

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**Who do we
want to be as
U.S. citizens?**

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values of the
Declaration**

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**Bidding a fond
farewell to
Barbara G. Walker**

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March 2026

Religious charter school lawsuit

Court allows Tenn. parents to intervene

FFRF, others to represent the five local taxpayers

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and several other groups are representing five taxpayers in Knox County, Tenn., to intervene in a lawsuit against a proposed religious public school.

The five intervenors, who support public education and state/church separation, were granted permission by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee to join the lawsuit.

The lawsuit, Wilberforce Academy of Knoxville v. Knox County Board of

Education, was filed in November 2025 by a religious organization that wants to run a public charter school — funded by taxpayers — that, according to the school's own complaint, would provide an “explicitly biblical and Christian education.”

In the case, the court determined that these taxpayers — all parents of current or former Knox County public school students — had a legal right to participate in the lawsuit. These taxpayers, who are also parents of current or former Knox County public school students, are now intervenor-defendants in the lawsuit.

In response to their motion filed in

late January, the court ruled that the parent taxpayers “demonstrated direct and concrete interests in: (1) preventing the potential unlawful use of taxpayer funds to establish religion and (2) ensuring that their children's education is not diminished by the diversion of funds to religious schools.”

The court also noted the serious stakes of the case and the fact that no other party planned to defend the constitutionality of Tennessee law forbidding religious charter schools. As a result, the court determined that these taxpayers had a legal right to participate in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit was initially filed after

Wilberforce Academy sought to open as a publicly funded charter school with a religious mission. Knox County Schools previously denied the application, citing state law that bars religious charter schools.

The intervenors are represented by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Education Law Center, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the law firm Morrison Foerster pro bono. The counsel

See Tennessee on page 18



Keep proselytizing out of public schools

The FFRF Action Fund is pleased to announce the introduction in three states (Vermont, Kansas and Oklahoma) of pioneering legislation to preserve the secular nature of our public schools.

The Action Fund is working with a coalition including American Atheists and the American Humanists Association to introduce cutting-edge bills titled Keep Proselytizing Out of Public Schools (KPOP) Act, also known as the Student Secular Bill of Rights, designed to protect the rights of public school students across the country.

The legislation will uphold long-standing U.S. Supreme Court case law safeguarding student rights to a secular

ffrf ACTION FUND

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public school education. This includes ensuring no school-sponsored prayer and bible reading (Engel v. Vitale, 1962; Abington School District v. Schempp, 1963), school-sponsored prayer at grad-

See KPOP on page 19

Full video archive available on Freethought TV

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has completed the uploading of its entire 600-video archive to its new streaming channel, Freethought TV.

“We’re thrilled that all of this outstanding secular content is now available free on Freethought TV,” says Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. “This represents one of the world’s largest on-demand archives of videos addressing issues of atheism, freethought and the struggle to defend the constitutional separation of state and church.”

Designed for smart TVs, streaming sticks and mobile devices, Freethought TV provides on-demand access to the latest FFRF programming, as well as the recently completed archive of video content. The platform offers a dynamic mix of

informative, inspiring and entertaining content aimed at freethinkers, skeptics, state/church separation advocates and anyone curious about secular perspectives. Timely FFRF convention speeches or interviews are included featuring such individuals as Ron Reagan, scientist Donald C. Johanson, Cecile Richards, Gloria Steinem, Elie Mystal and Rep. Jamie Raskin.

Bruce A. Johnson, a public television veteran who has been FFRF’s video production manager for the past nine years, said the archiving project was a massive job.

“Many of the older videos had never been adequately cataloged or transcribed and it took some time to get them all ready for access on

See Freethought TV on page 2



Mid-October in Milwaukee

A scintillating FFRF convention line-up



Percival Everett



Jennifer Welch



Gigi Cervantes



Drew McCoy



Peter Isley



Jim Obergefell



Ron Reagan



Betty Lachgar

A stimulating line-up of diverse activists, authors, podcasters and state/church activists are joining the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s lineup for its 49th annual convention, taking place at Milwaukee’s Baird Convention Center primarily on Friday, Oct. 16–Sat., Oct. 17. There will be “early bird workshops” and a complimentary reception on Thursday afternoon, Oct. 15, and the convention concludes about noon on Sunday morning following the annual membership and state representatives’ meetings.

The registration will open online in early March at: ffrf.org/convention2026. Subsequent issues of Freethought Today will also include the registration form and full details on making your reservations at hotels near the convention center in downtown Milwaukee. Meanwhile, please hold the date!

- FFRF is excited to announce its newest speakers. They include:
- **Percival Everett**, 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. His latest novel, “James,” was published in March 2024 to great critical acclaim, winning both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. His other titles include “Dr. No” (finalist for the NBCC Award for Fiction and winner of the PEN/ Jean Stein Book Award”), “The Trees” (finalist for the Booker Prize and the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction), “Telephone” (finalist for the Pulitzer Prize), “So Much Blue,” “Erasure” and “I Am Not Sidney Poitier.” He has received the NBCC Ivan Sandrof Life Achievement Award and The Windham Campbell Prize from Yale University. “American Fiction,” the feature film based on his novel “Erasure,” was released in 2023 and was awarded the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. For more information on Everett, please visit prhspeakers.com.
 - **Jennifer Welch**, an open atheist and co-creator and co-host of the hit podcast “I’ve Had It,” will receive FFRF’s **Emperor Has No Clothes Award** and statuette,

- bestowed on public figures who make known their dissent from religion. Her podcast now reaches over 3 million listeners a month and has 150 million+ monthly views on its YouTube Channel. Journalist Mehdi Hasan recently described her as “perhaps the most influential woman in the Democratic Party right now.” Welch will speak on “I’ve had it with Christian nationalism” and sign copies of her new book, “Not Today, Fascists,” which will be published Oct. 6.
- **The Henry Zumach Freedom From Fundamentalist Religion Award**, now at \$75,000, will go 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 work of allies.
 - Two Texas teachers with the courage of their convictions who quit their jobs rather than display Ten Commandments posters in their public school classrooms will be recognized: **Gigi Cervantes**, a high school theatre and activating teacher in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and **Johnny Cotton**, a band leader and teacher 42 years in the Carthage ISD. They will receive a “First Amendment Heroine” Award and “First Amendment Hero Award” respectively.
 - **Drew McCoy**, the creator of the “Genetically Modified Skeptic” YouTube channel, with over 850,000 subscribers, will also speak. 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.
- Previously confirmed powerhouse speakers include:
- **Peter Isley**, who is receiving FFRF’s **Clarence Darrow Award** and statuette, is a survivor of childhood sexual assault and abuse by a Roman Catholic priest. He is a co-founder of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) and has spent decades working to expose clerical abuse and institutional cover-ups.
 - **Jim Obergefell**, who will receive

- FFRF’s **Forward Award** and statuette reserved for individuals who have moved society forward. The lead plaintiff in Obergefell vs. Hodges, the 2015 Supreme Court decision that legalized marriage equality, will talk about the case and sign copies of his book, “Love Wins: The Lovers and Lawyers Who Fought the Landmark Case for Marriage Equality.”
- **Ron Reagan**, known for his fearless political commentary, 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” — will be the Saturday evening keynoter.
- FFRF is also proud to announce it will be bestowing the \$5,000 **Avijit Roy Courage Award**, memorializing the slain Bangladeshi-American freethought author and activist, to **Ibtisame (Betty) Lachgar**, a Moroccan freethinker, feminist and civil libertar-

- ian who has been imprisoned for blasphemy in her native country.
- This year, FFRF will be offering “early-bird” workshops Thursday afternoon, 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 Regional Governmental Affairs Manager Mickey Dollens, a seated state legislator in Oklahoma, and FFRF’s other legislative team members. That will be followed by a late afternoon complimentary reception.
- The annual conference will also 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 (with its popular “moment of bedlam”), the drawing for “clean” (pre-“In God We Trust” currency) and several optional group meals and complimentary receptions.

Freethought TV

Continued from page 1

- Freethought TV,” Johnson said. “Each video is converted into seven different formats for various televisions and smartphones, so it was a huge undertaking.”
- The archiving project has been a real trip down memory lane for Johnson. “We’re normally so busy getting the next program ready that we don’t get a chance to look back at all that FFRF has accomplished,” he said. Johnson said a personal favorite is the episode of “Freethought Matters” in which TV legend Ed Asner sang the Scottish folk song “Annie Laurie” to FFRF co-founder Annie Laurie Gaylor.
- “It’s one of the most human moments on any of our shows,” Johnson said. “I always get a little misty.”
- Other archive high points:
- “The Top Five Contradictions of the Bible,” a 2018 episode of “Ask an Atheist” that’s received half a million views.
 - The late philosopher and author Daniel C. Dennett’s freewheeling discussion with Barker and Gaylor about “New Atheism” and his role as one of its “Four Horsemen.”
 - Renowned jazz vocalist Tahira Clay-

- ton teaming up with Barker on piano for a performance of hits from the 1920s at an event honoring the 100th anniversary of the Scopes Monkey Trial.
- An animated image of “God” appearing on “Ask An Atheist” to spar with hosts Barker and FFRF Attorney Sam Grover.
 - New York Times journalist Michelle Goldberg’s scathing speech targeting Donald Trump and Christian nationalism.
 - “Saturday Night Live” alum Julia Swee-ney’s hilarious story at FFRF’s 2017 convention of her escape from Catholicism.
- Freethought TV is available for free download on Roku, Samsung Smart TV, Google TV, Fire TV, Android TV and Android smartphones. Versions of Freethought TV for LG, AppleTV and iPhones will be announced soon. With a built-in search function and an optional free personal account, users can instantly find and bookmark their favorite episodes. Freethought TV is simple to install — just search for “Freethought TV” in your device’s app store and follow the easy prompts to start streaming immediately.
- “Our goal is to make Freethought TV a godless refuge in a wasteland of streaming content from televangelists,” Barker said. “We like to think of it as free content for free minds.”
- Stay tuned!

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Dangerous fake abortion clinics on the rise

By Sammi Lawrence

The assault on abortion access continues as predatory faith-based women’s “health care” outfits move into locations where now-defunded Planned Parenthoods once stood. Crisis pregnancy centers are taking the place of these clinics — like Christian nationalist Spirit of Halloween stores.

For those unfamiliar, crisis pregnancy centers are religious faux clinics that claim to provide women’s health care, erecting a facade that implies the crisis pregnancy centers are willing and able to provide a full range of reproductive



Sammi Lawrence

health care services to patients. Most, if not nearly all, of these centers are affiliated with and inspired by evangelical Christianity, though that’s not always clear to patients upfront, since their websites and advertisements often conveniently leave out their religious affiliations.

In reality, crisis pregnancy centers are not staffed by real doctors or nurses. They traditionally entice women by offering free pregnancy tests or free ultrasounds, which many states require abortion patients to undergo as part of targeted restrictions on abortion providers. And, sadly but unsurprisingly, many of these centers are receiving millions in taxpayer dollars to lie to and frighten pregnant people. It is a travesty that since Roe v. Wade was overturned, states overall have increased their funding of fake crisis pregnancy centers by about \$500 million. Anti-abortion ideology masquerading as health care is being subsidized by us taxpayers, a majority of whom support legal abortion.

To repeat: Crisis pregnancy centers are not real health care clinics. They don’t provide actual reproductive care, and many of them operate unethically, spreading misinformation to people in need of real medical advice in an effort to convince women not to have abortions. According to the American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists, crisis pregnancy centers “actually aim to dissuade people from accessing certain types of reproductive health care, including abortion care and even contraceptive options.”

Real doctors and health care professionals are bound by ethical guidelines and laws meant to protect patients. For example, your doctor can’t lie to you about a diagnosis, purposely give you incorrect medical advice, or share your personal information with anyone without your consent.

In contrast, crisis pregnancy centers



Protesters line up outside a pregnancy crisis center in St. Paul, Minn.

are unregulated. This means that clinics and staff aren’t subject to the same laws as actual doctors, including HIPAA. They don’t have to provide patient confidentiality like real medical professionals do. Carrie Baker, a professor of gender, law and public policy at Smith College, has expressed concern that crisis pregnancy centers are collecting data on pregnant women in order to create a national database that could be used for criminal prosecutions if Christian nationalists succeed in criminalizing abortion nationally.

A recent PBS news report provides an example of how one woman was tricked by a Boston-area center. Hana Miller recounted to reporters how she searched for reproductive care clinics after discovering she had an unwanted pregnancy. She stumbled upon a website for a clinic that looked legitimate and made an appointment, and she described the inside of the “clinic” as looking “exactly like any doctor’s office, down to a woman in scrubs.” But halfway through the appointment, Hana realized she’d made a mistake and was at a crisis pregnancy center, not a real doctor’s office. The staff member at the center who was essentially providing Hana with unlicensed medical care even incorrectly told Hana she was eight weeks pregnant, when she was actually only six weeks pregnant. This isn’t surprising, given that crisis pregnancy centers use unethical and misleading means to convince women not to get abortions,

including outright lying about how far along their pregnancies are. Thankfully, Hana was able to receive real medical care elsewhere, but other women are often not so lucky.

The legal avenues for fighting crisis pregnancy centers are murky, at best. After California enacted a law requiring centers to provide clients with accurate information, the Supreme Court ruled in 2018 that it was unconstitutional

“Crisis pregnancy centers are not real health care clinics. They don’t provide actual reproductive care, and many of them operate unethically, spreading misinformation to people in need of real medical advice in an effort to convince women not to have abortions.”

on free speech grounds.

In New York, Attorney General Letitia James sought to prevent specific centers in the state from promoting “abortion pill reversal” — a fake and dangerous unproven medical treatment that claims to reverse the effects of medication abortion. James argued the crisis pregnancy centers have made false and misleading statements to patients by claiming that the abortion pill reversal treatment works. Notably, one study that attempted to examine the efficacy of abortion pill reversal was shut down early after only 12 women signed up and three of the women “required ambulance transport to a hospital for treatment of severe vaginal bleeding.” Unfortunately, a federal appellate court recently upheld a preliminary injunction that prevents the AG’s office from taking action against the centers while the case proceeds. The appellate court agreed with the lower court’s conclusion that the AG’s actions likely violate the free speech rights of these centers. According to the court, the First Amend-

ment allegedly protects the “free speech right” of crisis pregnancy centers to lie to pregnant people and tell them that a fake and dangerous treatment works.

A new case is before the U.S. Supreme Court, First Choice Women’s Resource Centers Inc. v. Platkin, which yet again examines the “free speech” rights of crisis pregnancy centers. In Platkin, the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs began investigating First Choice, one such center, over concerns that its website and advertising practices misled donors and clients, as well as allegations of misleading medical advice and unlicensed staff performing medical services that require professional credentials. During the investigation, New Jersey sought documents from First Choice, including advertising materials, donor information and information on staff. First Choice objected to the requests on First Amendment grounds while the state case continued. Now, the Supreme Court is poised to decide whether the First Amendment provides a cover for First Choice to avoid giving New Jersey materials it needs to build a case against it.

Regardless of whether crisis pregnancy centers have free speech rights, they’re still a target for lawsuits by patients they harm. In 2023, a Massachusetts woman filed a class action lawsuit against a center, Clearway Clinic, after the clinic failed to diagnose her ectopic pregnancy. The plaintiff claimed that the Clearway Clinic “nurse” who performed an ultrasound on her did not adequately inspect her for an ectopic pregnancy, and, about a month after the appointment, the plaintiff’s fallopian tube ruptured, leading to a life-threatening emergency. The plaintiff further claimed that the center used false and misleading advertising tactics. The parties ultimately settled the case in 2024 after a court declined to dismiss the suit.

After the Clearway case, the Massachusetts Legislature passed a law requiring pregnancy ultrasound services to be supervised by licensed medical professionals who provide medical care for pregnant people as part of their practice. The law aims to crack down on crisis pregnancy centers and protect the public, and it provides an example of what lawmakers in other states can do to fight such entities. The Massachusetts law is crafted in a way that does not clearly set the stage for a First Amendment challenge, and states have a legally recognized interest in regulating the practice of medicine. Massachusetts further launched a campaign to explain to the public what crisis pregnancy centers are, why they’re dangerous, and how to spot them. The campaign was advertised on social media, billboards, radio and public transit.

Beyond legal and legislative fixes, there’s always good old-fashioned public education. Private organizations must educate people about crisis pregnancy centers and why they’re dangerous. In the post-Roe landscape, public education is perhaps our most important tool. While laws and lawsuits are an important part of the fight, the best way to attack crisis pregnancy centers is to persuade people not to go to them in the first place.

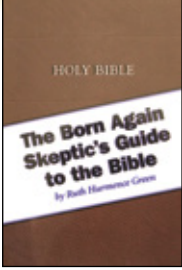
Sammi Lawrence is an FFRF staff attorney.



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

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

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The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible

By Ruth Hurmence Green

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

—Published by FFRF. 440 pages / PB

Buy it from FFRF online ffrf.org/shop

Across

1. Desert bloomers

6. Holstein call

9. Young salmon

13. Egg-shaped

14. Unit of electrical resistance

15. Pool problem, pl.

16. All over the web

17. *Wade’s 1973 opponent

18. Like haunted house

19. *Freethinking “Erasure” author Percival ____

21. *Atheist Ian McKellan’s “Lord of the Rings” role

23. Campfire residue

24. “At ____, soldier”

25. Biathlon equipment, sing.

28. Sandy golf hazard

30. Exotic furniture wood

35. Deprivation

37. U in I.C.U.

39. Plant-based laxative

40. “Blackfish” (2013) movie subject

41. *Prophet of the ten commandments fame: “Kill every male among the little ones...” (Numbers 31:17)

43. *Atheist Stieg Larsson’s “The Girl ____ the Dragon Tattoo”

44. ____ robin

46. *Freethinking playwright Sir ____ Coward

47. Potting need

48. Poole, England county

50. a.k.a. Operation Neptune

52. Not paleo

53. Best-loved, slangily

55. Born, in society pages

57. *Freethinking Milan ____ of “The Unbearable Lightness of Being” fame

61. *Bible: suitable punishment for using god’s name in a curse

65. Vidalia one

66. *Freethinking BAFTA Award-winning actor Jude ____

68. Olympic award

69. Like a coat with extra layer

70. Female reproductive cells

71. Bring character to life

72. Hewing tools

73. One in a set

74. Parachute material

Down

1. Sheltered mooring spot

2. Tel ____, Israel

3. Apple leftover

4. Queen topper

5. Most idle

6. King Julien’s sidekick in “Madagascar”

7. Exclamation of surprise

8. Opposite of alpha

9. Same as pleaded

10. Taj Mahal city

11. Iron horse track

12. Great Barrier one

15. “Aeneid” protagonist

20. Monotonous hum

22. Pharaoh’s cobra

24. TV show installment

25. *Jesus: “I have not come to bring peace, but a ____” (Matthew 10:34-36)

26. Dry plateau in South Africa

27. Bring upon

29. At another time, to Romeo or Juliet

31. Condensations on grasses

32. Opposite of cation

33. Unlace

34. *Atheist artist Frida ____

36. Soaks in rays

38. Got ready to drive

42. Biased perspective

45. *”____ the Constitution” yard sign

49. Feather glue

51. Beefeater

54. Hero quality

56. *Freethinking Henrik Ibsen’s play “An ____ of the People”

57. Caffeine-producing tree

58. Computer operating system

59. Number of judges on Supreme Court

60. “Nobody ____ It Better”

61. Tit for tat

62. Adored one

63. Brussels org.

64. Hidden valley

67. Address abbreviation

Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12	
13						14				15				
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Answers on page 21

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

Court hears arguments in two FFRF 10 Commandments cases

On Jan. 20, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals heard oral arguments in two cases challenging state laws in Louisiana and Texas that require public schools to display the Ten Commandments in every classroom. The Freedom From Religion Foundation is part of a coalition representing the plaintiffs in both cases.

The arguments in these cases, *Rev. Roake v. Brumley* and *Rabbi Nathan v. Alamo Heights Independent School District*, come nearly a year after a unanimous three-judge panel of the 5th Circuit ruled that Louisiana’s House Bill 71 is “plainly unconstitutional,” finding it directly contradicted long-standing Supreme Court precedent. That decision was vacated when the full court agreed to rehear the case. Federal courts in Texas have likewise issued multiple preliminary injunctions blocking enforcement of Senate Bill 10, concluding that the law violates students’ First Amendment rights by forcing government-endorsed religious scripture on public-school children.

The Louisiana plaintiffs in *Roake v. Brumley* are represented by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU

of Louisiana and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, with Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP serving as pro bono counsel. The Texas plaintiffs in *Rabbi Nathan v. Alamo Heights Independent School District* are represented by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU of Texas and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, with Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP serving as pro bono counsel.

The plaintiffs in both states are multi-faith and nonreligious families who simply want their constitutional right to decide their children’s religious education respected by the government. They want their children’s public schools to remain welcoming and inclusive for their families and students of all backgrounds.

“I send my children to public school to learn math, English, science, art, and so much more — but not to be evangelized by the state into its chosen religion,” said Rev. Jeff Sims from Louisiana. “These religious displays send a message to my children and other students that people of some religious denominations are superior to others.”

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.”

Freethought Today Cryptogram

BV FRN ENHF LMHN, SMBFR KNMUNH AFRNTIBHN

INKK-BVFNVFBAVNJ XNAXKN BVLXMEKN AS FRBVOBVW

TMFBAVMKKP MEAZF DMVP AS FRNBT JNNXNHF LAVLNTVH; MF

IATHF, BF BH M LAVFBVZAZH HAZTLN AS RZDMV UBAKNVLN.

—HMD RMTTBH

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: E => B-. Answer is on page 21.

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

What are you missing? Check out our other offerings!

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

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Daily online calendar of famous freethinkers
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Legislative action alerts
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ffrfactionfund.org

We Dissent - monthly legal podcast
wedissent.org

IN THE NEWS

Court: Trans pronouns didn't violate rights

Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland did not violate the First Amendment rights of a Christian substitute teacher by requiring her to use transgender students' pronouns in the classroom, according to a ruling by a federal appeals court.

In a 2-1 decision released Jan. 28, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed a lower court's ruling that dismissed a majority of the teacher's claims that the Maryland school system's policy violated her free speech and religious rights under the Constitution, and rejected her request for an injunction that could have upended the school board's policy.

Writing for the majority, Judge Robert B. King said the teacher had not convinced the court that a school board policy instructing educators to use transgender students' pronouns was hostile toward religious views. King also wrote that the teacher's free speech protections were not violated because following the policy was a part of her official duties as a public school teacher.

In the majority ruling, the appeals court said that "no one forced Polk to become a substitute teacher in Montgomery County" and added that by accepting her position, she agreed to follow policies set by the school board.

Wis. city council ends prayers before meetings

La Crosse, Wis., City Council members on Jan. 8 voted 9-4 to end the practice of inviting representatives of the faith community to offer a message at the monthly council sessions. FFRF and member Hank Zumach first raised concerns over the practice more than 15 years ago.

Mackenzie Mindel sponsored the resolution at the urging of some members of the public. "I'm really glad that's over," Mindel said after the vote, "because it's really difficult . . . to have the community so upset about an issue."

She added that people have asked her for several years to propose an end to the invocation practice.

City leaders said the vote to end invocations would not change other traditions at council meetings, such as a moment of silence or the Pledge of Allegiance.



Poetic license

This wonderful license plate was seen on a vehicle on the streets of Madison, Wis., on a recent Sunday morning. (As is typical of cars in the winter in the northern states, it is covered with road salt.) If you have a license plate (or see one) that shows support for state/church separation, nontheism, freethought or FFRF, send a photo to editor@ffrf.org. We'll publish them in Freethought Today.

Vouchers for 46% of Wis. private school students

Almost half of all private school students in Wisconsin now receive school vouchers, signaling a rapid reshaping of the state's educational landscape powered by state taxpayers, a study by Wisconsin Watch reports.

In 2025, nearly half (46 percent) of all private school students in Wisconsin received vouchers across the state's four programs. Taxpayers this school year will spend more than \$700 million to defray tuition costs for about 60,000 students. Almost all (about 96 percent) attend religiously affiliated schools.

When it launched in 1990, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, the nation's first modern private school voucher program, included just 300 students at seven secular private schools. The students came from families earning less than 175 percent of the federal poverty level, and state taxpayers covered \$2,446 of tuition for each.

The total price tag that year: about \$700,000, or \$1.78 million today adjusted for inflation. It was a pittance compared to the \$1.9 billion of state aid and \$2.4 billion of property taxes provided to public schools in Wisconsin that year.

Decalogue placed outside Texas courthouse

In Tarrant County, Texas, a Ten Commandments monument was placed outside the courthouse after it was approved last year by commissioners in a 3-1 vote.

The proposal for the monument raised legal questions whether it should be allowed on government property. The monument, unveiled during a public ceremony on Jan. 16, stands alone on the courthouse grounds in Fort Worth and features the Ten Commandments rendered in the King James translation. It was accepted as a donation in April from the American History & Heritage Foundation.

FFRF wrote to the County Commissioners Court to voice its displeasure. The letter explained that the Supreme Court has repeatedly struck down courthouse Ten Commandments displays that lack a genuine secular context.

County officials have reportedly attempted to justify the monument by claiming the Ten Commandments reflect the moral and legal foundations of American law. History and law disprove that assertion, FFRF asserts.

'Nones' increase markedly in Latin America

A survey by the Pew Research Center shows that the religiously unaffiliated ("Nones") nearly doubled or saw even larger gains in every country in Latin America over the last decade.

The survey studied Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. The gains were largest in Chile and Colombia. A third of Chileans identified as religiously unaffiliated in the most recent Pew survey, more than double the 16 percent of Chileans who said the same a decade ago, reflecting a 17-point gain. Colombia also saw a 17-point gain in the religiously unaffiliated. In 2024, nearly a quarter (23

percent) said they were religiously unaffiliated, almost quadrupling the 6 percent who said they were unaffiliated in the survey a decade earlier.

Also, over the last decade, Catholicism has continued to decline sharply in Latin America. Colombia saw the largest drop, where 60 percent of adults identified as Catholic in 2024 compared with 79 percent in the 2013-2014 survey.

The smallest drop in Catholicism was in Peru — the country where Pope Leo served for more than two decades before being elected pope — with a 9-point decrease over the decade between surveys.

GOP wants prayers at Ariz. school meetings

After Arizona school board members were shut down for praying at meetings, Republicans in the Legislature want to make sure it doesn't happen again.

GOP lawmakers advanced a bill that would allow prayer during school board meetings. The bill sparked a lively debate during the House Education committee meeting in late January about whether the First Amendment was intended more to protect freedom of or freedom from religion.

Republicans argued it should be obvious that school board members be allowed to pray at meetings, while Democrats argued it was not a top-of-mind issue for Arizona voters and it could attract costly lawsuits.

The bill still needs a full vote by the Arizona House of Representatives and, if passed, would move to the Senate. If it passes both chambers, it would still need approval by Gov. Katie Hobbs, a Democrat.

Bible verses could be required in Texas schools

A major effort to bring religious texts back into Texas classrooms has hit a pause, but it is far from over. State education leaders delayed a final vote on a controversial proposal to add bible passages and other religious readings to English classes from kindergarten through 12th grade.

According to the Houston Chronicle, the proposed law calls for dozens of new books in some grade levels and would require 10 passages drawn directly from various versions of the bible to be included in the English curriculum for all K-12 grades.

The Chronicle also reports that parents would likely have the option to opt their children out of reading the religious texts. That could give families some flexibility if they object to the material on faith or personal grounds. However, there is a significant catch: Even if students skip those readings in class, the religious passages are expected to be folded into the state's standardized tests if the plan goes through. That means the material could still influence what appears on high-stakes exams that affect students, teachers and campuses.

If approved, the mandatory readings would not appear in classrooms immediately. Under the current proposal, the new requirements wouldn't take effect until the 2030-31 school year.

A note to FFRF Members

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FFRF VICTORIES

Arkansas

FFRF made sure that seniors at the McAuley Senior Center in Hot Springs, Ark., were no longer being forced to pray in order to receive their meals.

FFRF learned that employees at the center were organizing prayers before each meal. Additionally, seniors were expected to stand and were not being given food until the prayer had been delivered.

“Federal regulations prohibit senior centers receiving federal funding to engage in religious activities at government-sponsored functions,” FFRF Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow Kyle J. Steinberg wrote to the senior center.

After investigating the situation, Executive Director Barbara Flowers confirmed that a new policy had been implemented to put a stop to the abusive and coercive practice taking place. A moment of silence policy was introduced, and, as part of the policy, Flowers confirmed that participation would be completely voluntary, and no specific form of reflection would be required or encouraged.

California

The Los Angeles Unified School District affirmed secular students’ rights not to participate in religious assignments going forward after FFRF pointed out the exclusive nature of a Day of the Dead lesson.

A district parent reported that from October to November 2025, Broadway Elementary School was instructing their first-graders about Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) and required students to participate in crafting an “ofrenda,” an altar to deceased family members.

The student was given a flyer that explained “Families believe the spirits of their loved ones return to the world of the living for a brief time to visit their families,” and that “Offerings are made to the spirits, including their favorite foods, drinks and personal items, to help guide and nourish them on their journey.”

The parent stated that their child was confused and did not comprehend the spiritual meaning behind creating the altars, and they had to explain to their child that the traditions the school was teaching were not practices the family believed in.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district, which then worked to provide a more inclusive and welcoming environment for students. “District policy allows students to opt out of extracurricular or noninstructional activities that may conflict with religious or personal beliefs,” Chief Administrative & Education Counsel My I. Huynh wrote. “In the event that an opt out is requested, school administrators are to ensure that an alternate activity is provided as a form of accommodation. Parents can be notified ahead of time to ensure that they have ample time to request any accommodation.” Huynh also ensured that school administrators were instructed that if religious themes were to be included in lessons going forward, they must be presented in a neutral and objective manner, and be directly related to sound secular educational goals.

Colorado

FFRF’s advocacy ensured that the Denver Public Schools system reminded employees of their responsibility to remain secular at district-sponsored events.



A district parent reported that on Feb. 27, 2025, Lena Archuleta Elementary School invited students and parents to the school for a school-sponsored Community Unity Night Black History Event. Reportedly, the master of ceremonies, a teacher at Lena Archuleta, explained that “prayer is a foundation of Black culture.” After this comment, the teacher acknowledged that she was not supposed to lead students in prayer at school, but she “wanted to start the event off with prayer anyways.” According to the parent, the teacher directed all attendees, including students, to bow their heads and join her in a prayer that was explicitly directed to God.

Following a letter from FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence, the district conducted an investigation into the situation. Lauren Parsons, senior counsel for the Denver Public Schools, confirmed that the district had taken appropriate steps to address the violation, including addressing the matter with the teacher, and providing ongoing training and guidance to employees regarding constitutional requirements.

Georgia

FFRF made sure that a principal in the Jefferson (Ga.) City Schools system would no longer be pushing her religion onto faculty and staff as an official representative of the district.

A concerned employee reported that the Jefferson Middle School principal was regularly leading faculty in prayer during meetings. Reportedly, the principal had also appointed the assistant principal to lead prayer if she cannot attend a faculty meeting. The prayers were noted to always or nearly always specifically be Christian.

Additionally, the principal was sending weekly emails to faculty and staff in which she directly referenced and quoted the bible. The employee who contacted FFRF explained that they felt it was wrong for the principal to talk about Jesus and God, and they felt bad for those who had to be subjected to the principal’s belief system “as if it is the RIGHT way to believe.”

After receiving a letter from FFRF Attorney Sammi Lawrence, the district reached out to legal representative Cory O. Kirby. “The superintendent met with the middle school principal and explained the principal separation of church and state specifically addressing the perception of promoting or inhibiting a particular religion through her communications,” Kirby wrote. “The superintendent and the district are confident that the principal is now cognizant of this matter and has assured the superintendent that this will not occur again.”

Georgia

FFRF was able to assure that students in the Dalton Public Schools system in Georgia will no longer have to listen to blatantly Christian music over speakers while they are arriving in the morning.

A district community member reported that a Bluetooth speaker in the Dalton High School cafeteria was “blasting” Christian worship music every morning. The speaker was located next to the breakfast cart that students used in the morning. Reportedly, the speaker belonged to school staff, not students, and the music could be heard down the hallway. The music was said to be overtly Christian, confirmed by a video received from the complainant.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district and it responded quickly. “School district administration is meeting with the cafeteria staff to remind them of the requirements of the First Amendment as it relates to the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses,” Cory O. Kirby, the district’s legal representative, confirmed.

Indiana

FFRF reminded the Delphi Community School Corporation in Indiana that allowing for a religious program to take place during school hours was unconstitutional.

A district parent informed FFRF that Delphi Community Elementary School let the Carroll County Religious Education Program take place during the school day on school property. A flier sent home at the beginning of the school year about the program said, “The children will line-up in the cafeteria with their lunch and walk to a room down a hall from the cafeteria where they will have around 25 minutes of bible teaching while eating their lunch.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler stepped in to remind the district that religious programs have no place in public schools.

After FFRF’s letter was sent, the district took action to see that the district was no longer violating the Constitution. “Please know that we will be stopping this program immediately at our elementary school,” Superintendent Pamela Moore wrote. Moore additionally forwarded FFRF the letter parents were sent confirming that the program had been cancelled in order to provide every student with a safe and inclusive learning environment.

Minnesota

After learning of ongoing prayers at staff meetings in the Schoolcraft Learning Community in Minnesota, FFRF helped the district update meeting

guidelines to create a welcoming community for all employees.

An employee reported that SLC was regularly opening mandatory staff meetings with bible readings. According to the employee, SLC teachers rotate through leading these staff meetings and are encouraged to begin each meeting with a reading. The reading, according to the staff website, “can be used to serve as a point of inspiration; to preview the day’s activity; to provide a topic on which to reflect; and to serve as a demonstration of one of the Core Values or Habits of Scholarship.” The employee reported that SLC administration was allowing staff to begin these meetings with readings from the bible from at least November 2024 and into November 2025, when FFRF wrote the letter of complaint.

The employee told FFRF that they excused themselves from the meetings several times when bible readings occurred. “I feel sick to my stomach with anxiety before each meeting not knowing what reading and message will be pushed. I feel embarrassed, disrespectful and unprofessional when I have to excuse myself in the middle of a staff meeting for the reason of preserving my rights,” they wrote. FFRF learned that SLC’s administration received complaints regarding religious readings at the mandatory staff meetings, and the employee who contacted FFRF feared retaliation from SLC administration for exercising their rights to abstain from religious practices while at work.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence sent a letter to the learning center, writing, “Keeping open readings secular costs nothing, excludes no one, and welcomes everyone.”

After receiving FFRF’s letter, the district consulted legal counsel to find the best solution. After the school board reviewed the situation, Superintendent Mark Bjornrud wrote an email detailing the steps the district had taken as corrective measures. “We have since clarified that the portion of the Staff Circle that is led by a different staff member each month should mirror the expectations, substance and structure as the morning crew circles that teachers hold in their classrooms each day,” Bjornrud wrote. “We have put together and conducted all staff training on the expectations and

secularspotlight

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

structure for these circles. Clarifying language will also be included in our staff handbook.”

Missouri

FFRF successfully worked with the Hannibal School District #60 in Missouri to stop religious prayers at district softball events.

A concerned parent reported that on Nov. 13, 2025, the Hannibal High School Girls’ Softball Coach directed a student to lead all attendees in prayer at the softball team’s award banquet. While the student led the prayer, the coach and the assistant coach reportedly stood and bowed their heads with the students and parents in attendance. The parent who contacted FFRF stated that this is the second year in a row that the coach promoted religion while acting in his official capacity as coach. Additionally, the assistant coach had a pattern and practice of praying with students before and after games while serving as a representative of the district.

The parent stated that they and their child felt “obligated” to participate in the banquet prayer because the vocal majority of the team was religious, and they feared retaliation. Further, the student reported that the prayers made them uncomfortable, but they participated to avoid losing opportunities to receive awards or have the coach speak to college coaches on their behalf.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district, and the district took immediate corrective action. Superintendent Ritchie Kracht emailed FFRF to detail an investigation that confirmed FFRF’s report. Kracht explained that he spoke with both coaches to make sure they fully understand that the prayers were unacceptable.

“The head coach will ensure this will not happen again in his program,” Kracht wrote. “We are also educating the rest of our coaching staff in all our activities to ensure this does not happen again.”

Ohio

FFRF worked with the Coshocton City Schools in Ohio to see to it that future assemblies would not incorporate prayer or religious music in order to create a more welcoming environment for students.

A parent reported that on Nov. 11, 2025, Coshocton High School held a mandatory Veterans Day assembly. During the assembly, a teacher at the high school led all students in a Christian prayer followed by a request that



the students stand and sing “God Bless the USA.” The parent stated that their child felt very uncomfortable and pressured to participate. Their child also reported that they felt like if they did not comply, they might be bullied, ostracized or possibly punished.

“Coshocton City Schools has an obligation under the law to make certain that its teachers are not violating students’ rights by proselytizing or leading children in prayer,” FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Charlotte R. Gude wrote.

FFRF’s message was received and Superintendent Mark Kowalski informed FFRF that no assemblies at the district are mandatory, but the parent’s concern was addressed regardless. “I can assure you that in the future that none of our assemblies will include any type of prayer or any music that could be mistaken for ‘religious’ in nature,” he wrote. “All of our assemblies will continue to remain voluntary in nature, as well.”

Ohio

The Washington Nile Local School District in West Portsmouth, Ohio, learned not to promote religious organizations at district events and on official district social media pages after receiving a letter from FFRF.

A parent reported that on Oct. 29, 2025, Portsmouth West Elementary School (PWES) hosted a Trunk or Treat/Math and Literacy Night event where there were tables promoting various local churches. The parent reported that these churches were invited to set up booths inside the school. PWES’s official Facebook page also promoted the event as presented by PWES.

Additionally, the PWES official Facebook page was reposting Compass School Ministries’ Facebook post about religious teachings during release time onto the official school’s Facebook page.

“The district cannot allow its schools to be used as recruiting grounds for churches at school events,” Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Charlotte R. Gude wrote. “As the district is aware, public schools may not show favoritism towards nor coerce belief in religion.”

In response, Superintendent Chris Rapp reported the corrective actions taken. “In response to your letter, Washington-Nile Local Schools will ensure that PWES refrains from promoting religious organizations at school-sponsored events going forward,” Rapp wrote. “We have deleted the aforementioned post and have counseled our staff to refrain from promoting religious teachings using official district channels, including social media.”

Ohio

FFRF is pleased to see the Maysville Local Schools system in Ohio realign with the Constitution by agreeing to keep church leaders out of high school graduation ceremonies after a pastor asked students to “submit to God.”

A district parent reported that Maysville High School included prayer at its graduation ceremony. FFRF was informed that a local pastor was invited to the podium to deliver a prayer during the ceremony. The pastor began his religious speech with an immediate bible quotation: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” The pastor also asked the audience to bow their heads in a prayer over the graduates that contained numerous references to “lord God” and asked that God “assist [the graduates] as they acknowledge and submit to you.”

FFRF Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow Kyle J. Steinberg wrote to the district over the concerns.

The district rightly concluded that students deserve the chance to celebrate their achievement in a religion-free ceremony. “Your letter prompted a review of the district’s commencement ceremony and of the legal issue you raised,” Superintendent Joe Daniels wrote in an email. “Considering the current court cases that have interpreted the First Amendment’s requirements as to religion and public schools, the district agrees that offering prayer at the commencement ceremony could be problematic. Therefore, the district is taking appropriate steps to alter this practice going forward for all school-sponsored ceremonies.”

Ohio

After hearing from FFRF, the Sylvania Schools System in Ohio agreed to ensure that any future guest presentations would not push religious content onto students.

A district parent reported that Highland Elementary School held an assembly on Sept. 23, 2025, where a musician talked about their career. During the assembly, the musician played a music video of theirs which included lyrics such as, “So give me faith like Daniel in the lion’s den, give me hope like Moses in the wilderness, give me a heart like David, Lord be my defense,” and “I’m gonna stand up, step out when you call, Jesus, Jesus.” The assembly was reportedly mandatory and parents were not notified that Christian music would be played to students.

“The school’s actions unconstitutionally coerced students, such as our complainant’s child, into listening to Christian music as part of an official school-sponsored assembly that they

were explicitly, or at least impliedly, required to attend,” FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Charlotte R. Gude wrote.

FFRF received an email response from Assistant Superintendent Tim Zieroff, addressing the concerns raised in FFRF’s letter. Zieroff confirmed that some of the songs performed included Christian references within the lyrics, but also added that the speaker never discussed religion or promoted their religious views. “That said, we recognize the importance of ensuring that all guest speaker experiences are appropriate for students and consistent with constitutional requirements,” Zieroff wrote. He concluded the email by listing newly implemented protocols for district guest speakers, which include screening any potential viewing materials, and enforcing that no part of future presentations are allowed to push religion onto students.

Pennsylvania

FFRF has had a Fellowship of Christian Athletes representative removed from the Conemaugh Township Area (Pa.) School District’s football program.

FFRF learned that “Character Coach” Todd Cover of the fellowship was allowed to lead Christian devotionals and pray with students in the district’s high school football program. Reportedly, Cover had been leading a devotional with the players before every home game, during which “he ensured that each student had the chance to pray and talk during their time together.” He had stated, “These devotionals are a great time to get the team participating and involved in conversations about Christ’s love.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler wrote to inform the district that Cover’s actions violated students’ First Amendment rights. As a result of FFRF’s letter, the district conducted an investigation, leading to clearer boundaries between school athletics and coercive religious practices.

Ronald N. Repak, the district’s legal representative, wrote back to FFRF detailing the district’s compliance with the Constitution. “The administration explained that we need to ensure a clear distinction between student led and FCA led activities as we move forward,” he wrote. “Additionally, Mr. Cover will no longer be serving as the character coach for the Conemaugh Township football team.”

Tennessee

When FFRF informed the Tipton County Schools superintendent of sports team coaches forcing their players to pray, the district took action to see the practice come to an end.

A local parent informed FFRF that at middle school softball games, the coaches of both teams were leading their teams in the Lord’s Prayer in a prayer circle. Additionally, the coach told the parent’s child directly to participate in the prayer circle, and that coach-led prayer is common across sports teams in the district.

FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Charlotte R. Gude wrote to the district, and Superintendent John Combs emailed FFRF, stating that he spoke with district principals, and reminded them of their expectation of adhering to the Constitution. Combs additionally wrote that his office would be open to the complainant’s family in the future if incidents were to occur again.

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Judge: FFRF case against tax exemptions may proceed

A judge issued a ruling on Jan. 30 allowing a lawsuit to move forward that the Freedom From Religion Foundation and three Madison, Wis., residents filed against an unconstitutional tax exemption benefiting the rental properties owned by two religious entities in their hometown.

The suit challenges a property tax exemption that was created and then amended to benefit specific church-owned rental properties to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. The Pres House and Lumen House Apartments, both serving student renters and owned by two of the defendants, are explicitly relieved of paying their share of taxes.

The judge denied the defendants' motions to dismiss and the case will proceed — a big step toward securing a decision that will end the unconstitutional exemption.

The exemption is unlawful under the Wisconsin Constitution on several counts, the plaintiffs contend. The exemption harms property tax-paying plaintiffs Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker, FFRF co-presidents, and David Peterson, by forcing them and all other city of Madison property taxpayers to pay higher property taxes to make up for the unlawful omission of these properties from the tax rolls. Further, the exemption harms plaintiff FFRF, by favoring rental properties owned by two religious nonprofit organizations to the exclusion of all other nonprofits that may desire to run student apartments in the future.



Photo by Chris Line

A judge has ruled that a lawsuit may move forward that FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor (and a third party) filed against an unconstitutional tax exemption benefiting the rental properties owned by two religious entities.

“The court can make the reasonable inference that the exemption as it exists today does not have a reasonable relation to a legitimate purpose of government,” Dane County Circuit Judge Julie Genovese writes in her court order. “As such, plaintiffs have alleged facts sufficient to support a claim that the exemption violates the Uniformity Clause” of the Wisconsin constitution.

The Wisconsin Legislature enacted the property tax exemption in 2009

to benefit the Pres House Apartments owned by the Presbyterian Student Center Foundation. The Legislature approved an amendment in 2013 to benefit the Lumen House Apartments, owned by St. Raphael’s Congregation within the Diocese of Madison. The Legislature at that time adopted language to prevent additional properties from ever qualifying for this property tax exemption. No other properties in Madison or Wisconsin can ever benefit, and the exemption specifi-

cally targets properties serving University of Wisconsin-Madison students to the exclusion of students at all other colleges.

The Pres House Apartments’ current market value likely exceeds \$25 million, with estimated property taxes owed in excess of \$300,000 annually. The Lumen House Apartments’ current market value likely exceeds \$7.6 million, with estimated property taxes exceeding \$94,000 annually. Based on their combined estimated \$33 million in value, omitting these properties from the tax rolls is approximately the equivalent of exempting an entire neighborhood from paying property taxes, FFRF asserts in the legal complaint.

On April 4, 2024, FFRF’s counsel sent a letter to the city of Madison assessor, Michelle Drea, laying out the legal reasons why the exemption is unlawful under the Wisconsin Constitution. Within hours, Drea replied strongly disagreeing.

The tax exemption that the Pres House and Lumen House Apartments benefit from is unconstitutional for multiple reasons, the plaintiffs contend. The exemption violates the Uniformity Clause of the Wisconsin Constitution, which states, in part, “The rule of taxation shall be uniform.” The exemption breaches, too, the Equal Protection Clause set forth in the Wisconsin Constitution by creating a distinct classification, student rental properties meeting extremely specific criteria, and treating this class significantly differently from all other similarly situated properties.

OVERHEARD

I have serious concerns about human rights in El Salvador and the fact that the Trump administration no longer seems to value human rights — so every member of this delegation should be asked whether they were briefed on this, what embassy staff and State Department officials had to say about it, and whether they were allowed to meet with dissidents and victims of the Bukele dictatorship’s abuses — or whether this was just a cheerleading tour for a dictator who panders to Republicans by holding an evangelical prayer breakfast.

Rep. Jared Huffman, in a statement responding to a trip to Central America by the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, to launch El Salvador’s first National Prayer Breakfast.

JonathanLarsen.Substack, 1-22-26

You got jail deaths, commissioner courts meetings are tumultuous, we have conflict in the city hall meetings. Where is this being modeled? Where are the sentiments that are expressed in the Ten Commandments being modeled?

Michael Bell, pastor of Greater St. Stephen First Church in Fort Worth. Bell, along with about 20 other interfaith leaders, peacefully protested the Decalogue installation on county land.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 1-16-26

They want to be politically protected for having the freedom to tell us we must convert to their religion. This is about whether a person of the nondominant perspective can go about their school life without being bullied or coerced against their conscience.

Rev. Dr. Russell Meyer, executive

director of the Florida Council of Churches, opposing moves in Florida to amend the state constitution to adopt language to allow discrimination in public schools in the name of religion. FFRF Action Fund is opposing the amendment proposal.

Florida Trident, 1-30-26

The glorification of cruelty and rejection of compassion don’t just shape the Trump administration’s policies. And they have become a rallying cry for a cadre of hard-right “Christian influencers” who are waging a war on empathy. It threatens to pave the way for an extreme vision of Christian nationalism that seeks to replace democracy with theocracy in America.

Hillary Clinton, in her column, “MAGA’s war on empathy.”

The Atlantic, 2-1-26

Public mistrust of science accelerated during the Covid pandemic, when changing guidance was viewed by many as either deceptive or revealing feet of clay. In fact, those changes reflected science working as it should, responding to new evidence virtually in real time during an emergency. To rebuild trust, scientists and public health leaders must communicate not only scientific facts but also the process of science itself: testing, revising, questioning and learning. . . Revision is not a weakness of science; it is fundamental to its process, and clear communication of this is a mark of integrity.

Professor of Medicine Robert A. Phillips and Professor Emeritus of Radiology H. Dirk Sostman, both of Weiss Cornell Medicine, in a letter to the editor.

New York Times, 1-7-26

Nick McManus forges his own trail

Name: Nick McManus.

Where I live: Kalamazoo, Mich. I was born in Kalamazoo in 1969 and was raised there. However, I lived in Miami for 20 years, which turned me into a big city boy, kinda-sorta?

Family: I no longer have any immediate family, although I do have some extended family — aunts and cousins.

Education: I have a high school diploma, but no formal education beyond that. I am a carpenter by trade.

I got where I am today: By getting sober and staying sober. Hopefully I’m headed in the right direction.

Person in history I admire: Karl Bushby, the Englishman who has been walking around the world for 27 years. He would be the first person to completely walk an unbroken path around the world. He is set to finish in the fall of this year. How cool is that?

A quotation I like: “Not all who wander are lost,” by JRR Tolkien.

Things I like: Language learning, Spanish in particular. I also like working out at the gym and extreme hiking.

Things I smite: Ethnocentrism and bigotry.

My doubts about religion started: Around 2013, when I was dating a girl who identified as an atheist, prompting me to buy a book by none other than Dan Barker called “Godless.” It’s been a journey of discovery ever since.

Before I die: I would like to “maybe” have a child, either naturally or



Nick McManus

adopted.

Ways I promote freethought: I attend freethought conventions, of course, and donate to freethought organizations and speak to people, usually friends, about the secular worldview.

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Stop the politicization of health care

This is the speech given at FFRF's national convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C., by Dr. Maggie Carpenter on Oct. 17, 2025, in accepting FFRF's Forward Award.

Carpenter is a co-founder of the Abortion Coalition for Telemedicine, or ACT, a New York-based nonprofit that provides technical and legal support for telemedicine providers. In February 2025, Louisiana indicted Carpenter and charged her with a felony for allegedly mailing abortion pills to a patient in their state.

By Dr. Maggie Carpenter

I am so sorry that I cannot be with you in person to accept this amazing award. I am humbled. This award really goes to all telehealth shield providers — my peers who are bravely doing work that is so desperately needed in this dark time in our nation's history.

It also goes to the courageous lawyers David Cohen, Rachel Rebel Shea and Greer Donnelly, who almost four years ago imagined a way that progressive states could fight back providing abortion to thousands who otherwise would lose access due to draconian restrictions — a truly proactive idea rather than the typical defensive crouch we have seen over the last 50 years in response to attacks on reproductive rights.

It also goes to the bold legislators and governors who passed the telehealth shield laws and the thousands of supporters, their constituents who encouraged them. We hope to see more states follow suit. This award also goes to the pharmacies, the funders, the tech gurus and the lawyers, everyone who has helped to bring pills by mail to patients across the country.

I started as a telehealth abortion provider in May of 2020, when Covid shut down access to medical care. Prior to this, I could never have fathomed providing care to patients I had not seen in person. But, sometimes necessity opens the door to new models of care, and research shows that no-touch abortions are as safe and effective as in-person care.

Without the rise of telemedicine abortion during Covid, the Dobbs decision could have brought us back to the days of back-alley abortions, putting patients'



Photo by Chris Line

Dr. Maggie Carpenter, who cannot travel as Louisiana wants to extradite her, speaks via recorded video to the FFRF convention audience on Oct. 17, 2025.

lives at risk. In fact, just the opposite happened. The telehealth movement succeeded in providing access to abortion care to more people across the country than before Dobbs. Now, medication abortion is the preferred method, which accounts for more than three quarters of all abortions in the United States.

It's no wonder that the anti-abortion movement is pulling out all the stops to ban it. And make no mistake, this war against reproductive health will have deadly consequences for patients. It already has. This is a true life and death fight. It is an understatement to say we are living in difficult times. The depth of devastation is far reaching, more than any imagined — education, health care, civil rights, LGBTQ rights, political violence, separation of church and state, our justice system. It seems no area is safe. We are living in a time of authoritarian power and greed, not freedom and equality. We need sanity and decency. Many of us never thought we would be here. When

I graduated from college in 1992, it seemed anything was possible. The civil rights and women's rights movements had opened doors. I was able to dream of becoming a doctor and a mother, not being forced to forsake one for the other.

The economy was strong and jobs were plentiful. Anything seemed possible. This is not the same environment my children are finding as they graduate from college. The Christian nationalist manifesto is being played out as designed in Project 2025. Even though most Americans do not want this, the political division we see is a tool to divide us and prevent us from recognizing that most of us want the same things — affordable housing, clean water, decent jobs, safe streets, quality fact-based health care.

We will never agree on everything, but there is enough common ground to work together. We can fight corruption and bigotry. Imagine what it would be like to get medical issues out of our electoral processes. Force politicians to discuss policy

“The depth of devastation is far reaching, more than any imagined — education, health care, civil rights, LGBTQ rights, political violence, separation of church and state, our justice system. It seems no area is safe.”

issues, climate change, governance, poverty, roads, trade and even public health which, by definition, is the health of a population as a whole and has nothing to do with individual pregnancy choices.

We need to stop the politicization of health care. I dream of a world where we are able to separate medicine and state through a constitutional amendment, a freedom of medical decision act. Over 80 percent of Americans believe that medical decisions should be between them and their health care provider, not by their state or federal legislators, and certainly not by judges.

This amendment would allow medical decisions to be made in privacy and partnership with medical professionals, as it should be. Doctors are already regulated by state medical boards and specialty boards and governed by the Hippocratic Oath. I've always believed my role as a family medicine provider is to provide my patients with high quality, evidence-based care and to present them with their options.

Whether a patient chooses prenatal care or an abortion based on their individual circumstances, their health and their family situation, that is their choice, not mine. What should not be a choice, but, unfortunately, has become an awful one presented to many providers is following the standard of care to help a patient or save their life or complying with the law. And yet, now, in the face of politically motivated, unscientific laws in many states, politicians are forcing doctors to choose between helping their patients or going to jail. This is wrong and it will and has had deadly consequences for patients and women in this country. So, there is a lot to do, to say the least. The road ahead of us feels longer than it ever has.

A good friend always ends her emails with an old proverb, “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” These times demand we all work together to create a more humane and equitable world. I thank you for honoring me with the Forward Award. I will keep it on my desk as motivation as we push forward on these crucial issues that affect us all.

Thank you so much.

ABORTION NEWS

Texas sues Delaware nurse over abortion pills

Texas is suing another abortion provider for allegedly mailing pills into the state. Attorney General Ken Paxton is now suing Delaware Nurse Practitioner Debra Lynch of Her Safe Harbor. He is already suing New York's Dr. Margaret Carpenter over similar allegations, while Louisiana seeks to extradite and arrest both Carpenter and California's Dr. Rémy Coeytaux (see following entry).

Last summer, Paxton threatened Lynch and several other abortion providers with \$100,000 fines for offering telemedicine abortion services. Afterward, Lynch publicly said she was undeterred — and that Paxton's actions sparked over 250 more requests for pills from Texans.

Since then, attacks on shield laws and telemedicine access have escalated.

Delaware is a shield state; it protects abortion providers who mail the medication into banned states from civil suits and criminal charges. In late 2025, the state strengthened its laws to bar officials from

aiding out-of-state investigations targeting abortion providers accused of doing so.

Calif. won't extradite abortion provider

California Gov. Gavin Newsom said Jan. 28 that his state would refuse to extradite a doctor who has been charged in Louisiana with providing abortion pills to a resident of that state.

On Jan. 27, Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill released an indictment accusing a California abortion provider, Dr. Rémy Coeytaux, of prescribing and mailing abortion pills to a woman who had found the telemedicine abortion service the doctor worked for in October 2023, shortly after discovering she was pregnant. Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry said hours later that he would sign an extradition order for the doctor.

The case is the latest escalation in the battle between states that has arisen since the U.S. Supreme Court eliminated the national right to abortion in 2022. About a third of states, includ-

ing Louisiana, currently have near-total bans on abortion. About 20 others have some type of abortion shield law, including at least eight states — California among them — that explicitly refuse to cooperate with prosecutions, lawsuits or investigations against providers who supply abortion medication to states with bans.

FFRF: Religion behind abortion pill hearing

FFRF pinpoints a recent U.S. Senate hearing on the abortion pill as a textbook example of religious ideology intruding into government decision-making under the guise of public safety.

Although billed as a hearing on the safety of medication abortion, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee proceeding, misleadingly titled “Protecting Women: Exposing the Dangers of Chemical Abortion Drugs,” served primarily as a platform for anti-abortion lawmakers to promote religiously motivated misinformation

and pressure federal regulators to abandon evidence-based standards. The result was a parade of junk science, fearmongering and overt attempts to substitute theology for medicine.

The religious motivation behind the hearing was made explicit during a post-hearing press conference, where senators and hearing witnesses stood alongside Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, and Jason Rapert, founder and president of the National Association of Christian Lawmakers, to demand sweeping executive action against mifepristone.

Mifepristone was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2000 and has been repeatedly reviewed since. Each review has reached the same conclusion: Medication abortion is safe and effective. Serious adverse events occur in fewer than 1 percent of cases, a rate confirmed by decades of data and endorsed by leading medical organizations, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Medical Association.

Emperor Has No Clothes Award

Mary L. Trump: Who do we want to be?

This is the speech given by Mary L. Trump at FFRF's national convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Oct. 17, 2025. She was introduced by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. To watch the speech, go to ffrf.us/con25.

Annie Laurie Gaylor: Almost 20 years ago, when a very dear and creative member named Mildred Perpigna first suggested that FFRF create the “Emperor Has No Clothes Award,” none of us could have imagined we’d be living in an America with an actual self-appointed emperor.

We think of this award as recognizing public figures who are like the small child in the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, who proclaim “the emperor has no clothes” and who tell it like it is about religion. This award has gone to many famous nonbelievers, from Christopher Hitchens to Rep. Jared Huffman to John Irving. And make no mistake, Mary L. Trump, as an atheist, is a public figure who makes known her dissent from religion.

Mary is author of two insightful and poignant books about growing up in the extended family of Donald Trump, including the bestseller “Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World’s Most Dangerous Man,” which sold nearly a million copies on its first day of sales. She followed that with a book in 2021, “The Reckoning: Our Nation’s Trauma and Finding a Way to Heal,” about the failure to address the scourge of white racism.

Last year, her haunting family memoir called “Who Could Ever Love You” came out. Mary has a literature degree from Tufts University. She earned a master’s in English Lit from Columbia and is a trained clinical psychologist who holds a Ph.D. from the Derner Institute of Advanced Psychological Studies.

She’s taught graduate courses in trauma, psychotherapy, psychopathology and developmental psychology, and we are so grateful to her for everything she does. She has been so kind to the Freedom From Religion Foundation in being here today and for agreeing to accept the Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

Please give Mary a very warm welcome.

By Mary L. Trump

Wow. This is humbling. I almost did not accept this award because I didn’t want to have to imagine this particular emperor with no clothes. But, this organization and its cause is far too important. It is a cause I believe in deeply and hopefully I will be able to convey that to you adequately.

This means a lot to me. It has, as you can imagine, been a very, what’s the word . . . tricky . . . few years for all of us. To be able to be among like-minded people in a setting like this is extraordinary. Thank you, Annie Laurie and the Freedom From Religion Foundation for doing this essential work.

For the last 10 years, I’ve been asking myself this question: Who are we? As this country continued to worsen after November 2016, in the instance of every new horror inflicted by the new administration — the Muslim ban, the child separation policy, the attacks on the trans community, the assaults on Black Americans, especially in the wake of the murder of George Floyd — I heard this constant refrain: “This is not who we are.” Over and over again. “This is not who we are.” Our dark and complex history is reflected in moments, in years, in



Photo by Chris Line

Mary L. Trump speaks at FFRF's national convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Oct. 17, 2025.

decades, indeed, and centuries of the denial of our origin story — our white privilege, our Christian privilege, our male privilege, our straight privilege.

But, if we are to overcome the limits imposed by the complacent majority, we must unflinchingly face the truth of this moment and what has led to it, just as we must admit, as unflinchingly, that this is indeed who we are now as a country, if not as individuals. And we must turn as one, all of us who care so deeply, to believe unflinchingly in this nation’s promise to ask this question: Who do we want to be? And then we must ask, “What do we need to do in order to become the people we want to be?”

But, first, I want to talk about the fight. What are we fighting against?

Some of this is obvious. We are faced currently with the very real possibility that this country will complete its slide into fascist autocracy with a leader who is the most corrupt, cruel and incompetent man who has ever walked this planet. And, trust me, I know. A man who has the support of a political party that shares his quest for power and money and a corrupt, illegitimate supermajority of the Supreme Court that has not just willingly, but gleefully, chipped away at the foundations of our rights and our institutions.

The grievance of the would-be dictator co-opts the language of the oppressed, and those of us who struggle to maintain equanimity in the face of

such an onslaught against everything we value. The grievance attempts to silence our pain and nullify our struggles. But we must refuse at every step along the way to be silenced. We must continue to resist, no matter the cost. And we must reject wholesale their

strategy to enact a set of policies that is antithetical to what we stand for as a country, to engage in politics that has as its sole mission dividing us at a time we most need to be united,

to bastardize the majority religion in this country that teaches its followers that their god is a hateful god, and that anger and disdain and vengeance are more Christian than love and acceptance and understanding.

How do we fight back?

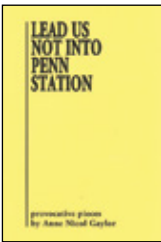
Which brings us to the question of how we fight. As you can imagine, or maybe not, I don’t know, like I can’t even imagine it sometimes. Back in July of 2020, my life changed and in ways that I never could possibly have comprehended because my book was published. Nobody knew I existed.



Photo by Chris Line

Mary L. Trump signs copies of her books for convention attendees.

“So, I implore all of us, no matter how difficult or scary it is going to be, dig deep. Hold the line. Stand strong. Let us all strive for what is best in us.”



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comprise 41 percent. New Yorkers make up 3 percent of the population and are estimated to comprise 30 percent of it. If only that were the case! Not that I have any investment in that whatsoever.

Atheists, I assume, comprise 99 percent of the population in this room, and yet only 3 percent of the population of America. And those who fear us believe that we make up 33 percent of the population. Again, if only. Atheists are among the most reviled minority in America. And obviously misunderstood, because if they understood this, they would not revile us.

Become a better ally

I'd like to take a brief detour in order to discuss allyship. There is no excuse for us atheists not to be better allies, especially being a maligned minority. We know what it's like. This is true across the board. The idea that we, as a hated minority population, would not welcome with open arms anybody — no matter their race or ethnicity or political affiliation or sexual orientation — who is on our side of the fight is unacceptable.

We all have to challenge ourselves to do better and to embrace those who are willing to stand with us, no matter how different their paths, no matter how different they might be from us, no matter the degree of our discomfort with those differences. That discomfort is our responsibility.

There is much to fear, no doubt. It is, in fact, eminently sane in this fraught era to be afraid. It is therefore necessary for us to look back to those who, under circumstances so dire they are beyond our imaginings, stood up and fought for rights and freedoms and a better life that they themselves would never have. There is no excuse for our engaging in cowardice.

To those corporate media companies and white shoe law firms and well-endowed universities, with your power and wealth, who have capitulated to this regime, I say thank you for making the targets on the backs of those individuals who continue to fight every single day more visible. But we will not capitulate . . . ever.

'We can't look back'

You know that saying we heard after the George W. Bush administration started torturing people. We heard this in the Obama administration after we let banks off the hook for impoverishing millions of hardworking Americans because the banks fucked up: "We can't look back. We have to look forward." Yeah, well, as I said, we must look back. But, yes, we



Photo by Chris Line

Mary L. Trump holds up her Emperor Has No Clothes Award, which was presented to her by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

also must look forward.

We have to look ahead, though not in a way not to let people off the hook. We have to look ahead to a future that is ours to shape. If only we have the courage, because we have the strength and we do have the numbers. There are more of us than there are of them if only we are willing to get out of our own way and stand together.

I have forgotten my way sometimes. I have forgotten who I am. I have forgotten who I aspire to be. I have given in to the dark impulses the other side deliberately strives to stoke in us. I have said the word "hate," and felt the feeling of it more times than I care to admit over the last decade. But, we have to hold ourselves to a higher standard because we're better than that. We can't lose sight of what we're fighting for, but we must not lose sight of who we are in this fight. We must not lose our democracy, obviously. This is about our rights and our freedoms and our ability to pursue happiness and securing

those rights for all of us.

But, it's also about answering the questions, "Who are we? What kind of people do we aspire to be?" This is more existential and profound than any policy or politics. This is indeed about what it means to be human in a time of grave danger and consequence, while never losing sight of what is best and doing everything we can — everything we can — to aspire to be our best selves.

This is a struggle for human decency. This is a struggle to remember that it is our empathy and our kindness and our creativity that will lead us to build a better world. Remembering what is the point of being human, of being people who have the capacity to build, to create, to experience wonder, to be the kind of people who do everything in our power to protect those who make our world a more beautiful place because of their generosity and their spirit and their talent and their ability to believe in all that is best in humanity, which we must believe is so much greater and more powerful than the destructive forces that have gained ascendance in America today.

Right side of history

I believe that we're fighting for something essential, and we know it. But, that's not enough. Let us, in this fight, while knowing that we are on the right side of history and that our cause is a righteous cause, let us use this opportunity to define who we are in this moment, so that we can prevail . . . and we will. I promise you.

Let us reimagine this country, not rebuild it, but reimagine it so that finally we will have created a true multicultural, representative democracy in which all of us, regardless of our belief system or our race or ethnicity or gender or sexual orientation, regardless of the choices we make as mature, freethinking adults within the bounds of the social contract, are at long last, equal. So, I implore all of us, no matter how difficult or scary it is going to be, dig deep. Hold the line. Stand strong. Let us all strive for what is best in us. Let us, every single one of us, separately and together, with every ounce of kindness and empathy and creativity and tenderness, stand as one. And remember what we're fighting for while not losing sight of who we are in this fight. Individually and collectively, it is up to us, my friends. This is our moment. This is our time. Let us enter the breach. Unyielding and courageous. Together.

Thank you.

Feeling hopeful while defending civil rights

By Patrick Elliott

As an attorney, I usually address civil rights violations in court. For 16 years, I have worked on cases for the Freedom From Religion Foundation to protect constitutional and civil rights. I have participated in demonstrations on just a few occasions. Jan. 25 was one of those times.

I live in a Twin Cities suburb, as does most of my extended family. My sister invited me to join a protest in late January along a busy street in her city to show support for members of our community and to oppose what ICE is doing to people in our state. I went with my sister and my mom, who I do not recall ever attending such an event before. About 40 people stood on different corners of an intersection, holding signs and facing traffic.

I am the father of two boys, ages 6 and 4. After seeing what happened to 5-year-old Liam Ramos, I felt that I had to start doing something. I had already planned to protest by the time ICE killed another citizen, Alex Pretti, on Jan. 24. Alex was a registered nurse, just like my wife, who works at a hospital in the Twin Cities. While I went to the protest, my wife spent her Sunday shopping for groceries to be delivered to immi-



FFRF Legal Director Patrick Elliott and his sister participate in a protest in Minneapolis.

grant families in need. We aren't doing much, but we are trying to help.

It was zero degrees, so bringing our kids was not an option, nor would it have been advisable for safety reasons. I was glad children were not present, given the behavior of some drivers. My fellow protesters and I were called "f***ing r**ards" by one angry woman. We got the finger from others. We were told to "go home" and to "get a job." But it was Sunday — and we have jobs.

Two teenagers tried to "roll coal" by

blasting truck exhaust on us. They had just a standard truck, so it didn't really work. I called them "bootlickers" on their second or third drive-by, but the protester next to me had the better response: "Have the day you deserve!"

Despite all of this, I felt hope. I stood near an elementary school teacher and shared that my school district had emailed families a few days ago to inform us that ICE had been at two schools in the district.

Overall, onlookers were overwhelm-

ingly positive, with the ratio of positive to negative responses around 20 to 1. Families honked, waved and gave us thumbs up. More than once, I assumed an approaching driver would flip us off, only to be surprised by encouragement instead.

A woman stopped and delivered a comically large number of hot chocolates. Another person dropped off coffee. Protesters shared hand warmers, whistles, signs and snacks. One person tried to hand us a \$100 bill and a fellow protester replied on behalf of us, "Give it to someone in need."

The only time religion came up was when a supporter driving by said, "Seek justice. Isaiah 1:17." As an atheist, I don't need biblical inspiration or moral guidance from religion. But some people do.

"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

I'll allow it.

Minnesotans are giving me hope. Protecting civil rights is not dependent on government officials, legislatures or courts. Everyday people are showing up, standing together and speaking out. And that matters.

Patrick Elliott is FFRF legal director.

Clarence Darrow Award

Rediscover the values of the Declaration

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

Amit Pal: It's such a privilege and pleasure to be introducing this year's recipient of our Clarence Darrow Award — Jamelle Bouie. He is, as you many of you know, a columnist for the New York Times.

He was formerly chief political correspondent for Slate, was awarded a writing fellowship for the American Prospect, a fellowship at the Nation Institute, then went to the Daily Beast, and then joined the Times as a columnist in 2019.

Our Clarence Darrow Award is a solid bronze miniature, not a replica, of the 7-foot Clarence Darrow statue created by sculptor Zenos Frudakis that FFRF placed on the lawn of the Rhea County Courthouse during the Scopes Trial Centennial celebration that some of you may have attended in Dayton, Tenn. The Clarence Darrow Award is one of only 20 statuettes we have created to date. It's an all-purpose award to recognize civil libertarians. Past recipients have included Ed Asner, Rep. Jamie Raskin, Elie Mystal, and two previous New York Times columnists, Linda Greenhouse and Michelle Goldberg.

We are proud today to honor Jamelle Bouie for his brilliant commentary on the law, the Constitution and democracy.

By Jamelle Bouie

Thank you so much. This is such an honor. It's a pleasure to be here. It's such an honor to receive this award and be in the company of previous award recipients, and also in the company of all of y'all who are doing such important work in fighting for the separation of church and state, fighting for the United States, not as some kind of Christian nationalist authoritarian country, but the United States as I think it was meant to be: a secular country with room for everyone, regardless of what faith they practice or what faith they don't practice, regardless of where they stand on the question of faith, that this country has a room for them in its civic and political and economic life.

It's so fitting that we are gathered here this afternoon. The No Kings protests are ongoing. I've been watching video feeds from around the country. And millions of Americans across the country gathered in our major cities — Chicago, New York, L.A., and smaller cities, little rural towns. I live in Charlottesville, Va., and I'm told that we have something like 10,000 people out of a metro area of about 200,000. That's a ton of people for the size of the place.

So, millions of Americans gathered not just to protest this administration's monarchal pretensions, not just to protest its illegitimate seizure of power, but to also stand for a vision of the United States which seems to be in decline, at least among our political elites who hold power. This is a vision of the United States that isn't a narrow place for a select group of Americans, but it is what Frederick Douglass called the composite nation, a nation that has room for everyone. It is a version of what MLK called "the beloved community." It's a version of what W.E.B. Du Bois called "abolition



Photo by Chris Line

New York Times columnist Jamelle Bouie speaks at FFRF's national convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Oct. 18, 2025.

democracy." It is a nation founded on equality, founded on egalitarianism and devoted to making sure that everyone who calls it home and anyone can call it home has a place to make their life as they see fit.

Opposing vision of U.S.

I want to speak a little about some of the people who oppose this vision, about some of the political figures who are currently arguing that the United States is nothing like that at all, that the U.S. is this narrow, restricted country for a select group of people.

Vice President JD Vance gave a speech at the Claremont Institute in California arguing against what he called the creedal vision of the United States. I'm going to quote him here: "If you think about it, identifying America just with agreeing with the principles, let's say, of the Declaration of Independence, that's a definition that is way overinclusive and underinclusive at the same time. What do I mean by that? Well, first of all, it would include hundreds of millions, maybe billions of foreign citizens who agree with the principles of the Declaration of Independence. Must we admit all of them tomorrow? If you follow that logic of America as a purely creedal nation, America purely as an idea, that is where it would lead you."

He kind of goes on to explain that America, in fact, is a place with a defined heritage for a defined set of people. He has this unusual line where he says that if you embrace egalitarian values of the Declaration of Independence, this would lead you to exclude Americans who reject those ideals, even if they had deep roots in the nation.

I'm quoting Vance again here: "That answer would also reject a lot of the people that the A.D.L. would label as domestic extremists." He refers to the Anti-Defamation League without explanation in the speech. I guess the audience knows where he's going here.

"Even those very Americans who had their ancestors fight in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War."

Vance sees this as basically unacceptable. "I think that the people whose ancestors fought in the Civil War have a hell of a lot more claim over America than the people who say they don't belong."

As just sort of a quick critique of rhetoric here, no one says that the people who disagree with the values of the Declaration don't belong. It's sort of that kind of the whole point that you can be here, too.

The point is that their vision, that idea, doesn't actually stand for the nation as a whole. But Vance's argument

throughout this speech, and he goes after Zohran Mamdani as being ungrateful for issuing criticism of the country, is that this is a country for a set number of people.

A couple of months after that, another Republican, along the same ideological lines as Vance, gave a speech to the National Conservative Conference in Washington, D.C. This is Missouri Sen. Eric Schmitt, and he gave an even more explicit vision version of this address that Vance gave.

I'm going to quote from Schmitt here: "For decades, the mainstream consensus on the left and the right alike seem to be that America itself was just an idea, a vehicle for global liberalism. We were told that the entire meaning of America boiled down to a few lines in a poem on the Statue of Liberty, and five words about equality and the Declaration of Independence. Any other aspect of American identity was deemed to be illegitimate and immoral, poisoned by the evils of our ancestors."

Schmitt goes on to explain that his America is not an idea, it's a nation and a people with its own distinct history and heritage and interest. He describes that history and heritage as such: "We Americans are the sons and daughters of the

Christian pilgrims that poured out from Europe's shores to baptize a new world in their ancient faith. Our ancestors were driven here by destiny, possessed by urgent and fiery conviction, by burning belief devoted to their cause and their God."

He cites a couple of different groups: pilgrims, pioneers, settlers. He says they believe they were forging a nation, a homeland for themselves and their descendants. He concludes that "America belongs to us. It is our birthright, our heritage, our destiny." I read this and I was like, I feel like I've heard that speech in German before.

It is so clear that Schmitt is describing a country by and for white Americans, first and foremost. And, even then, those white Americans who belong to a Christian faith as he sees it, which clearly is a kind of Christian nationalism, a Christian faith that is about the domination of others in the polity in the country. The thing about Schmitt's speech and the thing about Vance's speech is they both take aim at the Declaration of Independence.

Schmitt's sort of dismissive "five words" is how he describes it. It feels to be somewhat in an unusual place to be a person on the left, standing up for Thomas Jefferson and standing up for the Founding Fathers and standing up for the Declaration of Independence. I found myself in recent months really going back to the founding vision, not because it's perfect, not because it's not without flaw, but because it still stands for something significant and still stands for something meaningful. The Declaration, in particular, stands for something significant and stands for something meaningful.

Gettysburg Address

I think the best articulation of what that stands for came from Abraham Lincoln and the Gettysburg Address, which I recommend. I've read it a bunch recently, and I've read a lot about the Gettysburg Address and its construction, and its conceptualization. It's worth revisiting because it does stand as such a powerful rebuke to the Schmitts and the Vances of the country. Lincoln says it best: "Fourscore and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Gettysburg was this consecration of this vision, this consecration of the soldiers who died defending the Union. Lincoln imagined a nation dedicated to the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the aims of the Founders, as he understood them, and

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his critics of the time, from Stephen Douglas, his political opponent in 1860 election, to Roger Taney, the supreme chief justice of the Supreme Court, the leaders of the Confederate rebellion. All of them insisted that the society was not one of equals, but it was one of rigid and permanent hierarchies.

Ultimately, the contest of Lincoln’s day was settled by force of arms. It was not decided by debate. It was not decided by discussion. It was decided by musket shot and cannons.

It’s worth saying that Lincoln’s vision was a vision of a country that had room for everyone who wanted to call it home. There is a great line in the July 1858 speech that Lincoln gives where he says that everyone who comes to the country, “If they look at the Declaration of Independence and they see ‘we hold these truths to be self-evident,’ ‘that all men are created equal,’ and they may feel that that moral sentiment evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all the moral principle in them, and that they have a right to claim it as though they were the blood of the blood and the flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote that Declaration.”

And Lincoln continues, “And so they are. That is the electric cord in the Declaration that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together that will link those patriotic hearts as long as the love of freedom exists in the minds of men throughout the world.”

So, Lincoln long believed that if you embrace these ideas, you’re as American as anyone else. And the Army that defends Lincoln’s vision of the country is, at the time, one of the most diverse armies ever assembled on the North American continent. It includes not just Anglo-Americans, but recent Irish immigrants, Black Americans, hundreds of thousands of them. It includes Mexican Americans fighting in the Western Front. It includes Native Americans fighting for the Union, as well. A broad, diverse army fighting for an egalitarian vision of the country.

There’s a great extent to which we now live in Lincoln’s America as much as anyone else’s. That makes it so ironic that it appears that the primary political project of Lincoln’s partisan descendants — Vance, Schmitt, the president of United States — is the destruction of this republic of equals in favor of a homeland for a select few. I hate that word “homeland” because it just sounds authoritarian. It has a vibe that I don’t think really fits with what this nation is at its best.

Powerful touchstone

The five little words that Lincoln held up, but that Schmitt and Vance have disparaged, have been a powerful touchstone for some of the great moral and political crusades in our nation’s history.

I’ll just go through some of them. The women at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, they declare that “they



Photo by Chris Line

Jamelle Bouie accepts the Clarence Darrow Award from Zenos Frudakis, who sculpted the original 7-foot Darrow statue that FFRF placed on the lawn of the Rhea County Courthouse where the Scopes Trial took place in 1925. The award is a solid bronze miniature of that statue.

hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal.” Frederick Douglass writes, “The Declaration of Independence is the ring bolt to the chain of the nation’s destiny. The principles contain the instrument, our saving principles.” Eugene Debs declares that “The Declaration of Independence recited the cause of the great strike for liberty.”

And one of my favorite reflections on the Declaration comes from Martin Luther King Jr., who, in a sermon, says, “Never before in the history of the world has a sociopolitical document expressed such profound eloquence in unequivocal language the dignity and worth of human personality. The American Dream reminds us — and we should think about it anew — that every man is an heir of the legacy of dignity and worth.”

The Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal.” Those five words stand for dignity and worth, the dignity of every person, regardless of their skin color, the dignity of every person, regardless of their ethnicity and the dignity of every person, regardless of their religion or lack of religion.

Here it’s worth mentioning, of course, Jefferson, not a particularly religious guy himself, and so, the notion that you sometimes see in Christian nationalist writings that Jefferson himself was trying to anoint a nation with God, it’s just nonsense. It’s bunk. Jefferson,

for all of his flaws, his many flaws, the serious flaws, at the very least understood that the kind of self-governing polity that he imagined could not exist if it was torn apart by religious strife.

And the figures that have carried forth Jefferson’s vision simply expanded that observation beyond religion to include all different categories of human diversity. Then we see Schmitt’s and Vance’s rejection of this idea and their insistence that America is a nation and a people with its own distinct history and heritage and interest.

A casual reader of American history will very quickly see a major issue here. That is, we do have a distinct history in this country, and it is a history of immigration and migration and the amalgamation of many cultures and traditions into something wholly different from its constituent parts. That the American heritage is this heritage of diversity, is a heritage of tolerance. This country has not just produced a vibrant secular movement, but it has produced so many different religious traditions and denominations that all emerge from the basic impulse of, “Hey, I don’t like what you’re saying so I’m going to go do something else.”

And that’s part of the heritage as well, a rejection of established dogma and an attempt to build something new out of constituent parts.

What is true for our culture and identity is also true for our interest, if you want to use that word. We are the interest the United States has as a nation or those of a fundamentally cosmopolitan nation, a nation shaped at each stage by movements of people from around the world and the cultures and traditions they bring here, as well.

Schmitt. Vance. They are presenting their rejection of the U.S.’s cosmopolitan heritage, its secular heritage, its ethnically and racially diverse heritage as something new and novel, a new kind of idea, a new way of organizing things. But, the truth is that it is one of the oldest visions we have in this country, and it’s always been a kind of stale orthodoxy for people who believe in human aristocracy, who believe that you can rank

humans according to some hierarchy, that some belong to the top and some belong on the bottom.

One of my historical interests is simply those intellectual and political figures in the American history who have been especially forthright defenders of white supremacy. This is a weird intellectual interest to have, but I find myself genuinely fascinated by reading the thoughts of those who do defend the human hierarchy and see the kinds of arguments they make, which is part of why Vance and Schmitt and those around them are so familiar to me, because they just kind of sound the same.

So, if you were listening to George Wallace’s 1963 inaugural address as governor of Alabama, you would hear something very similar when he starts singing his ode to the “great Anglo-Saxon Southland.” If you had attended a lecture by Lothrop Stoddard, who was the author of “The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy” and the “Revolt Against Civilization: The Menace of the Under Man,” you would have heard something very similar to Vance and Schmitt. If you had joined the pro-slavery ideologue George Fitzhugh in the 1860s, you would have heard him explain that quote, “The Anglo-Saxons of America are the only people in the world fitted for freedom.” You can see these ideas again and again. The thing about these ideas is that they are comprehensively defeated by a vision of a more cosmopolitan and egalitarian America.

Fitzhugh ends his career the devotee of an institution that’s destroyed in the Civil War. Stoddard, who is a eugenicist, finds his ideas discredited by the Second World War and the Allied victory against Nazi Germany. George Wallace has a five-, six-, seven-year period of real national influence, but even that declined in the face of the civil rights movement and the emergence of a real national commitment to building a more equal America.

I think that Schmitt and Vance, like their fellow travelers past and present, are going to lose. They’re going to lose. The thing to remember, though, is that their defeat is not going to be automatic. It has to be something that is part of a devoted and specific and dedicated political movement.

I think the task in this moment is to rediscover the values of the Declaration and rediscover the values of the Gettysburg Address, rediscover the values that are part of some of our greatest moments as a nation and stand for them. Stand for them as strongly in this proudly as we can and rebuke those that say that the United States is in some way just another country, just another place where those who belong according to some arbitrary measure are those who deserve to be on top.

In the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln asked his audience to recommit itself to the great task called the “unfinished work” of preserving a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Schmitt, Vance, their fellow travelers, their allies — they believe the work has already gone too far. I believe the work hasn’t gone far enough.

I think that today, this room and the events happening around the country are such a powerful reminder that millions of Americans also think we have so much work to do and that we’re going to do it and that we’re going to win.

Thank you.



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION
P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • ffrf.org

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

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

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

‘Life goes on’

Medically assisted death needs broad support

This article first appeared in the January 2026 issue of Isthmus newspaper and is reprinted with permission.

By Ingrid Andersson

Our 6-year-old hen has started crowing daily at 6 a.m. The sound is more like a croak than a crow. Even so, it sounds to me like a kind of joy: It’s a good day to be alive!

Having just flown back from Sweden, my body thinks it’s afternoon. I get up and make coffee. Outside the kitchen window, honeybees and goldfinches are at work in the lavender hysop. The hens in their run scratch and flap their wings.

It’s a good day to be alive. These are the words with which my father’s daily calls to me often began. When my dad still was able to go for walks in his neighborhood, he’d brake his walker every block or two, sit down on the built-in seat and look around. With his laboring heart, cancer-eaten bones, and an expression of love on his gaunt face, he would soak up every detail, name every bird (he was a veteran birder), and offer a positive comment to anyone passing by. For my dad, quality of life with terminal illness meant getting up in the morning (even after mind-racing nights of little or no sleep) and feeling that it was a good day to be alive.

My father taught me that the only person who can measure the quality of a life is the person living it.

About a year before my dad died and several years into repeated and increasingly traumatic hospitalizations, he asked me to find him “pills.” He wasn’t talking about his Warfarin. He was saying to me: When my time comes, medically assisted death is my method of choice. He was saying: *I want to die the same way that I have lived.* A decades-long supporter of body autonomy, as well as a longtime member of the Madison Optimist Club and a Las Vegas gambler who more often than not beat the house, my dad knew the difference between long odds and prolonged death. He knew when to walk away from the table.

Thirteen states and nine European countries have legalized medically assisted death for people with terminal illness. Wisconsin isn’t one of them. This is in spite of repeated efforts by families and legislators here to pass a



Ingrid Andersson, holding her child, is shown with her father, Alfred Johnson, a Lifetime FFRF member and benefactor, who took his own life because he was unable to access medical aid in dying.

compassionate right-to-die act. My state senator tells me that the “Our Care, Our Options” Act has not yet been reintroduced in 2026 but is expected to be.

It’s modeled on a law that’s been in practice for almost 30 years in the state of Oregon, without a single substantiated instance of abuse. The Death With Dignity Act, as it’s called in Oregon, allows terminally ill, mentally capable adults with a prognosis of six months or less the option to request, obtain and take lethal medication in the time, place and company of their choosing.

The right to die peacefully on his own terms was what Dad was telling me he was looking for. But he didn’t

have the will or stamina to make a cross country trip to a different state. So, two months before he died, he walked into a gun shop, verbally confirmed that he was neither angry nor depressed, signed a form, handed over \$500 and walked out with a snub-nose revolver.

What kind of society makes access to guns easier than access to a peaceful and lovingly supported end of life? The cruelty and injustice of it made me want to howl.

I asked my Swedish cousin, a retired journalist covering cultural affairs, what people with terminal conditions do in Sweden, where guns are very difficult to get. “They go to Switzerland,” she said. She knew somebody who’d done this. In contrast to my family’s experi-

ence, that person’s friends and family members were able to share last moments with their beloved, laugh and cry together, hold each other through one of life’s most memorable and profound experiences. Right-to-die advocacy in Sweden is led in part by Björn Ulvaeus, the same Björn who comprises one of the “Bs” in ABBA. Alveus has studied systems around the world and champions one in particular: Oregon’s.

My dad’s exit was quiet and quick at home. He harmed no other person or property and left a note of intent for the police. There was less blood than I’m used to cleaning up after birth, in my work as a nurse-midwife. But he could not include his family in his timing. His family could not be by his side for support or sit with his body and make goodbyes after death. Prompt criminal investigation was required by law, and anyone suspected of aiding in his death could have faced prosecution.

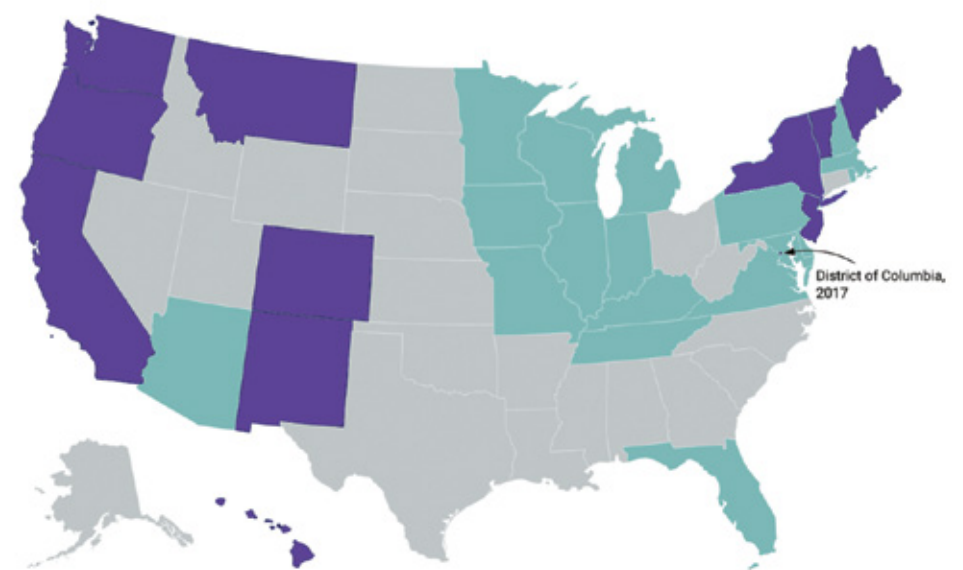
The investigation after my father’s death felt more violent than the death itself. A dozen or more boots on the ground were followed by the sheriff, followed by the medical examiner, followed by the medical photographer amid overlapping and repetitive questions from strangers in hospice and law enforcement. It all culminated in my father’s death certificates arriving in the mail, bearing in capital letters the jarring conclusion: SUICIDE.

“We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.” Toni Morrison spoke these words in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Stockholm, 1993. The degree to which we can “do” truer language around the universal yet deeply individual life transition of death is the degree to which we’ll succeed in creating more loving and just options for dying people and their families.

About the time he bought the gun, my dad’s language changed. I no longer heard him say, “It’s a good day to be alive.” Gazing out from the front of his last card to me (he was a prolific writer of notes and cards) is a bluebird, and lingering inside, in my dad’s quivering hand, his final favorite phrase: “Life goes on.”

Ingrid Andersson is a home birth nurse midwife and writer in Madison, Wis.

States with medical aid in dying



Thirteen U.S. states and the District of Columbia (dark blue) have passed laws allowing medical aid in dying. Another 16 states (light blue) have legislation pending.

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Bidding farewell to Barbara G. Walker

A fearless voice for feminism, freethought

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

Prominent feminist and freethinker FFRF Lifetime Member Barbara G. Walker died at age 95 on Dec. 21, 2025. Barbara was the notable author of the monumental “The Women’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets” (1983), known to almost all feminists of that era, whose goal was to trace the “transition from female-oriented to male-oriented religions in western civilization.”

As a connoisseur of facts on the origins of religion as well as paganism, I feel sure that Barbara would have been quite all right about dying on the Winter Solstice.

Barbara originally was known as a knitting expert, writing classics such as “Treasury of Knitting Patterns.” Then she became the famed author of the bestselling “Woman’s Encyclopedia” and at least 26



Annie Laurie Gaylor

other books, including on feminism and freethought, with titles such as “The Skeptical Feminist,” “Man Made God,” “Belief and Unbelief” and “Feminist Fairy Tales.” FFRF was honored that many of the columns that became the chapters of “Man Made God” were first published in our newspaper, Freethought Today. We published many of her pieces, with titles such as “Subjugation of women entirely based on religion,” “Religion is the world’s greatest scam” and “How patriarchal religion suppressed sexuality.”

I included a chapter on this atheist writer in the 1997 anthology, “Women Without Superstition: No Gods — No Masters,” published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

I first met Barbara in May 1993, when, as co-chair of the Feminist Caucus of the American Humanist Association, I introduced her at AHA’s conference in Philadelphia to receive the annual “Freethought Heroine” award. I was charmed by her talk. (More on that later.)

We spoke and corresponded periodically through the years, usually about her submissions to our newspaper. The last time I talked at any length with Barbara was in 2022, when I interviewed the nonagenarian for our former TV show, “Freethought Matters.”

Having been in touch with Barbara, I had been impressed that the nonagenarian was bicycling in her retirement community in Florida. Chatting before the interview, she informed me, somewhat sadly, that she’d had an injury and had to give up outdoor bicycling. But Barbara was chipper and, as always, poised, articulate and endlessly quotable in tell-



Barbara G. Walker wearing one of her handknitted sweaters.

Image from Instagram

ing it like it is about religion. (View the episode at Freethought TV, FFRF’s free app for smart devices.)

After her son thoughtfully informed me about her death the same day she died, I looked up that interview. Watching it, suddenly I remembered how we’d had to delete an amazing remark made while debunking the underpinnings of Christianity. It contained the “f” word. To quote Barbara:

“And then I was told also that God and his son are one and the same. They’re both the same god, same person. So that made Mary the mother of one and the bride of the other and they were both the same person. So that made God the original mother fucker.”

These true words coming from the mouth of this sedate, white-haired, elderly woman broke our crew up after the recording was over. If you watch the deleted clip, you’ll see my face fall — because all I could think was that we’d have to edit it out, since the show was broadcast on some 13 TV stations around the country at the time. So that’s what we did.

But, after remembering this astonishing moment, I immediately contacted our video director, Bruce Johnson. He was on vacation at the time, and his reply tempered my expectations, saying he usually didn’t retain outtakes. But Bruce promised to check. It made my month when he found it was somehow still in his files. FFRF has uploaded the footage to YouTube.

I am so pleased FFRF can resurrect Barbara’s pithy pronouncement, which, besides being unforgettable, has the benefit, as she logically shows, of being true.

Barbara was full of pithy pronouncements. During the 2022 interview, I asked

her to recount my favorite anecdote, from her Humanist Heroine speech, which is reprinted in full in “Women Without Superstition,” and is called “The Skeptical Feminist.” In this talk, Barbara explained that she became a skeptic very young,

after her dog had died, and her minister told her dogs don’t go to heaven because they have no souls.

She was a rather quiet child, but at this, she stamped her foot and said, “I don’t want anything to do with your rotten old God and nasty old heaven.” She continued, “I entered Sunday school [and there] was a life-sized crucifixion scene with a lot of agony and twisted muscles and it was horrible. I was told that God had decreed that this had to be done to his dearly beloved son. . . . And then we children were taught that not only was this poor man tortured on the cross but we had to become cannibals and eat him. . . . I began to think in my childish way that the God who decreed all of this was some kind of a lunatic.”

Barbara also wisely noted in that talk, “Every psychologist knows that childhood fears eventually become adult cruelties and/or dysfunctions. Being forced into unnecessary fear is not really the best route to mental health and confidence in adulthood. On the contrary, the very fears and guilts imposed by religious training are responsible for some of history’s most brutal wars, crusades, pogroms and perse-

cutions. . . . History doesn’t say much very good about God.”

At 12, Barbara found her first love, astronomy, studying stars through her telescope every night. Then came a “horse phase,” interrupted by a major in journalism at the University of Pennsylvania. She married research chemist Gordon Walker, moved to D.C., and worked at the Washington Star. After relocating to New Jersey, this multi-talented individual taught the Martha Graham dance technique.

Then she fell into knitting, innovating exciting new methods and writing 10 volumes on the craft, including the classics, “Treasury of Knitting Patterns” and “A Second Treasury of Knitting Patterns.” Vogue Knitting once declared that “knitting without them is like writing without a dictionary.”

In the mid-1970s, she worked at a local hotline for women, and soon set out on her second career as a feminist/skeptical writer.

I often feel that no public figure has been properly memorialized until their obituary runs in The New York Times. With kind help from a former writer there, I contacted the obituary department in case they didn’t know about Barbara. I sent them a link to a memorial that had run in a knitting magazine, but supplied plenty of information about Barbara’s second profession — her skeptical writing. While her knitting achievements are phenomenal and deserve lots of copy, I was so crushed that the Times, in its lengthy piece, devoted less than a short paragraph to her feminist and skeptical writings. At least they did reprint the cover of her book, “The Skeptical Feminist.” If you go online to read the obituary, it’s still really fun to see the color photos of Barbara modeling many of her famous stitches and creations.

“I feel satisfied with my life and glad to have contributed to the creativity of so many other people,” Barbara wrote for Piecework. “I have been one of the fortunate ones, to have found fertile niches that challenged my mind, heart, and hands, and lived in them with joy.”

Wanting her work to live after, Barbara arranged to share these thoughts with FFRF and the world at: bgw.works

The freethought and feminist worlds have lost a major player, but Barbara has created an important legacy, not just through her stitches, but also through her scholarship and plain-speaking about religion.

Annie Laurie Gaylor is FFRF’s co-president.

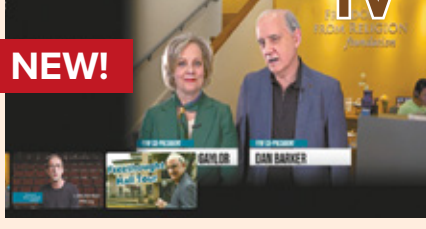


Image from Instagram

Barbara G. Walker



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What Is a Freethinker?

freethinker n.

1 A person who forms opinions about religion on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.

Bob Harp was computer innovator

Computer entrepreneur Robert Shelby Harp, 87, died Jan. 13 in Thousand Oaks, Calif.

Born on Feb. 20, 1937, in New Jersey, he was the only child of Robert Smiley Harp, a civil engineer, and Helen Weems, a homemaker. Bob Harp was a scientist, technology visionary, entrepreneur, world traveler, tinkerer and aviation enthusiast.

Bob moved many times growing up. He showed an amazing aptitude in engineering from an early age and enjoyed making model airplanes from balsa wood. In his early teenage years, Bob won the West Virginia state science competition. His later teenage years were spent in Kentucky. He earned extra spending money fixing televisions when he realized many of their problems were caused by defective vacuum tubes. He also built crystal radios as a hobby and went on to experiment with various electrical circuits, radio signals and building mechanical components.

After graduating as a member of the



Bob Harp

class of 1959 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a degree in physics, Bob enrolled at Stanford University, where he did research in plasma physics and eventually earned his Ph.D. in electrical engineering. During his time at Stanford, Bob met Lore McGovern, with whom he had two daughters — Michelle and Dina.

He worked as a professor at Caltech and Hughes Research Laboratory. Lore and Bob settled in Westlake Village, Calif., in 1972. In his spare time, he en-

joyed tinkering in his garage, where he invented a memory board. The memory board became the first product of Vector Graphic Inc., a successful early entrant into the budding personal computing space, which he founded with Lore and a friend. After Vector Graphic turned into a growing concern, Bob left Hughes to become the CTO and is credited with being an early inventor of the external keyboard. Versions of computers pioneered at Vector Graphic can be found in the Computer History Museum in Palo Alto.

After Vector Graphic, Bob founded Corona Data Systems. During that time, he met his second wife, Jeane Berry, with whom he had a daughter, Jenny. Following the sale of his interest in Corona, his curiosity and active mind led him to develop an electron force microscope and found Quesant Instruments.

In his adult years, you could find him on his road bike pedaling furiously around Westlake Village Island and trying to best his time, piloting his Cessna to visit his young daughters in San Francisco and San Luis Obispo, scuba diving or skiing.

“Mr. Harp was a very significant benefactor to FFRF during his lifetime, quietly giving major support, which helped FFRF so much,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

community; owned and managed rental properties; gardened and cared for nature; remodeled their home; loved a series of cats; and raised their daughter, Amanda.

Don accomplished so much in his life because he was intelligent, curious and thoughtful. While finance, rental ownership and management, politics, trains, vintage cars, do-it-yourself home remodeling, travel and history were topics of study, education was the foundation of it all. Don wanted young people to have an open-mind and a life of opportunity. That is why he dedicated nearly 30 years to teaching and mentoring.

Don led a meaningful, special life. In college, Don loved his philosophy courses and discovered rationalism. In Portland, his dedication to rationalism found a home in humanism and the Humanists of Greater Portland (HGP). He was an early member of HGP, serving in many roles. Humanism was the worldview that fit Don’s free thinking; kindness; and care and empathy for others and for the natural world.

In September 2019, Don was diagnosed with neuro-endocrine tumor of the pancreas. In September of 2024, Don had a severe case of Covid, which led to long Covid that he would not survive. Don died at home on Sept. 13, 2025.

Don Feller believed in education

Longtime teacher Donald C. Feller died Sept. 13, 2025, at his home.

He was born March 1, 1937, in Kramer, N.D. Don grew up in farm country, the youngest child of German immigrants. His childhood was difficult and lonely as his siblings were much older, his parents divorced when he was 10, and he attended a one-room schoolhouse.

Don first experienced indoor plumbing when he went to Minot State College. He held two jobs while going to school, one at the local men’s clothing store and one with the Great Northern Railroad. After one year of college, he decided to enter military service. Following basic training, he was sent to Wiesbaden Army Airfield, a U.S. Army base in Germany.

After his military service, Don returned to North Dakota, earning his bachelor’s degree from Minot State in political science, history and finance/accounting. (He would later earn a master’s degree from Portland State



Don Feller

University.) He took the LSAT, then decided on finance rather than law, earning his brokerage license by training on Wall Street. After Minot, Don alternated between teaching high school business courses and brokerage.

Don and his soon-to-be wife Mary met Sept. 30, 1964. They were encouraged by mutual friends to co-chair the committee, Washington County Young Voters to Elect Lyndon Johnson. Just six months later, they married on March 19, 1965. They traveled the globe; shared a love of world history and culture; collected antiques and refurbished them; ran several businesses; shared teaching careers; served in the local Tigard, Ore., com-

Gerald Florence dies at 91

FFRF Member Gerald Philip “Jerry” Florence, 91, died in his home in Sonoma, Calif., on Sept. 13, 2025, after battling prostate cancer for more than a year.

Born and raised in Hammond, Ind., to Charles and Priscilla Florence, Jerry was the eldest of six children. He graduated from Purdue University with a degree in electrical engineering. After serving two years in the Army, he built a distinguished career in defense electronics, working at Bendix, Sanders (now BAE) in New Hampshire, Litton ATD in Santa Clara,



Gerald Florence

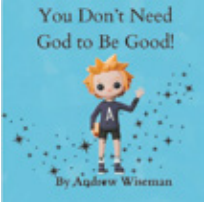
Calif., and Unisys in Reston, Va. He was instrumental in bringing the Compass Call program to the U.S. military, a system that neutralizes enemy air defenses. Jerry later served as CEO of UTL Corp in Dallas, and as vice president for business development at ARGOSystems, a Boeing subsidiary, in Santa Clara.

Jerry and his wife, RoyAnne, shared a deep passion for sailing. They sailed their 34-foot Sabre sailboat on the Chesapeake Bay, shipped it to Texas, and eventually to the San Francisco Bay, where Jerry became a member of the San Francisco Yacht Club. In retirement, he enjoyed fly fishing, playing guitar, traveling to distant destinations with RoyAnne, and spending time with his family.

FREETHOUGHT BOOKS

The following books are written by FFRF members on the topics of religion or freethinking. FFRF does not do book reviews. These books are not offered through ffrf.org/shop.

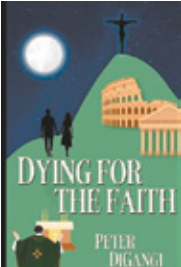
You Don’t Need God to Be Good



By Andrew Wiseman

This picture book can help parents and caregivers negotiate the challenges of being a secular child in a nonsecular world. It is written for children who may feel alone, are bullied as a nonbeliever, or need help understanding they are not alone. Its purpose is to help fill the gap in the education of young children (and old) to show that religion isn’t — and shouldn’t be — the only valid answer to life’s difficult questions.

Dying for the Faith



By Peter DiGang

How did Christianity begin and evolve into one of the most popular and influential institutions in history? Go on a speculative odyssey in this work of fiction, beginning in first-century Judea, then traveling to Rome in 112 CE, and finally, to rural Vermont, where three people try to make sense of it all in the context of the modern world.

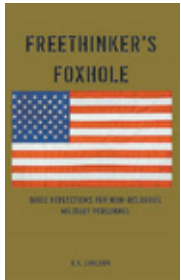
Once There Were Angels



By Johnny E. Nix

This engaging story is about a brilliant young woman who struggles to overcome a childhood dominated by her emotionally abusive mother. Defying her family, she leaves home to attend university and eventually finds acceptance, friendship and love with a young professor of religion. This novel reflects diverse attitudes toward religion and the influence that faith has on individual lives. The story examines some of the most thought-provoking questions that people ask about faith and the religious beliefs accepted by conservative Christianity as indisputable truth. The transitions from devout faith to disillusionment to defining one’s own views about God and religion are the themes woven into a memorable love story.

Freethinker’s Foxhole: Daily Reflections for Nonreligious Military Personnel



By E.R. Carlson

This is an inspirational resource for members of the U.S. armed forces who may have no religious affiliation and who may be agnostics, atheists or humanists. It contains a one-page reflection for every day of the year. Each of the daily reflections contains a quote, a brief essay and a historical note. The book is intended to support the spiritual readiness of military service members in an entirely secular way. The author is a retired U.S. Marine Corps combat veteran.



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THEY SAID WHAT?

I don't know how you make peace with those who seek your destruction. I think you destroy them first.

U.S. Rep. Randy Fine of Florida, on how to deal with mainstream Muslims.
X, 12-11-25

God's word is truth for all life, and the deeper I dug into his word, the more I found real conviction about the sanctity of every human life from the moment of conception, about God's design for marriage and family and sex. If left to our own natures and our own desires, we are sinful beings. And we're easily led astray. You want to keep power as diluted as possible.

You never want to end up in a situation where you have consolidated power without checks and balances. The more authority and power you give over to the government, even for people who say they have good intentions, without a system of checks and balances and without respecting and valuing the individual, which again is a deeply Christian ideal, is completely contrary to where the world was prior to Christ.

Aaron Baer, president of the Center for Christian Virtue, a Christian nationalist group headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. The group has lobbied to increased tax dollars to families sending children to private schools and worked to limit transgender health care and sports. The Southern Poverty Law Center classifies CCV as an anti-LGBTQ hate group.
Cleveland.com, 1-11-26

I refused to receive the Eucharist from an Indian woman. I was supposed to go to her. She was in my aisle, but across the church was the white priest, so I walked across all the pews and received it from him, for fear that I might get fecal matter on my Eucharist, receiving it from an Indian woman. Plus, I'm not gonna receive it from anyone who's nonwhite.

Mike (last name unknown), in a video he made in his car following a Catholic church service.
Religion News Service, 1-20-26

I know not everyone here is a Christian, and that's OK. I'll pray for you. And you know, there's only one way. There's only one way and that's . . . through Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Wicomico County (Md.) Councilmember James Winn at the start of a council meeting.

Tennessee

Continued from page 1

team issued the following statement:

"There is no question that Knox County taxpayers, including our clients, have a substantial interest in preventing their tax dollars from illegally funding a religious public school. Likewise, public school parents have a clear interest in preventing already-scarce funding from being diverted away from their children's schools to pay for religious instruction.

"We are pleased that neither side opposed our clients' participation in the Wilberforce Academy lawsuit, and that the court immediately recognized our clients' right to assert a vigorous defense of the laws forbidding religious public education.

"Someone needs to stand up for the cherished and longstanding American principle of church-state separation and for the public schools that are the cornerstone of our democracy. We're proud to represent these clients, who have stepped up to do just that."

The Friendly Atheist, 1-22-26

As important as all this politics stuff is, it is about whether we will remain a civilization under God, or whether we ultimately return to the paganism that dominated the past.

Vice President JD Vance, speaking at the March for Life on the National Mall.
Religion News Service, 1-26-26

The Founders understood that we are made in the image of our Creator, and that he is the one that gives us our inalienable rights, the rights of life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Our rights do not derive from the government. They derive from God himself. And we need to remind everybody of that.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, speaking at the March for Life rally. Vance and Johnson were named FFRF Action Fund's "Theocrats of the Week" on Jan. 30.
Religion News Service 1-26-26

We're bringing back faith in America; we're bringing back faith in God. With your help and support we'll continue to fight (for) the eternal truth that every child is a gift from God.

President Trump, in a video speech during the March for Life.
YouTube, 1-24-26

For decades, we have taught fiction as fact and forced the theory of evolution on our kids. That ends now. Senate Bill 1868 fixes this problem by putting both evolution and creationism in the classroom for students to learn.

Oklahoma state Sen. David Bullard, sponsor of a bill that would force educators who teach evolution to also teach students "the concepts of creationism and/or intelligent design."
The Friendly Atheist, 1-23-26

I would put God back in everything we've taken God out of since the 1980s, when I was a kid growing up, when Ronald Reagan was president.

Florida state Rep. Taylor Yarkosky, speaking before a House committee, which approved a proposal to amend the state Constitution to "provide protection from discrimination for student and

school personnel religious expression in public schools" that would go beyond free speech rights.

Florida Trident, 1-30-26

The dominant religion in the culture may be Christianity, but the dominant religion in the public school system is certainly not Christianity. That is secular humanism, the presupposition that God does not exist. And many people are absolutely hostile to the values stemming from the Christian faith or the Jewish faith, or maybe even the Muslim faith — in maybe some North Florida counties, you may have that.

John Stemberger, president of Liberty Council Action, a national advocacy group, likewise advocating for passage of the constitutional amendment.
Florida Trident, 1-30-26

I don't know how a person of faith can vote for a Democrat. I really don't. And I know we have some here today and I don't know why they're here because they certainly don't give us their vote. . . But on that momentous day in 1776, history changed forever when our Founders proclaimed the immortal truths that echoed around the world and down all the way through time. They declared that all of us are made free and equal by the hand of our creator. A lot of presidents refused to say that. . . Some major politicians refuse to say the word "God." I say it, that we are endowed with our sacred rights to life, liberty and not by government, but by God Almighty himself. . . You have to have religion . . . You have to have faith; you have to have God. . . We're going to rededicate America as one nation under God. . . I've always said, you just can't have a great country if you don't have religion. You have to believe in something. . . Quite simply, prayer is America's superpower.

President Trump, in rambling remarks addressing National Day of Prayer at the Capitol on Feb. 5. He unveiled new Department of Education guidelines "to protect the right to prayer" in public schools, noted that he created a task force to combat being "anti-Christian," and touted the federal expansion of vouchers passed last summer. He compared the closure of churches under Covid restricts applying equally to other groups and businesses as being like "the Gestapo." He announced that on May 17, 2026, "we're inviting Americans from all across the country to

come together on our National Mall to pray, to give thanks." He repeated he had ended the Johnson Amendment prohibition against tax-exempt churches from electioneering but warned as a joke that if you said something bad about him, he would go after you.
Roll Call, 2-5-26

One of my hopes is that we clear the way for family-friendly, faith-inspired patriotic content.

Daniel R. Suhr, a Wisconsin lawyer who works for the Center for American Rights, one of several rightwing groups pushing the MAGA plan to take over TV.
New York Times, 1-12-26

We'll have our home again.
Joint social media posts by the White House and Department of Homeland Security in January. That's the title of a song by a self-described "pro-White fraternal order" that's been embraced by the Proud Boys, white nationalist groups and neo-Nazis.
New York Times, 1-28-26

Trust the plan.
Similarly, the Labor Department posted a "noir-style image" with these words, considered a central catchphrase of QAnon, the internet conspiracy theory that falsely claims the world is run by a cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles and that Donald Trump has been chosen to vanquish it.
New York Times, 1-28-26

One Homeland. One People. One Heritage.
This was a caption on a video posted by the Labor Department in January, which echoes the infamous Nazi slogan, "Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fuhrer ("One People, One Realm, One Leader")."
New York Times, 1-28-26

Thanks to President Trump, the U.S. has officially escaped from the Paris Climate Agreement, which undermined American values and taxpayer dollars, and stifled economic growth.

White House spokeswoman Taylor Rogers, calling the official exit from the international treaty an "America First victory." America is the world's second largest climate polluter after China.
New York Times, 1-28-26

Vouchers hurt public schools, fund religion



principle that no taxpayer should not be compelled to support religion, especially someone else's. While public schools welcome all students, religious and nonreligious alike, preserving a neutrality that serves all, religiously segregated schools typically require prayer, religious instruction and adherence to faith-based doctrine as a condition of enrollment.

Despite decades of promises, voucher programs have failed to deliver better academic outcomes. Numerous studies show voucher students performing no better, and often worse, than their public-school peers. Meanwhile, private schools receiving public funds are usually exempt from basic transparency requirements, standardized

testing, accreditation standards and public oversight.

FFRF's maxim is: Where public money goes, public accountability must follow. When public money goes to private schools, the public loses the right to know how that money is being spent. That lack of accountability has led to documented fraud, school closures and students left stranded mid-year.

Voucher-funded schools are allowed to discriminate against students and staff based on religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability — practices that would be illegal in public schools.

The recent expansion of voucher programs has been driven by well-funded political groups and religious lobbying organizations, not by grassroots demand.

FFRF calls on policymakers to reject voucher expansion and instead invest in strengthening our public schools — the bedrock of our democracy and which are open to all students, accountable to taxpayers and committed to educating, not indoctrinating.

CHAPTER UPDATES

Cincinnati Metro Chapter

Reflecting on the success of our chapter's "One Big Beautiful Billboard," featuring the likeness of and a quote by Ron Reagan's father, the Cincinnati Metro Chapter did some further promotion by sponsoring programing on regional PBS stations, hard hit by government funding cuts.

Following a late-summer online talk by FFRF Attorney Ryan Jayne and a report on the FFRF national conference in Myrtle Beach, S.C., by chapter Secretary-Treasurer Mark Lightfield,

we began to focus on the Christian nationalist assault on public education in Ohio, with programs featuring Honesty for Ohio Education Director Natalie Hastings and a December presentation by The Satanic Temple's National Campaign Director June Everett. We also completed updating our chapter bylaws and strategic plan. Additionally, two new board members have been elected, bringing energy and ideas for future programs and activities.

Pikes Peak Region

The Pikes Peak Region chapter hosted a heavily attended speaker event in Colorado Springs on Veterans Day titled "Christian Nationalism in our own Backyard" to educate members of the community on the dangers of Christian Nationalism and the impacts to schools and city government.

The speaker was Logan M. Davis, an investigative reporter for the Colorado Times Recorder who has reported extensively on Christian nationalist activities in Woodland Park, Colo. For more information about our chapter, contact us at contact.us@ffrfPikesPeak.org, or visit ffrfPikesPeak.org.

Upstate New York Freethinkers

Upstate New York Freethinkers recently held an inaugural meetup for the Capital District, drawing a diverse crowd of authors, community leaders and local speakers focused on freedom from religion. This gathering served as an initial connection point for freethinkers across the region's outlying areas to meet regularly and build community. Now in its third year of development, the chapter is hard at work continuing a meetup in Buffalo for Western NY Freethinkers. This exclusive group for FFRF members aims to organize local community tabling events and further chapter growth. Interested members can join at unyft.org/Western.

Beyond Buffalo and Albany, the Central NY and Finger Lakes regions are meeting up via local humanist groups and collaborating with Secular Student Alliances, creating pilot efforts designed for replication across the state and beyond. To ensure sustainable growth, our board recently

traveled to Arizona and met with leaders from the Humanist Society of Greater Phoenix. During the trip, we toured the group's community center and Robert G. Ingersoll Library, and strategized with Mars de La Tour, president of the Valley of the Sun Chapter, to gain insights into successful chapter structures. Our chapter prides itself in making freethought connections wherever we travel, and we are currently exploring a customized platform to allow participants to arrange their own local social meetups.

We are thrilled to announce that our next major gathering will be held at the Albany Institute of History and Art. Save the date for Sept. 20! Tickets will be available soon, so please check unyft.org/gatherings for the latest updates and details.

If you are an Upstate NY FFRF member interested in joining or helping us test a pilot meetup in your local town, please email us at info@unyft.org or call 585-454-9921. To donate, visit unyft.org/Donate.



As part of the Arkansas DOT Adopt-A-Highway program, the Ozarks Chapter of FFRF came together on a beautiful Sunday morning to clean up rubbish from a 1-mile stretch of road.

Ozarks Chapter of FFRF

The Ozarks Chapter of FFRF had a busy fourth quarter of 2025, wrapping up a fantastic farmers market season, attending the FFRF convention in South Carolina, volunteering in the community, setting up a secular display in Little Rock and attending a "teach-in" to object to the Ten Commandments in public schools. Our chapter closed out a successful 2025

with the annual Festivus celebration and by donating to local nonprofits, including for the first time, the OMNI Center for Peace, Justice & Equality, whose mission is to educate, empower, and connect people to build a nonviolent, sustainable, and just world. Contact ozarksffrf@gmail.com or visit ozarksffrf.org for more information on the chapter.

FFRF-East Tennessee

Chapter President Aleta Ledendecker stood up for the separation of state and church by speaking at the December meeting of the Blount County (Tenn.) Board of Education meeting. The chair of the board was promoting the establishment of bible release time in the Blount County School System. During that meeting, the chair

also made unconstitutional remarks, which Ledendecker reported. All the members of the BOE received a cautionary letter from FFRF due to that intervention.

For more information on the chapter, please contact FFRF-East Tennessee at info@ffrf-etc.org.

KPOP

Continued from page 1

uations and other school events like football games (Lee v. Weisman, 1992; Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe, 2000), and striking down religious displays like the posting of the Ten Commandments in classrooms (Stone v. Graham, 1980). The court has also rejected efforts to sneak religious doctrine into school curricula by teaching "intelligent design" under the guise of science (Edwards v. Aguillard, 1987) while at the same time affirming students' right to personal religious expression.

The KPOP Act codifies these long-standing U.S. Supreme Court decisions into state law, creating durable protections for students and families that do not depend on shifting federal courts, which are rapidly threatening First Amendment Establishment Clause precedent. Below are details on recently introduced bills:

In Vermont, state Rep. Monique Priestley has introduced H 705, titled the "Student Secular Bill of Rights," which affirms and protects every student's true religious freedoms by ensuring that students are free to attend

school without pressure or coercion from teachers or school officials to adhere to particular religious beliefs. It guarantees that students cannot be compelled to engage in school-sponsored prayer, religious instruction, proselytizing or religious messaging, and provides for clear protections against discrimination on the basis of religious belief or nonbelief.

In Kansas, similar companion bills are moving through the legislature. In the House, state Rep. Heather Meyer recently introduced House Bill 2431, known as the "Student Secular Bill of Rights." On the Senate side, state Sen. Silas Miller has introduced Senate Bill 424.

And in Oklahoma, state Rep. Michelle McCane has introduced House Bill 3488. Many Oklahoma lawmakers have repeatedly sought to advance policies that invite religion into public schools; this bill serves as a safeguard against government-sponsored religious activity. HB 3488 reinforces that public education must remain neutral on matters of religion and ensures that no student is singled out, coerced or excluded because of their beliefs.

"Public schools exist to educate, not indoctrinate in religion," comments FFRF Action Fund President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The KPOP Act, or Student

Secular Bill of Rights, makes clear that the captive audience of students of all religious faiths or none at all, have the right to attend school without religious pressure, coercion or exclusion. And crucially, these protections will stand regardless of the whims of the U.S. Supreme Court or any lower federal courts regarding the Establishment Clause."

FFRF Action Fund notes that studies show up to 43 percent of young people have no religious affiliation, and overall among U.S. adults, 28 percent are atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular, making the "Nones" the single-largest bloc by religious identification, surpassing any one denomination. Today, Christian identification has dropped to 62 percent from 78 percent 17 years ago yet typically when religious coercion pops up in public schools, it is Christian or even evangelical in orientation. Baptisms, religious posters and assignments, imposed prayer and distribution of religious texts are common violations in public schools, which particularly marginalize those who are not Christian, religious or often Christians who are not Catholic or evangelical.

The Action Fund's state legislative campaign comes amid a nationwide increase in laws and policies that blur the line between state and church in

public education. By codifying settled constitutional principles directly into state law, these bills provide clarity for school districts, protect students' rights and help prevent costly litigation.

The FFRF Action Fund is excited about these bills being introduced, but introduction is only the beginning. The Action Fund has just unveiled a comprehensive, easy-to-use toolkit that outlines the bill's purpose and scope. The toolkit also provides clear guides designed to support advocacy efforts as these bills move throughout the legislative process.

"We need to keep proselytizing out of our public schools," adds FFRF Action Fund Senior Counsel Ryan Jayne, "and we are moving ahead to enshrine these protections of freedom of conscience in the face of rapidly changing Establishment Clause jurisprudence."

FFRF Action Fund is a 501(c)(4) organization that develops and advocates for legislation, regulations and government programs to preserve the constitutional principle of separation between state and church. It also advocates for the rights and views of nonbelievers, endorses candidates for political office, and publicizes the views of elected officials concerning religious liberty issues.

LETTERBOX

‘Freethought of the Day’ entries should be a book

Greetings to all my friends at FFRF! One of my favorite things to do is to read my daily “Freethought of the Day” email from FFRF, especially when I get to read the bios on the nonbelievers — actors, scientists, authors, sport stars and everyday folks. I save every email to my notes section so I can return for inspiration or just to enjoy everybody’s own words and feelings and views on why they are nonbelievers. Then it dawned on me: Why doesn’t FFRF put all these short little biographies into one big, beautiful book and sell them, push them relentlessly so the rest of America can see how many great people of all colors and occupations are nonbelievers! I think it would fly off the bookshelves if properly marketed. I would immediately buy 20 copies and hand them out to my Christian and nonbeliever friends. Thank you! I would love a large coffee table book loaded with interesting stories like the ones I get every day from FFRF!

Indiana

Editor’s note: FFRF is already in the process of publishing a book of free-thinkers culled from “Freethought of the Day” entries and the FFRF free-thinkers birthday calendar.

Catholics should support medical aid in dying

I am sorry that Pope Leo is “disappointed” that Illinois has just passed a Medical Aid in Dying law, as the Chicago Tribune reported. I respect his right to an opinion on the subject, but if he wishes to suffer through his final agonies, no matter how horrific, that’s his choice. Personally, I would like to have the option, if I am suffering at the end, of



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

drinking something and peacefully going to sleep. I wish Pope Leo and the Catholic bishops would respect my choices and mind their own business. I would have more respect for Leo’s opinion if he would announce that contraception is good, masturbation is not a sin, divorce is OK and women can be priests.

Aid in dying is now legal in California, Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, New Mexico, Colorado, Maine, Vermont, New Jersey, Delaware and Washington D.C., and coming soon to Illinois and New York. It’s a choice that terminally ill mentally capable adults may make — never an obligation — and nobody qualifies just because of age and disability. Despite the views of the Catholic hierarchy, polls consistently show strong support for aid in dying among rank-and-file Catholics.

Even in heavily Catholic Italy, medically assisted dying has been permissible under Italian law since

2019, and the Italian state of Tuscany just approved a medical aid-in-dying law earlier this year.

Illinois

Thanks to FFRF for fighting against bigotry

I’m 87 and I thank you for fighting the arrogant, self-righteous religious bigots who are forever trying to foist their weirdness on the American people.

New York

Unpopular Trump isn’t enough to quell tyranny

The convention speech by Professor Steven Levitsky might be the best talk on the subject of authoritarianism regarding this volatile administration.

I disagree with one point however: Levitsky opined that Trump’s lack of

popularity will be among the reasons why the United States won’t fall into complete tyranny. Lest we forget how unpopular he was after he attempted his coup five years ago?

Thanks in large part to Fox News and the rise of alt-right podcasts, Trump began an early campaign spewing hateful rhetoric, much to the delight of the MAGA faithful, which in turn led to his sweep of the contested states, and a rare popular vote win for Republicans.

Oregon

Hegseth: Nonreligious not welcome in military

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has announced that he will overhaul guidelines for chaplains in the military. He claims that, at present, the chaplaincy acts more like therapists than spiritual advisors and is infused with “new agey” concepts and secular humanism instead of stressing faith and “warrior virtues.” He stated that there are over 200 recognized chaplain religious backgrounds, including Wiccans and atheists, and that the number of permitted categories will be drastically reduced.

It is clear that, under Hegseth, non-religious military personnel will be viewed as lacking the proper “warrior virtues,” of which “faith,” in his view, must be an integral part. Members who adhere to the wrong religions, such as the Wiccans, will also no doubt be found wanting. Aggressive proselytizing on the part of the right kind of Christian chaplains, along with “born again” officers, can be expected to ensure that the U.S. military is purged of the “wrong kind” of Americans. Do not be surprised if “Onward Christian Soldiers” becomes the official marching song of the U.S. Army, which was singled out by Hegseth as seriously lacking in “warrior virtues.”

New York

CRANKMAIL

Welcome to another installment of Crankmail, where we publish some of the vitriol (and, shall we say, more colorful language) from those who don't share FFRF's mission. Printed as received.

God is real: Religion isn't the problem You are. God is real just as much as the air you breath. Science cant explain any of the things created no matter how they try. They've also found DNA to prove God is real. One day maybe you'll see the light and will be scared to burn in hell as you say. Religion needs put back in the USA. Good luck and God Bless.

Communists: You really have such a thing as this communist bullshit. Ron Reagan, you're a commie. Go to bed...and hell. Piss off.

Jesus! Jesus!: Just tell the Freedom from Religion Foundation to just go shove it. Tell the kid who got so bent out of shape at hear the name of Jesus, to pull up their big girl panties and get over it.

JESUS!!

Bullies: I read about your bullying attempt to rewrite our Constitution to prohibit Arkansas from giving employees off Christmas & 12/26. America was founded as a Judeo-Christian country, allowing its citizens to worship within their religion or not. So stick your bullying up your whatever.

Sickening: Stop your attack on American values. You are fucking scumbags and Americans who understand what American culture is will fight you all the way. Your legal attacks against Ameri-

can culture is sickening and if you don't like where you live get the fuck out. Also communism and socialism will be shout down. So merry Christmas you losers and to all your lawyers you are a plague on society.

Eternity in hell: Where will you spend eternity? There are only two choices with God or separated from God (and that is hell). The only way to spend eternity with God is by accepting Jesus as His son. No one comes to the Father except,through the Son. There are no second chances. You may want to give your position serious thought. Eternity in hell will not be pleasant.

God's money: You want a division of country and religion? Cool. Just one thing. Please surrender all currency which has, In God We Trust printed on it!! Ya'll really should find a better path, you disgust me.

Losers: You folks are noting but a gaggle of Putz's. Waste your time doing something constructive if that word is in your vocabulary

Constitution: I really think you need to go back to high school retake your government class an pay attention this time. What you are stating to the Governor is far from what separation of Church and state is ment for. That claus is to protect the church from the government go back and reread it. Before you try to throw that into peoples faces. You guys are the brightness crayon in the box are you

Attention: As you know, the separation of chil-

dren's state is not law in the United States. Rather, it was a concept put forth by Thomas Jefferson in his letter to the Danbury Connecticut Church in 1804. You have no right to force your policies on anyone. By contrast, American citizens have every right to exercise their religious beliefs. You people need to find a different line of work and stop wasting everyone's time and money.

Just leave: What a WORTHLESS piece of shit you guys are.. If you hate American , LEAVE fucking idiots

Suicide: You fuckers should shoot yourselves in the fucking head?

Insignificant: i won't even try to explain how this country was founded on religion .. or how it

holds people to a higher plain... It's organizations like yours that destroy countries... The fact that you have only 42k members should show you how insignificant you are.

Die: If you don't want to celebrate Christmas that's fine. Go to a room, close the door, and go fuck yourself! When you're done fine a gun and blow your fucking brains out!! Your a piece of shit that doesn't need your live! End it by suicide!

Hell is real: This great Nation was founded on the belief in God and nothing you can do or say can change that!! There IS a God and if you don't change your ways you will end up in a BURNING HELL!! You can't say you weren't told because now you have been!!

Your weekly antidote to the Religious Right

FREETHOUGHT RADIO

PODCASTS AND BROADCASTS

— Hosted by Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor —

Slightly irreverent views, news, music & interviews

Check out “Freethought Radio: In Studio” video versions of interviews. Visit FFRFs Youtube channel or Freethought TV app.

ffrf.us/youtube

FFRF.ORG

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

FFRF members should help the elderly with rides

I suggest that members offer ride-sharing to elders in their neighborhoods. This does not mean buying groceries for those who you take along. It costs members nothing, as they are shopping for groceries, too. Just ask homebound elders in the area if they would like to come along with you.

I, at age 97, am homebound and it's a thrill to get a ride to the grocer or Walmart or Dollar Tree. Just getting out of the house is my life's savior.

There are also possible residual benefits, as one of these elders may be the goose that lays you some golden eggs in their estate. I once befriended an elderly couple and a decade later their estate gifted a local group \$650,000.

Ministers and priests make special efforts to visit the elders, but the strategy of their church is to "soften up" these elders so that they gift to the church . . . or the minister or priest, personally.

Arizona

Christian nationalists prefer revised preamble

"Recognizing Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, and acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ as the governor among the nations, his revealed will as the supreme law of the land, We, the People of the United States, in order to constitute a Christian government, form a more perfect Union, establish Justice . . ."

That version of the preamble to the U.S. Constitution was suggested in 1864 to President Lincoln. It was proposed by a national association of Protestant pastors, who were horrified by the carnage of the Civil War, then in its fourth year. Clearly, the Union needed God on its side, yet the U.S. Constitution failed to mention "God" even once, an offense to the Almighty that needed to be rectified.

Lincoln wisely procrastinated, and the campaign failed, although the pastors did succeed in getting Congress to add "In God We Trust" to the 2-cent coin that year.

Fast forward 162 years. The spirit of those musty, 19th-century clergymen

Cryptogram answer

In the best case, faith leaves otherwise well-intentioned people incapable of thinking rationally about many of their deepest concerns; at worst, it is a continuous source of human violence.

— Sam Harris

Crossword answers

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



is burning bright today in the hearts of MAGA's Christian nationalists. For them, every word of that revised preamble rings true. It is a pitch-perfect articulation of their worldview, and how the United States should be governed: as a Christian nation. Officially declared, right there in its founding document, in the preamble to the Constitution.

As Trump's presidency and the country unravel in 2026, look for the Christian nationalists who surround Trump (they are legion) to seize control of the hot mess that is Donald Trump's brain, and — backed by police and military power, if necessary — go pedal to the metal for a biblical republic as described in the preamble above. (I'll admit I've got a bad case of Trump Derangement Syndrome, but that doesn't mean I'm wrong.)

Colorado

Despite no proof, the Tooth Fairy could exist

In the November Letterbox, a member writes: "We do, in fact, have evidence of the nonexistence of the Tooth Fairy, Easter Bunny and Santa Claus. As children, when we find out that it is a parent who exchanges a tooth for cash or hides Easter eggs and candy or puts presents under the Christmas tree, we then have evidence that it was not the Tooth Fairy or Easter Bunny or Santa who did those things. The claims about God are not as easy to disprove."

The writer claims that "lack of evidence is not evidence of lack," but it seems to me rather that the writer is applying a different standard to arguments about God than they are to arguments about these other entities, accepting evasions and redefinitions in the one case but not in the others.

To illustrate this, I present a series of evasions in defense of the Tooth

Fairy (T.F.). Discussion about how each of these evasions applies to discussions of God is omitted for brevity.

- 1) Just because you discovered that your parents cheated does not prove that every parent cheated. Perhaps children in other families, or in other lands, were administered by the T.F.
- 2) Perhaps the T.F. exists, but exchanging cash for teeth is not among her duties. Discussions about who the T.F. actually is, and what she actually does, are deferred to a later time.
- 3) Perhaps the T.F. actually exists, but in a spiritual dimension. She works through parents to exchange cash for teeth. Whether or not the parents are aware of their role is not vital to the argument. Good luck disproving this one.
- 4) Perhaps the T.F. is not a "person," physical or spiritual, but exists as a concept, or a metaphor or a meme. As long as parents exchange cash for their children's teeth, the T.F. will be there, right alongside Tom Joad, and can be said to "exist."

New York

New pledge gets at the heart of humanity

I'm tired of pledging allegiance to a piece of cloth (American flag) and to an area bounded by imaginary lines on our planet (the republic for which it stands). And I'm tired of saying, "under God," for which there is no evidence that would stand up in a court of law or a scientific inquiry. So, I've proposed a more reasonable and universal Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

"I pledge allegiance to my species, and to all other species and ecosystems upon which life depends. One planet, under stars, with respect, compassion, liberty and justice for all."

Ohio

Hook's quote resonates today more than ever

"We must all put our thinking minds on guard to resist the first infraction of freedom and strengthen the institutional and educational safeguards of breaches in the wall separating church and state." — Sidney Hook (1902-1989), renowned American philosopher, from "The Quest for Being."

Iowa

Duplessis was antithetical to state/church separation

FFRF excels at educating the public on historical church/state entanglements through its publications and campaigns.

Maurice Duplessis, Quebec's premier from 1936–1939 and 1944–1959, exemplifies such violations during the "Great Darkness," where his government delegated education, health care and welfare to the Catholic Church, subsidized religious orphanages as mental institutions for extra funds, and used the Padlock Act to persecute minorities like Jehovah's Witnesses. These actions parallel American cultural issues, such as Bible Belt states historically enforcing Sunday blue laws restricting commerce to honor Christian Sabbath observance, school prayer mandates echoing Duplessis' clerical control over Quebec classrooms, and prosperity gospel televangelists wielding political influence akin to the Church's grip on policy.

I urge FFRF to feature Duplessis in brochures, "day of" articles, or online resources to highlight global precedents for separation of church and state.

Texas

Freethought Hall is like Mecca for atheists

I'm writing to say a big thank you to FFRF Facilities Manager Matt Kenyon for the gracious and warm welcome he provided to my friend Desiree and me during our visit to the FFRF headquarters in Madison, Wis., on Jan 12. Desiree is a new member and although I had been to Freethought Hall before, she had not.

Our communications with Matt to arrange a time to visit were met with genuine kindness and flexibility. It was grand to receive a tour of the building, to learn of its history, to see images of the founder, Anne Nicol Gaylor, as well as much freethought-related iconography and to be in the phenomenal library housed there. Desiree and I thank you so much. We were able to shop among the wonderful retail items for sale and I replaced my lost or stolen "Out of the Closet Atheist" cap and my Afterlife member pin. Hooray! We were lucky enough to briefly cross paths with Annie Laurie Gaylor, as well. Thank you, Matt and Annie Laurie, and the other staff involved for making us feel welcome and for accommodating our shopping excursion. It was a little like an atheist Mecca visit. I encourage all members to make the trek to Freethought Hall. It is a treat, I promise you.

The work y'all do is so vital and more so than ever in these vexing dispiriting times we're living. Looking forward to seeing y'all at the annual convention in Milwaukee later this year.

Illinois

ON THE ROAD WITH DAN BARKER



On Jan. 24, Dan spoke and performed at FFRF’s Salt Lake City chapter at the library in Sandy, Utah. Front row, from left: Board members Dustin Couch, Rick Utykanski and Spencer Warner; Dan Barker; chapter President Douglas Hendricks. Board member Emily Eckart is second from left in back row.



Dan Barker speaks at the San Francisco Public Library on Jan. 17. He spoke about his book, “God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction.”



On Jan. 18, Dan spoke in Palo Alto, Calif., at the Unitarian Universalist Church. The event was co-sponsored by the Atheist Community of San Jose and Humanist Community of Silicon Valley.



On November 21, FFRF co-president Dan Barker participated in a panel at the annual conference of the Society for Biblical Literature (jointly with the American Academy of Religion) in Boston. Sponsored by the Evangelical Philosophical Society, the event included readings from an upcoming book “Debating God’s Existence: Believers and Skeptics in Friendly Conversation,” based on a 2022 “Does God Exist?” debate between Barker and Adam Lloyd Johnson.

Pictured, from left, are atheist Dan Linford, an independent philosopher specializing in philosophy of physics and religion; atheist Benjamin Watkins, a nuclear engineer with the U.S. Navy and host of the Real Atheology podcast; theist Andrew Drinkard (book editor) from Palm Beach Atlantic University; theist Robert Koons of the University of Texas, Austin; Dan Barker; theist Paul Copan, well-known evangelical author from Palm Beach Atlantic University; and theist Adam Lloyd Johnson of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.



On Jan. 10, Dan spoke to the newly revived chapter of FFRF in Olympia, Wash., at the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia. Pictured are some of the attendees, including chapter president Darrell Barker (Dan’s brother, kneeling in front. Sadly, Darrell died Feb. 3 from liver cancer. A memorial will be in the April issue.) Standing at the end of the piano in the light-blue sweater is long-time FFRF member and volunteer Beth Taylor.



On Jan. 25, Dan spoke and performed at the Oasis congregation in Salt Lake City. Pictured are some of the enthusiastic attendees who stayed for the photo. At both Salt Lake City events, Dan sang the “Salt Lake City Blues,” a parody poking fun at Mormon doctrine, co-written by the late Steve Benson, a famous “apostate.” Many in the audience were “ex-Mo’s.”



Dan stands with a group from the San Francisco chapter following his talk. Pictured with Dan are his hosts Mark Thomas and Judy Banister. On the left end is Dana Treadwell and on the right is Scott Wakefield, two of the people who organized the event.



On Jan. 19, Dan played piano and talked to a full house of FFRF’s Sacramento Chapter members, held at the Reason Center in Sacramento, Calif.