.

Sen. Chuck Schumer, in a July 4 message. FFRF called on him to retract the bogus quote.

X, 7-4-26



This billboard was posted at the corner of Chicago Avenue and Wells Street in Chicago.

- Francisco.
- South Street and 15th Street, Philadelphia.
- Farragut Square, Washington, D.C.
- 14th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, D.C.
- Franklin Square, Washington, D.C.
- Seventh Street and Maryland Avenue SW, Washington, D.C.
- Seventh Street and E Street SW near L’Enfant Plaza, Washington, D.C.

Billboards

Continued from page 1

The messaging highlights the constitutional principles of secular government, individual liberty and freedom of conscience as the nation commemorated the 250th anniversary of its founding.

“America’s Founders created a country that belongs to all of us, regardless of our views on religion,” says FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. “As we celebrate the nation’s 250th anniversary, we’re encouraging Americans to remember that protecting freedom of conscience is one of our country’s greatest achievements.”

This initiative is part of FFRF’s broader national effort to educate the public about the importance of maintaining the constitutional separation between state and church.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor notes that the Declaration of

How leaving Christianity led me to FFRF

By Daniel Dossey

A few days ago, sitting at my desk on the legal floor of the Freedom From Religion Foundation in Madison, Wisconsin, I opened LinkedIn and found the message that began all of this. The date was March 19, 2024. The time was 2:51 a.m. I was in Dallas then, awake in the middle of the night, writing to a person I did not know — my future supervisor. As I looked at it again, I could feel how much of my life had begun pivoting around that timestamp.

At the time, my family did not know I had been an atheist for almost two years. I had left Christianity on May 20, 2022, one of the most consequential dates of my life. That day, after years of accumulating doubt, I sat down and took an inventory of what I actually believed.

I realized that I no longer believed in many of the doctrines that had once organized my world, and, more fundamentally, that I did not have evidence enough to believe in a god. I was frightened by what that admission might cost me, but I could no longer reconcile Christian identity with what I actually believed.

Strangely, the decision was accompanied by an unshakable sense of peace, as though some part of my mind had finally been released from a power it had lived under for too long. That same night, searching for something like “freedom after religion,” trying to find language for what had just happened inside me, I ended up on FFRF’s website. I remember clicking around, reading enough to understand that I had found a group saying publicly and legally what I had needed someone to say for much of my life. The day I left Christianity was the day I found FFRF. Less than two years later, awake at 2:51 a.m. in Dallas, I was messaging someone there.

When I messaged Matt to apply for a position at FFRF, I did not yet have a professional language for the life I was trying to enter. I had followed FFRF’s work from Texas, after leaving my conservative religious background, and state/church separation mattered to me beyond political agreement. FFRF had helped me name something I had been living with inside me long before I could describe it legally or publicly. I wanted to be near that work somehow, though I did not yet know how to translate deconversion, religious OCD, family rupture and secrecy into a message another person could receive.

Life inside that religious world gave me an intimate understanding of how institutional power can shape perception, belonging and self-trust. I knew how religious authority could enter a room before anyone said anything explicitly coercive; how public prayer could seem harmless to the people for whom it was designed while telling others that full belonging required performance; how fear could be called love, concern become surveillance and eternal stakes turn ordinary disagreement into catastrophe. I knew because I had lived it — state/church separation protects one of the civic conditions that allows private conscience to remain private.

From Dallas, while still living inside a family system that did not know the full truth about me, FFRF represented a kind of public sanity I had needed for a long time. The organization was willing to say plainly that the government cannot make religion official, that Christianity does not get to become the assumed underpinning of citizenship, that nonbelief is not a defect in one’s ability to belong in public life. Someone outside the room was naming the pressure I had learned to carry privately: the strain of living inside an atmosphere where Christianity could present itself as ordinary while still deciding who could feel fully at home.

With a fervent intensity, I prepared for the FFRF interview. Hundreds of people applied. Attorneys applied. Both interviewers, independently, ranked me as their first choice. I was 23. I write that with some hesitation, because the point was never that pain made me exceptional, or that preparation conquered contingency. The strangest thing was that, in the right context, parts of my life I had barely known how to explain became legible as perspective.

My religious background, psychology degree, deconversion and familiarity with obsessive fear all entered the interview with me. But FFRF became the rare institutional context in which those parts of my life did not have to be hidden, overexplained, apolo-



Daniel Dossey sits at his desk on the legal wing of FFRF’s Freethought Hall.

Photo by Chris Line

gized for or converted into something more conventionally impressive. They could mean, simply, that I understood the work.

I want to linger there carefully, because a life becoming beautiful after pain can invite a kind of retrospective theology of pain, a way of looking backward that makes harm appear instructive simply because some later version of myself learned how to speak from it. I distrust that instinct. Religious OCD did not become less violent because I can now describe its architecture. Growing up gay inside conservative Christianity did not acquire retroactive meaning because I can recognize the systems that made concealment feel necessary. Family rupture has not been softened into grace by distance, or by Madison. The fear I inherited — the kind that could turn a thought into evidence, a desire into danger, a question into an emergency — remains less a source of wisdom than an intimacy with terror I wish had never been asked of me. The wound was not a gift, even if parts of me formed around it, and even if those formed parts now sit with me at my desk.

Now, as a legal intake assistant, I help process complaints from people across the country who believe their public schools, city councils, courthouses, prisons or other government actors have crossed the line separating church and state. The work is procedural, often repetitive, but affectionately so. It involves emails, records, follow-ups, evidence, databases and the small administrative structures that allow someone’s fear, frustration or confusion to enter a civic process.

Underneath the procedure, there is almost always a human situation that precedes the file: A student sitting in a public school where the adults have made prayer feel like part of belonging; a parent trying to protect a child without making that child visible in a way that might invite retaliation; a teacher, inmate, resident or local citizen noticing that an institution meant to remain neutral has been symbolically arranged around a faith they do not share.

Someone wonders whether the pressure is real enough to name. Someone decides, finally, to write the sentence down and send it somewhere.

I know what it means to need language for something before the surrounding world seems willing to give it to you. I understand the rumination and humiliation of wondering whether you are overreacting, whether the prayer is simply tradition, whether the display is harmless, whether the discomfort is too subtle to justify saying anything. Religious power often survives through that subtlety. It teaches the person outside the assumed faith to doubt his own perception before he ever speaks. FFRF’s work interrupts that private doubt, giving people a place to send the

sentence, “Something is wrong here,” and allowing that sentence to become part of a public process rather than remaining only private discomfort.

When I think about the path from that 2:51 a.m. message to my desk in Madison, the absurdity of it still catches somewhere in my body. The same person whose family did not know he had left Christianity now helps the nation’s largest association of freethinkers respond to religious coercion in public institutions. There is a version of this story that could make the whole thing sound like destiny, although I do not believe in destiny and I do not want to smuggle providence back into my life simply because the secular version of the story feels beautiful.

I sent the message. Matt responded. I followed up. The job was posted. I applied. I prepared obsessively. Other people made choices. I got lucky. I was also ready. The truth, as usual, is less clean and more interesting than the consolations of providence.

You do not owe the world productivity from your suffering. You do not have to make your pain publicly available for it to deserve compassion. You do not have to become an activist, a writer, a complainant, an employee or an example. There are times when survival itself is the work. Still, I can no longer deny that some of the hardest material in my life became part of how I moved toward the life I now inhabit.

For FFRF members, complainants, former believers, closeted atheists, religious minorities, secular students and anyone who has ever sat in a room where the official atmosphere seemed to assume someone else’s faith, the knowledge you gained inside that discomfort may matter. The exact way you learned to notice pressure may matter. The private sentence you have been carrying, the one that says “something is wrong here,” may eventually become a sentence you can trust enough to say aloud, to write down, to send somewhere, to turn toward the institution that harmed you and refuse, even quietly, to let its version of events remain the only one in the room.

Use the material carefully, without praising it. Use the religious background, if it has taught you how systems enter bodies. Use the doubt, if doubt has taught you intellectual honesty. Use the complaint form, the public comment, the email, the refusal to stay silent, the organization you followed from afar, if any of it helps translate your life into a form that can push back against the structures that once made you feel alone inside it.

Perhaps, above all, it means noticing, with whatever steadiness is available, that the institution was real, the harm was real, and your perception is allowed to enter the public record, too.

Daniel Dossey is FFRF’s legal intake assistant.

“You do not owe the world productivity from your suffering. You do not have to make your pain publicly available for it to deserve compassion. . . There are times when survival itself is the work.”

Manufactured martyrdom on a baseball cap

This column first appeared on FFRF's FreeThoughtNow.org blog site on June 24.

By Chris Line

If you wanted to explain the modern Christian persecution complex to someone who had never encountered it before, you could hardly find a better example than the controversy surrounding the San Francisco Giants' Pride Night.

Here's what actually happened: During the Giants' recent annual Pride Night, several players wrote bible verse references on their Pride-themed caps while another player chose not to wear the cap at all. Major League Baseball then issued routine warnings because league rules prohibit players from writing messages on uniforms and equipment. The league emphasized that the policy applies regardless of the message's content. Players have received the same warnings for writing personal messages, family tributes and other unauthorized inscriptions on their gear.



Chris Line

That should have been the end of the story.

Instead, conservative politicians, pundits and activists quickly transformed a routine uniform-policy dispute into a national religious-liberty scandal. The Department of Justice launched an inquiry. Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., accused Major League Baseball of engaging in what "appears to be a pattern of discrimination" against Christian players and demanded that Commissioner Rob Manfred answer for it. Across conservative media, commentators cast the players as victims of anti-Christian persecution, all of this over a warning for violating a uniform rule that applies regardless of the message.

The irony is hard to miss.

The players were not suspended. They were not fined. They were not fired. They were not forced to renounce their faith. They were not denied the ability to attend church, read the bible, pray, evangelize or express their religious beliefs. They received a warning for violating a uniform policy that applies to everyone.

Yet this minor inconvenience was immediately elevated into evidence that



Sen. Josh Hawley posted this image on social media after several San Francisco Giants baseball players wrote biblical verse references on their caps in response to the team's Pride Night in June.

Christians are under attack.

This is the defining feature of the persecution complex. In a society where Christianity remains culturally dominant and politically influential, ordinary disagreement, criticism, or neutral rules are routinely recast as oppression.

A baseball league says players can't write messages on their hats? Persecution.

A store employee says "Happy Holidays"? Persecution.

A public school declines to sponsor a prayer? Persecution.

Someone criticizes a religious viewpoint? Persecution.

The standard has become so absurdly low that merely being told "the rules apply to you too" is often interpreted as anti-Christian discrimination.

What makes the Giants controversy especially revealing is that participation in Pride Night was not even mandatory. Reports indicate that players who did not want to wear Pride-themed caps could simply wear standard team caps

instead. One Giants pitcher reportedly did exactly that.

In other words, nobody was being forced to endorse a message contrary to their beliefs.

Yet even that accommodation was apparently not enough. Some players wanted to alter the event itself by adding their own religious messaging, and when MLB enforced its existing uniform rules, the enforcement became the scandal.

This reflects a broader trend in contemporary Christian nationalism. Increasingly, some Christians do not define religious liberty as the right to practice their faith. They define it as the right to receive special exemptions, special treatment and special deference. When those privileges are not granted, they claim persecution.

The result is a bizarre inversion of reality.

Christians make up the overwhelming majority of members of Congress. Christians dominate state legislatures. Chris-

tian symbols, rhetoric and assumptions permeate American public life. Courts have repeatedly expanded religious exemptions and accommodations. Yet some of the loudest voices in American politics continue to insist that Christians are victims. The evidence often consists of little more than being asked to follow the same rules as everyone else.

The Giants Pride Night episode perfectly illustrates this phenomenon. A routine warning became a federal case. A neutral policy became religious discrimination. A minor workplace dispute became a national narrative of Christian victimhood.

For people genuinely concerned about religious liberty and the separation of state and church, that should be troubling.

When every inconvenience becomes persecution, actual persecution loses its meaning. When every disagreement is treated as discrimination, real discrimination becomes harder to identify. And when members of a culturally and politically dominant religious majority insist they are victims whenever they encounter a neutral rule or mild criticism, they distort public understanding of what oppression actually looks like.

Meanwhile, LGBTQ+ Americans face genuine discrimination every day. Across the country, lawmakers continue to target LGBTQ+ rights, restrict access to healthcare, censor discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity, and stigmatize an already vulnerable community. That reality is precisely why Pride Month exists. It is a celebration of resilience in the face of real marginalization, not a symbol of some imaginary campaign against Christianity.

The lesson from the Giants controversy is not that Christians are under attack. It's that, for some activists and politicians, the persecution narrative has become too politically valuable to abandon.

After all, claiming victimhood is a powerful way to mobilize supporters, attract attention and avoid accountability. But when a warning for violating a uniform policy is treated as a greater injustice than the discrimination Pride Month was created to confront, the problem isn't anti-Christian bias. It's a persecution complex so entrenched that it mistakes the loss of privilege for oppression.

Chris Line is an FFRF attorney.

OVERHEARD

We have a good, healthy proportion of people of other religions or no religion. So there really isn't, in my view, a good justification for trying to turn our public schools into Sunday schools.

Rebecca Bell-Metereau, a Democrat on the Texas education board who voted against the proposed biblical reading list in April.

Religion News Service, 6-22-26

No matter how robustly our laws may appear to protect religious liberty, these rights are mediated, shaped and limited by a larger legal system that frequently fails to protect the most vulnerable.

Elizabeth Reiner Platt, in her column, "A Rastafarian's Supreme Court loss shows religious freedom depends on who you are," after the Supreme Court ruled that Damon Landor has

no right to sue the prison officials who shaved off his dreadlocks.

Religion News Service, 6-23-26

A compelling call to govern the United States with reason rather than authoritarianism. The time is now. Solid separation of church and state is the only way to preserve religious freedom — and to protect our democracy.

Bill Nye

Bill Nye, "The Science Guy," in a blurb for Rep. Jared Huffman's upcoming book, "No Prophets: The Fight to Save Democracy from Christian Nationalism." Nye was named FFRF Action Fund's "Secularist of the Week" on June 26.

X, 6-20-26

The evidence that the resolutions provide is very clear in terms of the kind of endorsement of the ideas of Christian nationalism that are present in the denomination. And the way those ideas have come to be simply the lingua franca, if you will, the way the culture of this denomination has been shaped over the last generation.

Sociologist Nancy Ammerman, referring to the most recent Southern Baptist Convention where it rejected both amnesty for undocumented immigrants and women in pastoral leadership roles. Ammerman wrote a chapter, "Southern Baptists and the Evolution of White Evangelical Politics" in a recently published book, "Understanding Christian Nationalism: Perspectives on the Political Religion of Trump's America."

Religion News Service, 6-29-26



Secular Spotlight is our revised weekly YouTube show!

Secular Spotlight shines a light on FFRF's legal battles as well as nontheism, state/church separation and secular issues. We often interview advocates, activists and online influencers working to uphold America's secular principles.

 ffrf.us/youtube

New episodes are uploaded on Mondays at 5 p.m. Central time.

A citizen’s guide to political change

This is an edited (for space and clarity) version of the speech given by Mickey Dollens at FFRF’s national convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Oct. 17, 2025. To watch the full speech, go to ffrf.us/con25.

By Mickey Dollens

My name is Mickey Dollens. I’m the regional government affairs manager for the FFRF Action Fund. And I’m also a current legislator from the OK state of Oklahoma. I say OK, but we’re doing a lot better now that Ryan Walters is gone. Am I right?

As skeptics and freethinkers, we like data research and evidence, including a recent study that said that only 19 percent of Americans surveyed contacted their elected officials in a particular year. Research also shows that legislators are up to 20 percent more likely to be influenced to vote the way you want just by one constituent reaching out. Another study showed that staffers often misestimate what the constituents actually want because they can’t represent what they don’t hear.

Today, we’re going to focus on the local level — the municipal and state level — where you have the most power to influence change, and where this legislation most likely impacts your life the most.

I understand that traditional civic engagement feels ineffective and, quite frankly, hopeless when you consider what we’re up against: religious extremism, the consolidation of power by the president, deploying federal troops in American cities, censorship and weaponizing the courts. If you’re feeling overwhelmed, drained, sad, and even disoriented, you’re not alone. In fact, it means you still give a damn.

People asked me just 10 minutes ago, how do you still have hope? I hear that all the time. Well, the people in this room give me hope. So, I’ve created this framework called the F.O.R.W.A.R.D method to help everyday people navigate legislatures, city councils, and how to effectively lobby their elected officials.

Cailey’s story

I want to take you back to 2017. I had just left the classroom. I was actually laid off due to budget cuts, so that’s why I decided to run for office. I went from the classroom to the state Capitol. One of my first experiences of being a legislator was when I walked into my tiny broom closet of an office in the basement of the Capitol, and sitting on my desk was a little postcard from a 10-year-old girl named Cailey.

She wrote, “Rep. Dollens, you just got elected. You represent me. I’m your boss. I want to tell you a story. I went to the Cleveland County Fair. I was having a great time with my mom and my grandma. We were riding rides, eating good food, playing games. And then I came across a carny game where they were using goldfish as prizes. I felt bad for them because half of them were dead. They were in this hot water, their belly up, so I wanted to do the right thing. I wanted to save at least one of these goldfish.”

So, she played the carny game, and then she played it again and again and then finally won a little goldfish and named it Ripples. She took Ripples home, put him in clean water, gave it fish flakes. But, unfortunately, the next day, Ripples was dead. So, she turned that sadness into passion. She asked her mom what could be done to save more animals? Her mom told her to reach out to her representative. I read this note and said, “Absolutely. This is exactly why I was elected — to help my constituents.”

I invited her and her family to the Capitol. We did our research. We found that quite a few states have banned pets as prizes. So, we filed the legislation in the first week of committee — nothing. Second week — still no word. I needed a chance to present the bill in front of the committee members. And then the third and final week. At this point, if you don’t get a committee hearing, the bill is dead. A more senior member came to me and said, “Have you lobbied for your bill?” I said, “No. I wrote the bill, I filed it, I did everything right.” He said, “No, no. You need to go talk to the committee chair and you need to go get a committee hearing.”

So, I go to the committee chair and tell him



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Regional Governmental Affairs Manager Mickey Dollens (and current Oklahoma state representative) speaks at FFRF’s convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C. on Oct. 17, 2025.

about the 10-year-old constituent who’s very passionate about how these living beings are being used as prizes. It’s a terrible thing. He said, “Dollens, you know, we’ve got bigger fish to fry.” I said, “Yeah, that was pretty good. But you’re a jerk.” So, I went back to Cailey and I said, “Cailey, I hate to break it to you, but we’ve got to pivot. We have to adapt.”

I wasn’t sure what to do, but then her mom suggested we reach out to the local news. That was a pretty good idea. I had made some relationships with local journalists and I knew they were overworked and always looking for stories. I reached out to the local news and a station covered the story, complete with interviews of Cailey and her mother and myself.

Well, two days after that story aired, I got a call from the county elected official who said he saw the news story. So, we arranged a meeting and they said, “Hey, Cailey, we saw your story. We’re blown away by your advocacy. We agree it’s not right. From this day forward, we’re going to pass a county ordinance banning pets as prizes in Cleveland County.”

Since that day, there have been four other counties across the state that have banned pets as prizes. While she didn’t get her ultimate goal, which was a statewide ban, she effected change at the grassroots level in her own backyard, but more importantly, equipped herself with the knowledge and confidence to continue making change.

My F.O.R.W.A.R.D framework is inspired by a 10-year-old. It works.

F.O.R.W.A.R.D

Find stakeholders
Organize
Reach out
Watchdog
Adapt
Raise awareness
Drive change

She found me as her stakeholder. She organized her messaging. She wrote and told a compelling story. She reached out to me as a watchdog, but I initially failed, so we had to adapt. We reached out to the local news, which resulted in raising awareness that ended up driving change.

We can take this F.O.R.W.A.R.D. idea from goldfish to Christian nationalism, because we’re up against a lot.

We’re seeing legislation that’s sweeping across the nation. They’re trying to take over public education. We’re seeing a judicial shift, unlike any other time. There are even some state senators from Oklahoma who are proudly holding up a Christian nationalist flag. They are so well funded and coordinated.

This is why it starts with your direct action and the path forward. Every tactic and every strategy I’m about to lay out is completely permissible. As individuals, you have the power to lobby. You have the power to endorse, to donate to campaigns, to even run for office. You can do all of that.

Find stakeholders

Let’s start at the basic level. We’re going to start off with F — Find stakeholders — because when I first ran for office, when I was trying to figure out what was going on in government, the first person I reached out to was my U.S. senator, and they immediately directed me back to the state level because the issue I was calling about had to do with education. So, whatever issue you take up, you want to be able to categorize it at the local, state or federal level.

Some of the big stakeholders at the local level are your school board members or city council members. At the state level in Oklahoma, each person has one House member and one state senator. And at the federal level, you’re going to have two U.S. senators, one U.S. House member. If you don’t know exactly who these people are, you can go to ballotready.org. Just put in your address. It’ll tell you exactly who your elected officials are, from the president down to your local school board member.

When you’re ready to reach out to them, you want to be able to navigate the chain of influence. Oftentimes when you call, you’re going to talk to a legislative assistant. This is gold. They are the direct connection to the lawmaker. They’re also policy experts. They have such a good pulse on the constituency. So don’t get frustrated if you’re not talking directly to the lawmaker to begin with. The legislative assistant is important.

The legislative staff members are the gatekeepers and subject matter experts. Many of them end up running for office themselves. If you build great rapport with the legislative assistant in the beginning, you very well could be likely building a great relationship with a future lawmaker.

Organize

Let’s move on to organizing. People love a good story. I could have given you facts and data about pets as prizes across the country, and while that’s important and impactful, it’s nothing like an actual 10-year-old taking matters into her own hands and telling her story. It’s the best way to communicate, especially with lawmakers.

Our Action Fund resources [ffrfaction.org] are very pivotal in getting out this constitutionally sound messaging that is guaranteed to help you formulate a message that you can add your personal lived experience and to make it even more impactful.

Another great resource we have are these testimonies that you can go and look at and help frame even more of your message to add on to the Action Alert, if you’d like.

You simply go to “Submitted Testimony” under “News” and then it’s divided up by state, by bill number and the issue at hand. These are very important. Once you’ve got your messaging ready to go, you’ve got your story. You’ve got a few data and facts in there.

Reach out

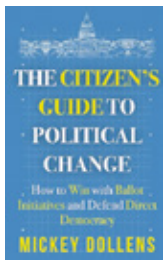
It’s time to reach out. Here are the top five effective methods for reaching out to your legislators:

Of course, the first is in-person visits. But hey, I live in Oklahoma. How am I going to go to D.C.? Don’t forget that your U.S. senators and your U.S. representative have in-house districts where you can meet with the staffers. That’s important. Any time a constituent wants to meet, if you live far from the Capitol, ask for an in-district meeting.

Phone calls are also very effective. That’s the second-best way. And email messages are third. Add your personal story on it. Or send individualized postcard letters like Cailey did, which is fourth best. And social media posts made the top five. Well, now more than ever, I promise you, every elected official is reading the comments. They’re reading what people say. They’re taking screenshots. This is one way in which I communicate with my legislative assistant, too. Don’t overlook the power of social media.

I’ve already had a couple of people come up to me today and tell me they signed up for FFRF’s Action Alerts. That is great news. This is a perfect place to start. We give you the template, the foundation to put in your own lived experience. It’s already utilized and pre-written in the way in which we decide to send these to you at the beginning of the session. When all these bills are filed, we mark them. We are tracking the good bills, we’re tracking the bad bills, and as they start to move through the legislative process, we try to catch them, especially

The Citizen’s Guide to Political Change



By Mickey Dollens

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in the committee process, where it’s the easiest to kill a bill. Once that bill’s up for a committee hearing, we’ll get a notice, usually 24 hours in advance. Then we’ll send you the Action Alert. Once you get that, look it over, add your input, your lived experience. Be sure to include your name, include your zip code, which will identify you immediately as a constituent, and then use that pre-written template. But before you send the Action Alert, call your elected official’s office and talk to the legislative staffer. Use that script that you have from the Action Alert and then make note of that, get the staffer’s name, and say thank you. Be very respectful. Remember, they’re oftentimes overworked and underpaid. Once you hang up, add that staffer’s name to your Action Alert. Then press send.

Right after that, take what you just said and put it on social media. “I reached out to Representative Dollens’ office. I talked to Peyton. This is what I said.” Put in the Action Alert link and say, “You can take action, too.”

Boom. In 10 minutes, you just had three invaluable points of contact. That’s going to go a long way. If you don’t have 10 minutes, at the very least, just shoot off the Action Alert. It’s a lot better than nothing. Here’s one of the best ones I always hear. Should I reach out to my elected official, even if I’m sure they won’t listen? Yes, because if you don’t, you’re going to be silent, and silence is taken as approval. Silence is where bad ideas flourish. But if your elected officials are great, give them a compliment. Thank them for representing you. It’s going to motivate them to stand up, to take an even bolder position on the issue they love.

Watchdog

After you’ve reached out, we’ve got the watchdog part. Now there’s a lot of opportunities to be a good watchdog. Try to catch your lawmak-

ers in their town halls if they’re still having them.

Report the violations. It’s one of the best things you can do as a watchdog, and you can report it anonymously to FFRF. Our legal staff will write a letter, if necessary. We’ll litigate it. It’s one of the best things you can do to be a good watchdog.

Adapt

Next is to adapt to challenges, and inevitably we’re going to run into challenges. That’s just the nature of government. It happens. That’s when you need to rely on our resources at the FFRF Action Fund and with our legal staff.

Politics is a long game. We have to keep at it. We can’t give up and we have to stay persistent. We also have to take care of ourselves.

Raising awareness

And here we are at raising awareness. I mentioned how getting Cailey’s story on the local news made a huge difference. These multimedia journalists are so overworked every single day. They’re responsible for finding a story, for editing it, for finding the interviews, and then they have to go present it.

So, if you have a good story like Cailey’s, they’re going to pick that up and then they’re going to say “thank you.” Then they’ll be going back to you and saying, “Do you have any more ideas like that?” It’s a great way to get your message out. Also, use your social media. You never know when a lawmaker will look at what you’re talking about.

We can even make that more impactful by tying it to a strike or a boycott. There’s one thing authoritarians kneel down to, and that’s the markets. We saw that with how effective it was when they reversed course just five days and \$4.5 billion later after people started canceling their Hulu accounts.

Drive change

And then to wrap it up, we’re going to have to drive it home. FFRF and the Action Fund have the most comprehensive strategy for fighting Christian nationalism — more than anyone in the country, which is suitable because we’re the largest freethought organization in the nation. It all starts right here with the membership, educating the public, reporting violations, engaging in protests, sending out those Action Alerts.

That’s when our legal staff can come in and then take action on those

reported violations. We write amicus briefs, we provide expert witness. We’re on the news. And then there’s the Action Fund. We’re endorsing good candidates. We’re lobbying against bad bills. We’re supporting good bills. We’re writing policy that now for the first time, we’re actually on offense instead of having to play defense. In the end, the Action Fund endorses great candidates who have the courage to put their name on the ballot.

Speaking of running for office, freethinkers need to run for office. We need more nonreligious people to run. I’ve talked to so many people who automatically disqualify themselves because of lack of faith. It couldn’t be further from the truth. There are 7,400 state legislator seats available every two years. At the municipal level, there are over 250,000 elected offices available around the country. There are more than 86,000 positions available for school boards. And one in three Americans are non-religious, but we hold less than 1 percent of elected offices.

You don’t have to fake faith to win. I’ve been elected for 10 years. I never had to fake my faith, and I’ve always run as an authentic candidate. People ask what church I go to and I say, “I’m not a churchgoer, but I believe in transparency, accountability. Here’s my phone number. I’ll be here for you. I’ll fill a pothole. I won’t tell you what to believe. I won’t preach to you or anything. But I’ll help you out.”

Also, direct democracy. Whether it’s ballot initiatives, voter referendums, election recalls — all of that is so important. And it’s being stripped away in states across the country, including in Oklahoma.

Every time you take action as a citizen lobbyist, you move the needle forward. Whether reaching out to your elected officials, sending in Action Alerts, reporting a state/church violation, raising awareness, voting, volunteering or running for office yourself, you are making a difference. Each action creates ripples you may never fully see, touching the lives and changing minds in ways that matter.

Each of you in this room remind me that progress requires courage, and courage is contagious. It spreads from one brave voice to another, from one small act of resistance to the next, building momentum until little ripples become waves of change. And together, day by day, we will continue moving forward. Thank you.



Photo by Chris Line

Mickey Dollens listens to FFRF members during his book-signing event at the convention.

“What a Treasure Trove!” — FFRF Member



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Beverly and Richard Hermesen Student Activist Award

Graduation venue change was moving experience

This is the speech given by Eli Frost at FFRF's national convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Oct. 18, 2025. He was introduced by FFRF Legal Director Patrick Elliott. To watch the speech (or any of the convention speeches), go to ffrf.us/con25.

Patrick Elliott: Good morning, everyone. Our next awardee will be receiving the Beverly and Richard Hermesen \$5,000 Student Activist Award. Eli Frost is a graduate of Chaska High School in Minnesota. His state/church activism started when he was just a sophomore in 2023, which is when FFRF and I became acquainted with his activism.

He was seeking to move his school's graduation from a discriminatory megachurch that had been hosting it for more than 20 years. That is, until Eli started a petition to move the graduation. Nobody seemed to have questioned it in the prior years. As a Minnesotan myself, I can attest and confirm that Eli has been on the local news as a sophomore, speaking out against his school and putting pressure on the board to move this long-term agreement.

I can attest that his activism was especially award-worthy. Not only did he organize other students, create a petition and organize community members, he also spoke to multiple news outlets as a young high school student to reach a broader audience.

At FFRF, we requested a copy of the contract that the school district had with the church, and, within that agreement, the church had the right to cancel any program if the church found that it violated its religious standards, and the law firm that the school district hired to review the issue ultimately agreed with Eli and FFRF that it posed legal problems to continue using the church venue.

Through his petition, attending school board meetings, and engaging with local media and advocacy organizations like FFRF, Eli successfully pushed the district to change the graduation venue to a more inclusive, secular location.

While in high school, Eli was in the National Honor Society Key Club, Speech Team, and Nordic Ski Team. Eli is now attending Minnesota State University, where he's planning on majoring in political science and potentially to attend law school.

His ultimate aim is to use his political influence to bring positive change, particularly standing up to Christian nationalist politicians and promoting respect and kindness for all people, not for religious rewards because it is simply the right thing to do.

Eli, please accept this plaque and the Beverly and Richard Hermesen Student Activists Award, along with \$5,000.

By Eli Frost

Hello, everyone. My name is Eli Frost. As Patrick mentioned, I am from Chaska, Minn. I graduated from Chaska High School in the class of 2025. I am extremely honored to be here today to be receiving the Beverly and Richard Hermesen Student Activist Award because of my work to change my high school graduation venue to a secular and nondiscriminatory location. A key bit of background about Chaska is that it is one of the last outer suburbs of the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, which is probably all you know about Minnesota.



Photo by Chris Line

Eli Frost speaks at the FFRF convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Oct. 18, 2025, about how he earned the Beverly and Richard Hermesen Student Activist Award.

It is also a very politically polarized community, barely voting for Biden and Harris, as well. So, this was an interesting activism project to undertake.

Grace Church, which is in Eden Prairie, Minn., had hosted graduation for Chaska since 2004. It had a very regressive view system that did not include many members of the community. And we can see that regressive view system through these quotes from a sermon titled "Marriage vs. Gay Marriage," in which they stated, "Love and tolerance are not synonyms, they are antonyms. Real love requires hatred of what destroys the beloved," and "LGBTQ people hijacked the civil rights movement. You cannot equate the color of one person's skin to another person's sin."

So, obviously, these quotes show the importance of church/state separation cannot be overstated, and I care deeply about that and the work that the Freedom From Religion Foundation has done for me.

However, especially as a 10th-grader, this was not my main motivation for making this change, but it was certainly a part of it. I have a lot of respect for church/state separation, but the main reason I undertook this project was because these quotes and Grace Church's blatant disregard and disrespect for human beings made me angry.

Grace Church does not care about people and seemingly was rewarded for their bigotry. Our district was paying the church over \$30,000 a year to host graduation. I was taught by my parents to treat others how you want to be treated — with respect, which I thought was a Christian value. But here we are. And Grace Church can't even muster common human decency.

I fought for this change because, if I can help it, I will never let anyone be discriminated against in my community. So much in life, as we have heard throughout the convention, is out of our control or seemingly far out of our control. But,

this time I had the chance to try to make a positive change, so I tried my best.

Started petition

For first steps, I started a petition to move the graduation away from Grace Church to a secular location that didn't consistently have such horrible views. By the time I first spoke at a school board meeting, I had already gathered over 300 signatures from community members, and I also met with the chair and the vice chair of the school board to discuss this issue.

I was able to gain traction on my petition by utilizing community Facebook groups, such as Chaska Underground and Chaska Uncensored, to post the link to my petition explaining why I was undertaking this project and also just gain more signatures. I also used my personal social media accounts to spread the petition to my friends and to my broader school community.

It wasn't just in my community, though, as a big part of my work was outreach, as Patrick mentioned, with local and state news. I conducted several interviews during this process, the first one being with our now closed local paper, the Chaska Herald. After that, I also gave interviews to Minnesota statewide news outlets such as Kare 11, Fox 9 and

the Star Tribune.

In all of these interviews, I tried to stay very consistent about my view that graduation should be moved away from Grace Church because of the fact that it was not a secular venue, and that it discriminated against the LGBTQ community. This process also helped me spread my petition further, as these news sites would post the stories on their social media sites and I could respond in the comments with a link to my petition, which was very helpful for spreading that.

I also contacted about a dozen political TikTokers. To my surprise, there were a few accounts that were willing to share my petition and help me with this. The fact that these literal strangers, people I have not met, were willing to share this petition just meant the world to me.

These videos were actually extremely effective, which was kind of to my surprise, as well. It gained tens of thousands of views and 5,300 likes. This helped catapult my petition to over 2,700 signatures by the time the district made the decision.

FFRF steps in

Now, this is the part you're all here for, where the Freedom From Religion Foundation came in. In my pursuit of this change, I emailed any advocacy groups or organizations I could think of, from the ACLU to the Human Rights Campaign to Gender Justice to the Minnesota School Boards Association. They did not respond, shockingly. I even set up a meeting with the Minnesota State Human Rights Division in state government, and some of these organizations gave minimal help, or, like the ACLU, were understaffed.

But the group that was far and away the most responsive was the Freedom From Religion Foundation. I reached out via email and found that it was already trying to contact me about this issue. So, shout out for being proactive.

It sent a letter to my school district explaining that holding graduation at Grace Church was unconstitutional, and that it was willing to sue on my behalf, if necessary. I just want to say this scholarship is far beyond anything this organization was obligated to do for me, and I am extremely grateful to be able to accept this award to start my education into political science at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I'm very grateful.

“Walking that stage was a pretty incredible feeling. I felt like I was on top of the world.”

American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll

By Orvin Larson
Prof. Larson writes with affection and respect of this illustrious 19th century freethinker.
— 316 pages / PB
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I started this endeavor in May 2023, and the school district announced their decision for the 2024 venue in September 2023. I remember this moment very fondly because it was when I found out that graduation would be moving to the Target Center. I was on the way home from school when my mom sent me an email that the district would soon be announcing the move, and the euphoria that I felt when I got home from school, let's just say I haven't matched it quite yet.

That was not an outcome that I expected, and I was so grateful and happy that night. Ice cream tasted pretty frickin' good that night.

The official announcement was proof that I would not have been able to make this change without the Freedom From Religion Foundation. In the official meeting announcing the change, the district's legal counsel read off a letter that cited, in part because of the letter the Freedom From Religion Foundation sent, that the district was at extreme risk of a lawsuit if they continued to use the church as a graduation venue.

Unexpected setback

You might think that's the end of it. And, quite honestly, I was kind of hoping it was, but unfortunately, that's not how life works. This was very exciting and positive news, and it lasted most of the year until an unexpected caveat showed up — the Minnesota Timberwolves. For those of you who don't know, the Timberwolves are Minnesota's professional basketball team, and they play at the Target Center, which was the new location of graduation. In the spring of 2024, the Wolves made an extremely exciting run to the Western Conference Finals.

However, unfortunately, this resulted in graduation at Target Center being canceled due to NBA policy and potential scheduling conflicts if the



Photo by Chris Line

Eli Frost is awarded the Beverly and Richard Hermesen Student Activist Award by FFRF Legal Director Patrick Elliott.

Wolves made the Finals. As a result of this decision, the school district made the decision to move graduation back to Grace Church in 2024. I was told this during the school day by my principal. As you can imagine, this was fairly devastating for me, especially given the horrible and dismissive community opposition this change faced, which I will not talk about because I could spend 30 minutes on that.

The one thing I had was the win and the fact that these awful people wouldn't get to host graduation. And that was ripped away from me. People in my community actively celebrated the change back to Grace Church.

Well, I cried for the first time in years.

This was a massive betrayal and resulted in extremely angry emails to the school board and the superintendent. I contacted the Freedom From Religion Foundation, but because I was a junior, I had no standing to sue. So, other than venting frustration, graduation occurred at Grace Church in 2024. Over the summer and for about a month in the fall semester of senior year, I waited with a little bit of nervous energy to see what the district would decide to do for the graduation of 2025, which was my class.

It ended up choosing Mariucci Arena, where the University of Minnesota men's hockey team plays. This was a huge relief and a win for reaching my goal, but I was still extremely worried after the previous

year that something would happen or that the district would move it.

In the end, my worries were in vain, and Chaska High School had its first graduation ceremony in 22 years that was not at Grace Church for my graduating class in 2025.

Walking that stage was a pretty incredible feeling. I felt like I was on top of the world, as I'm sure you can imagine. This was change that, once again, would not have been possible without the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

I want to thank everyone who's a part of this great organization as an employee, a volunteer or a member. All of you here have made a massive difference in my life and helped save, and I do use the word "save," me and over 700 other students from a Grace Church graduation in 2025 and hopefully beyond.

I would specifically like to thank your co-president, Annie Laurie Gaylor, and Patrick Elliott, the legal director, for their direct communication with me. They were absolutely lovely to work with. I know there were likely numerous other people involved in the drafting of the letter the district sent to me, so I'm grateful for them, as well. I would also like to thank one of my classmates who, because of the current political scene will remain unnamed, who advocated very fiercely alongside me and was a key part of this entire process.

I would like to once again thank Beverly and Richard Hermesen for endowing this scholarship and for allowing me to be honored with it. I'm just blown away that I'm even here right now.

And, last but not least, of course, I would like to thank my family. My mom, who's here today, as well as my dad and my sister. They stood by me, especially when the going got tough. And I love them so much.

Thank you, everyone. I appreciate you.

'In God We Trust' is an un-American motto

This column first appeared in the Orlando Sentinel on June 14 and is reprinted with permission.

By David Williamson

"In God We Trust" recently turned 70. Somehow it seems older — those must have been a tough 70 years.

A national motto should reflect the values that unite a nation. But on July 30, 1956, President Eisenhower signed "In God We Trust" into law as the motto of the United States, despite the fact that Americans were not then, have never been, and are not now united by a shared religion.



David Williamson

During the Cold War, elected officials and religious leaders found common cause. What better way to distinguish God-fearing Americans from the godless communists of the Soviet Union than to put God on the money? Rather than rely solely on the pulpit, the movement enlisted the U.S. Treasury.

However, this distinction did more than pit pious Americans against an atheist enemy. It divided Americans along religious lines in a way that would have surely disappointed the founding generation. The early republic, shaped by founders who were themselves largely religious, still chose inclusive language to describe the American people as the nation was finding its footing.

"E Pluribus Unum" served us well as our first national motto. Translated from Latin, it means "Out of many, one." Unlike the "trusting God" sentiment, this de facto motto dates to the founding. The words first appeared on the Great Seal of the United States in 1782 and remain part of our American



Image from Wikipedia

heritage today. The original motto has appeared on U.S. coins since 1795 and on the one-dollar bill since 1935.

Our original motto made no claim about what Americans believed about God. It called Americans to build a better country across their differences without erasing those differences. That is precisely what our divided country needs today and what can inspire civic patriotism rather than blind nationalism.

That original motto captured the Thirteen Colonies working together around shared values: colonists fighting as one army against tyranny and forging a single, secular nation — one with no king, no subjects and no national religion.

The language was inclusive because it was secular. Secularism isn't the enemy of religion; it is what prevents government from choosing one faith over another. It is a foundational principle of the American experiment, woven into the First Amendment's protection of religious liberty.

Religious liberty requires two fundamental freedoms: freedom from government-imposed religion

and freedom to practice religion without government interference. The 1956 motto betrays both.

Recent Pew Research data shows that roughly 58 million Americans do not affirm belief in any god or universal spirit. Americans can agree on a great many things, but we have never agreed on religion.

I am an American citizen, a veteran of the United States Navy, and one of many millions written out of the Cold War motto because I do not trust in God.

Nor am I alone. Millions of others who don't believe in any gods have no national motto. Instead, we live under a motto that reflects none of the values we share with our fellow citizens and marks us as second-class Americans — ones deemed less patriotic because of what we do not believe. Or rather, because of others' religious bigotry.

"In God We Trust" is not merely exclusionary; for millions of Americans, it is an outright lie.

What the 1956 motto does best is embolden pastors and politicians who repeat the tired myth that the United States is a Christian nation. Meanwhile, their nonreligious colleagues, constituents, and even congregants sit silent out of the real-life fear of being called "a communist," "an atheist," or even worse, "unpatriotic."

That Cold War replacement is not a shining example of religious liberty. It is a reminder of how far we have drifted from religious liberty's first requirement: a government that does not take sides in matters of faith. That principle protects believers and nonbelievers alike.

You cannot freely exercise your faith if the government prefers someone else's.

Divisive, exclusionary and false are all bad enough. Worse, "In God We Trust" is un-American.

Lifetime Member David Williamson is co-founder of the Central Florida Freethought Community chapter.

‘Religious Liberty for All’

Celebrating our founding freedom at 250

In June, four organizations dedicated to religious liberty compiled a collection of essays from 20 prominent voices on the importance of religious freedom.

Compiled and curated by the Center for American Progress, American Humanist Association, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and Interfaith Alliance, the report included leading scholars, historians, elected leaders, legal experts, faith leaders and theologians from across the country.

“Religious liberty belongs to all people, not to any single tradition, political party or administration,” the introduction reads. “This report unites diverse voices in an expression of interfaith solidarity and democratic responsibility. It presents a clear and compelling alternative to the Trump administration’s Religious Liberty Commission. The individuals quoted here envision religious freedom rooted in the First Amendment, built on the separation of church and state, and grounded in historical truth and the realities of a multireligious nation.”

FFRF is presenting three of those voices here. (To read the full report, go to this site: shorturl.at/jkbsd.)

Rep. Jared Huffman (D-Calif.)

Religious liberty is a great American success story for one critical reason: Our Constitution requires government neutrality in matters of faith. For more than two centuries, that principle has allowed diverse religions to flourish, protected freedom of conscience, and prevented any group from imposing its beliefs through government power. A secular, neutral state is why America escaped the sectarian bloodshed that consumed Europe for centuries.

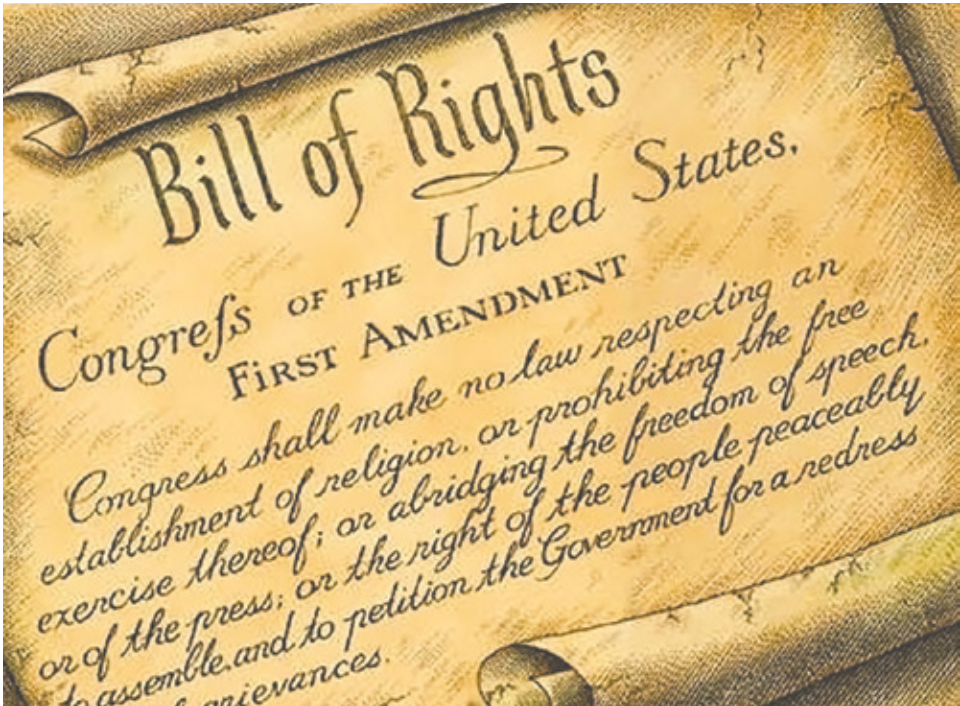


Rep. Huffman

I’ve seen the benefits personally. My mother was a devout Protestant, my brothers are agnostic, my sister is an Orthodox Jew, my wife of 30 years is Catholic. After leaving the Christian faith of my youth, I eventually embraced humanism. That kind of freedom and pluralism is possible in America because our government does not take sides in matters of religion.

It is exactly what the Founders intended. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison understood that genuine religious liberty requires both freedom of religion and freedom from religion. Jefferson enshrined this in the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, the first law in the newly independent colonies to declare that rights must never hinge on religious belief and government must never favor any faith. Madison later embedded the same principle in our Constitution through Article VI’s ban on religious tests and the First Amendment’s prohibition on governmental “establishment of religion.” Jefferson called it a “wall of separation.” And it was built on a uniquely American foundation laid a century earlier by Roger Williams, the Puritan dissident who founded the colony of Rhode Island as a haven for religious liberty — the first government in the Western world to guarantee church/state separation in its charter.

That is our founding legacy — the real religious liberty we should celebrate on the



250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Unfortunately, the Trump administration’s sham Religious Liberty Commission and its politicized America 250 campaign seek to replace it with a fake Christian nationalist narrative that turns religious liberty from a shield that protects all of us into a sword that declares America a “Christian nation” and privileges one religious group over all others.

As we mark America’s 250-year milestone, we must push back against this distortion while lifting up the true story of religious liberty — our secular constitutional framework that has kept the peace, protected minorities, and allowed an extraordinary diversity of beliefs to thrive while ensuring a public square that Americans of all faith perspectives share on equal terms. Let’s celebrate and reaffirm our government’s neutrality on matters of religion — the all-American idea that makes religious liberty possible.

Rep. Yassamin Ansari (D-Ariz.)

My parents fled the Islamic Republic of Iran, a theocratic regime that controls how people speak, act and pray. They came to this country, the United States of America, seeking its promise of freedom, which began imperfectly 250 years ago this July.

While our nation has never fully lived up to its founding ideals, for the first time in our nation’s history, we are going backward instead of forward, with our rights and freedoms actively under attack by right-wing Christian nationalists. I work every day to ensure that we live up to our nation’s values: freedom, equality, and democracy. Everyone must not only be free but welcome to practice, or not practice, whatever faith they may choose.

I am proudly agnostic and do not partake in religious practice. This must be equally as valued in our society and government as someone who practices a particular religion or denomination. The separation of religion and state is vital not only to the rights of nonpracticing people but also for those of religious individuals; rather than have the government dictate religion and practice, it must be up to every person to choose what they find meaningful in.



Rep. Ansari

Right now, the freedom of religion and practice in this country is under direct assault from the Trump administration. We have outspoken Christian nationalists serving in the highest offices in our land, mandating religion in school, undermining non-Christian worship and practices of public servants, including service members, and openly espousing extreme Christian viewpoints from their positions of authority.

While this moment may feel particularly grim, we must double down on our efforts to revitalize the vision of our founders, who wove the separation of religion and state into the fabric of this nation. It is a shared institutional value that we must fight to protect and defend.

Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-Md.)

When I was in school, they used to teach that the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause were in tension with each other. The theory was that the free exercise clause promotes and expands religious worship but the establishment clause confines and controls it.

But this was a completely distorted and erroneous way of thinking about the Constitution and Thomas Jefferson’s beautiful metaphor of the “wall of separation” between church and state. Our history teaches us that both religion clauses advance the essential value of the religious freedom of the people, and the



Rep. Raskin

two clauses stand best when they stand together. And the meaning of both is further enriched and illuminated by the little-known but crucially important third religion clause — Article VI, Clause 3, which forbids any religious test for public office.

Free exercise means that everyone is free to worship and believe as he or she sees fit so long as your religious practice does not violate a religiously neutral, universally applicable law. For example, all religions must respect laws against animal cruelty. On the other hand, a state or municipality cannot gerrymander the law to target and ban the unnecessary killing of animals in a religious context when the same rule does not apply generally to secular slaughterhouses. That is the meaning of the Supreme Court’s powerful free exercise decision in *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah* in 1993.

The Establishment Clause similarly protects minority religious adherents and freethinkers from impositions of religious doctrine by religious majorities that capture state power. That is why the current appeal of the 5th Circuit’s 9-8 decision in 2026 in *Rabbi Nathan v. Alamo Heights Independent School District* is so important. This anomalous and provocative decision upheld a Texas law mandating prominent display of the Ten Commandments in every public school classroom in the state.

The 5th Circuit decision directly contradicts the Supreme Court’s excellent Establishment Clause ruling in *Stone v. Graham* (1980), invalidating a similar Ten Commandments state compulsory display law. The Supreme Court recognized such a law as a deliberate state endorsement of a particular religious creed and monotheistic doctrine and thus a blatant violation of the rights of religious minorities such as Hindus, Muslims, atheists and those who recognize a different version of the Ten Commandments than the one being displayed. We might add that the compulsory posting of the Ten Commandments is a violation of the rights of children even in the religious majority, who also have a right not to be propagandized by their government. Under the Establishment Clause, the state cannot declare an eternal religious code or truth for anyone. Everyone has the right to evolve and change their views under the First Amendment, a strong implication of both the religion clauses and the speech clause.

These constitutional commitments have given us more religious freedom — and more freedom from religious coercion and imposition — than any people on Earth. These enduring values are a great triumph of the framers, those luminous Enlightenment liberals who broke from centuries of religious warfare, superstition, Inquisition, holy crusades and witchcraft trials to place government policy on the foundation of empirical reason and the social contract on the basis of the unalienable rights and freedoms of the people. The confluence of the religion clauses with the rights of free speech and free press have created a dynamic of free thought and freedom fighting in our country that have brought us ever closer to Abraham Lincoln’s tantalizing ideal of government “of the people, by the people and for the people.”

This doesn’t mean, of course, that we are home free and that freedom is never under attack. There is always backsliding. There are always efforts to dress up agendas of authoritarian social power in religious garb and then to impose them on the people.

I recently saw one of my colleagues on the House floor arguing for a school prayer constitutional amendment. He said that the “moral downfall of America was in 1962 with the Supreme Court’s decision in *Engel v. Vitale*, which banned prayer in public schools.” I rose to correct him by saying that the Supreme Court never banned prayer in public schools. As long as there are pop math quizzes, there will be prayer in the public schools in America. Anyone can pray when he or she wants to. The court simply found that the government cannot choose a religious script of its own preference and then compel your children to utter it. What a beautiful synthesis of our religion clause values. No establishment and free exercise for all.

CHAPTER UPDATES

San Francisco Bay Chapter

San Francisco’s best known and widely loved 19th-century eccentric, Emperor Norton, was a delightful freethinker. The San Francisco Bay chapter of FFRF has joined other local groups to support placing his name on a tunnel in the middle of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge — a bridge that he decreed be built.

Joshua Abraham Norton (1818–1880) proclaimed himself “Norton I, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico.” During his “reign,” he issued hundreds of proclamations which local newspapers happily printed. He held no office and was poor, but was generally enjoyed and treated respectfully by Bay Area residents.

Norton was a religious humanist and pluralist who defended the separation of church and state and stood against sectarianism. He was a voice for fair treatment for immigrants and other marginalized groups, including Chinese, African Americans and Native Americans. He supported women and women’s suffrage. He attacked corruption and fraud of all kinds, and defended the people’s right to fair taxes and basic services. He was perhaps the most freely thinking of citizens in a city known then and now for tolerance and freedom of thought.

In 1872, Norton issued three proclamations decreeing a bridge from



Photo credit: Collection of The Emperor Norton Trust
Emperor Norton

Oakland to San Francisco via Yerba Buena Island. Six decades later, the California Legislature followed suit, and in 1936 the Bay Bridge opened, including the tunnel through the island.

You can join the SF Bay chapter in supporting this project by signing the petition at change.org/EmperorNortonTunnel.

Upstate New York Freethinkers



Upstate New York Freethinkers members volunteered at the Ingersoll Birthplace Museum cleanup (top left); met for Western New York Sunday café meetup strategy (top right); and viewed Frederick Douglass art inside Rochester’s Memorial Art Gallery.

Upstate New York Freethinkers hosted Freethought Trail visitors and leaders from the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara, the Freethought Society and the Thomas Paine Memorial Association (our chapter participants serve on the board) to view Frederick Douglass art inside Rochester’s Memorial Art Gallery vaults. (See resources at unyft.org/rochester-freethought-trail-visit). Local action continues with the annual Ingersoll Birthplace Museum cleanup in the Finger Lakes and a

new Meetup organizer in the Western New York region.

Our big event is September’s 3rd Annual Freethinkers Gathering weekend in Albany. All nationwide guests are welcome for Saturday dinner and Sunday keynotes by FFRF Director of Governmental Affairs Mark Dann and David Hoffman. A discounted Hilton Albany room block (\$149/night) is available. Register at unyft.org/go. Contribute or connect at unyft.org/donate, info@unyft.org, or 585-454-9921.

Ozarks Chapter of FFRF



The Ozarks Chapter made huge strides in June, collecting over 100 unique email addresses and growing our database by nearly 15 percent. Citizens of the Ozarks are getting tired of the unyielding Christian nationalism and we’ve seen a tremendous response. At the recent NWA Pride Festival, our chapter was revered for the work of FFRF, including the judgment from Stinson v. Fayetteville School District.

We now turn our attention to the 2026 Secular Speaker Series, which kicks off on July 18 with FFRF Senior Counsel Sam Grover, and continues on Aug. 22 with “The Friendly Atheist” Hemant Mehta. Visit OzarksFFRF.org for more information and tickets.

Ozark Chapter members, from left, Ryan Bradburn, Sarah Nickerson, Ruth Stanfield, Chris Sweeny and James Brazeal prepare to walk in the NWA Pride Parade in Fayetteville, Ark., on June 27.

Greater Sacramento Chapter



Sacramento chapter members helped out at a Pride 2026 table.

The Greater Sacramento Chapter of FFRF was proud to be at our third Pride event! We had two volunteers who were new to the Pride event. Not only did they have a blast handing out swag and trinkets, but they also helped us get 40 new chapter sign-ups!

Here in blue California, Pride

events are where we are able to reach people who aren’t familiar with FFRF, but who do have great concerns with the separation of state and church. Christian nationalists in our state find our LGBTQ youth the easiest to target, particularly through the school boards and local governments.

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FFRF.ORG **FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION**

2026 Lorraine Hansberry winners announced

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is excited to announce, in association with the Women’s Leadership Project (WLP), the awardees of the 2026 Lorraine Hansberry Humanist Scholarship Awards.

FFRF gave \$2,500 to help fund scholarships for four college students this year. The honorees were chosen by the Women’s Leadership Project, which, with Young Male Scholars, conducts school and community-based peer education programming, outreach and professional development, offering invaluable life and job training skills.

The award memorializes Hansberry, the freethinking playwright who famously wrote in 1964: “Though it be a thrilling and marvelous thing to be merely young and gifted in such time, it is doubly so — doubly dynamic — to be young, gifted and Black.” Hansberry’s freethinking play, “A Raisin in the Sun” (1959), was the first drama by a Black woman produced on Broadway.

Awardees receive between \$250-\$1,000 in honor of their racial and gender justice community service, peer education and organizing engagement during their high school and college careers.

Participating students meet weekly with program coordinators and interns and are trained in sexual harassment and sexual violence prevention, LGBTQ-plus youth leadership outreach and homeless education.

For the past several years, these youths have demonstrated outstanding social justice leadership, peer education and community organizing. These multiyear college scholarships are designed to support Women’s Leadership Project and Young Male Scholars’ youth through graduation. The majority are first-in-the-family college students. Besides the Freedom From Religion Foundation, support was also provided by the Carrie and Ellie Harrington Fund.

This year’s scholarship winners are:

Ama Boateng (UC-Merced), \$1,500.
E’niya Glover (Howard University), \$500.
A’Mor Jackson (UC-Davis), \$1,500.
Divine Omoruyi (U.S. Army), \$1,000.



Ama Boateng

Ama Boateng

I joined the Women’s Leadership Project when I was 16. I will be attending UC Merced and enter as a junior in the field of aerospace engineering. My alma mater is Alexander Hamilton Senior High School as well as West Los Angeles College. My academic and professional aspirations include attaining a bachelor’s degree and a Ph.D. in aerospace engineering. I would like to use these degrees to join a start-up or large corporation to manage or contribute to aero and astronomical systems, while actively using my knowledge and skill set for prosperity.

My profession of choice is indeed extremely male-dominated and those effects I have already felt in the STEM community. So, with these passions and game-changing goals, I will encourage inclusion in my field and potentially teach my profession later in my career.

Many of these ambitions and skills are linked to my time in the Women’s Leadership Project. It was there that I learned the value of self-advocacy, persistence and intellect. Many times, I believed that my silence or lack of action would remove me from the truth and I would be able to live freely. But that’s not the case. Speaking against choices made for me allowed me to define what is to be me, to be intelligent. It allowed me to feel comfortable enough to speak against those in Public Comment, who make poor decisions for my community, and force them to recognize their shortcomings. It allowed me to march and protest with my peers and bring awareness to issues like sex trafficking and gender-based violence, issues I thought would not affect me. Women’s Leadership has brought me truth and community, themes that I always yearned to be a part of.

E’niya Glover

I am 17 years old and I joined the Women’s Leadership Project in 2025. I graduated from King Drew Magnet High School and I will be attending



E’niya Glover

Howard University with plans to major in psychology. I hope to become a forensic psychologist who would bring meaningful change to society.

I find myself eager and driven to advocate for equity and inclusion in my community. I am motivated to challenge myself every day to beat the stereotypes attached to me. I have no choice but to notice the constant disparities against minorities, and I find that my own intersectionality has brought its share of challenges. Constantly overcompensating, speaking out and refusing to be dimmed or pushed to the back are things that I deal with every day as a Black woman, navigating a world that wasn’t set up for me.

By being involved in WLP, I was able to advocate and use my voice to inspire change among my peers and the overall public. I was able to cultivate the thoughts and concerns that were always in the back of my mind and was able to share them loudly without shame. The Women’s Leadership Project gave me the space to build, grow and learn.

Events such as our recent beach retreat and the UCLA youth summit were opportunities given to my peers and me to hold space for each other and truly express the topics that hold the most value in our lives: equity, justice, alliance, racial equality and a safe space for LGBTQIA+ youth who often struggle in silence. Through these events, we discussed real-world issues and what might need to change to improve those sad realities. We drummed, did yoga, collaborated and smiled. It’s these events that hold the most impact.

A’Mor Jackson

I am 17 years old and I joined the Women’s Leadership Project in 2023. I graduated from King/Drew High School and will be attending the University of California, Davis. My academic goal is to earn a bachelor’s degree in nutritional science and become a pediatric dentist with my own practice.



A’Mor Jackson

Through my dental career, I hope to provide affordable dental health care in South Central Los Angeles and create confident smiles for children. By building a pediatric dental office, I plan to create a safe environment where children can have positive experiences, gain confidence and have access to resources for the youth at risk.

The Women’s Leadership Project has taught me the importance of advocacy, leadership and using my voice to create change. Participating in the #Standing4Black rally for Missing and Murdered Black Girls showed me the importance of sharing people’s stories and voices, while speaking at City Council meetings taught me how to take action and advocate for my community. These experiences improved my leadership skills and inspired me to continue empowering others by being involved in my community. As I pursue my education and career, I will carry the Women’s Leadership Project teachings by advocating for communities, creating safe spaces for youth and using my leadership to make a positive impact overall.

Divine Omoruyi

I am 18 years old and I joined the Women’s Leadership Project in my junior year of high school. This month, I graduated from King Drew Magnet High School, and I will be attending California State University Long Beach. Some academic goals that I’m pursuing are earn a bachelor’s degree in my chosen major and to then work toward a master’s degree shortly after. I have not yet decided what I would like to get my degree in, but through research studies and internship programs I am confident that I will be able to know what’s right for me and my future.

I also intend to get a realtor’s license and start a few businesses to provide for myself and my community. I want to improve my community and other communities around the world. I want to be the



Divine Omoruyi

person that younger generations can relate to.

My goals align with the Women’s Leadership Project by being a person that others can see to know that their stories are valid and valued. I want to be a support system for everyone who needs it because I know how it feels to not have it. The Women’s Leadership Project has been extremely impactful in my life, making me realize that there is a plethora of things in this world that go unheard, unseen and unnoticed. Some recent events that have made me realize that was our annual rally that took place at Leimert Park. That rally helped me understand how others view our society because they are unaware of the tragedies that occur within our neighborhoods.

Another action was definitely the LGBTQ+ youth summit. This summit made me realize that even though you can be open about your sexuality nowadays, it doesn’t mean that others still support your choices. All in all, the Women’s Leadership Project took my hand and made me look outside of the box and showed me what I had always known — that there was a bigger world out there.

We’re on Instagram!

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

Please follow us at @ffrf_official for weekly updates and content.

We look forward to connecting with you there!



Freedom From Religion Foundation Activist Award

Arizona student ends graduation prayer

A student who organized a secular revolt against unconstitutional graduation prayer at El Capitan High School in Colorado City, Ariz., has received a \$2,000 Freedom From Religion Foundation Student Activist Award scholarship. The award has been endowed for many years by a generous West Coast couple who prefer anonymity, and is given for significant activism to promote FFRF's aims.

Dahlia Richter says she was "scared to file the report at first." She explains: "Standing up to the school board was intimidating. I am very relieved that the FFRF legal team has been kind and supportive throughout this whole process. Just knowing that my report helps protect future students means a lot to me."

El Capitan High School has long included official invocations and benedictions at graduation ceremonies, with students selected in advance to lead the audience in prayer. This year's graduation program was set to feature scheduled prayers led by two designated students, despite clear Supreme Court precedent ruling such practices unconstitutional. That is, until Dahlia objected and organized other students to join her.

District officials reportedly initially altered the program so that the prayer would occur before the ceremony officially begins and described participation as "optional." But in the end, the Consti-



Dahlia Richter

tution was followed.

Dahlia writes: "I decided to submit a complaint to the FFRF because my high school, El Capitan, has a history of forcing prayers during graduation ceremonies. One of my friends said that during her grad year, there was a mandated prayer. Even though the school board was pushing for the prayer again this year, it thankfully backed down. From what I know,

during its meeting, it was dead set on keeping the prayer, but it did back down after its own lawyer advised it against this unconstitutional practice.

"I still chose to submit the official complaint because I felt it was important to document the school's past violations, as well as ensuring that future graduating classes don't have to deal with the same pressure. Also, if a lot of my classmates didn't speak up about the prayer

during the school board meeting, we would still be doing it."

Dahlia just graduated from her high school and this coming semester she will be attending Mohave Community College online to pursue an associate degree in accounting. She will also be getting a certification of bookkeeping there.

During her free time, she enjoys crocheting, listening to music and watching documentaries.

"I would like it to be known that I'm incredibly grateful to the FFRF for their support," Dahlia adds. "This scholarship is going to directly help me get a computer laptop so I can succeed in my online college courses! (The one I currently have keeps crashing on me.)"

Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence worked with Dahlia to end the prayer.

FFRF congratulates Dahlia on her activism.

"It pays to complain," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, who held up a placard protesting a religious invocation and benediction at her own high school graduation ceremony. "Even after the Supreme Court's Weisman decision in 1993 ruling that graduation prayers are unconstitutional, enforcement unfortunately still falls not only upon FFRF, but on the shoulders of vigilant students like Dahlia."

CRANKMAIL

Please enjoy this batch of voicemails, emails and social media comments that doesn't seem to agree with FFRF principles. Printed as received.

Burn!: Hi. My name's Kim, and I'm from a house full of God loving Christians. I hope you all burn in hell. I pray for that daily for you atheist nonbelievers. Burn in hell.

FU: You all are going to hell! FUUUUUCK YOOOU!

Reagan ad: So I just saw your commercial. Your organization should be ashamed of yourselves. I'm Catholic, and I'll always be Catholic. You atheist motherfuckers should all burn in hell. Every 1 of yours. Now I don't give a fuck if you call me. I don't give a fuck if you trace this number, and I don't give a fuck anymore. Because if you walk into a Catholic church, you will have real freedom. If you walk into whatever the hell you call your place, you shall burn in hell. And with that being said, have a pleasant day.

America 250: Your BITCHING about the 250th celebration of America is wrong thinking! America is BASED on Christian VALUES! ALL the first colonies had to SWEAR to those values to join! THERE IS NO WHERE IN THE CONSTITUTION THAT SEPARATES CHURCH AND STATE! Benjamin wrote a letter BUT IT'S NOT LAW! We ARE a CHRISTIAN country if you don't like that LEAVE or GTFO! Where has all your BITCHING been for the local trash holes governments that are broadcasting the call to prayer 5 times a day??? - NOT A WORD - or blocking streets in NY to pray! Or are you ONLY against Judeo Christian worship or mention? EQUAL OR NONE!!!

Horrible: I think it's absolutely horrible that you can be on TV saying the things you're saying. I cannot believe that you don't believe in Jesus Christ and our Lord. I think it's horrible.

Losers: how do you start a movement against other people's beliefs it's dumb they believe as much as you believe not and duh ok carry on with your wasted time duh

Christian country: First of all, you're all out to lunch. The country was started on godly principles. If you look at our money, it says in God We Trust. And, you know, your credibility goes out the window when mister Reagan at the end of the commercial goes, I'm not afraid to burn in hell. You guys are sick. You're really sick and disgusting on your commercial. Really sick and

stupid and disgusting.

Dumb: Almost till recently, I waa thinking that atheism was about having rational thinking. I am now convinced that a good number of atheists are irrational dumb assess. You are only reconfirming my understanding. Need to dig deeper into the matter. For that you need to lift your heads from the sand that you are buried in.

God is good: Secular behaviour comes from bad personal choices led without a guide. But God is a guidance for those who need to be guided to make good choices. There is nothing an atheist can positive give someone. Apart from supposed freedom. I say that lightly.

Idiots: So your saying Jesus was a conspiracy theory? So you atheists must be evolutionists. Something from nothing? Are you honestly saying that you care what people think, or are you trying to convince yourself to avoid the issue of your doubts.

Fools: You should check your REALITY the God you deny says that youre a fool to deny Him so if you're a fool that makes youre DILUSIONED REALITY nothing more than MERE FANTASY

You stink: You are a blooming idiot...sep from church and state.. Your a uneducated skunk..

Go away: Leave America..go to another country..where you are welcome..This country

was built and founded on Godly and Bibical principles.

Nothing is yours: The only true way to get freedom away from God: Create your own earth, your own universe and your own afterlife. You Atheists don't own anything here

Not nonexistent: How can you so vigorously strive against something that doesn't exist? How can the non existent put up such a fight? Your old enough and educated enough you have no excuse. Hey I want God to listen to me and do what I tell him to, but I guess if he did he wouldn't be God I would be or I'd have to no him and trust him enough to want the same things he does. Just because you don't like him or his rules doesn't make him none existent. America was founded on the concept of God creating us. You have no right to expect freedom from religion, just freedom of religion.

Evil: Your ideology is the definition of evil and every thing that is wrong with society. O well I guess according to you there is no definition of right and wrong except your own opinions, no one spoke the "universe" into existence, you don't have to study documented history just make up a fairytale instead; we all evolved from an amoeba and share a common heritage with earth worms, so doct you telling me we're nothing but animals, nothing is absolutely. Ha! You absolutely sure about all that? You are the thing you hate.

MOVING?



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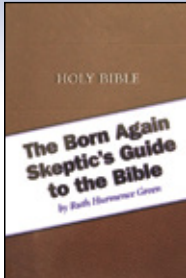
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The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible

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

LETTERBOX

Sen. Scott’s comments on May 17 were disgusting

I read your coverage of the Christian nationalist “prayerthon” in Washington on May 17 and I was sickened by the quote by Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina: “Our rights don’t come from government, they come from God.” It makes me feel disgusted because it is in complete, ignorant denial of how the Founding Fathers struggled for years — throughout the American Revolution and since — to ensure that our country has fair and democratic (not religious) laws and civility!

The Founders were humans, not divinities. It gives me consolation, however, when I recall how my physician-atheist father pointed out the back of a \$1 bill, where, under the pyramid image, it has the Latin phrase “Novus Ordo Seclorum,” meaning New Secular Order. We are a secular country without an established religion, as clearly stated in the First Amendment of the Constitution.

Thank you, FFRF, for being here for us, and for protecting us from Christian fanaticism and evangelical con artists.
California

‘God’ is a monster not deserving of adoration

A letter of mine that was published in the May edition contained a gross error on my part that I would like to correct. In it, I referred to Deuteronomy 20:16-17 as “proof” that “god” was “omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent” when, in reality, I meant to refer to it as proof of the fact that the “God” of the bible is anything but “omnibenevolent.” Rather, he is more a genocide-demanding monster hardly deserving of adoration and worship.

I apologize for the significant error and thank you for allowing me to correct it.
New York

Thanks much to FFRF for helping ‘the little guys’

I neglected to thank you for your interest in one individual’s efforts to repudiate the religious language imbedded in official government proceedings, and for following it up with an article in May’s Freethought Today (“Serving his country without ‘god’”).

There are thousands of us out there — the little guys, unheralded, sometimes denigrated, who try to rebuild the wall of separation between church and state one brick at a time.

We deeply appreciate the work of groups like FFRF, who perform on a much larger stage, and address aspects of the big picture.

During Trump’s shameless religious pandering to a receptive citizenry, we need all of us to stay on task. I’m reminded of the last words of Emmett Dalton, after the Dalton Gang’s last shoot-out in Coffeyville, Kan.: “Never surrender! Die game.”
Kansas



"I'm looking for a religion that hates the same kind of people that I do."

CartoonStock.com

Trump backers are anything but Christian

I found it hard to write about this until now. But I’ve been talking about it and feel that you should know about it, too.

The people waiting to get into Trump’s “Christian” service on the National Mall on May 17 were awful people. Not Christian, and not your typical tourist. (We’ve seen plenty of tourists — we were both tour guides at the Capitol and in the city.)

My husband Art and I — both loyal FFRF members — went down to the mall, with Art’s sign from a couple of demonstrations ago stating “Jesus would hate Trump’s cruelty” — and he would, if there were a real Jesus.

After posing for the picture (with the inflatable golden calf), we decided to walk down to the entry of the service, to try to get in. We walked along the line, trying to find the end of it, and it stretched all through the Mall!

The people in line noticed our sign and commented on it — negatively. Good old Art was kind to the people, but I wasn’t. I told them about the recent Pew Research poll that found that most people don’t think Trump is religious. I naively thought that

the people in line, supposedly good Christians, would be appalled to hear that, but they couldn’t have cared less. One woman screamed, as the others looked on calmly in apparent agreement, “I don’t give a shit!” I was the only one who was stunned.

Seeing their reactions made me very sad. I thought they were at least good Christians, who, at the very least, would be surprised to learn that most people did not think Trump was religious. But they weren’t. Obviously, they weren’t the least bit surprised to learn that most people did not think Trump was a Christian — they don’t either, and they don’t care. All they care about is that Trump says that he hates the gays and the transgendered . . . and Joe Biden. They mentioned them over and over again.

So, that’s my story. Perhaps it’s more about my naivete than anything else. Art was not as upset as I was. He says that, ultimately, those “Christians” forgive Trump for being non-religious because he hates the same people that they hate.

Linda LaScola
Washington, D.C.

Thanks to FFRF for the much-needed secular voice

Thank you for all you do for atheists and other secular people; your representation is greatly appreciated. The secular voice is critically needed in this time of aggressive Christian nationalism by many of our government’s elected leaders. The perspective that representatives from the Freedom From Religion Foundation provide are a breath of fresh air in a sea of polluted religious-based and irrational babble from the mouths of the Christian nationalist stooges pandering for political gain.

I am optimistic the secular perspective will eventually prevail, but it will take all we can do to support and stand with those willing to be on the front lines of the secular movement.

And special thanks to FFRF Legal Fellow Kyle Steinberg, who spoke at the April Minnesota Atheists meeting. Kyle gave an informative review of legal issues FFRF has been involved with in the past year. All of us appreciated the update from a person on the front lines of protecting the wall separating government from religious doctrine.
Minnesota

Treaty of Tripoli upends U.S. as ‘Christian nation’

Regarding Christian nationalism and the separation of church and state, a very important historical piece of the puzzle is often left out of the discussion: the Treaty of Tripoli.

The Treaty of Tripoli was between the United States and the Barbary states of Northern Africa. Its aim was to cease the kidnapping and enslavement of American sailors by the Barbary pirates. Article 11 reads in part: “As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion . . .”

The treaty was written in 1796 and was ratified unanimously by the U.S. Senate in 1797 and signed into law by President John Adams. The 32 senators (representing all 16 states) and Adams were quite literally Founding Fathers who unambiguously proclaimed the non-Christian nature of our government. There is no wiggle room in the phrase “not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.”

U.S. treaties are black letter law and do not have an expiration date or a “best if used by” date. Christian nationalists claim that since the

Founding Fathers were Christians, they intended us to have a Christian government. But the Treaty of Tripoli fatally upends this fake claim!
New Jersey

These religious tidbits prove it’s nonsense

Regarding the posting of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms (supposedly because of significance to the Constitution), you could point out that the law makes no such provision. This would show the religious bias.

I grew up in a semi-Christian household (not strict) and was able to shed the myth. I have read the bible and have researched it enough to have found multiple contradictions and abstract revelations. For one, the narrative of Jesus rules him out as the Messiah. (His only human parent has no lineage to King David. Either he was descended from King David through Joseph — ruling out his divine origin — or he was not a descendant of King David.) Either way, the greatest fable ever told is busted.

You might find it humorous that the Ark of the Covenant was topped with graven images, a violation of a commandment. You might consider Noah’s Ark as a wonder of technology, being that it must have been the first pressurized vessel in history. Christians insist that the fossil shells on top of high mountains were deposited by the Great Flood and constitute proof of the bible’s legitimacy. If the water of the flood covered Mount Everest, at over 29,000 feet, Noah and his passengers would have needed a pressurized cabin, and maybe an oxygen mask in case the cabin ruptured.

Lastly, one that really gets under my skin, is the presidential inauguration. For as long as they have been broadcast on TV (and I’m sure long before), the chief justice has always concluded the oath with “so help me God.” Nowhere in the oath, or the Constitution, does the phrase appear, yet the chief justice inserts it as if it is required.

I just feel that these items, and others, should be used to demonstrate the invalidity of religious dogma. Our very existence is a paradox, so I’m not in the business of disputing the existence of God. I wholeheartedly dispute, however, anyone’s claim to speak for God, especially given such utter nonsense as proof, and equally object to the mixing of government and religion. The main reason we were given the First Amendment is that history showed what religion has to offer to government — nothing but trouble, confusion and misery.

Florida

Crossword answers														
B	L	A	H		E	S	P		M	A	T	E		
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Great American Freethought Songbook



Darcie Johnston and FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker gather prior to the third installment of “The Great American Freethought Songbook” on June 8.



Darcie Johnston sings “The Man I Love,” which was part of the 1924 score for the Gershwin musical comedy “Lady, Be Good” before being scrubbed from that show and put into the Gershwins’ 1927 government satire “Strike Up the Band.”

Photos by Chris Line



Dan Barker regales the audience with some background information on the songs by freethinkers Ira and George Gershwin.



A nearly full house of FFRF members and friends waits for the start of “The Great American Freethought Songbook” at the Charlie Brooks Auditorium in Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis.

White House

Continued from page 1

to individuals who refused Covid-19 vaccines on asserted religious grounds.

The report repeatedly claims that the constitutional principle of state/church separation is a “myth” and argues that religious liberty should instead function as a “bridge” between church and state.

“That is exactly backward,” says FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. “The Establishment Clause exists precisely because the government must remain neutral on matters of religion. Religious liberty flourishes when the government neither favors nor disfavors religion.”

The commission’s central premise rests on a false dichotomy. Although the phrase “separation of church and state” does not appear verbatim in the Constitution, it has long been understood as shorthand for the First Amendment’s prohibitions on establishing religion and

interfering with its free exercise.

The report also presents a profoundly distorted account of religious liberty in America.

Although it claims to defend “all Americans,” the report overwhelmingly centers alleged grievances involving conservative Christians while paying scant attention to the religious discrimination routinely experienced by atheists, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Native American practitioners, Sikhs, minority Christian denominations and the religiously unaffiliated. Even its discussion of antisemitism is framed almost entirely through the commission’s preferred political lens while ignoring the broader reality that religious freedom belongs equally to every American.

“The commission defines religious liberty almost exclusively as the right of conservative Christians to receive exemptions from laws they dislike,” says Gaylor. “True religious liberty means the government cannot pick winners and losers among religions or between religion and nonreligion.”

The report repeatedly portrays routine constitutional limits on government religious endorsement as examples of anti-religious hostility. It criticizes restrictions on religious displays in public schools, calls for expanded government support for religious education through school choice programs, urges greater government accommodation of religious expression

by public employees and proposes new federal mechanisms to encourage complaints whenever individuals believe their religious expression has been limited.

Many of these recommendations would invite constitutional violations rather than prevent them.

Public school students unquestionably possess the right to pray voluntarily, discuss religion with classmates and express their personal beliefs. The Constitution prohibits government officials from using public schools to promote or endorse religion. Teachers, principals and other government employees have constitutional obligations that differ from those of private citizens because they wield the authority of the state.

Likewise, churches and religious organizations already enjoy broad constitutional protections under the Free Exercise Clause, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and decades of Supreme Court precedent. The commission offers virtually no evidence that these existing protections are inadequate. Instead, it seeks to transform religious liberty from a shield protecting conscience into a sword allowing religious entities to receive preferential treatment.

One of the report’s most dangerous recommendations is the repeal of the Johnson Amendment. Eliminating that safeguard would effectively convert tax-exempt churches into taxpayer-subsidized political-action committees, allowing houses of worship to endorse candidates while continuing to receive the substantial benefits of tax-exempt status.

The report also urges presidents to nominate judges who share the commission’s preferred constitutional approach rather than emphasizing judicial impartiality.

Equally revealing is what the report omits.

The commission expresses virtually no concern about increasing efforts to impose religion in public schools, to display the Ten Commandments in government buildings, to inject prayer into official government functions or to use public funds to advance religious education. Nor does it meaningfully address discrimination against the growing number of religiously unaffiliated Americans, who now comprise nearly one-third of the U.S. population.

“The commission starts from the assumption that Christianity deserves a privileged place in public life,” Gaylor says. “That is not religious liberty. It is government favoritism.”

The First Amendment guarantees every American the right to practice any religion, or none at all, without government interference or favoritism. That constitutional promise has made the United States one of the world’s most religiously diverse nations.

Cryptogram answer

The bible and the church have been the greatest stumbling block in the way of women’s emancipation.

— Elizabeth Cady Stanton

FFRF convention, Oct. 15–18

Hop on over to Milwaukee!

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation in its home state of Wisconsin for its 49th annual convention from Oct. 15–18 at the Baird Center, 400 W. Wisconsin Ave, Milwaukee.

General schedule

Thursday, Oct. 15
FFRF will be offering early-bird workshops on Thursday afternoon in the Baird Center from 1-4 p.m. Please indicate on your convention registration form if you are interested in attending these workshops.

Convention registration will open during a complimentary Early Bird Welcome Reception from 4–6 p.m. in the Crystal Ballroom at the convention hotel, the Hilton Milwaukee Downtown, 509 W. Wisconsin Ave. This will be the only event occurring in the Hilton Hotel. The remainder of the program will occur in the Baird Center, which adjoins the Hilton Milwaukee Hotel.

Thursday night, Oct. 15 — Saturday, Oct. 17

The formal convention programming begins in the Baird Center Ballroom on Thursday evening with Rep. Jared Huffman’s speech and continues through Saturday evening.

Registration will reopen on Friday at 8 a.m. in the Baird Center Ballroom foyer and registration will continue throughout the conference.

Sunday, Oct. 18
On Sunday morning, the membership and State Representatives meetings will take place in the Baird Center Ballroom, ending around noon.

To see the list of 2026 national convention speakers, turn to Page 3 or visit the convention speakers page at: ffrf.us/con-26speakers. View the detailed schedule at ffrf.us/con26schedule.

Registration

Registration for the convention is \$100 for FFRF members, \$105 for companions accompanying members, and \$160 for nonmembers (or save by joining FFRF when you register). High school students and younger may register for free, and college students may register at the discounted rate of just \$25. To register, complete and return the form on the right, or register online at ffrf.us/con26register.

T-shirt

Preorder your commemorative 2026 Convention Logo T-shirt when you register (either online or print). The T-shirts will be available for pick up at the convention.

Optional group meals

Three optional group meals will be offered this year: Friday dinner, the Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast and Saturday dinner. Additionally, FFRF will offer three complimentary receptions: A Thursday afternoon reception (4–6 p.m.) including light hors d’oeuvres and a cash bar, a complimentary Friday morning continental breakfast, and a complimentary Friday evening dessert reception with hot beverages. The Hilton Milwaukee hotel also offers five in-house restaurants for your convenience.

Friday Dinner

Chicken: Citrus & herb-marinated airline chicken with oven-roasted tomato and onion jam, roasted garlic confit, fingerling potatoes and seasonal roasted veg-



This is the logo that will appear on the special convention T-shirts, available to order on the registration form.

etables with rosemary jus (GF). \$65
Pork: Roasted garlic-crusted pork tenderloin with Door County cherry glaze, brown sugar-whipped sweet potatoes and charred asparagus (GF). \$65
Vegan/Veggie: Roasted eggplant & squash ratatouille with tomato and saffron purée, toasted pine nuts and aged balsamic (GF, V, VEG). \$65

Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast
Regular: Fluffy scrambled egg bake with bacon, spinach and wild mushrooms; served with crispy fingerling potato hash and thick cut Applewood smoked bacon (GF). \$40
Veggie: Egg white frittata. Feta cheese, spinach and oven-dried tomatoes; served with a side of sweet potato hash \$40 (GF, V).
Vegan: Chickpea tostada. Blackened chickpea and tofu tinga tostada with re-fried beans, avocado, pico de gallo and micro cilantro; served with toasted breakfast potatoes (GF, V, VEG). \$40

Saturday Dinner
Chicken: Dijon roasted airline chicken breast with pretzel crust, whole grain mustard cream sauce, pickled mustard seed, garlic whipped Yukon potatoes and haricot vert tossed in a lemon vinaigrette (GF). \$65
Fish: Miso & honey-glazed salmon, with lemon grass-scented basmati and forbidden rice, tamari-glazed bok choy and stir fry vegetables (GF). \$65
Vegan/Veggie: Pan-seared roasted cauliflower steak with pecan and caper salsa over housemade lemon herb roasted garlic hummus and single estate olive oil (GF, V, VEG). \$65

Hotel booking

FFRF’s discounted hotel room block will be at the Hilton Milwaukee, 509 W. Wisconsin Ave., which is connected to the Baird Center via ADA-accessible skywalk.
We encourage you to book your room soon. Reservations must be made on or before Tuesday, Sept. 22 (unless the block sells out before then), to receive FFRF’s discounted rate of \$229 plus taxes per night.
If you need an ADA-accessible room, please indicate your needs when making your reservation. Check-in time is 4 p.m., and check-out time is 11 a.m.
Book your room online or by phone:
Online: ffrf.us/con26reserve
Phone: 800-774-1500. **State that you are with the Freedom From Religion Foundation** and provide our group code “90N” when booking.
Cancellation policy: One night’s room rate plus tax will be charged for all no-shows and for reservations canceled within 48 hours of arrival.
Find out more at ffrf.us/con26

FFRF

National Convention

MILWAUKEE

OCTOBER 15–18, 2026

CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: ffrf.us/con26

REGISTRATION FEES	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___	\$100 \$ ___
Spouse or Companion (Non-member accompanying member)	___	\$105 \$ ___
Youth (ages 17 & under; must be accompanied by a paid adult)	___	Free \$ ___
College Student with ID	___	\$25 \$ ___
Non-member	___	\$160 \$ ___
☐ 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 23% service charge. Please specify your ADA needs and dietary requirements below.

Thursday, October 15th

Thursday Afternoon Workshops [must indicate to attend] ___ Free

Check box if attending ☐ Registrant 1 ☐ Registrant 2

Evening Welcome Reception [must indicate to attend] ___ Free

Check box if attending ☐ Registrant 1 ☐ Registrant 2

Friday, October 16th

Friday Dinner (all selections are gluten free) ___ \$65 \$ ___

Registrant 1 ☐ Chicken ☐ Pork ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan

Registrant 2 ☐ Chicken ☐ Pork ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan

Saturday, October 17th

Saturday Nonprayer Breakfast (all selections are gluten free) ___ \$40 \$ ___

Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan

Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan

Saturday Dinner (all selections are gluten free) ___ \$65 \$ ___

Registrant 1 ☐ Chicken ☐ Fish ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan

Registrant 2 ☐ Chicken ☐ Fish ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan

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

Optional Commemorative 2026 Convention Logo T-shirt (Cream)

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

Size(s) _____ ► 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 Wednesday, September 30th (unless the event is sold out)