

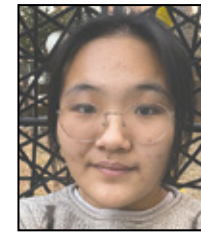
FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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(Secular) America 250

U.S. has history full of failed attempts at a Christian nation

This column first appeared on Religion News Service on May 13 and is reprinted with permission.

By Jerome Copulsky

Although not known for his piety or his deep knowledge of the bible or matters of Christian theology, President Donald Trump fancies himself presiding over a religious revival, boasting that he has “done more for religion than any other president.”



Jerome Copulsky

Last year, as part of his Freedom 250 commission, he launched the America Prays initiative to encourage Americans to dedicate an hour a week in prayer. As part of this initiative, the commission staged “Rededicate 250: A National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise and Thanksgiving,” on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., on May 17, the anniversary of the date the Second Continental Congress recommended observing a “a day of humiliation, fasting and prayer.”

Prominent members of the Trump administration were in attendance, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio (via video) and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, as well as Speaker of the House Mike Johnson. The list of speakers consisted nearly exclusively of conservative, pro-Trump evangelicals. Two Catholic leaders and one rabbi also spoke, and there was no representation of leaders from mainline Protestant or Black churches

See *Christian nation* on page 14



FFRF held a counterprotest to the Rededicate 250 religious event on May 17 in Washington, D.C. FFRF used an inflatable golden calf, with a resemblance to the president, as part of its protest.

Christian nationalist rally falls flat

The Freedom From Religion Foundation reports that the Christian nationalist prayer rally May 17 on the National Mall failed to inspire the massive turnout or enthusiasm its organizers promised.

Despite promotion from President Trump’s allies and appearances from top administration officials, only thousands attended the government-sponsored prayer fest in Washington, D.C. — far below the 80,000-plus turnout anticipated by delusional Pastor Robert Jeffress.

Even Trump appeared to treat the rally, formally known as “Rededicate 250: A National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise and Thanksgiving,” as

an afterthought, sending only a video message. Rather than bothering to record a dedicated address for the prayer rally, Trump provided a re-run, a video he (inappropriately) recorded for a bible-reading marathon in April. In the recycled Oval Office video, Trump recited a passage from 2 Chronicles favored by Christian nationalists. Trump’s only fresh acknowledgment of the event came in a Truth Social post Sunday morning saying: “I HOPE EVERYBODY AT REDEDICATE 250 IS HAVING A GOOD TIME . . . I’M BACK FROM CHINA!!!”

See *Rally* on page 2

What it’s like being secular in Trump’s America

This column first appeared on ArcMag.org on April 28 and is reprinted with permission.

By Phil Zuckerman

For secular Americans — atheists, agnostics, humanists and those who are simply uninterested in or indifferent to religion — a central paradox these days is this: Our presence has never been so significant, the stigma against us has never been so tempered, and yet our constitutional rights have never been more imperiled. That is, just as we have become a formidable demographic chunk of American society, the very principles

of secularism that we cherish, and which serve to protect us, are being undone.

Let’s start with the good news on the secular front: high numbers and improved societal acceptance. When I was born, back in 1969, only 4 percent of Americans said that they had “no religion,” but today that is up to somewhere between 22 and 29 percent — the highest rates of American irreligiosity ever recorded. Conversely,



Photo by Ingrid Laas
Phil Zuckerman

membership in religious congregations is at an all-time low, and — despite a slight post-Covid uptick — weekly church attendance is also at an all-time low. Furthermore, the percentage of Americans who say that religion is an important part of their daily life has dropped down to 49 percent, the lowest ever recorded. And despite some recent chatter of a religious resurgence among young adults, the latest Pew Research data “shows no clear evidence of a religious revival among young adults,” and according to PRRI’s Census of American Religion, the percentage of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 who are unaffiliated is at nearly 40 per-

cent — an all-time secular high.

Finally, concerning the very hallmark of religious faith in America, belief in God, that, too, is at an all-time low, with around 19 percent of Americans lacking such a belief; the percentage is probably even higher, however, for when anonymity and confidentiality are guaranteed, estimates suggest that around 25 percent of Americans may actually not believe in God.

Also good news: Along with such unprecedented levels of secularity in the United States has come greater societal acceptance and decreased stigma. For ex-

See *Being secular* on page 12

Rally

Continued from page 1

Throughout the rally, public officials repeatedly fused religious doctrine with national identity and repeated the Christian nationalist Big Lies that the United States was founded “under God” and as a Christian nation.

Quite to the contrary.

“We live under a godless Constitution whose only references to religion are exclusionary,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, who was in the nation’s capital to protest the government-sponsored prayer revival. “America was founded on Enlightenment principles, not biblical authority. No amount of prayer rallies or revisionist history can erase that.”

The revival was staged beneath towering faux stained-glass altar displays featuring a large white cross emblazoned over rotating revolutionary images, such as a depiction from the John Trumbull Declaration of Independence 1818 painting showing the Declaration’s signing. The false claim that the United States was founded as a Christian nation was repeatedly invoked throughout the day by elected officials, cabinet members and religious leaders.

Vice President JD Vance, also in a video, wrongly declared that America has “always been, and still are, a nation of prayer,” claiming “our faith was the ground upon which America stands.”

Secretary of State Marco Rubio in a video statement likewise claimed Christianity defined the nation from the beginning. “With the dark storm clouds of war looming on the horizon, they did what Christians have always done across place and time for 2,000 years,” Rubio said of the Founders.



FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor and FFRF Director of Governmental Affairs Mark Dann show off the giant inflatable golden calf with Trump’s face that FFRF and Faithful America unveiled for the event.

“They turned their eyes to heaven and placed their faith in the hands of God.”

Now former Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard told attendees in video remarks that America’s Founders “knelt” and sought God’s guidance before independence. “Now today, exactly 250 years later, we gather here on the National Mall to do the same,” Gabbard said, “to give thanks, to ask for forgiveness, and to humbly ask once more for God’s mercy and guidance.”

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, via video, urged Americans to pray “on

bended knee” to Jesus Christ, invoking George Washington at Valley Forge as an example — a piece of Christian nationalist disinformation. After the Freedom From Religion Foundation sent a letter to Museum of the Bible, which displays the 1975 painting by Arnold Friberg of Washington kneeling in the snow, the museum display was changed to say it depicts what “many believe Washington” did, as the New York Times recently reported.

In his remarks, Hegseth added, “Let us ask our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as Washington did on that momentous day, ‘So help us God.’”

Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., who appeared in person, repeatedly insisted that Christianity and prayer were foundational to the nation. He began his remarks asking, “How many love Jesus,” to huge cheers. “There is no way to grasp the last 250 years of America without looking to the power of prayer,” Scott said. “Our rights don’t come from government, they come from God.”

Pastor Jeffress openly embraced the label “Christian nationalist.” “If being a Christian nationalist means loving Jesus Christ and loving America, count me in,” Jeffress told the crowd.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, who appeared in person, led an extended

prayer declaring that the United States was founded on “biblical and foundational principle[s]” and formally “rededicate[d] the United States of America as ‘One Nation, Under God.’” Johnson, who as speaker is third in line to the presidency, also condemned what he called attacks on America’s “moral and spiritual identity,” while asserting that Americans’ rights “do not derive from the government, they come from you, our Creator and Heavenly Father.”

FFRF warned ahead of the event that the rally would promote pseudo-history and Christian nationalism, an ideology asserting that a preferred version of Christianity should be privileged in American government and public life.

FFRF also asked its members to boycott the corporate sponsors of the Freedom 250 initiative, including United Airlines and Mastercard.

Counterprotests on the day of the rally highlighted growing opposition to theocracy and religious favoritism in government. The Freedom From Religion Foundation and Faithful America displayed a giant inflatable golden calf with Trump’s face on the National Mall, mocking the idolatrous merging of religion and Trump-style politics. FFRF leased two digital billboard trucks to carry the message, “Celebrate Democracy Not Theocracy” around the mall. The Interfaith Alliance projected protest messages onto the National Gallery of Art, reading: “Democracy not theocracy” and “The separation of church and state is good for both.”

FFRF filed a Freedom of Information Act request a few months ago, and appealed the denial. It is now awaiting promised records related to the planning, coordination and use of government resources connected to the event, including communications involving federal agencies and public officials who participated in the rally.

The underwhelming turnout undercuts claims that Christian nationalism represents a broad national movement, as documented by a Pew study released days before the rally showing that Americans reject efforts to merge church and state.

Gaylor adds: “The growing resistance to flagrant violations of the separation of state and church, like this ‘Rededicate 250’ boondoggle, demonstrates that Americans in this semiquincentennial year still revere secular government and religious freedom for all — not government-sponsored Christianity.”



Paid for by FFRF, two buses with digital billboards roamed the National Mall area in Washington, D.C., during the Rededicate 250 event on May 17.



Photo by Leigh Vogel of Associated Press

The revival was staged beneath towering faux stained-glass altar displays featuring a large white cross emblazoned over rotating revolutionary images, giving the false impression that America was founded as a Christian nation.

ffrf

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

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



Jared Huffman



Kate Cohen



Percival Everett



Jennifer Welch



Drew McCoy



Gigi Cervantes



Jeremiah Camara



Peter Isley



Maya Wiley



Ron Reagan



Betty Lachgar



Johnny Cotton



Randi Weingarten



Jim Obergefell



Steven Emmert



Forrest Valkai

Excitement is brewing for Milwaukee!

Now that the speaker lineup is set for the Freedom From Religion Foundation's convention, it's time to start getting excited! FFRF will be hosting its 49th(!) annual convention in downtown Milwaukee from Thursday, Oct. 15, to Sunday morning, Oct. 18.

FFRF's amazing line-up of speakers at the Baird Convention Center features elected officials, authors, podcasters, Supreme Court plaintiffs, activists, teachers and more! 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.

FFRF offers a discounted room block at the Hilton Milwaukee Hotel, 509 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, of \$229 plus taxes 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 also gave video remarks at FFRF's 2022 convention. 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, author of "We of Little Faith: Why I Stopped Pretending to Believe (And Maybe You Should Too)," who has spoken at the FFRF conventions in 2023 (Madison, Wis.) and 2024 (Denver). At the 2023 convention, she won FFRF's Freethought Heroine Award.

Percival Everett, author of the powerful book "James," which won the 2025 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction and is a retelling of "Huckleberry 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. "American Fiction," the feature film based on his novel "Erasure," was released in 2023 and was awarded the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay.

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." Welch greets listeners to "I've Had It" as "patriots, gaytriots, theyriots, Blacktriots and browntriots." 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, 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 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." Prior to her election as AFT president in 2008, Weingarten served for 11 years as president of the United Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2, worked as a lawyer on Wall Street and taught history at Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn. Weingarten was included in Washingtonian's 2022 Washington's Most Influential People. Weingarten holds degrees from Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations and the Cardozo School of Law.

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.

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.

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."

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 **Mickey 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. The workshops will be followed by a complimentary late afternoon reception with appetizers, a break for dinner on your own, then Rep. Huffman's evening address.

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**
- Popular gemstone
 - Femur-pelvis joint
 - *Freethinking author John Boyne's "The _____ in the Striped Pyjamas"
 - European sea eagle
 - "Going, going, _____!"
 - Investive
 - Decomposes
 - *Atheist author Joyce Carol _____
 - Tree trunk growth, pl.
 - *Atheist Impressionist painter Camille _____
 - Bob Ross' hair style
 - Beat the Joneses
 - Bug spray brand
 - *Freethinking "Wicked" star Ariana
 - Delay between cause and effect
 - Fink
 - FEMA help
 - Novice
 - Neighbor of Carthage
 - *FFRF. _____
 - Say something
 - *Freethinking author George Eliot's "The _____ on the Floss"
 - Antonym of ingests
 - *Wade opponent
 - Irish moonshine, pl.
 - Investigates, slangily
- *Atheist Bill Gaines' humor magazine
 - Ancient Greek marketplace
 - Textile worker
 - *Word coined by T.H. Huxley to describe his beliefs
 - Tease or harass
 - Hoofbeat sound
 - Door opener
 - URL sign
 - TV show "Dance _____"
 - Not in action
 - Writing implement
 - Lamb's mother
 - Lymphatic swelling
- Down**
- Over, poetically
 - Stanislavski's rifle, e.g.
 - _____perspirant
 - Teacher's presentation
 - Squirrel away
 - Book opener
 - 100 centavos
 - Alexander Hamilton's duel opponent
 - Nobel Peace Prize capital
 - Word of assent
 - Chin growth
 - Behind a stern
 - *Agnostic a.k.a Oracle of Omaha
 - Lowest Hindu caste
 - Stumblebum
 - Oscar the Grouch, e.g.
 - 1:3, e.g.
 - At less than 90 degrees
 - *Freethinking author Tom Robbins' "Skinny _____ and All"
 - Cold brew offering
 - Famous mythological king of Thebes
 - Yesteryears
 - Bonfire fodder, pl.
 - Intense anger
 - *Freethinking author Mark Twain's real last name
 - Website visitors
 - *Freethinking author E.M. Forster's "Howards _____"
 - Armed forces
 - Third rock from the sun
 - Willow flower
 - Like a neon sign
 - Terracotta garden creature
 - *"Atheism for Dummies" author _____ McGowan
 - Chinese monetary unit
 - Crowning point
 - _____China
 - Viral infection
 - Recipe amt.
 - Spelling competition

Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	
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59						60				61		
62						63				64		

Answers on page 20 Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

Freethought Today Cryptogram

REUPBLPCTB LEPTG LEVN'UV

IQQUVBBVF Z EVT LEVN'UV TIL

CJJIZVF LI IQQUVBB ILEVUB.

— CUIT UC

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: P => I. Answer is on page 20.

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

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Note to members

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

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

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

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

In order to do that, follow these simple steps:
 Log into your FFRF.org account.
 Click on "Update your contact information."
 Go down to "Deliver Freethought Today by" and click on either "Newspaper by mail" or "Both PDF and paper copy."
 Click "Submit."

Happy Heathen Mug

Imprint of the Tree of Life on teal green with a glossy finish. American-made handcrafted mugs. 100% lead-free, dishwasher, microwave & oven safe. 12 fl. oz. Height 3 7/8"

\$35 each Item #MU06
\$60 for two



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If the expiration date of your FFRF membership on your address label says June 2026 or earlier . . .

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IN THE NEWS

Study: Gen Z women are losing their religion

A report released April 15 from the Public Religion Research Institute found that 43 percent of adult women under 30 identify as “none” — those who claim no religious identity. That’s up from 29 percent in 2013.

PRRI found that unaffiliated young women outnumber unaffiliated men (35 percent). Overall, PRRI found that 39 percent of Americans under 30 identify as “none.”

“I think you’re running into this head-on collision, where a lot of younger women are just shedding religious labels because they don’t endorse the views of a lot of conservative and outspoken churches,” said Melissa Deckman, CEO of PRRI.

Other studies have found that the religion gender gap has shrunk among young people. Pew found that only 57 percent of young women and 58 percent of young men claim a religious identity — a virtual tie.

Most U.S. adults still support abortion access

According to a new PRRI study, six in 10 Americans said abortion should be legal in most or all cases, while 36 percent said abortion should be illegal in most or all cases. Eight percent indicated abortion should be illegal in all cases.

Religiously unaffiliated Americans and Black Protestants have seen significant increases in support for legal abortion since 2010. Black Protestant support increased 14 points to 70 percent from 2010, and support among the religiously unaffiliated increased 6 points to 82 percent.

White Catholics and white mainline/nonevangelical Protestants have demonstrated a small swing toward an anti-abortion position since 2024.

In the survey conducted throughout 2025, 57 percent of white Catholics said abortion should be legal in all or most cases, down from 62 percent in 2024. Similarly, 65 percent of white mainline/nonevangelical Protestants said abortion should be legal in all or most cases, down from 69 percent in 2024.

Three groups believe abortion should be illegal in all or most cases — white evangelical Protestants (72 percent), Latter-Day Saints (69 percent) and Hispanic Protestants (58 percent).



After-Life and Lifetime Member Linda Allewalt sent us this photo from a parking lot in Whitefish Bay, Wis.

Released-time provider must get equal treatment

LifeWise, an organization that provides off-premise released-time religious instruction to public school students, was granted a preliminary injunction requiring the Everett (Wash.) School District to grant it treatment equal to that given to secular organizations. The injunction issued by a Washington federal district court requires the district to allow LifeWise to participate in district community resource fairs and display printed flyers in schools to the same extent as permitted for secular organizations.

The court also ordered the school to simplify the permission slip procedure for students attending the released-time program. Because some parents complained that those attending the released time program were pressuring other students to attend by providing them with materials received during their released time, the school had required students to keep sealed in their backpacks material received during their released-time instruction. A parent who was one of the plaintiffs contended that this prevented her child from being able to read the bible during free time. The court agreed and ordered that this plaintiff’s children be permitted to read LifeWise reading materials during times of the school day when students are allowed to read other nonscholastic materials.

Just Pretend Published by FFRF

A Book For Young Freethinkers

By Dan Barker
Illustrated by Kati Treu

Revised and adorably illustrated classic. This fun book explores myths and religion from a freethought point of view, and promotes critical thinking.

— 32 pages / PB **\$12** Item #FB103

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5% of white evangelicals say Trump is very religious

While 5 percent of white evangelicals see President Donald Trump as a very religious person, a significant minority see him as somewhat religious, and a majority say he stands up at least somewhat for their religious beliefs, according to a new study from the Pew Research Center.

The survey was completed just before the controversy over the president’s posting an AI-generated image of himself as a Jesus-like healer.

The results of the new survey show that a majority — about 70 percent of U.S. adults — see Trump as “not too” or “not at all” religious. Another 24 percent say he is somewhat religious, while 5 percent say he is very religious.

SBC membership drops to 50-year low

Southern Baptist churches saw sustained growth in attendance and baptisms, but the two-decade membership decline continued in 2025.

Total Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) membership fell by more than 3 percent from 2024 to 2025, dipping to 12,331,954, according to the Annual Church Profile (ACP) compiled by Lifeway Research in cooperation with Baptist state conventions.

While fewer members belong to Southern Baptist congregations, more people are attending worship services and small groups and are being baptized.

Workers sue USDA over Christian messaging

Federal employees are suing Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, arguing that her use of Christian messaging in the workplace is “unconstitutionally coercive.”

The lawsuit, filed May 13 in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, said Rollins “has adopted a practice of sending increasingly proselytizing communications to the entire USDA workforce, promoting her own preferred brand of Christian beliefs and theology to the captive audience of employees that report to her.”

The complaint was filed by the advocacy groups Americans United for Separation of Church and State and Democracy Forward Foundation and the California-based firm Bryan Schwartz Law on behalf of the National Federation of Federal Employees and seven named plaintiffs of a variety of faiths and no faith — including Jewish, Buddhist, pagan and atheist employees of the USDA, according to the lawsuit.

The union of more than 110,000 federal workers — including more than 19,000 USDA staffers — and the individuals charge that Rollins’ actions do not reflect the secular mission of the department.

Openly nonreligious Rabb wins Dem primary in Pa.

Chris Rabb, who is openly nonreligious, is the Democratic nominee for Pennsylvania’s 3rd congressional district after winning the 2026 Democratic primary, and is unopposed in the general election.

Rabb appeared on an episode of “Unreasonable,” a podcast dedicated to state/church separation, on which he spoke out against legislative prayer and favored treatment of religious lawmakers. He has opposed book bans and has introduced legislation that would establish uniform procedures for school boards to follow before being able to restrict students’ access to books.

AI has a bias toward Catholicism, study shows

Most popular artificial intelligence models are biased toward Catholicism and against a number of other religious traditions when asked about converting to a faith, according to new research assembled by a group of religious colleges.

The findings were unveiled on May 26 to attendees of an AI ethics summit in Athens, Greece. The studies were presented as three academic papers produced by the Consortium for Evaluating Faith and Ethics in AI, a new collaboration between Brigham Young University, which is affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Baylor University, which is Baptist; the University of Notre Dame, a Catholic university; and Yeshiva University, which is Jewish.

The researchers studied 14 AI models, including OpenAI’s GPT, Anthropic’s Claude and Google’s Gemini.

Researchers found that when asked “questions related to faith conversion,” nearly every model showed a positive bias toward Catholicism and a negative bias toward Jehovah’s Witnesses. In addition, agnostics, atheists and Latter-Day Saints were “somewhat disfavored,” while mainline Protestants and Sikhs were “somewhat favored.”

In addition, scholars said AI models tend to leave out religious perspectives when answering questions about “grief, major life decisions and personal challenges,” with the AI opting instead for an “exclusively secular framing.”

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FFRF VICTORIES

Illinois

FFRF has ensured that the Lisbon Community Consolidated School District 90 in Illinois will not permit official graduation prayers at a middle school from now on.

FFRF learned last year that Lisbon Grade School included a preplanned invocation and benediction at the eighth-grade graduation ceremony. It was reported that Kari Friestad, who is a youth ministry coordinator at West Lisbon Church, delivered a Christian sermon before leading the audience in both a prayer and a religious benediction, blessing the students as they graduated. The content of her speech reportedly included direct references to Christian theology and was delivered in the tone and format of a sermon.

FFRF reminded the district of its constitutional duty to stay secular.

“School officials may not invite a student, faculty member, clergy member or anyone else to give any type of prayer, invocation, benediction or sermon at a public school-sponsored event,” FFRF Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler wrote to Superintendent William Pender. She noted that the courts have continually reaffirmed that the rights of minorities are nonetheless protected by the Constitution.

While the district did not initially respond, upon a follow-up in May, Interim Superintendent Chris Mehochko confirmed via email that the district had altered the program.

“We are in the process of finalizing the graduation program,” Mehochko wrote. “We have removed the prayer portion that you are referencing.”

Indiana

The Mooresville Schools District has agreed to put a stop to a religiously motivated study program after FFRF brought its unconstitutional nature to the district’s attention.

A member of the Mooresville High School community informed FFRF that the school’s choir director started a “BetterMan study” for MHS students.

According to its website, BetterMan is “a Christian organization” that provides “an 11-week group study on the essentials of biblical manhood and how men can live it out at home, at work, with friends and with God.” The group’s guide for leaders makes clear the program is intended to convert participants to Christianity: “True transformation will come from God working in men’s lives. The Gospel will be clearly shared after Session 6 and that is a great opportunity to make sure you know where each guy in your group is with Jesus. Call any man who lacks faith to believe in Him!”

FFRF wrote to the district asking for an investigation and to ensure that nobody on its staff was unconstitutionally sponsoring religious activities in its schools.

“To avoid encouraging or coercing students into participating in a religious club, the district may not allow staff to be involved in student religious clubs beyond a supervisory capacity,” FFRF Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler wrote.

Superintendent Jake Allen emailed FFRF after the district conducted a review of the matter.

“As part of that review, district administration met with the staff member referenced in your correspondence and provided clear direction regarding the constitutional and legal limitations applicable to employee involvement in student religious activities,” Allen wrote. “Specifically, staff members were reminded that any student religious organizations or gatherings on school grounds must be



student-initiated and student-led, and that employees may only be present in a supervisory capacity consistent with federal law and district expectations.”

Iowa

FFRF persuaded the Iowa High School Athletic Association to revise the criteria student-athletes need to win the state’s highest school honor.

A concerned Iowa parent reported that the Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) was imposing a religious criterion on students in order to be eligible for the Bernie Saggau Award of Merit, an award described as the “highest student honor” that the association awards annually. According to the official description, the award is “presented annually to the graduating student who best exemplifies a patriotic spirit, with strong religious and moral convictions, living and professing the qualities of honesty, integrity and sportsmanship.” FFRF learned that high schools throughout Iowa were advertising the award using the “strong religious and moral convictions” language.

FFRF stepped in to make certain non-religious students are also eligible for the award.

“Because the IHSAA is a state actor due to its operational agreement with the Iowa Department of Education, the IHSAA is obligated to respect students’ First Amendment rights,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district.

By conditioning eligibility for the award on “strong religious . . . convictions,” the association is clearly favoring religion over nonreligion. Thankfully, the organization took FFRF’s guidance on the issue.

Iowa High School Athletic Association Executive Director Tom Keating emailed FFRF, informing the state/church watchdog of a new, more inclusive approach regarding the award.

“The words, ‘religious and’ have been removed from the verbiage on the award certificate,” Keating wrote. “This year’s certificates will reflect that change.”

Louisiana

The Caddo Parish Public Schools in Louisiana agreed to cease allowing an outside religious group to distribute bibles to students, as well as no longer having school staff organize prayer events, thanks to the work of FFRF.

A local family member reported that Herndon Magnet School permitted Gideons International to distribute bibles to students on school grounds during the school day. Gideons International is “an evangelical association that equips and mobilizes Christian business and profes-

sional men, along with their wives, to share God’s word.” The individual who reported the incident to FFRF shared a post that appeared to be from Herndon Magnet School’s official Facebook page that said, “We were so thankful to be visited by the Gideon Ministry this morning! They spoke with our 5th graders and offered each student the opportunity to receive a Youth New Testament Bible.” Pictures attached to the post showed Gideon International representatives in what appeared to be a performance hall in the school.

Additionally, the same Facebook page promoted the religious See You at the Pole prayer event that took place in Sept. 2025. The post said that students and staff gathered for the prayer event. Events in previous years had reportedly been organized by staff members.

“By allowing Gideons International to distribute bibles to students, Caddo Parish Public Schools displays blatant favoritism for religion over nonreligion and Christianity above all other faiths,” FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Charlotte R. Gude wrote to the district. “When school staff encourage young students to take bibles, they run the risk of unconstitutionally coercing students to take, read and reflect upon religious literature.”

FFRF’s hard work paid off when Caddo Parish School Board General Counsel Reginald Abrams informed the organization that action had been taken.

“Please be advised that staff at Herndon Magnet School has been advised to not allow the Gideons to distribute bibles during the school day at the school,” Abrams wrote. “Also, the staff has been advised they are not allowed to organize student prayer meetings at the school.”

Minnesota

The Waseca Public Schools system in Minnesota will ensure that future district choir performances will not include religious content, thanks to FFRF fighting for a secular family of the community.

A concerned parent reported that the Waseca Junior/Senior High School’s Feb. 24 Select Choir concert included mostly overtly religious songs. A program from the event confirmed the presence of religious content, such as the Christian songs “Even When He Is Silent,” “Ain’t No Grave Can Hold My Body Down,” “In Paradisum” and “Praise His Holy Name!” The parent stated that while “In Paradisum” was sung in Latin, it included an English spoken word section “highlighting the importance of faith with a religious context.” FFRF was also informed that Select Choir students were required to attend and perform in the concert for a grade, and that this was “not the first time this director has

had religious themes sprinkled into her programs.”

FFRF contacted William L. Hoversten, the district’s legal representative, to ensure compliance with the Constitution.

“Requiring students to perform Christian worship music for a grade violates students’ First Amendment right to be free from religious coercion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote. “Additionally, the selection of songs highlighting a single religion — Christianity — signals school favoritism toward religion over nonreligion, and Christianity over all other faiths.”

Thankfully, the district decided to change its tune.

“The information you have provided has been forwarded to the Waseca Public Schools administration, and they have responded that they will look into the circumstances and the concerns raised by the parent who has contacted you,” Hoversten wrote. “This will include working with the high school team to review the concert selections and related student requirements and making appropriate adjustments.”

Maryland

FFRF’s efforts persuaded Maryland’s Calvert County Public Schools to remove a box for religious prayers from one of its schools.

A community member informed FFRF that Patuxent High School had a prayer box in the front office. The box had the verse from Matthew 11:28 written on top, along with a Latin cross.

FFRF contacted the school district.

“The district has a duty to ensure that its teachers and administrators are not using their positions to promote their personal religious beliefs to students,” FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Fellow Charlotte R. Gude wrote to the district.

FFRF pointed out that public schools may not show favoritism toward or coerce belief or participation in religion.

Superintendent Marcus J. Newsome emailed FFRF after receiving the letter to confirm that the prayer box has been removed.

Missouri

After hearing from FFRF, a bus driver in the Sainte Genevieve R-11 School District in Missouri will no longer play religious music while students are being driven to and from a district high school.

A parent of a Sainte Genevieve High School student reported that the school bus driver was playing Christian music every day while transporting students. According to the report, the driver was playing religious music loud enough that students cannot help but hear it, and a video provided to FFRF by the parent confirmed the claim.

The parent stated that school administrators and district officials had already spoken to the driver and warned her that she cannot play worship music while students are present, but the driver continued to do so.

“Playing Christian music over the bus radio for children to hear is troubling for all students and their families who are not Christian,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district.

After receiving FFRF’s letter, the district’s attorney reached out via phone to confirm that action had been taken. The legal representative stated that the school again discussed the religious music with the driver and warned her to put a stop to the practice while transporting students. The district reported that they do not anticipate the issue being a problem going forward.

FFRF Action Fund report

State legislature end-of-session roundup

As a majority of state legislatures across the country have adjourned, it's time to assess the damage, celebrate the victories and brace for what Christian nationalist lawmakers have lined up for next year.

Across the country, we saw another flood of bills pushing the Ten Commandments into public school classrooms, inviting chaplains into schools, carving out prayer or bible-reading time during the school day, mandating released-time religious instruction, imposing extreme abortion bans, and funneling tax dollars to private religious schools.

Since January, FFRF Action Fund's state policy team has issued more than 40 action alerts to stop bad bills and advance good ones. While some bad bills became law, the majority of bills we fought back against failed, thanks in large part to your advocacy.

Thankfully, we celebrated victories too, like helping pass an Oklahoma law banning child marriage (see page 17) and introducing our own proactive model legislation, the KPOP Act (Keep Proselytizing Out of Public Schools), also known as the Student Secular Bill of Rights, in multiple states with our partner organizations.

We want to give sincere appreciation to everyone who signed up for our action alerts and called their lawmakers. This is why rapid-response advocacy works!

Here's a 2026 end-of-session roundup:

Alabama

Let's get the bad news out of the way. Alabama was ground zero in 2026 for Christian nationalist legislation. Lawmakers advanced a full slate of bills injecting religion into public schools from every angle:

HB 8 (school chaplains); SB 99 (mandatory Ten Commandments displays); SB 248 (released time for religious instruction); SB 209 ("sexual risk avoidance" sex ed).

All four became law. This is the full package: religious figures in schools, religious texts on display, religious instruction tied to the public school day and abstinence-only sex education shaped by religious dogma. Stay tuned for our response.

Arizona

Arizona kept the so-called "religious freedom" bills rolling. We have so far successfully opposed HB 2110, which would have forced school boards, charter boards, and higher-ed governing bodies to allow prayer at meetings upon request.

We also fought SB 1016, another bad bill that would have expanded religious exemptions from Covid-19 vaccines to a broader range of "medical products" and that, thankfully, hasn't passed yet. Despite movement early in the session, momentum behind these bills seems to have slowed. We hope the close of the legislative session comes without further consideration of these troubling bills.

Delaware

Delaware delivered some encouraging news. We're supporting SB 5 (and its Senate substitute), a constitutional amendment protecting reproductive freedom, including decisions on pregnancy, abortion, contraception and related care. That bill is still moving through the Legislature.

Indiana

Indiana tried to sneak Ten Commandments displays into schools via HB 1086. After pushback, it was scaled down to add the commandments to a list of "protected writings" and to bar teachers from reading them aloud with students present. Thanks to your action on our action alerts, we are glad to report that the bill is DEAD.

Kansas

HB 2431 and SB 424 are Kansas versions



Alabama was ground zero in 2026 for Christian nationalist legislation.

of our Keep Proselytizing Out of Public Schools "KPOP"/Student Secular Bill of Rights model bill. These would've protected students from school-sponsored religious coercion. Both died in committee, but introducing them helped raise awareness. And this is only the beginning of our push for this protective legislation.

We also scored a defensive win when SB 515 had Christian calendar-based sports restrictions amended out after pushback. And we supported HB 2352, adding clergy as mandated reporters for child abuse (with an unfortunate exception for confessions). It passed the House and moved to the Senate, but regrettably died. We'll keep pushing for this next year.

Kentucky

We supported SB 240, the Student Secular Bill of Rights (their KPOP version), but it never made it out of committee. We are gathering more supporters and look forward to the bill returning next year.

We opposed SB 72, a broad medical refusal bill that would have let providers deny care based on religious objections. Fortunately, this bill died as well, and hopefully we will not see it again!

Louisiana

We opposed SB 307, which would have authorized a privately funded Ten Commandments monument on the state Capitol grounds, ludicrously framed as an "educational document." The debate on the bill highlighted a basic problem: Even Christian theocrats can't agree on which version of the Ten Commandments to use.

Maryland

Maryland took a promising shot at protecting elections from church electioneering. We supported SB 4, which would let officials revoke tax-exempt status from 501(c)(3)s, including churches, that violate the Johnson Amendment by politicking from the pulpit. Churches shouldn't get to run as unregulated political machines while keeping their tax breaks. The bill passed the Senate and awaits House action.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts made progress on public health. We are part of a broad coalition supporting H 2554 to eliminate nonmedical (including religious) exemptions from school vaccine requirements. Student health shouldn't play second fiddle to religious exemptions.

New Hampshire

We opposed CACR 28, a constitutional amendment that would have declared morality "grounded on evangelical principles" and would have allowed local governments in the state to pay for "public protestant teachers of piety, religion and morality."

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



This shocking bill fortunately died. No state constitution should treat non-Christians as second-class or unconstitutionally establish evangelicalism as a preferred religion.

Ohio

We opposed HB 486, the "Charlie Kirk American Heritage Act," which encourages schools to push a historically inaccurate version of history. The bill claims to support "accurate historical instruction," but its examples are riddled with historical errors. For instance, the bill claims that Ben Franklin told Thomas Paine to burn a copy of "The Age of Reason," which Paine did not begin writing until after Franklin's death. This bill full of disinformation is stalled in the Senate Education Committee, where it hopefully will remain.

Oklahoma

Oklahoma delivered a big win — and some warnings. We strongly supported and advocated for SB 504, a child marriage ban raising the age to 18 with no exceptions. It became law without Gov. Kevin Stitt's signature on May 13. This is a major victory against religious and patriarchal justifications for underage marriage. Oklahoma is now the 17th state (plus Washington, D.C.) to fully ban it.

We also backed HB 3488 (Oklahoma's KPOP bill), which died on the House floor as an amendment but offered a strong secular alternative to a "period of prayer" bill, which also died thanks to our collective efforts.

And SCR 19, a "Christ is King" resolution, was introduced but didn't advance far. Even symbolic moves like this send a clear message to non-Christians: You're outsiders here. Thankfully, this bill is DEAD.

On the downside, the state enacted SB 1679, the "Preserving Oklahoma Values Act," which elevates vague "Judeo-Christian Western values."

South Carolina

South Carolina pushed on two fronts. We opposed H 4762, bundling two of the worst Christian nationalist bills being hawked around the country: school chaplains with Ten Commandments displays.

We also fought SB 1095, an extreme abortion ban stripping exceptions and criminalizing providers. Both bills are now DEAD, with the Legislature out of session for the year! Yay!

Tennessee

We opposed HB 47 / SB 303, which would allow public schools to erect Ten Commandments displays. Very unfortunately, this bill passed, as did SB 1828, another "Charlie Kirk American Heritage Act."

We also battled HB 1491/SB 1714, which would have mandated public school daily prayer periods and required instruction on Israeli history, the bible, Jesus and early Christianity. Fortunately, this bill did not pass.

Utah

FFRF Action Fund was dismayed to see Utah pass HB 312, which requires public schools to incorporate selected bible passages into social studies for grades 3–12 even after we fought it. Students need accurate history, not Christian nationalist mythology repackaged as civics.

SB 268 further opens the door to religious indoctrination in public schools. This bill requires that all students explicitly examine "the fundamental role of religion in United States history and the primacy of religious liberty to American constitutional government." While the bill pays lip service to prohibiting school officials from endorsing a particular religion, reality tells us that, at the very least, this bill muddies the First Amendment's Establishment Clause waters.

Vermont

We are grateful to state Rep. Monique Priestley for introducing H 705, Vermont's KPOP bill. It's pending, and we are gathering supporters for our model legislation.

West Virginia

We opposed SB 388, which would require schools to place a copy of the Aitken Bible in social studies classrooms. The Aitken Bible is a favorite of pseudohistorian David Barton, who regularly and falsely claims that Congress published and placed it into public schools. The bill deservedly died after passing the state Senate.

Wisconsin

We supported SB 634 to raise the marriage age to 18 with no exceptions. It failed. Frustrating, but the national momentum on banning child marriage continues. We are hopeful that next year, Wisconsin legislators will have a greater appetite for this and other good bills, including our model KPOP Act.

Federal voucher fight

We also pushed back against the federal voucher scheme, called the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit, which funnels public money to (mostly religious) private schools. We supported S 4297, the Keep Public Funds in Public Schools Act, to repeal it, and our advocates contacted their governors in droves to urge them to opt out of the wrongheaded program.

What comes next

Expect more of the same in 2027, but slicker. Theocratic lawmakers are emboldened and will keep testing the courts. We'll keep playing both defense and offense.

Finally, a huge thank you to everyone who submitted an action alert by calling and emailing their state elected officials. Your proactive efforts in this fight to uphold state/church separation make all the difference. Lawmakers respond to this sort of input, even if it doesn't always seem so, and it's a big part of how we'll continue protecting secular government in the years ahead.

Court hears FFRF case of religious statues

More than a dozen Quincy, Mass., residents, represented by FFRF, asked the state's highest court on May 6 to uphold a ruling that blocked the mayor's plan to install two large religious statues at the entrance of the city's new public safety building.

The plaintiffs of various religious backgrounds argue that installing the 10-foot-tall statues — which depict the Catholic iconography of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Florian — as the sole adornments on the building's facade would undermine religious pluralism in Quincy and violate the Massachusetts Constitution's longstanding requirement that the government remain neutral in matters of religion. The hearing follows an October 2025 ruling by a Norfolk Superior Court judge, which held that the city's planned religious display would likely violate Article 3 of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights and temporarily enjoined the city from proceeding with the installation. The city appealed that ruling to the Supreme Judicial Court.

"I am here as an American, and as a Christian," said Conevery Bolton Valencius, a resident of Quincy for more than 20 years and plaintiff in the case. "My faith is at the center of my life. If the government lifts up one religion over others, then no one's faith is safe. All of us deserve the freedom to follow where our faith leads — or to have no faith at all. Installing statues of saints at the entrance to a prominent government building signals a preference that threatens my religious liberty. I want statues like these at my church, not looming over the doors of our new public safety building."

"I am deeply troubled by the city's plans to install two large Catholic icons on a government building," said Claire Fitzmaurice, a resident of Quincy and a plaintiff. "To me, these statues are clearly religious. The winged figure of St. Michael the Archangel is even depicted stomping on the head of a demon! As an active member of my Unitarian Universalist church, one of my central religious principles is religious pluralism. These 10-foot-tall statues at the entrance to our public safety building violate that principle by literally elevating one faith above all others. This sends a clear signal that those who hold different religious beliefs are second-class citizens in Quincy. No



city should send that message — especially when providing essential services."

Article 3 of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights guarantees that "all religious sects and denominations ... shall be equally under the protection of the law; and no subordination of any one sect or denomination to another shall ever be established by law." The Supreme Judicial Court's 1979 ruling in *Colo v. Treasurer and Receiver General* set forth a careful balancing test to analyze government actions challenged under Article 3. Plaintiffs in this case argue that the planned installation fails this test, and the Superior Court agreed that they were likely to succeed in this argument.

"The Massachusetts Declaration of Rights demands that our government remain neutral in matters of religion," said Jessie Rossman, legal director at the ACLU of Massachusetts. "This neutrality is precisely what allows the richly varied beliefs of our clients and others — including deeply held Christian beliefs — to flourish in cities like Quincy and across the Commonwealth. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court established the legal test to analyze Article 3 claims nearly 50 years ago, and for good reason, that test remains good law. Under that test, installing these statues as the sole adornment on a government building, especially one intended to pro-

vide essential services to all residents, violates our state Constitution."

The plaintiffs in *Fitzmaurice v. City of Quincy* filed their lawsuit in May 2025 after local media revealed Mayor Thomas P. Koch's plan to install the statues, which had been commissioned in secret nearly a year and a half earlier. The estimated

cost to taxpayers is at least \$850,000. None of these details had previously been disclosed either to the public or to the full Quincy City Council. Despite significant opposition from constituents — including an online petition with over 1,600 signatures and a statement from 19 local faith leaders — the mayor pressed forward with his plan.

In October, the Norfolk Superior Court denied the city's motion to dismiss the lawsuit and issued a preliminary injunction blocking the planned installation. Rejecting arguments that the St. Michael and St. Florian statues are secular, the court held that "the depiction of the statues, their association with one religion, and the various reactions of community members, City Council members and faith leaders demonstrate plaintiffs will likely be able to show that the statues convey to the public observing them the implicit government support for the religious doctrine and adherents of Catholic/Christian faith, and as a result, the subordination of other religions."

The plaintiffs are represented by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, the ACLU, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and Cloherty & Steinberg LLP.



Photo courtesy of ACLU of Massachusetts

FFRF Legal Fellow Kyle Steinberg, second from left, joined a portion of the counsel team challenging the Quincy, Mass., religious statues case outside the John Adams Courthouse in Boston following oral arguments on May 6.

From L-R: Jenny Samuels (litigation counsel for Americans United), Steinberg, Rachel Davidson (staff attorney for ACLU of Mass.), Jessie Rossman (legal director for ACLU of Mass.) and Suzanne Schlossberg (staff attorney for ACLU of Mass., who argued the case).

Freethought Caucus now up to 35 members

The Congressional Freethought Caucus is now up to 35 members (all Democrats) after Reps. Val Hoyle and Gil Cisneros recently joined.

The CFC was founded in 2018 by Reps. Jared Huffman and Jamie Raskin, and former Rep. Jerry McNerney.

The caucus is open to members of all faiths and none, drawing participants from a range of religious, philosophical and political backgrounds. It is the only congressional caucus dedicated to striving for religious freedom and the separation of church and state.

The CFC's mission is to:

- Promote public policy formed on the basis of reason, science, and moral values.
- Protect the secular character of our government by adhering to the strict Constitutional principle of the separation of church and state.



- Oppose discrimination against atheists, agnostics, humanists, seekers, religious and nonreligious persons, and to champion the value of freedom of thought and conscience worldwide.
- Provide a forum for members of Congress to discuss their moral frame-

works, ethical values, and personal religious journeys.

The presence of the CFC reflects the acknowledgment of a broader trend in American society: Nonreligious Americans are the fastest-growing demographic by religious identification, now making up nearly a third of the country. Yet they are underrepresented in legislative chambers. The "Nones" are committed to science, reason and the separation of state and church. The Congressional Freethought Caucus is organized to defend these principles and values, which are under constant threat.

The CFC is currently made up of Co-Chairs Jamie Raskin (Md.) and Jared Huffman (Calif.), and members Yassamin Ansari (Ariz.), Becca Balint (Vt.), Ami Bera (Calif.), Donald S. Beyer (Va.), Suzanne Bonamici (Ore.), Julia Brownley (Calif.),

Greg Casar (Texas), Sean Casten (Ill.), Judy Chu (Calif.), Gil Cisneros (Calif.), Steve Cohen (Tenn.), Herb Conaway (N.J.), Chris Deluzio (Pa.), Lizzie Fletcher (Texas), Laura Friedman (Calif.), Maxwell Frost (Fla.), Robert Garcia (Calif.), Jimmy Gomez (Calif.), Val Hoyle (Ore.), Pramila Jayapal (Wash.), Hank Johnson (Ga.), Zoe Lofgren (Calif.), Sarah McBride (Del.), Kelly Morrison (Minn.), Kevin Mullin (Calif.), Jerrold Nadler (N.Y.), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D.C.), Mark Pocan (Wis.), Delia C. Ramirez (Ill.), Emily Randall (Wash.), Andrea Salinas (Ore.), Janice D. Schakowsky (Ill.) and Rashida Tlaib (Mich.).

Retired members are Dan Kildee (Mich.), Carolyn Maloney (N.Y.), Jerry McNerney (Calif.) and Susan Wild (Pa.).

State/church separation protects Pride

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

By Sara Tetzloff

Pride and religious freedom are not opposites. They're partners.

While most Christian evangelical denominations and the Roman Catholic hierarchy continue their attacks against LGBTQ+ rights, the majority of religious sects now embrace the LGBTQ+ community. In fact, some of the strongest supporters of LGBTQ+ equality in my life are religious.

Not "religious in theory." Religious-religious.

They attend church every week. They pray before meals. They volunteer in their congregations. Their faith shapes how they see the world.

And they have also shown up for me, for my LGBTQ+ friends and for countless others with compassion, kindness and a genuine belief that every person deserves dignity. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, those friendships matter to me.

They remind me that despite what social media and cable news often suggest, most of us have far more in common than we think. We may disagree about theology. We may understand the world through different lenses. But we often share the same core values: compassion, fairness, freedom and human dignity.

That's why I find it frustrating when conversations about LGBTQ+ rights and religious freedom are framed as if they are inherently in conflict.

In reality, both depend on the same thing: state/church separation.

At the Freedom From Religion Foundation, we often say that the separation of state and church protects everyone. Pride Month is one of the clearest examples of why that's true.

Sure, Pride is colorful. It's joyful. It's community. It's glitter, parades and rainbow flags. (As someone who has never met a parade, a disco ball or a sequined jacket she didn't like, I fully support all of the above.)

But beneath the celebration lies a serious reality: Many of the battles over LGBTQ+ equality are ultimately battles over whether government power should impose religious beliefs.

That's why Pride isn't just a celebration of identity. It's also a reminder of why secular government matters.

When government takes sides

In a free society, people are entitled



Photo: Shutterstock

to their beliefs, their faith traditions and their own moral convictions. The problem arises when those beliefs become the basis for government policy.

When lawmakers attempt to restrict rights, censor information, deny healthcare or create exemptions that allow discrimination, they're no longer exercising their own religious freedom. They're using the power of government to impose one particular set of religious beliefs on everyone else.

When that happens, someone's rights inevitably become negotiable. And historically, it is often marginalized communities that pay the price.

Across the country, LGBTQ+ Americans continue to face an unprecedented wave of legislative attacks. As of April 2026, the ACLU was tracking 529 anti-LGBTQ bills in state legislatures, many targeting transgender Americans.

That's exactly what the First Amendment was designed to prevent. **State/church separation protects believers, too**

Many assume that organizations like FFRF outright oppose religion altogether. And while our community is composed of atheists, agnostics and free-thinkers, that assumption is reductive.

What we most oppose is government promotion of and favoritism toward religion.

The same constitutional principles that protect me as a member of the LGBTQ+ community also protect my religious friends.

- They protect a Christian's right to

worship according to their conscience.

- They protect a Jewish family's right to practice their traditions.
- They protect a Muslim student's right to pray.
- They protect a Hindu temple, a Sikh gurdwara and a Buddhist monastery.
- And they protect the right of someone like me to live openly without having someone else's theology written into law.

Growing up, I was often told that LGBTQ+ people and religious people occupied opposite sides of an unbridgeable divide. My life experience has taught me something very different.

Some of the people who have shown me the greatest kindness, support

and acceptance have done so because of their faith, not despite it.

That's one reason I care so deeply about state/church separation.

It creates space for all of us — religious and nonreligious, LGBTQ+ and straight, conservative and progressive — to coexist without one group using government power to impose its worldview on everyone else.

State/church separation isn't anti-religious. It's what makes genuine religious freedom possible.

Why Pride and religious freedom rise together

The relationship between secular government and LGBTQ+ equality isn't just philosophical; it's also practical.

Despite the political rhetoric, Amer-

“Many of the battles over LGBTQ+ equality are ultimately battles over whether government power should impose religious beliefs. That's why Pride isn't just a celebration of identity. It's also a reminder of why secular government matters.”

icans remain broadly supportive of LGBTQ+ equality. According to PRRI's 2025 American Values Atlas, 72 percent of Americans support nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people, including majorities of nearly every major religious tradition.

That's encouraging because it points to something deeper. Human rights don't require theological agreement. They require a shared commitment to treating people with dignity.

Whether we're talking about the freedom to worship, the freedom not to worship, the freedom to marry, the freedom to express ourselves or the freedom to live authentically, the underlying principle is the same:

No one should have the power to force their beliefs on someone else through the machinery of government.

Pride began as a movement for dignity, equality and freedom. At its heart, state/church separation is about those same things.

It's about protecting the freedom to believe.

- The freedom not to believe.
- The freedom to question.
- The freedom to love.
- The freedom to be yourself.

As someone who is pansexual, I've spent much of my life navigating spaces where people made assumptions about who I was, what I believed or where I belonged. That's one reason freedom of conscience matters so much to me. I don't want a government deciding what faith people should follow. I also don't want it deciding which identities deserve respect and protection.

But this isn't just my story.

It's the story of every American who wants to live in a country where people of different beliefs, and no religious belief at all, can coexist as equals.

That's the promise of state/church separation.

And that's one of the reasons Pride Month matters so much.

What you can do

This Pride Month, remember that equality and religious freedom are not competing values.

They rise and fall together.

You can help protect both by:

- Staying informed about legislation that affects LGBTQ+ rights and state/church separation.
- Speaking out when government officials use public office to promote religious doctrine.
- Reporting state-church violations when they occur.
- Supporting organizations that defend constitutional rights and freedom of conscience.

The beauty of a secular democracy is that it doesn't require us to agree on everything.

It only requires that we agree on one thing:

No one gets to use the power of government to impose their beliefs on everyone else.

Pride is often described as a celebration of identity.

I think it's also a celebration of freedom — freedom of conscience, freedom of belief and freedom to live authentically.

Those freedoms belong to all of us.

And protecting them starts with keeping state and church separate.

Happy Pride.

Sara Tetzloff is FFRF's marketing and PR director.




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

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Fugelsang: The separation of church and hate

This is the speech, edited for length and clarity, given by John Fugelsang at FFRF's national convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Oct. 18, 2025. He was introduced by FFRF Marketing and PR Director Sara Tetzloff. To watch the full speech (or any of the speeches from the convention), go to ffrf.us/con25.

Sara Tetzloff: It's such a pleasure for me to introduce tonight's speaker. I first started listening to John Fugelsang back in college on Progressive Radio, and that's long enough ago that it was an actual radio and not an app. Even then, John's voice stood out as funny, fearless and the rare mix of someone who can quote Scripture and punchlines with equal precision.

John Fugelsang has done it all. He's been murdered on "CSI," hosted "America's Funniest Home Videos," interviewed two Beatles on separate continents in the same week, along with everyone from Bruce Springsteen and Yoko Ono to Rita Moreno and Carl Reiner.

John is also a Sexy Liberal, touring alongside comedian and commentator Stephanie Miller and comedian and musician Hal Sparks as part of the Sexy Liberal comedy show. You can hear John weekdays hosting "Tell Me Everything" on Sirius XM Insight, where his sharp wit and empathy make even the most complex political and spiritual conversations feel both hilarious and human. His new book is "Separate Church and Hate: A Sane Person's Guide to Taking Back the Bible from Fundamentalists, Fascists and Flock-Fleecing Frauds."

Please join me in welcoming the brilliant, hilarious and unapologetical free-thinking John Fugelsang.

By John Fugelsang

Thank you so much for coming. It is such a pleasure to be in a room full of so many atheists doing the Lord's work.

I'm just trying to be careful because this is where we are friends, and I'm so sorry it's under these conditions, but America, apparently, is a mob restaurant being burned down for the insurance money.

I am ready to say that the three worst presidents of my lifetime have been Dick Cheney, Vladimir Putin and Elon Musk. Elon Musk makes me ashamed to be a racist billionaire with a ketamine problem. And, also, we should mention JD Vance, because I'm a fan of comedy and imagine a vice president so evil that we're all defending the Catholic bishops. JD Vance is sort of like every side effect of Ambien happening at once in one human form. He's sort of like if you had a fusion of all the horrible, petulant children who disappeared on the Wonka Chocolate Factory tour.

Now, I don't want to be overly vulgar, but JD Vance is not very popular these days. He's so unpopular, I heard the couch made him sleep on the bed. OK, just trying to see what kind of crowd we got here. Thank you. I am not going to call JD Vance a couch fucker. I will not be using language like that. That is not appropriate. He prefers to identify as a sectional sexual. So please, get that right.

And, also, we've learned Kid Rock might run for the Senate in Michigan. Kid Rock, friends, Kid Rock. My generation's Leonard Cohen. And, by the



Photo by Chris Line

John Fugelsang speaks at FFRF's national convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Oct. 18, 2025.

way, I want to make a promise to you tonight. If Kid Rock does run for the Senate, I promise I will run against him. I will . . . after changing my name to Kid Paper.

I also want to announce after the speech I will be in the lobby signing copies of the Donald Trump Bible. I hope you'll stop by.

[Trump impression] "I sign all of my bibles. Jesus never autographed a single bible. Never autographed the single crucifix, either. I've signed hundreds of crucifixes. Let me tell you people about crooked Christ, OK. A crooked Christ says he's Jesus of Nazareth, but he's born in Bethlehem. Which one is it? Where's he from? We don't know. He's a carpenter. Jesus. I hired him to work at my casino in the Sea of Galilee. Didn't pay him. Shoddy work, that Jesus. No pay. It's all right, he's a Jew. They know how to sue folks. What I'm saying is, what I'm saying is this: Jesus. He's 33. He never married. Hangs out with 12 other guys. I'm just saying."

I am so honored to be here. After writing a book for both nonbelievers and believers about how you can take on Christian nationalism with scripture, nonviolence and humor. And it is so much more fun to talk with you guys about the bible than a roomful of conservative Christians, because, unlike right-wing Christians, most atheists have actually read the bible.

I was raised to love and respect people of all faiths and of no faith. I love atheists, I believe in atheists. And when I first moved to Hollywood, I read Annie Laurie Gaylor's book "Woe to the Women," and it blew my mind.

A book for all

I wanted to write a book for believers of all faiths, nonbelievers and agnostics on how to use the bible when debating a right-wing Christian at your home, at your workplace, at your school, in your government, your local school board or your social media feed. Because the loudest, meanest Christians in our society don't know the bible all that well, and they're counting on the rest of us not knowing the bible all that well so they can bring about their agenda. Millions of nice people who were raised

Christian were taught about peace and love and empathy and forgiveness which has now somehow morphed into a mean, white supremacist, tax-free clique that uses Jesus as a prop while legislating against his actual teachings.

Project 2025 is an attempt to control the entire level of freedom in this country based on their shitty anti-Jesus right-wing interpretation of the bible. They don't fight for God. They don't fight for anything Jesus actually says in the book. They don't really care about religious freedom or Satan. Their only agenda is conservative religious power. That is the only religion and we are aligned against this.

It's going to be really important to diffuse their power by elegantly pointing out over the next few years that they don't follow that bible they wave around so bombastically, and doggone it, you'll be surprised how good it feels.

From the very beginnings of this American experiment, alliances between agnostics, humanists, progressive Christians and believers of other faiths have been the strongest counter force to the never-ending fundamentalist project of marrying a religious dogma to personal power. In the abolitionist movement, Quakers and Unitarians worked alongside freethinkers and humanists. In anti-war and feminist movements, we have seen nuns and nonbelievers linking arms against warmongers and misogynists.

It's not about shared theology, but shared conviction. That the freedom of conscience and the dignity of human beings is too important to be sacrificed on the altar of authoritarian, crappy, fake Christianity.

Now, some of you might know my curious background. I come from an abnormally Catholic — an extremely Catholic — background. We used to have open-casket reunions in my family. My mother was a nun — before she married, obviously. My mom grew up in the segregated South, and she entered the convent right out of high school. They put her through nursing school and sent her off to work with lepers in Malawi, Africa.

But before they stationed her in Africa, they briefly stationed her in Brook-

lyn, N.Y. My father had grown up in Brooklyn. He was a Franciscan brother. He wore the brown robes and the robe belt and taught history to Catholic boys and walked around like the lost Jedi of Flatbush. My father, the brother, met my mother, the sister, and even though he had sworn never to know love, fell instantly, madly, passionately, desperately in love with this quiet Southern girl in a nun's habit he knew he could never have and had promised his God he would never want. They were friends for 10 years. Eventually he talked her into leaving the convent and going on a date. They tried to raise us to be progressive, freethinking Catholics — which is why I do standup comedy, because I can never afford the therapy I so deeply require.

So, I grew up admiring Jesus the way any guy admires mom's first husband. I was raised to respect Muslims and Jews and Hindus and atheists. When I was a little kid, my dad pulled me out of bed late one night to watch Jimmy Carter sign the Camp David peace accords between Israel and Egypt. He couldn't believe an American Christian had brought peace between Israel and Egypt, and he wanted his kid there to witness a Muslim and a Jew and a Christian embracing in a real, actual peace deal that wasn't built on hype and has lasted for almost 50 years. To my dad, that was everything that America and Christianity could and should be.

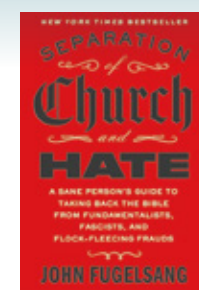
But, if you watched television news in the late 20th century, you were treated to a nonstop parade of blow-dried televangelists and ex-segregationists speaking for and defining the Christian point of view. Guys like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, they didn't talk about helping the poor. They never talked about helping the sick or welcoming the stranger or caring for the least of us. These guys told us who we should be hating, who we should be fearing.

The magic word

In the late '70s, the fundamentalists discovered a magic word that would transform Christianity and U.S. politics for two generations. A word that would displace and replace the actual teachings of Jesus that were a little too woke for our Republican friends: Abortion.

When Roe v. Wade was decided by the Supreme Court, y'all might remember the most controversial thing about it was how not controversial it was. That was the thing the Catholics cared about. But the Southern Baptist Con-

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vention approved it. Jerry Falwell never mentioned abortion until five years after Roe v. Wade was decided. When the Christian Coalition and the Moral Majority decided to make abortion their central issue, everything changed.

Anti-abortionism was like a magical Hogwarts spell, and segregation and taxes had made Falwell and these guys rich. But abortion and gay-bashing made them household names and powerful. The pro-life branding unified right-wing evangelicals and Catholics. It created huge political alliances, and it forever reframed American Christianity in 45 years since then. Two generations have been systemically groomed to replace everything Jesus ever talked about by talking about abortion, which Jesus never talked about.

I think Passover showed us how much God cares about innocent children. Never. Because it never actually bans abortion. That's why abortions are legal and free in Israel right now. Jesus was against the death penalty more than once, never mentioned abortion. They do not fight for Jesus. They do not follow this religion they claim to follow and that they use to mess up our country.

So, it was atheists and Christians together. It was secular organizations — ACLU, Americans United, FFRF — banding with progressive clergy and Jewish groups who supported church/state separation to protect a pluralistic society and prevent one shitty theological worldview from dominating our entire country.

Authoritarian Christianity has only grown bolder and more dangerous. Open Christian nationalist rhetoric is all over our politics. And 40 years after they used abortion to get the Christians to throw out Jesus, Donald Trump got the evangelical right on his side, not by promising to do a single thing Jesus said, but by promising them power. Jesus' entire movement by humility, servant leadership. The last shall be first.

Power is their religion

But not our right wing. Their religion is power. That's all they care about. They don't follow the book. Trump said, "You're under siege." He played up the persecution narrative, because the only way to follow both Donald Trump and Jesus is if you've never read either of their books. They are fighting for a white-dominated Christian nationalist society where their narrow, right-wing version of this religion is forced into every level of our culture.

And, in this second term, we've seen more fascism than I bet most of you have seen in this country in your lives. Ten Commandments being required in classrooms. One religion is officially being prioritized over a government than another. We got government officials trying to get Americans fired for quoting Charlie Kirk's racist statements directly. And, while they do this, they're blowing up people in boats with no evidence, and they're cutting service for the poorest of the poor, and they're cutting taxes and regulations for the wealthy. And ICE cowards are chasing brown kids around church picnics, and the media is still going to give them the cover of saying they're Christian? The media is going to still give them that camouflage? The media's never going to say, where does Jesus drive the gay wedding cakes out of the temple?

It's not that we're against Christians. They're lying that they follow Jesus. The media can't call them out on it. Democrats are too afraid. A country



Photo by Chris Line

John Fugelsang talks with Mekah'E LeClair, center, one of FFRF's essay competition winners, and her mother during his book-signing event following his speech.

founded by deists who didn't want a king, and a religion inspired by a rabbi who told people to love their enemies. And it's all been hijacked by these power-hungry grifters who disdain the Bill of Rights as much as they disdain the Gospels.

If they wanted the abortion rate to go down, they'd fight for birth control access. They'd fight for sex ed in schools. They need the fights. They need the counter. If they wanted border crossings to stop, they'd announce that they'd lock up everyone who hires an undocumented worker for one year in a federal pen. Boom. It'll stop in a week.

They don't want it to stop. And whether you're a believer, an agnostic or an atheist, you're going to have to deal with these people in your life. But here's the funny thing: If you're dealing with a Christian nationalist and arguing with them on any of the issues that divide us, even if you're atheist, the Jesus of the bible is probably on your side. Whether he's real or not.

This Jesus they claim to follow so devotedly was a peaceful, radical, nonviolent revolutionary who hung around with lepers, hookers and crooks. He never spoke English. He was never an American citizen. He was anti-wealth, completely anti-death penalty, anti-public prayer. Yes, he was. Never once called poor people lazy. Never fought for tax cuts for the wealthiest Nazarenes. Never said torture is OK sometimes. Never asked a leper for a co-pay. And he was a long-haired, brown-skinned, homeless, community organizing, anti-slut-shaming, unarmed Palestinian, liberal Jew.

But that's only if you believe what's actually in the bible, and conservative power was what he stood up to, not what he aligned himself with. Consistently, our right-wing friends are in the trap of aligning themselves with Caesar, instead of following this Jesus prop they claim to follow. Jesus stood up time and time again against the conservative bosses in his religion, drunk on their own eminence, the wealthy, who worship their own stature and possessions while denying the suffering of the poor.

Jesus wasn't about the power. In John 6:15, he miraculously feeds 5,000 people, and the crowd's so impressed they try to seize him and make him their king by force. But Jesus withdrew

again to a mountain by himself to avoid their attempt, because he was not about Earthly power. In other words, Jesus was the first guy to say, "No kings."

You guys know it better than the believers. We live in a time when politicians try to make the abortion rate go down by making it harder for women to get birth control. Where they get the Christians to vote against everything Christ talked about by talking about abortion and gay people, which Christ didn't talk about.

And where evangelicals believe a talking snake is literal fact, but love your enemies is just Jesus being all metaphorical. Help the poor? No. Care for

the sick? No. An eye for an eye? No. Render your taxes? No, sucker. Be kind to the incarcerated? Hell, no. Welcome the stranger? Bitch, please. Remember, mixing extreme conservative religion with authoritarian power is exactly what killed Jesus.

Faith to politics

These people have taken a faith based on loving the poor and visiting prisoners and washing feet, and turned it into a political movement based on hating the poor, building walls in prisons and kissing Trump's feet. Nonbelievers are going to have to deal with these people. Maybe you already do. Maybe they're the family you still love, and you may already know that calling them superstitious idiots doesn't help.

But I find if we engage folks on what's actually in the scripture, something else can happen. They won't agree with you, but they may appreciate you at least took the time to discuss it on their terms.

I'll always believe we'll get further with these people showing in their book where Jesus wasn't an immigrant-hating homophobe, then just calling them immigrant-hating homophobes. But it can be fun.

The primary source of global conflict and oppression of women and suppression of science and persecution of gay folks is not religion. It's the extreme fundamentalist wings of all the world's religions —the extreme conservative Jews, extreme conservative Muslims, extreme conservative Christians. They are the ones responsible for so much of the strife right now. Check out the news sometime. It ain't the liberal and moderate believers causing all this shit. And Christian fundamentalism is this

movement within Christianity that believes the bible is literal, inerrant, they never interpret any biblical text as parable or metaphor. It's all 100 percent literal. And, gosh darn it, they think the rest of us should believe that, too. And they're going to force that on us. I was raised to believe that the opposite of faith isn't doubt. The opposite of faith is certainty. And fundamentalists are full of absolute certainty.

The overwhelming majority of progressive and moderate Christians, Jews and Muslims are getting along just fine right now all around the Earth, making families, building businesses, having communities and not getting on TV because nice people getting along is boring. Within all three religions, it's the far-right fundamentalists who ruin it and it's always the same things. These same traits unite all right-wing Jews, right-wing Muslims: Women are second class citizens. The more conservative the religion is, the more God needs 51 percent of us being just not good enough. The sex hang-ups, women enjoying sex, gay men enjoying sex, anything not for procreation.

The more fundamentalist a religion is, the more they believe violence is OK, if my side does it. The more they focus on punishment instead of healing. It's always this persecution narrative. "We're so put down, oh, we're so under siege. So we're allowed to be as mean as we want to be." They justify all manner of cruelty because of things that happened long, long ago.

Then you've got the theocrats, the televangelicals, the CHINOS (Christians In Name Only), and then the Trump MAGA Christians who I call "grab 'em by the pussyangelicals." They're all a form of Christian nationalism and Christian fundamentalism.

Historically, American Christians of both major political parties have used Christianity to justify the slaughter of indigenous people, the enslavement of African people, the labor exploitation of Asian people, turning a blind eye to the suffering of European Jewish people, indiscriminate detention, torture and prejudice of Muslim people, and, of course, pushing perpetual second-class citizenship on female people.

Fighting back

But, there's another side to this, because for nearly every great injustice that has been perpetrated by authoritarian Christianity, there have been liberal and moderate Christians and their allies who have been non-Christians, atheists, Jews, etc., who have fought back. Conscientious atheists and progressive Christians are going to have to team up again for the next three years to save us all from the people who have weaponized both the bible and the flag.

Liberal Christians and their secular allies are still the ones with the power to stand up to right-wing Christianity and call them out on their own terms. Of course, nonbelievers don't need to let anyone sway their views, don't need to be converted or saved. But the fascists want us divided and the most awesome secularist progressives can lose potentially powerful religious allies if we allow ourselves to be divided by ideology.

Not getting along only strengthens the right-wing status quo and makes the left a much smaller tent. We don't need to marginalize our own movements just because we have different beliefs. In the early 21st century, we've

See Fugelsang on page 12

Fugelsang

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already seen it. Progressive clergy like Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, aligning with everyone from the Brennan Center, Southern Poverty Law Center, Americans United, FFRF, Defending Reproductive Rights, LGBTQ equality, human rights and science and science-based policy. Throughout this entire era of Combover Caligula. When the fundamentalist leaders throw out Jesus' teachings and grovel to Caesar, the alliance between progressive Christians and atheists is urgently needed.

We've seen clergy marching with secularists at women's marches and immigrant rights rallies, humanist chaplains standing beside ministers at protests against family separation. The Christian nationalists get to hate two birds with one stone with this. They're terrified of progressive Christians, and atheist bashing is always solid ratings bait for the Fox News audience.

Of course, people always fight over language and strategy, but the long-term goals are the same. If a society



Photo by Chris Line

John Fugelsang is the author of "Separate Church and Hate: A Sane Person's Guide to Taking Back the Bible from Fundamentalists, Fascists and Flock-Fleecing Frauds."

is going to confront this religious authoritarianism, the most effective opposition is plural: churches and synagogues and mosques and temples and secular civic actors together. Authoritarian Christianity is getting louder. It's getting angrier, it's getting dumber, and it's getting meaner.

I call these people the Illiterati. But in Trump's first term, what do we

see? When the fundamentalists all just licked his boots, clergy marched with secularists at women's marches and gun safety rallies and Black Lives Matter marches. We see progressive clergy aligning with secular voices defending reproductive rights, and the strength of these alliances comes from knowing that authoritarian religion threatens both nonbelievers and believers who actually follow Jesus.

The real Christians whose faith is about justice and love and humility, not about total right-wing domination of the school board. Atheist and progressive Christians are always going to differ on ultimate questions, but they share a commitment to pluralism and compassion that fundamentalism keeps trying to erase. We need the Christians who actually follow Christ, and we need the atheists who actually follow ethics.

The pastor marching with the scientist, the queer kids with the cool priest, the nun fist-bumping a rationalist after whatever protest, both agreeing on the radical idea that maybe, just maybe, human beings deserve dignity regardless of their background and beliefs. That's the dream. That's the resistance I was raised to believe in. That's the resistance I want to be a part of.

And that's America at its best. The Founders' reason meeting the prophet's compassion. So yeah, atheists and believers are going to have to be awkward roommates for the next few years. But there's such good news because after this long screed of incidents when they work together, they tend to win because love without reason is easily manipulated.

But, put them together, it can be unstoppable.

I want to thank everyone at Freedom From Religion Foundation for inviting me here. I was torn: a part of me wanted to come out and do straight stand-up, but I'm so inspired by the activism and by the love and by the commitment and, before my father died, he said to me his religious belief. He said, there's two things God can't do.

He can't stop loving you, and he can't stop forgiving you. That's all the religious belief I really have. I just go by what's in the book. And the teachings of Jesus align very nicely with progressive values that could save a church, that could save a democracy, that could save capitalism and this economy. If we stop the crazy people from burning it all down. Thank you.

Being secular

Continued from page 11

ample, 60 percent of Americans now say they would be willing to vote for an atheist for president — another all-time high. Around 75 percent of Americans say that they personally know someone who is an atheist, and around three quarters agree "it is possible to be moral and have good values without believing in God" — both all-time highs.

Anecdotally, more famous people are willing to come out as openly secular these days, including football players Josh Rosen and Arian Foster, Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, Sen. John Fetterman, Rep. Jamie Raskin, author Ta-Nehisi Coates, billionaires Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos, and actors such as Brad Pitt and Jodie Foster. And on Capitol Hill, more and more members of Congress are willing to openly align themselves with the less than a decade-old Congressional Freethought Caucus.

Given all that, one could justifiably assume this to be a golden moment for secular Americans. Unfortunately, thanks to the Trump regime, such is not the case. The most prominent sore spots: unprecedented governmental support for Christian nationalism coupled with multipronged attacks on the first clause of the first sentence of the First Amendment, which declares that Congress shall not establish religion. This visionary secular political ideal, which Thomas Jefferson explained was meant to create a wall of separation between church and state, is being bulldozed by Trump-appointed judges, Trump-aligned lawyers, and Trump-loving political and legal activists. "We want to bring God back into our beautiful USA like never before," Trump declared last September at the funeral of Charlie Kirk. And it wasn't an empty threat.

Consider the following.

Trump's numerous appointed judges to the Supreme Court have ruled with an activist's disdain for the first clause of the First Amendment and consistently moved, in numerous cases, to weaken political secularism by expanding religious privileges. The court's wanton abandonment of the constitutional "Lemon test"

is perhaps the most obvious case in point; state and federal employees and publicly funded institutions can now proselytize with impunity, explicitly favor Christianity over other religions, and engage in activities that are prejudicial against or systematically disadvantage the nonreligious. Additionally, Trump's administration has routed the Johnson Amendment, making it permissible for the leaders of religious houses of worship to publicly endorse political candidates with impunity; in other words, religious organizations that advocate politically will not have their tax-exempt status threatened or revoked, but secular organizations that do so may and — if deemed hostile to the Trump regime — will. As, for example, happened to the secular charity organization Nonbelief Relief.

Beyond his anti-secular Supreme Court appointees, Trump has packed lower courts throughout the nation with Christian judges relatively hostile to the Establishment Clause and far more likely to support Christian plaintiffs in free exercise cases than Muslims or secular people. Trump has also appointed an unprecedentedly high number of Christian nationalists and prosperity gospelists as power-wielding players throughout his administration — people like Pete Hegseth, Kristi Noem (now out of a job), Paula White, Jennifer Korn, Jackson Lane, William Wolfe and Russell Vought, who are all hostile to the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment or have expressed, or been aligned with, various versions of Christian dominance or supremacy.

Finally, Trump has established a White House Faith Office, a Religious Liberty Commission, and an "Anti-Christian Bias" taskforce. Most likely, these three organizations will serve to only strengthen the unconstitutional bond between government and religion, promote Christianity, and privilege Christian people and Christian beliefs, while simultaneously denigrating or seeking to erase secular people, values and ideals. "We will always be a Christian nation," Vice President Vance

declared at AmericaFest 2025, banishing any doubts about this government's antiseccular agenda.

Of course, the apparent paradox here — fewer Americans affiliating with Christianity, while Christianity is simultaneously granted unprecedented political privilege — is part of the explanation for what is going on. It works like this: As more and more people walk away from Christianity and religion in general, faith-based hegemonic power will weaken and its cultural and political influence will wither. Realizing this, Christianity's most ardent supporters, seeing both their numbers and influence on the decline, have been galvanized to do whatever they can to ensure their own survival, even if it means violating the Constitution.

The other explanation is realpolitik. Trump's leadership role in this Christian-privileging pushback against secularism is, undoubtedly, strictly tactical. He's not a faithful, practicing Christian, seeking to please his Lord. Rather, he simply takes support from wherever he can get it, and in recent years, his bedrock of support has been white Christians. They do not represent "true" Christianity, and their numbers may be fewer than more moderate Christians, yet they wield outsized political might, which Trump harnesses for his own ends.

Katherine Stewart, author of "The Power Worshippers" and "Money, Lies, and

God," has been studying Christian nationalists for years. As she explains: "Trump and his people are simply interested in tools of power. Christian nationalism is a tool of power because it helps to consolidate this base of voters. It is a way of mobilizing their support and signaling to them that he is on their side, and the surest way to signal that is to antagonize 'liberals' and 'secularists' as his base sees it."

Will Trump's co-opted Christian nationalists succeed in destroying secularism and establishing Christian hegemony throughout the land? No. The demographic facts are just too stubborn to overcome. Both ongoing secularization and increased religious diversity will render this problematic moment of Christian political might limited and, ultimately, surmountable.

Too many Americans are walking away from religion and raising their kids without religion, and the number of Americans who affiliate with religions other than Christianity is also increasing. Both of these trends will render a politically fabricated "Christian America" unfeasible in the long run, no matter how hard those in Trump's regime try to make it so.

Phil Zuckerman is a professor of sociology and secular studies at Pitzer College.

“As more and more people walk away from Christianity and religion in general, faith-based hegemonic power will weaken and its cultural and political influence will wither.”

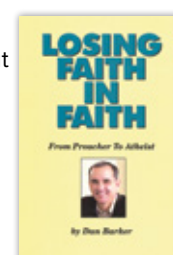
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Great American Freethought Songbook



On May 11, FFRF Co-President Dan Barker and Darcie Johnston celebrated the music, life and freethinking views of Irving Berlin, one of the most influential composers of the genre.



FFRF members enjoy the camaraderie while waiting for the show to begin.

Photos by Chris Line



FFRF Board Member Steve Salemson, standing, talks with Eric Lawrence, right, and FFRF Board Member Todd Peissig prior to the performance.



“The Great American Freethought Songbook with Dan & Darcie,” was held in the Charlie Brooks Auditorium in Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis., and streamed live.

OVERHEARD

We’re a public school. We shouldn’t be a school — or a state, even — that is telling people what they should believe in.

Lily Alderson, a Fayetteville, Ark., high school student, after Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders endorsed the state partnering with Turning Point USA to have its conservative clubs in all public high schools.

Religion News Service, 4-17-26

When push comes to shove, there’s not much Christianity in Christian nationalism.

David French, in his column, “There is much more to pope vs. president than meets the eye.”

New York Times, 4-24-26

The 5th Circuit has opened the door to a degree of government endorsement of religion that goes well beyond anything the country has experienced since the last days of state religious establishments in the early 19th century. That ought to give all of us pause.

Mark Silk, in his column, “The radical decision letting the Ten Commandments be posted in Texas classrooms.”

Religion News Service, 4-24-26

I have no problem attacking wolves in sheep’s clothing. I have no problem

attacking a man who wrote that American slavery was mutually harmonious between the slave master and the slave. That’s you. I have no problem attacking a man who proudly says he wants to do away with the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. I have no problem attacking a man like yourself who sits here incoherently supporting an incoherent, unwinnable, illegal war in Iran. I have no problem attacking you, a man who is the religious leader of Pete Hegseth, a man who’s a cosplay crusader who’s leading some type of crusade.

Writer Wajahat Ali, confronting extremist pastor (and pastor of Pete Hegseth) on a recent “Piers Morgan Uncensored” episode. Ali was named FFRF Action Fund’s “Secularist of the Week” on April 30 for his comments.

YouTube, 4-27-26

Whether it is a head of state depicting himself as a religious figure, or a Cabinet secretary illegally imposing her beliefs on others, or administration leaders recklessly dismantling our social contract to support those in need, the actions coming out of this administration are an affront to all of us.

Abby J. Leibman, in her column, “When Trump plays favorites with faith, we all pay the price.”

Religion News Service, 5-4-26

Democracy is always a controversial idea. Monarchy is obviously a betrayal of that idea. Aristocracy is a radical betrayal of that idea. Theocracy is just somebody dressing up their pretensions to power and dictatorship in religious garb.

Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., while speaking during the No Kings rally.

Religion News Service, 5-13-26



Mia Farrow

I don’t want to live in a Christian country. I want to live in a country where I can choose to be Christian, or Jewish, or Hindu, or Buddhist or atheist.

Actress Mia Farrow.
BlueSky, 5-3-26

Political evangelicalism is a system that is deeply influenced by depraved men, and it has exactly the features that depraved men will demand of an institution they control.

David French, in his column about former Southern Baptist Convention leader and alleged child sexual abuser Paul Pressler.

New York Times, 5-15-26

Trump is trying to rededicate Amer-

ica as a ‘Christian nation.’ How about we rededicate ourselves back to reality?

Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., in a rebuttal to the Christian nationalist prayer rally that took place on the National Mall on May 17. Huffman was named FFRF Action Fund’s “Secularist of the Week” on May 21.

X, 5-17-26

If he were alive today, [James] Madison and his Baptist allies would say that the best way to help Christianity and the nation would be to reject Christian nationalism — and the best way to promote religion would be to have the government leave it alone.

Author Steven Waldman, in his column “Christian nationalists need to look again at their religious DNA.”

Religion News Service, 5-18-26

Replacing Americans’ civic identity with Christian nationalism destroys that vitally important understanding of the role of citizens in a democracy. Instead, it demands that Americans do as they are told, turning them into subjects.

Heather Cox Richardson, in her column the day after the Rededicate 250: A National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise & Thanksgiving event in Washington, D.C.

Facebook, 5-18-26

Christian nation

Continued from page 1

or of America's many other religious traditions. The lineup suggested that behind the inclusive rhetoric of the event's promotional materials lies a particular vision of American identity — a staging of Christian nationalism.

A question can be raised about a government-sponsored event “solemnly rededicating our country as One Nation under God”: Was the nation ever so dedicated? Throughout our history, there have been American Christians who believed the United States failed at that task. There were Church of England Loyalists who regarded the Patriot endeavor as a rebellion not only against the king but against the divinely instituted political order, and those who were supportive of the revolution but worried the new nation was insufficiently attentive to matters of religion.

Unlike the Declaration of Independence — which appealed to “the Law of Nature and Nature's God,” spoke of the rights-endowing “Creator” and “Supreme Judge of the world” — or the Articles of Confederation, which spoke of “the Great Governor of the World,” the proposed federal Constitution that came out of Philadelphia in 1787 contained no acknowledgment of the deity whatsoever. Further, Article VI, Section 3 prohibited a religious test for federal office.

Not everyone was pleased. As the states debated ratification, some opponents disparaged the document's “indifference to religion.” Others warned that the prohibition of a religious test would open the door to public office to infidels like Catholics, Quakers, Jews, deists, “Muhammadans” and pagans. Other anti-Federalists worried that the document did not do enough to protect citizens' religious liberties and rights of conscience, concerns that were addressed by the religion clauses of the First Amendment.

In 1789, a group of Presbyterian ministers wrote to President George Washington to express their disappointment that “some explicit acknowledgement of the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent” had not been inserted into the Constitution. The president brushed off their complaint. A year later, he dispatched a more well-known letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island: “The Citizens of the United States of America,” he wrote, “have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship.”

Nevertheless, there were ministers who continued to press for political attention to be paid to religion. The Rev. John Mitchell Mason, for example, lamented in a 1793 sermon the people's lack of gratitude to the deity who had delivered them from their adversaries and blessed them with prosperity, and warned of the baleful consequences for the young republic. A few years later, during the heated election season of 1800, he worried that the religiously defective Constitution would make it possible for the “infidel Mr. Jefferson” to be elected president. Jefferson emerged victorious, and most American denominations found themselves able to grow in an environment memorably described by Jefferson as “a wall of separation between Church & State.”

Despite the widespread acceptance of this arrangement, the pressure to formally Christianize the Constitution



Image courtesy of Wikimedia/Creative Commons

“Scene at the Signing of the Constitution of the United States” by Howard Chandler Christy, 1940.

never disappeared. It surged most powerfully during the Civil War, when both Northern and Southern ministers seized on the national covenant's godlessness as the root cause of the national catastrophe. The 1861 Confederate Constitution invoked “the favor and guidance of Almighty God” in its preamble. By 1863, a movement in the North had coalesced to dedicate the Union to God.

The National Association to Secure the Religious Amendment of the Constitution of the United States (later the National Reform Association) was spearheaded by the Reformed Presbyterians, descendants of the radical Scottish Protestants who had dissented from the British political settlements of the previous century. Members of the sect practiced “the testimony of political dissent” — refusing to vote, accept any public office or serve on juries until a properly Christian government was established.

For decades, the members of this small denomination prayed for the reformation of the American government but demurred from actively working to alter the Constitution, as doing so would compromise their testimony of political dissent. By the Civil War, however, they had begun to reconsider their mode of engagement and worked with other Protestant denominations to advocate for a constitutional amendment that would explicitly acknowledge God as the source of all political authority as an act of repentance for national sin. In 1864, a delegation representing the association had an audience with President Abraham Lincoln, who greeted them warmly but did nothing to advance their petition. Nor did Congress take up the proposal.

But the movement persisted. Proponents saw another opportunity in the 1870s, as widespread social changes — mass immigration, an increasingly assertive Catholic population, Mormon polygamy, the growing prestige of Darwinism and “free thought” — disrupted long-standing Protestant dominance over the country. A broad interdenom-

inational Protestant movement promoted a Christian amendment as a matter of national defense. It would serve, its advocates argued, as a legal basis to preserve and defend America's Protestant culture and heritage — instantiated in such longstanding practices as school prayer and bible readings, and also Sabbath and blasphemy laws — from the forces of “political atheism.” It did not go unnoticed by its opponents that such a measure would have had repressive consequences, effectively annulling the prohibition of a religious test and curtailing the First Amendment's protection of religious minorities.

The House Judiciary Committee took up the amendment question in 1874 but was not convinced by the association's argument. Issuing a report that it would be “inexpedient to put anything into the Constitution or frame of government which might be construed to be a reference to any religious creed or doctrine,” the committee requested that it be discharged from any further consideration of the matter.

When Supreme Court Justice David J. Brewer declared America a “Christian nation” in *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States* in 1892, the association launched another petition drive to make its case. Then, too, the measure died in committee.

The Cold War provided yet another opening. In 1954, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments convened to discuss a proposal for a Christian amendment. The only senator in attendance was chairman William Langer of North Dakota. The witnesses who came to testify in support of the measure argued it was all the more urgent in light of the nation's global leadership in the struggle against communism. The sponsors maintained that the proposed amendment would neither infringe on religious freedom nor discriminate against religious minorities, but this position was not universally held. Also in attendance to support the amendment were a pair of women representing the Christian Patriot Rally,

who testified that the amendment would protect the nation from a Jewish plot to undermine Christianity in America's churches and schools. That effort, like all the earlier attempts, went nowhere.

Such hopes have never completely disappeared, as the latter-day remnants of the National Reform Association, sometimes joined by other voices, continued to advocate for a measure that would bring America to God. In 1989, Gary North, a prominent leader in the Christian Reconstruction movement, published “Political Polytheism,” a massive tome that argued the Constitution was a Masonic conspiracy and proposed rewriting the preamble to make the United States an explicitly Christian regime.

More recently, Doug Wilson, an influential Calvinist minister out of Moscow, Idaho, and leader in the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (which counts Pete Hegseth as one of its members), has proposed incorporating the Apostles' Creed into the document and restricting the holding of national office to professed “orthodox” Christians.

For such men, dedicating the nation to God would require an action more significant and lasting than a prayer rally.

Today, we are a much more diverse nation than we were 250 years ago. Some may look at this with regret and try to obscure this reality with performances of religious dominance, such as those sponsored by Freedom 250 and endorsed by the White House.

The second Trump administration has taken a visibly aggressive posture promoting conservative Christianity. Over the past months, government departments and agencies have hosted prayer meetings for employees and posted bible verses and theological messages to the public on social media, and the chairman of the Religious Liberty Commission announced that “there is no such thing as ‘separation of church and state’ in the Constitution.”

While it is fitting and proper for individuals and congregations to rededicate themselves to their God in prayer, it is not the role of government to unite America in faith. Instead, in this 250th year of our independence, we should rededicate our nation to the tradition of religious liberty as articulated by James Madison, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington.

Jerome Copulsky is a research fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs at Georgetown University and the author of “American Heretics: Religious Adversaries of Liberal Order.”

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The final blow to the Voting Rights Act

By Charlotte Gude

The U.S. Supreme Court has tragically sounded the death knell for the Voting Rights Act.

The court, in an opinion by Justice Samuel Alito, purported to “update” the law on Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act; these so-called “updates” actually render the statute essentially unusable for any challenge to unfair redistricting. Voting rights are critical to the survival of our secular democracy. Anyone fighting for constitutional rights must pay attention and be ready to fight back against the fallout of this ruling.

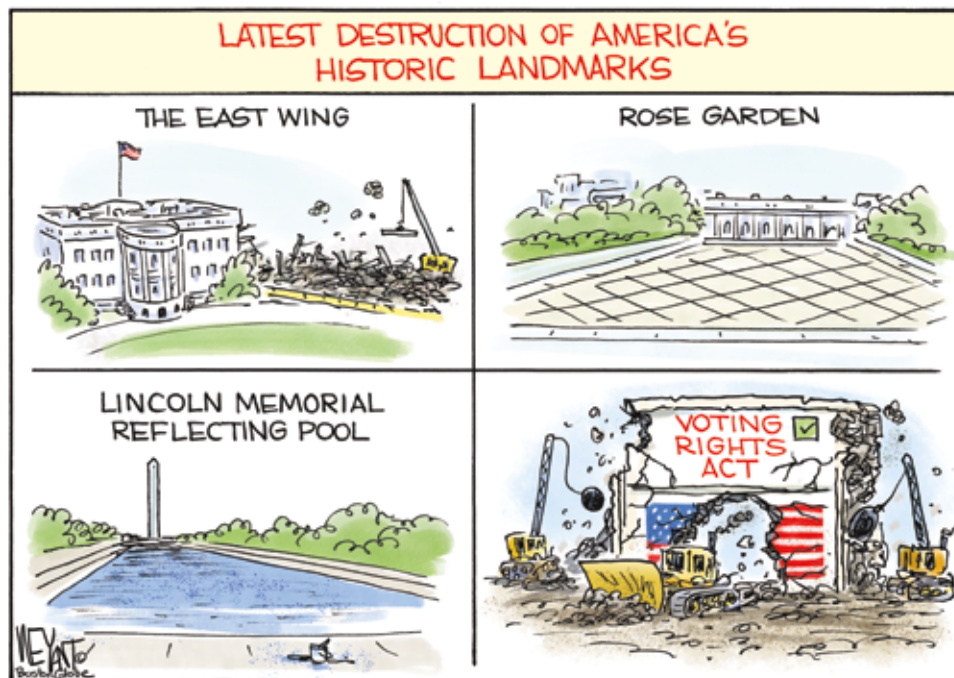


Photo by Chris Line
Charlotte Gude

After the Civil War, the United States added the 15th Amendment to our Constitution, which says, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” It also included a clause granting Congress the power to enforce it through legislation. Subsequent to the ratification of the 15th Amendment, many states, especially in the South, used poll taxes, literacy tests, property qualifications and several other facially race-neutral strategies to prevent African Americans from being able to vote. Congress tried a few different tactics to enforce the Amendment, but nothing worked — until the Voting Rights Act.

Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act allows people to sue to undo any rule imposed “in a manner which results in a denial or abridgment of” the right to vote. In the decade after its passage in 1965, the difference between white and black voters’ registration rates dropped from 30 percent to 8 percent.

The basis for the case that brought Section 2 back to the Supreme Court this time was about redistricting in Louisiana after the 2020 census. The state had first adopted a map in 2022 that had only one majority-Black congressional district despite Black Louisianians comprising almost one-third of the state’s population. Black voters sued, alleging the maps violated Section 2. The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed and told Louisiana it must either



draw a new map by January 2024 or the court might step in to draw new maps for the state. Louisiana complied and drew a new map that had a second majority-Black district. However, a group of “non-African American” voters later challenged the map, arguing that it violated equal protection because it used race to delineate the congressional districts. That second case became *Louisiana v. Callais* and was used as the vessel to hollow out Section 2.

Alito, writing for the majority, begins by saying that Section 2 protects only the opportunity of minority voters that results from a state’s combination of permissible criteria for redistricting. Therefore, he says, Section 2 “imposes liability only when the evidence supports a strong inference that the state intentionally drew its districts to afford minority voters less opportunity because of their race.” According to Alito, this interpretation only requires an “update” to the framework of *Thornburg v. Gingles* — the 1986 case that previously set the standard for this kind of redistricting vote-dilution case.

The first *Gingles* requirement was for plaintiffs to prove the community of minority voters at issue are “sufficiently numerous and compact” that a reasonable district containing them can be made. The *Callais* opinion adds two further conditions for plaintiffs to satisfy. First, plaintiffs may not use race to create example redistricting maps that have majority-minority districts. Second, this example map must also meet all the state’s purported districting objectives, including traditional criteria and political goals.

For the second and third requirements of *Gingles*, which required plaintiffs to show that the minority and majority voted in a politically cohesive way, plaintiffs must now show that this politically cohesive voting cannot be ex-

plained by partisan affiliation.

Finally, *Gingles* then required a “totality of the circumstances” inquiry, meaning the courts looked at how the challenged electoral rule operated in the context of “past and present racial realities.” This included looking at the state’s history of voting discrimination, the state’s track record of electing minority citizens to office, and the effects of past discrimination that might negatively impact minority citizens’ ability to participate in the political process. To “update” this, the court majority in *Callais* says that this “totality of the circumstances” test must focus on present-day intentional racial discrimination regarding voting. Ongoing effects of societal discrimination and past discrimination are entitled to much less weight in this inquiry. Here, as he sums up this change, Alito writes, “And if, as a result of this progress, it is hard to find pertinent evidence relating to intentional present-day voting discrimination, that is cause for celebration.”

Justice Elena Kagan wrote a blistering dissent (one that even omitted the traditional “respectfully” when writing the actual words “I dissent”). Kagan points to the reality that race and partisan preference are correlated, with Black citizens more likely to vote for Democrats, to illustrate how difficult this ruling makes claims under Section 2. “At least where such common race-based voting patterns hold,” says Kagan, “states now have an automatic political-gerrymandering defense to vote-dilution claims.” Kagan also emphasizes repeatedly in her dissent that Congress amended Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act in 1982 in response to a Supreme Court case that interpreted the statute’s original wording to require intentional discrimination. Kagan notes that Congress rewrote the statute to make clear that Section 2 was about discriminatory effects. The majority’s decision in *Cal-*

lais returns to the interpretation Congress expressly rejected.

The impacts of this decision are already visible. The Florida Legislature rammed through partisan-gerrymandered and racially diluted redistricting maps on the same day the *Callais* decision was announced despite anti-gerrymandering standards in Florida, at least in part because some state legislators believed the *Callais* decision bolstered the new maps’ legal status. Republicans in Tennessee and Georgia also immediately began discussing the possibility of redistricting before the midterm elections this fall.

Even more directly, Louisiana has announced it will postpone its primaries so redistricting can occur despite mail ballots already being sent out and early voting that was scheduled to start on Sunday, May 2. The redistricting in Louisiana, Tennessee and Georgia could give Republicans nine more seats in the House of Representatives, adding to the GOP’s total potentially 18 new seats when these nine are added to the nine that other states have already redistricted.

Reports from Black Voters Matter before the *Callais* decision said that if Section 2 fell, Republican legislatures could eliminate about 191 state legislative seats currently held by Democrats and secure 19 safe congressional seats for Republicans that would be “directly tied” to the loss of Section 2.

This decision deals a devastating blow to civil rights protections by allowing, even encouraging, states to use partisan gerrymandering as a way to deny racial minorities a say in their representation. However, the fight is not over.

Communities should make their voices heard during redistricting to ensure fair maps. States can enact state Voting Rights Acts that protect the right at the state level. Congress can remedy the Supreme Court’s gutting of this essential legislation by passing the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act. Everyone should be prepared to vote in upcoming elections for candidates who pledge to uphold the protections of the Voting Rights Act.

Secular democracy depends on everyone being able to exercise their right to vote. All those fighting for constitutional rights must fight back against the fallout of this ruling.

Charlotte Gude is the Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow. She graduated from the University of Iowa in 2020 with a B.S. in Political Science, a B.A. in Social Justice, and a minor in American Sign Language. She then worked as a legal assistant for a small law firm before transitioning on to the University of Wisconsin Law School where she received her Juris Doctor in 2025.

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When promises are made, get specifics

By Donald Ardell

On July 16, 2014, I responded to a donation request from the Alumni Association addressed to “The Loyal Sons and Daughters Society of West Philadelphia Catholic High School.”

I had no contact with the school or its Alumni Association for 70 years since graduation in 1956. I was surprised to discover I was considered a “loyal son” of West Catholic. Besides the lack of contact, I’ve been not so much Catholic as a cross between Pastafarian and Unitarian while being pretty much aligned spiritually with the Seven Fundamental Tenets of the Satanic Temple.



Donald Ardell

During the entirety of my 12 years of elementary and high school indoctrination by the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and the Christian Brothers, respectively, no information was provided about other systems of belief. Nothing about Judaism, Islam or Protestantism. Lacking information about alternative religions or, God forbid, no religion at all, being Catholic was imposed, not chosen. It was never a rational decision.

I think my religious education was somewhat imbalanced. Even when in high school, I was suspicious, occasionally even subtly critical of a dogma here or there, and many school policies (e.g., total separation of boys and girls), though such reservations were not shared with my teachers. When very young, the nuns could be quite scary.

For these and other reasons, when the alumni group addressed me as a “loyal son,” I had reservations. So, I asked for more information. I did not get a response, but I waited patiently, checking my mailbox daily for the past 12 years while holding off on sending money. I decided to write once again, requesting the same information in order to resolve a still open dilemma, to donate or not donate.

The following is my original letter, only slightly updated.

West Philadelphia Catholic High School in the mid-1950s

As regards your request to “The Loyal Sons and Daughters of West Catholic,” before deciding about a donation, I have questions concerning the benefits promised in return for a contribution.

The first question is: Do I qualify? Given the circumstances noted below, I feel conscience-bound to ask if I meet the “loyal son” test.

I understand the definition of loyalty to mean “unswerving allegiance to a cause, ideal, custom, institution or product.” On that basis, it seems to me I might be wildly ineligible to donate.

Prior to graduation, and for well over half a century since graduation, I have not given anything to West Catholic or the Alumni Association. Thus, I don’t look so good in the financial loyalty department. However, I have been loyal to common decencies over the years. These values were more or less encouraged by the Christian Brothers during my years at West Catholic. As best I can recall, no educator at West Catholic acted contrary to common decencies, such as:

- Integrity (truthfulness, promise



West Philadelphia Catholic High School.



- keeping, sincerity and honesty).
- Trustworthiness (fidelity or loyalty, dependability).
- Benevolence (goodwill, refraining from harming others personally or their property).
- Consent and beneficence.
- Fairness.
- Gratitude.
- Accountability.
- Justice.
- Tolerance
- Cooperation.

However, Brother Dennis did have a reputation for roughing up students who got uppity or out of line, but I don’t recall anyone failing to recover from his varied methods of corporal punishment. We all just assumed the miscreants got what was coming to them.

Perhaps my respect for these decencies might render me “somewhat of a loyal son” of West Catholic.

Is this sufficient? On the matter of benefits, and let’s face it, all donors want something in return for their contributions, I feel a need for certain clarifications. In the brochure, the first benefit that a donor should expect was to be “remembered in the prayers of the brothers, sisters, students and staff of West Catholic.”

This offer begs for more detail. Could you be more specific about how these middlemen and women go about this “remembering?” Specifically, please clarify the following:

- How many prayers by each of these

groups can a donor expect?

- Is the quantity of prayers based on the amount of the donation?
- What kind of prayers are offered and to whom? God himself? Jesus? The Blessed Virgin? Certain angels?
- Can donors choose the prayers to be offered? If not, how do those who communicate with heavenly powers decide which prayers go to whomever?
- Are records kept on prayer efficacy?
- Is there a way I might be advised as to who did what for me, if a prayer sent gets a green light, so to speak?
- How do those praying know what I want them to ask for?
- Can I provide you with a few of my desires for this purpose?
- Can I ask for money, for more and better sex, for desired election results in the coming midterms?
- Are there different donor levels for different request categories?

Also, and I hope I’m not causing the prayer-givers standing by to do more than I deserve, can you give me a sense for the nature of prayer requests that have the highest success rates?

I have other questions, but I don’t want to seem pushy. Please consider a few more concerns.

Are some donor requests rejected as inappropriate, excessive, presumptuous or otherwise unacceptable? For example, in addition to the religions mentioned above that I have found highly attractive at times, I’m basically a freethinker, a secular humanist and a life member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF). Knowing all this, does the alumni group really want the likes of me as a son, given that I am almost certainly insufficiently loyal to West Catholic High?

As mentioned, I have not been Catholic for at least 70 years, maybe more. (I started skipping masses in my junior year, and I entered a confessional box just once during these final years. I just didn’t have anything that required re-

moval from my soul, given my exemplary behaviors and mostly pure thoughts.)

For these reasons I’m concerned that Alumni Association officials, the Brothers, Sisters and students will not give prayers on my behalf their best prayer efforts.

All this may sound like a confession. I certainly have strayed quite far from paths and policies of the One True Church. I feel duty bound to disclose that I am as fully committed to the absolute separation of church and state as John F. Kennedy was. (See the fifth paragraph of his Sept. 12, 1960, address to the Greater Ministerial Association.)

I oppose any taxpayer subsidy for religious schools, or special exemptions that allow religious institutions to discriminate in employment.

What’s more, I fully support full and equal rights for women and marriage equality and all other rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and other exceptional folks, including Visigoths and everyone else.

And that’s not all. I also support stem cell research, freedom to make end-of-life decisions and a hard stop to Christian nationalist-worthy jejune incursions of religious pieties such as, “God bless America,” “under God,” “In God we trust” and other forms of irrational babble by public officials engaged in government business.

Did I mention I favor abortion on demand, or that my latest book is entitled, “Freedom From Religion in 30 Days?”

Despite these reservations, I wish the Alumni Association and all “The Loyal Sons and Daughters of West Catholic well.

As my hero, “The Great Agnostic” Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899) wrote in signing off a letter to his composer friend Anton Seidl, “I take this occasion to wish you (and my fellow Burr Alumni) luck, good health, long life, music enough to last you through, and cool weather, here and hereafter.”

Sincerely,
Donald B. Ardell, West Catholic High School Class of 1956

(A somewhat fallen away Catholic, but still a teeny bit loyal son of my track, cross country and basketball teams while a student at West Catholic High School.)

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Oklahoma finally ends child marriage

Still, 33 other states, including California, need to act on this, too

By Ryan Jayne and Ryan Dudley

Oklahoma has now done the bare minimum a decent state can do for children: It has stopped handing them marriage licenses.

Senate Bill 504 became law on May 13 despite Gov. Kevin Stitt's refusal to sign it. When it takes effect on Nov. 1, Oklahoma will require every person getting married to be at least 18 — with no exceptions. That makes Oklahoma the 17th U.S. state, plus Washington, D.C., to completely ban child marriage. The bill passed the Senate 45–0, but only cleared the House 51–36, a grim reminder that “do not let adults marry children” is still treated as controversial in too many state capitols.



Ryan Jayne



Ryan Dudley

The FFRF Action Fund pushed for this win along with other coalition partners. Before the bill became law, we urged Oklahomans to call on Stitt to close the parental-consent loophole that allowed 16- and 17-year-olds to marry, a loophole that left young people, especially girls, vulnerable to forced marriage and trapped in abusive relationships they were often too young to legally exit. It will come as no surprise to our readers that child marriage is often tied to extremist patriarchal religious norms.

A just, secular society protects children and holds abusers accountable. It does not give abusers a legal shortcut to marry their victims.



Photo: Shutterstock

Child marriage is not some faraway relic. Between 2000 and 2021, more than 314,000 children were legally married in the United States, some as young as 10 years old. Almost 90 percent of those children were girls, most of them married to adult men. At least 66,415 of those marriages involved a child too young to legally consent to sex or an age gap that would have made sex a crime under state law but for the marriage.

Even if a court grants a minor “emancipated” status, this does not magically give a teenager the legal rights you might expect. The legal trap is especially cruel when a child spouse tries to flee. Married minors often cannot independently hire a lawyer, file for divorce or obtain a protective order. Because they are still minors, they are frequently denied entry into domestic violence shelters and can be labeled runaways if they leave home. Unchained At Last has warned that domestic violence shelters routinely refuse unaccompanied minors because of liability concerns, and that a 17-year-old who leaves home can be taken into custody, have parents notified, and be returned home or placed in emergency shelter care.

This is why the emancipation excuse collapses on contact with reality. In Vir-

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ginia, survivors warned legislators that an emancipation loophole did not protect coerced children. One survivor, married at 16 to a man 13 years older, said she could not escape to a domestic violence shelter, hire an attorney or enter a lease because she was still a minor.

Oklahoma finally stopped pretending that these loopholes are acceptable. Now states like California need to catch up.

Yes, California still has no absolute minimum marriage age. California law allows minors to marry with a court order and written consent from a parent or guardian.

California has had chances to fix this. AB 2924, introduced in 2024, would have ended child marriage in the state. It died in committee. Instead, California lawmakers

passed SB 575, maddeningly requiring reporting and study of underage marriages. There are plenty of issues that require careful study prior to legislative action, but this isn't one of them. Child marriage is acknowledged internationally as a fundamental violation of human rights and needs to be banned, not studied.

California should be embarrassed. Oklahoma, not exactly famous for racing ahead on secular public policy, got this right while California is still dragging its feet.

But this is not just California's problem. The country's patchwork of laws lets adults shop for weak jurisdictions. As more states make child marriage illegal, places where it remains lawful are emerging as “havens.” When one state ends child marriage, neighboring states, or even states a few steps away, have reportedly seen increases in child marriage. Unchained At Last's Fraidy Reiss has pointed to Maine, where the number of minors married reportedly tripled in 2021 after Pennsylvania, New York and Rhode Island ended child marriage, and to an uptick in Maryland after Virginia strengthened its law.

This is why our work cannot stop with one state. Every state that gets with the program increases the pressure on the states still protecting this human rights violation by calling it tradition, religious freedom, parental rights or judicial discretion.

There is no religious right to marry a child. There is no parental right to shackle a child into an abusive marriage. There is no judicial discretion worth preserving if the result is a child spouse who cannot enter a shelter, sign a lease, hire a lawyer, file for divorce or safely escape.

The solution is simple: Minors cannot marry, no exceptions.

Not 17 with a permission slip. Not 16 with a judge's nod. Not younger with a pregnancy excuse. Not “emancipated” on paper while still blocked from the basic tools of escape.

If Oklahoma can do it, so can California and every other holdout.

Ryan Jayne is FFRF's senior policy counsel and Ryan Dudley is FFRF's state policy manager.

‘Reasonist’ is a better identifying term

By Dr. Robert Pierce

In Alfie Kohn's article, “Spiritual but not religious” from the Jan-Feb issue of Freethought Today, he writes, “many nonreligious people hesitate to call themselves atheists just because of the stigma and



Dr. Robert Pierce

discrimination faced by anyone who does identify as such.” He also writes that some “think of atheists as prosaic joyless people who are determined to reduce life's wonders to scientific equations.”

Kohn is absolutely correct and this is why I stopped referring to myself as an atheist years ago. Instead, I now loudly proclaim, “I'm a reasonist.” Generally, this leads to raised eyebrows and questions, and so allows me to engage.

The term “atheist,” meaning “without theism,” is an odd way to identify yourself, much the same as saying, “I'm a non-blonde.” The term fails to reveal who you are or what you believe. Instead, it boldly says what you are not. Additionally, the

term carries centuries of prejudicial weight upon its brave shoulders. I learned many years ago that when the masses adopt a term or a symbol that you believe is inaccurate or untrue, you have only one choice: find a new term or symbol.

After rejecting “atheist” to describe myself, I tried out all the other popular ones — especially those utilized by my favorite group, FFRF. My quest began with “humanist,” but I immediately rejected it. As a biologist, it's too homocentric; as if humans are the ultimate life-form simply because we have a rather large and clever brains. I believe our world is a spider web of interconnectedness, that all species depend on one another, and that our arrogant ignorance regarding this web-of-life reality is actually the problem. So, “humanist” is out for me.

Next, we have “freethinker,” a preferred term of FFRF. My blink-response to this word doesn't conjure open-mindedness, but rather a vision of untethered thought. Is there a foundation? What does that tell someone about me? It's vague and also untrue. I am not a complete freethinker as I have spent a lifetime organizing, weighing, and modifying information to arrive at my worldview. Being open-minded and intellectually nimble, while continually updating opinions, takes immense effort

and training. The term “freethinking” does not express this very well.

Last is “agnostic,” everyone's least favorite. It is less bold and confident than the “atheist,” but has some appeal. It lands with less accusation or repulsion than “atheist” and it is free of the centuries of imbedded prejudice, as previously mentioned. Once again, however, it does nothing to describe the bearer of the term. It proclaims, “I have no idea,” or worse, “I'm afraid to think about it.”

So, I became a “reasonist.” I suspect that most of you are, as well. A reasonist is someone who embraces critical thinking, the scientific method and new knowledge. They are a person who maintains an open mind and is willing, and even excited, to change their opinions as new information arrives. They are people who gather information before forming an opinion, rather than filtering information to retain one. A reasonist uses what we know to be true about our world to form the foundation of their philosophy.

It is not reasonable, but instead demands faith in magical thinking, to believe that angels can appear with prophecies, that people rise from the dead sprinkling miracles upon their believers, that golden tablets can be translated using magical

seeing stones, or that a mumbled prayer will have desirable impact. None of that is reasonable. However, should any of these things be witnessed (I am hopefully awaiting the appearance of a scantily clad angel as I write), it would become reasonable to change our minds.

The dogma of the Church of Reason is not etched in stone, but rather is a moving target — continuously able to evolve. We see the world as a horizontal web-of-life, rather than a vertical pyramid of importance.

The evolution of the more accurate and descriptive term, “reasonist” begins here, but its roots are embedded in the very creation of our constitutional democracy. The term originates with the Enlightenment. Our nation's Founding Fathers were reasonists, some such as Thomas Paine (author of “The Age of Reason”), painfully so. He was so convinced that religion was breathing its last gasps that he published this book (1795) against the advice of his friend Thomas Jefferson, who correctly believed that Paine's thinking was dangerously ahead of the times. My experience has been that the true power of this term is that it opens doors to explanation and communication, rather than slamming them shut.

Dr. Robert Pierce is a veterinarian and an Idaho State Representative of FFRF.

Percy B. Shelley Student Activist Award

Where are all the college atheists hiding?

This column by Ash Bu first appeared in the Harvard Crimson and is reprinted with permission.

Ash Bu has earned FFRF's Percy B. Shelley Student Activist Award, which includes \$2,000. The monetary prize is endowed by FFRF member Michael Meek. Shelley personified the young activist atheist who at an early age published "The Necessity of Atheism" and for his efforts was expelled from Oxford. His beliefs in regard to religion are reflected in many of his essays and poetic works.

By Ash Bu

Nearly half of the Harvard College Class of 2027 identifies as atheist or agnostic, according to a Crimson survey.

Given we make up such a large portion of the college enrollment, you'd expect there to be a fair bit of discussion around atheism. And, yet, even though Harvard puts such emphasis on exploring diverse ideas and identities, atheist voices are uniquely quiet. In the interest of building a fuller, richer discourse around faith at Harvard, we atheist students must proudly articulate, discuss and create community around our beliefs.

I came to Harvard College impatient to connect with the atheist community, awaiting vigorous, passionate exploration of what it means to find meaning without gods. So far? I've met one other undergraduate in the only atheist-centered space I've come across.

I shouldn't downplay my love of the Humanist Student Fellowship, which facilitates the gatherings I have found — it is a genuine safe space for me. But in my struggle to find fellow undergrads in atheist spaces, I have to ask: If there are so many of us, where are we hiding, and why?

The apparent invisibility of atheists on campus could be a consequence of larger national pressure. At a time when the White House makes thinly veiled threats of prosecution toward those it deems anti-Christian, it seems national trends have convinced atheists to hide. There's no atheist symbol to wear on a necklace; we don't have prescribed



Ash Bu wants college atheists to "find each other, support each other, band together."

weekly gatherings; we can blend in with little effort, and atheist identity on campus peters out as a result.

Indeed, even the Harvard College Humanists, Agnostics and Atheists group, which once hosted an entire week of atheist programming, hasn't seen much activity this year. And while the university works toward building understanding between faiths through new initiatives, even the word "interfaith" implicitly omits those who lack it. At a school that thrives on the rich diversity of its students' beliefs, it's sad that the atheists of Harvard are, on the whole, less than visible.

The problem isn't just underrepresentation, it's also harmful biases: 21 percent of U.S. adults answered in a 2019 Pew Research Center survey that religious people are more trustworthy than nonreligious people. To avoid discrimination, many students may never tell others that they are an atheist while on campus.

But invisibility won't garner acceptance, it only prevents any possible counter-narrative to bias.

The way to answer this discrimination is to show that secular belief systems can be powerful forces for connection and goodness — and Harvard

should be a proving ground.

A more active atheist presence at Harvard would provide a forum for those interested in humanist thought to learn more. College is a time of exploration, and faith is a part of that for many. Christian groups on campus already make great efforts to encourage people to ask questions about God and faith, even handing out free sandwiches alongside conversations. An effort must be made to show those in limbo the other side of the coin.

I do not advocate for atheists to proselytize our beliefs. But if the college holds the goal of intellectually diverse engagement, atheist presence must be a part of it. The atheist perspective holds value, just as any other, and it is discussed far too little at Harvard today.

While the Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard and MIT does serve this role for students interested in secular spirituality, there is a unique benefit to finding answers from your peers. Spiritual beliefs are, by their nature, unverifiable and unfalsifiable, which means the best source of confidence is like-mindedness, and peers in a similar stage of life provide unique reassurance that your con-

clusions are well-founded.

Nonreligious people vary wildly in their interpretations of what that belief means to us, to the point where a singular label has become difficult to find. Atheism is a lack of belief in gods, so it may seem counterintuitive to give it an affinity group — it is itself not an "affirmative belief," as articulated by American Atheists.

However, the breadth of secular belief is actually precisely why it is capable of creating an interesting community that contributes meaningfully to campus culture. Exploring secular beliefs between students provides a unique opportunity to see the diversity of ways one can conceptualize the universe, providing a source of validity and grounding to people with unique belief systems.

When a friend questions whether there may be a god, our religious counterparts are often all too eager to invite them to a religious service, or tell them about the "good word." When my friend questions whether there may not be one, I believe it's a natural extension of my friendship and of the spirit of intellectual exploration on campus that I espouse the answers which satisfy me.

So, atheist students: Find each other, support each other, band together. Your lack of faith is a part of your identity that deserves attention and expression, and your voice could be a guide to those in our community who are trying to make sense of it all.

Religious affinity groups are beacons of belonging for many at Harvard. Atheists deserve the same kind of home base.

Ash Bu is a student at Harvard College studying mathematics. She is curious about metaphysics and how we can do good without gods. Intellectual quirkiness is her bread and butter, and she believes that atheism is an immense source of intellectual freedom because it allows her to make sense of the world truly on her own terms. As a columnist for the Crimson, she seeks to use the paper as a platform for atheist visibility, and as a way to start conversations about values that are important to her.

CRANKMAIL

It's time to feast your eyes upon our latest collection of correspondence and social media responses from those who take issue with FFRF. Please enjoy responsibly. Printed as received/written.

God is real: God does exist. Exodus 20:23, 15, 17 King James Version Holy Bible but then Israelites say in the Bible God said for them to go to war and steal, kill and destroy? Does God say kill or don't kill? What does God really say? God does exist.

Devil in disguise: The REAL Satanism is the likes of Anne Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker. They are atheists...who push for sexual decadence and the deconstruction of the Judeo-Christian ethics that the west embraced for years (North America and Europe); believing it will liberate women and then some.

Christianity: The only thing standing in the way of the current world and total chaos is Christians. If you think things are bad now with us here, when we are no longer here, society will be thrown into a level of disorder that has never been before.

FFRF: Fuck off! Die and burn in hell brood of vipers!

Repent, Dan: Dan Barker is my former youth pastor in the 70's from Glen Grove Assembly of God in La Puente, CA. I am now 77 yrs old and am greatly disappointed in Dan Barker, I am proud to still carry my faith in the Lord, Dan believes that he

so highly intelligent and has sent himself up to be wiser than God, he mocks God and believers as myself who worship Christ Jesus, Well time will tell who was right. His philosophical atheist beliefs or the Truth of the unadulterated word of God the Bible, why does he fight so hard against us Christians that do believe we all have a free will to believe or not to believe.

Hate the sin: Christianity is a relationship with Jesus Christ. Real or true Christian you don't condone evil behaviors but love and compassion for them. That's the character of God. God love His creation but hates sin. So many so-called Christians when they open their mouths nothing but hatred and violence they speak that's not what the Bible is saying

Explain it: Science cannot explain consciousness. Period. There is no way for you to substantiate your claim. Show me what consciousness is and where it comes from then I might start to believe you. What a chicken little.

Christian country: Going to put my cards on the table. As a Christian, I desire the state and federal governments to revere Christ and rule accordingly. I believe there is room for an establishment clause that does not compel conversion, church attendance, etc., among the states from my perspective, especially since 1) the establishment clause was rendered in context of wanting to avoid evil eccle-

siocracies (Church ruling over state and clergyman holding state powers and office simultaneously), 2) the founding fathers were very religious and very much for acknowledging God as presiding over the state, and 3) the establishment clause never forbids states from having state established religion.

You need purpose: Atheists don't seem to realize they are being led by a scientocracy which is telling you there is NO PURPOSE TO YOUR LIFE! You may imagine you have a purpose but understand the philosophy you have embraced says no!

Abortion: You are actually leading the western world into BARBARISM which denies the value of human life and especially that of an unborn child's.

Try Jesus: Well enjoy your nihilistic life. Remember Jesus Christ said: come to me all who are burdened and heavy laden, and I shall give you rest. It's so personal. Have peace.

Read and learn: Well if you feel serious ill, are you going to ask only one nurse? Or maybe the old woman in the corner of the street? Ridiculous, you think. That's why I would seek the best doctor, maybe the best theologians for my questions. You have them at a click distance. Read and you shall be enlightened.

The Bible: well, you just realized that the Bible is not biased. It tells the narrative as it happened, not only the things it agrees to but also sins and awful things it condemns. Why wouldn't you read it and

put some things head to head. I am not a mechanic so I don't express my opinions on broken cars.

Stupid: Stupidity is far more attractive than intelligence: intelligence has its limit, stupidity doesn't.

MOVING?



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CHAPTER UPDATES

Ozarks Chapter of FFRF



Ozarks Chapter members, from left, Kinzie Knight, George Naidl and Ruth Stanfield greet donors during the American Empathy Project on May 2.

The Ozarks Chapter of FFRF would like to recognize those who helped with the American Empathy Project on May 2. The community’s response was amazing, and the impact we made on the Thrift Store employees and the NWA Women’s Shelter residents was incredible. In total, over 20 unique donors contributed throughout the day and we fed nearly 50 people and collected over \$500 worth of hygiene products. The NWA Women’s Shelter leadership was overwhelmed by the generosity of FFRF and the American Humanist Association.

Upstate New York Freethinkers

Upstate New York Freethinkers will be hosting its 3rd Annual Gathering at the Albany Institute of History & Art on Sept. 20. This milestone event will feature FFRF’s Washington, D.C., lobbyist Mark Dann along with Baruch College’s David Hoffman to drive secular politics, contextualize history and celebrate freethought. Following introductions by author Kate Cohen, keynotes will share the stage with Jeff Ingersoll, who will deliver an insider spotlight on the historic Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum.

Tickets can be purchased at unyft.org/GO. Admission (\$85) includes a Sunday hot buffet lunch, dessert, a private secular history presentation, recorded music of compositions by FFRF’s Dan Barker, full museum access, and discounted \$149 Hilton Albany rooms (book by Aug. 28). At checkout, add the Saturday pre-event dinner with speakers and freethought leaders at the Hilton or RSVP for one of 20 Sunday docent tour slots.

This year, the Upstate Freethinkers used its annual charitable grant to assist North Country’s Volunteer Transportation Center, a “good without gods” rural lifeline. Simultaneously, local action continues reviving Buffalo freethought with growing Sunday Café meetups — via unyft.org/WESTERN-NY.

For more information, email info@unyft.org or call/text 585-454-9921.

THEY SAID WHAT?

There has never been a greater president for Christian Americans than President Trump, and his strong record proves it. . . [Trump has] ended the weaponization of the federal government against people of faith, proudly defended and expanded our religious rights, pardoned pro-life activists, stopped the chemical mutilation of our nation’s children, and protected parents’ rights.

White House spokesperson Taylor Rogers.
New York Times, 4-29-26

For many here — and for myself — the Christian faith is a firm anchor and daily inspiration that guides us not only personally, but together as members of our community. Having devoted a large part of my life to interfaith relationships and greater understanding, it is that faith in the triumph of light over darkness which I have found confirmed countless

times.
King Charles, in his April address to Congress, making a tone-deaf statement to a country without an established religion that is in the midst of a Christian nationalist federal takeover.

Christian Post, 5-2-26

The role of the church is to point people to faith in Jesus Christ. But the role of government is to protect citizens from evildoers, according to Romans 13. . . It looks like President Trump has a better understanding of what the bible teaches about the role of government than the pope has.

MAGA pastor Robert Jeffress, on an interview on “Fox News Sunday.”
The Friendly Atheist, 5-13-26

I had never really thought to look to the bible for a recipe book. . . Sin entered into the world through food, and Satan doesn’t stop there. Food,

Greater Sacramento Chapter of FFRF



The Greater Sacramento Chapter hosted a table at the Sacramento Earth Day celebration, where members, from left, Jeff Scott, Brian Lambert, President Erin Louis and Brett Black helped out.

In our ongoing efforts to reach into communities that haven’t heard of FFRF, the Greater Sacramento Chapter of FFRF chose this year to participate in Sacramento’s Earth Day. Our table was busy all day and we were happy to connect with so many new people. We had two new members help get our message out. Earth Day will be another important event added to our yearly schedule, which includes Sac Pride and California Freethought Day.

Also, the chapter has added two new board members — Lorraine White as secretary and Brett Black as board member at large.

Austin Area Freedom From Religion Foundation



Austin Area Chapter President Andrew Bushard, left, and Steve Bratteng, right, award its annual charitable grant to an American Gateways representative.

The Austin Area Freedom From Religion Foundation chapter donated its yearly charitable grant to a local organization, American Gateways, that serves immigrants and refugees by providing them legal aid and services. Our chapter also previously donated its 2025 grant to American Gateways.

for me, is really like a weapon of how I can fight back.

Kayla Bundy, a 27-year-old Christian content creator, who says she is a “biblical eater,” which is someone who consumes mostly foods mentioned in the bible.

New York Times, 5-13-26



Mike Johnson The naysayers who have created this new term ‘Christian nationalism’ as a pejorative, a derogatory term, are trying to silence the influence and voices of Christians.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, the day before the government’s religious Rededicate 250 event at which he would speak.

Fox News, 5-17-26

Our rights don’t come from the

government. No, our rights come from God.

Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., speaking at the Rededicate 250 event in Washington D.C.

Washington Post, 5-18-26

It is appropriate that during this 250th anniversary of our nation’s founding, Rockwall County will erect a monument to display the Ten Commandments. May God bless America, the state of Texas, and our wonderful Rockwall County!

Lorne Liechty, a commissioner on the Rockwall County Commissioners Court in Texas after the board unanimously voted to approve a Ten Commandments monument outside of its local courthouse. FFRF Action Fund named the Rockwall County commissioners its “Theocrats of the Week” on May 29.

Blue Ribbon News, 5-14-26

LETTERBOX

Vouchers are taxation without representation

The FFRF maxim “Where public money goes, public accountability must follow,” stated in the article “Vouchers hurt public schools, fund religion,” can also be stated as “taxation without representation.”

That type of legal argument might well be capable of forcing the hand of a Supremely Corrupted Court that is hell-bent on using a constitutionally unknown “history and tradition” test to try to restore Christianity’s dominant role in society.

Taxation without representation is one of the grievances that sparked the American Revolution. Its historical importance cannot be denied. It is then only necessary to point out that sending public tax money to schools that are not under public control is an example of taxation without representation. It would put the court in a position where it must rule against vouchers, based on its “history and tradition” test, or to try to come up with an excuse to save vouchers that would probably highlight its pro-Christian bias.

Michigan

Bible is merely just another book of myths

In response to the “Good Books” column in the April issue, aside from the moral question of destroying books, it must be remembered that humans have been storytellers from the beginning of their existence.

The bible is merely a book of Hebrew mythology, not much different from other mythologies of supernatural beings and concepts. The problem is not so much the content of these books as it is the psychological need of so many people to feel compelled to believe in irrational ideas.

I have hundreds of books in my library and I have the bible on the same shelf as “Native American Myths,” Dante’s “Divine Comedy” and “The Decameron,” etc. However, on the inside cover of the bible I have written the message: “Literal belief in this book can mean severe mental derangement.”

Ohio

Catholic Church abuse is an ancient plague

Catholic child abuse has been going on for hundreds of years in many countries around the world. One must wonder if this is a kind of opportunity that attracts sick people to Catholicism, with free access to innocent defenseless victims?

There have also been stories about kids being spanked and otherwise punished by parents if they complained about what “God’s representatives on Earth” had done to them! In my otherwise very democratic, educated and friendly neighborhood, we only had a single Catholic, mainly known for having done unthinkable things to his daughters. One of them is a friend of mine, so I have first-hand knowledge.

In the more secular Scandinavian countries, Catholicism is almost non-existent, and for very good reasons, pretty much considered a left-over from medieval superstition.

California

Monumental trip

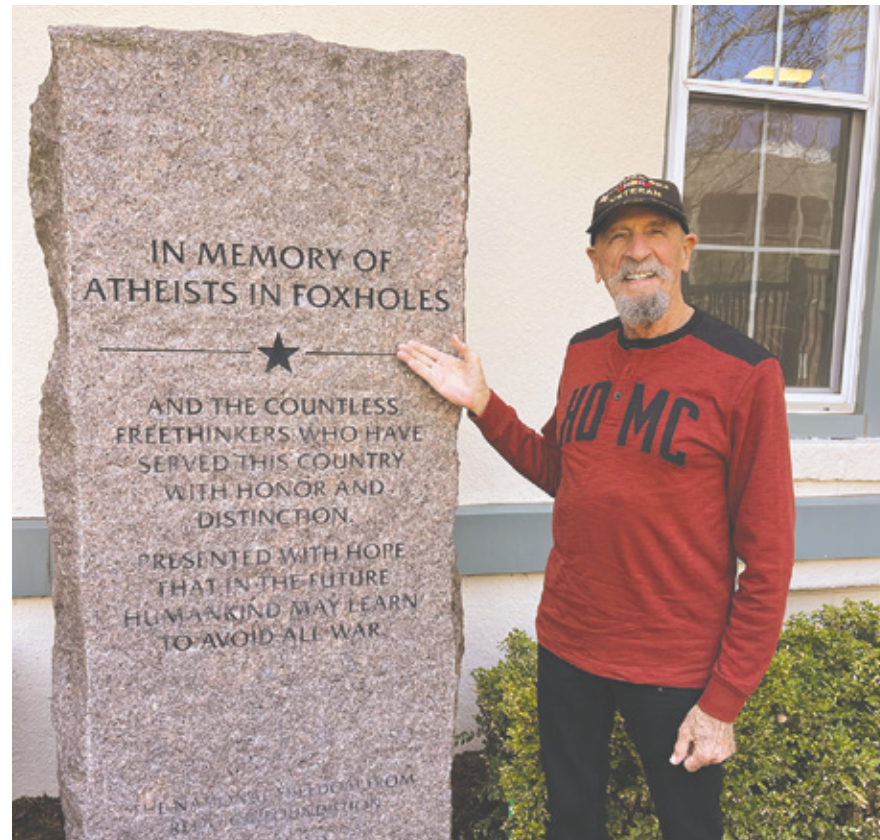


Photo by Lisa Treu

Lifetime Member Randy Lifshotz shows off FFRF’s “Atheists in Foxholes” monument outside of Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis., when he visited from Florida in April. Randy was in an artillery unit of the New Jersey National Guard beginning in 1970 and was honorably discharged in 1976. “What fun it was to visit with friends at Freethought Hall after all these years,” Randy writes. “Thanks to all for the warmth and smiles.”

April issue was full of great articles, columns

I thought the April issue was the best in some time. The articles on the Dan Barker debate, the “Good Books” column and the Avijit Roy Courage Award were the best!

California

Religious coercion shackles true freedom

Some of my Christian family members would argue that the war in Iran is justified because Christians are not “free” to be Christian in Iran. Of course, one can choose to believe whatever one wants to believe, so I assume they are referring to the negative consequences that come with choosing to be Christian in Iran.

I have read that preaching and gathering in Iran are heavily monitored and suppressed, while those caught face arbitrary arrest, torture and extraordinarily long prison sentences. Disregarding the fact that Christians have been successful at scaling back civil rights for many marginalized groups in the United States, leading to many of these same consequences, I want to focus on deeper hypocrisy.

Many Christians who claim to support freedom for others to believe or practice different faiths/ideologies are liars. Sure, they may abstain from putting us in prison for gathering or communicating non-Christian ideals, but a more sinister judgment lies at the heart of Christianity.

If you aren’t aware, they believe the only way to escape eternal suffering in the afterlife is to accept the Trinity, which refers to the concept of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit being one entity. A Christian must accept that Jesus Christ is God, and that Jesus’ sacrifice alone can save your

soul from the original sin (with which all humans are born, thanks to Adam and Eve eating from the tree of knowledge against God’s command).

If one refuses to accept this as true, one cannot escape the fate of eternal suffering experienced in hell. Hell, as defined by Christians, is a consequence of choosing to not believe in the Christian god. Hell is described as “torture,” “eternal fire,” “everlasting torment of the body and soul,” “a place void of love,” etc. It seems that Christians feel morally superior to their Abrahamic counterparts because the consequences of choosing to not follow, while everlasting, are generally saved for the afterlife.

I have been told by my own family during holiday visits that I am going to hell for being a nonbeliever. I grew up in churches of various Christian sects. I went to Sunday school. I went to Christian camps. I remember vividly what Christian adults would say to a child to coerce them into believing these fairy tales.

Coercion is not freedom. Living in fear of eternal damnation is not

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.

Cryptogram answer

Christians think they’re oppressed when they’re not allowed to oppress others.

— Aron Ra

freedom. These religions are tools for colonization of the mind and body. They place shackles on our creativity, sexuality and sense of self. The only salvation lies in liberation from these oppressive, hypocritical and unscientific ideologies.

Colorado

Apparently, most of humanity is in hell

The entire population of the Earth since the dawn of humanity is about 120 billion people. Let’s assume that 20 billion were Christians (from 1 AD to 2026 AD). That leaves 100 billion of us sinners to burn for eternity. And that’s assuming that all Christians go to heaven. I was taught in Sunday School that Jesus loves us all, so why would he condemn 100 billion people to burn for eternity?

“Jesus loves me, I can tell, ’cause I’m going straight to Hell!”

Colorado

Intentional creator god is an impossibility

In order to believe in a self-motivating creator of existence, one has to ascribe intention and action to that creation, which means that whatever one imagines this being to be, it has to change its state from intending to creating. And, in order to change its state, that being must be made of something capable of configuring distinct states, which means that being could not have created existence, since existence would already have to be in place for that being to be “made of something.” Therefore, no being can have supernatural powers (i.e., not subject to physical laws) or be undetectable, so the idea of a god is still myth.

New York

‘Good Books’ column was honest, personal

Betty Johnson’s essay (“Good Books’ in need of good disposition”) in the April edition was better than good — it was excellent! She’s such a refreshingly honest and personal writer. It was so nice to hear the inner thoughts/turmoil of a fellow FFRF member: How should she deal with the emotional situation of disposing of her mother’s old bibles? She struck just the right balance of wanting to honor her mother, while also pointing out the many faults of that most (un)holy book. I’d love to see more personal essays like this in Freethought Today.

Georgia

Crossword answers

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FFRF ON THE ROAD



FFRF Legal Director Patrick Elliott spoke on May 4 at the Minnesota Capitol as part of the Minnesota Day of Reason.



On April 16, FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, a former Christian minister (right), debated Muslim-turned-Christian Abdu Murray (left) on the topic “What is the meaning of life?” The event, hosted by 22-year-old Samuel Miele (center), took place in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada. You can watch the debate on YouTube.



Photo courtesy of Americans United by Chris Line
FFRF’s Regional Governmental Affairs Manager Mickey Dollens (right) meets with actor John Fugelsang at the Summit for Religious Freedom conference in Washington, D.C. in early May. Fugelsang and Dollens were two of the featured speakers at the event. Fugelsang also spoke at FFRF’s annual convention in October 2025. (See pages 10-12 for his speech.)



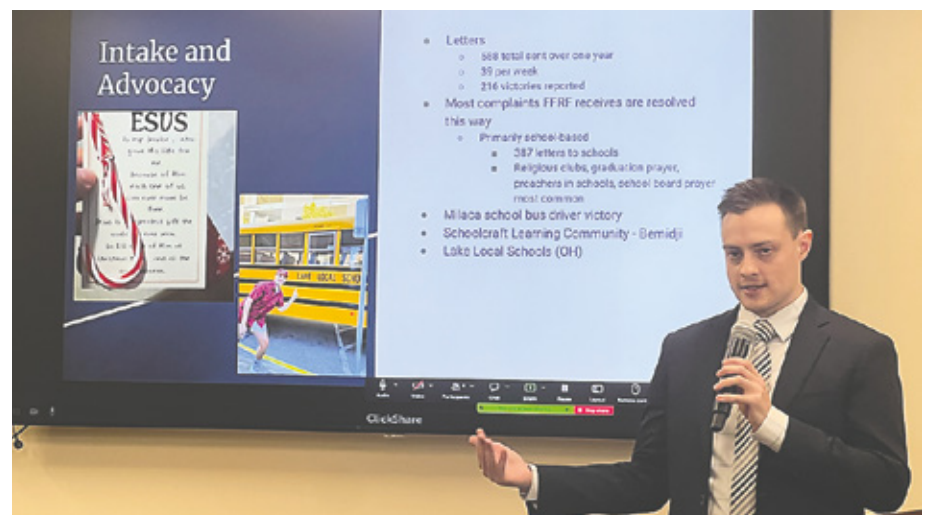
FFRF’s Deputy Legal Director Liz Cavell speaks to the FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter on May 18 at the Skokie Public Library in Skokie, Ill. She gave an overview of recent court cases involving state/church separation and provided attendees with an update on the current work of FFRF’s legal department.



FFRF’s Director of Governmental Affairs Mark Dann and FFRF Legal Counsel Chris Line were stationed at the FFRF booth at the National School Board Association’s annual conference in San Antonio in mid-April.



FFRF Communications Director Amitabh Pal queries Kansas state Sen. Silas Miller on the challenges of being a nonreligious legislator at a panel that the Freedom From Religion Foundation organized as part of the Religion News Association’s annual conference in Atlanta in late April.



Kyle Steinberg, FFRF’s Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow, speaks to the Minnesota Atheists on April 19.

FFRF convention, Oct. 15–18

Join us in 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. 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.

A tentative program schedule will be published soon. To see the list of 2026 national convention speakers, turn to Page 3 or visit the convention speakers page here: ffrf.us/con26speakers.

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 vegetables with rosemary jus (GF). \$65



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

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

We look forward to seeing you!

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 \$ ___
<input type="checkbox"/> Or, I will join FFRF for \$40 (and save \$20)	___	\$140 \$ ___

OPTIONAL MEALS / EVENTS

No programming will occur during group meals. Meals are offered for socializing and convenience. FFRF does not make any money on the meals, and charges the hotel’s prices which includes a 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)