

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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building for
tomorrow**

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No reign in the forecast!



Photo by Annie Laurie Gaylor

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and its advocacy affiliate, FFRF Action Fund, were once again official co-sponsors of the No Kings National Day of Protest on March 28, the third such nationwide demonstration. A small contingent of some of FFRF's hundreds of area members, as well as some staff, found their way to FFRF's Freethought Hall in downtown Madison, Wis., to get their photos taken with FFRF's "No Gods, No Masters, No Kings" banner before heading to the Wisconsin Capitol for the rally. FFRF also ran a full-page ad in The New York Times on March 28 with the same theme. (See page 2.)

FFRF court victory! Ten Commandments monument in Ark. unconstitutional

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and its co-plaintiffs have secured a major First Amendment victory after a federal court's ruling that a Ten Commandments monument at the Arkansas Capitol is unconstitutional and must be removed.

In a sweeping decision issued March 31, U.S. District Judge Kristine G. Baker struck down the state law mandating the monument and ordered that it be taken down, concluding that both the law and the display violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The ruling marks the culmination of nearly eight years of litigation

brought by FFRF, the American Humanist Association, the Arkansas Society of Freethinkers and a diverse group of Arkansas plaintiffs alongside a parallel challenge by the ACLU of Arkansas. Separately, the Satanic Temple and its members had brought First Amendment and Equal Protection claims.

"Based on the undisputed record evidence," the court held, "the Display Act and the Ten Commandments Monument violate the Establishment Clause." The court further found that the state's actions failed to avoid "ex-

See *Arkansas* on page 8

Texas Commandments law upheld by appeals court

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on April 21 upheld SB 10, a Texas law requiring the display of the Ten Commandments in every public school classroom across the state.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is part of a coalition in the lawsuit — Rabbi Nathan v. Alamo Heights Independent School District — representing a multifait and no-fait group of 15 Texas families with children in public schools. The coalition also includes 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.

In a close 9–8 decision, the majority took a narrow view of what the First Amendment's Establishment Clause is meant to prevent, relying on a narrow, allegedly historical view of the clause. Judge Stuart Kyle Duncan, a President Trump appointee, joined by eight other Republican appointees, wrote: "If students disagree with the commandments or ignore them or laugh at them, SB 10 imposes neither penalty nor sanction, formal or informal. . . . Nor

See *Texas* on page 8

FFRF joins group to block religious public school

A group of seven Oklahoma taxpayers — including families with children attending public schools — filed a motion April 1 in federal court seeking to intervene in a lawsuit brought by the National Ben Gamla Jewish Charter School Foundation.

Groups representing the intervenors in the case include the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, Education Law Center and the American Civil Liberties Union. Many of these organizations represented Oklahomans who chal-

lenged the first attempt to establish a religious charter school in their state, which the Oklahoma Supreme Court declared unconstitutional two years ago.

"We're pleased to be part of this pushback against religious imposition," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The public school system must remain secular — and we'll do our utmost to ensure that."

Ben Gamla is trying to open the nation's first religious public charter school in Oklahoma — a clear violation of state and federal law that defines charter schools as public schools that must be secular and open to all students. Like all public schools, charter schools cannot lawfully indoctrinate religion or discriminate. However, Ben Gamla's charter school applica-

tion makes clear that Jewish religious teachings will be integrated into "every dimension of . . . life" at the school, including classroom instruction and other activities.

Additionally, Ben Gamla's application indicates that the school plans to exclude students and staff who do not share its faith. Ben Gamla's application states: "Admission assumes the student and family willingness to adhere with respect to the beliefs, expectations, policies, and procedures of the school." Students and families

See *Public School* on page 8

“My family is Jewish. We know firsthand that people of all faiths are best served when public schools don't impose one idea of religion over others.

— Kara Joy McKee, a proposed intervenor in the case

FFRF ON THE ROAD



FFRF Deputy Legal Director Liz Cavell speaks during the Central Florida Freethought Community's annual cruise. Standing next to Liz is Andrew Seidel of Americans United, who also spoke during the event and the two of them did a joint Q&A afterward. There were about 85 registrants traveling with the CFFC contingent.



FFRF Attorney Sammi Lawrence, second from left, made a presentation to the Pikes Peak Chapter recently. "We had a well-attended event with a very engaged audience," chapter President Wes Prichard wrote. "Christian nationalism interference in local schools is been a hot topic and we received deeper insight into several local and national issues." After the presentation, several member of the chapter met with Sammi, including Scott Vigder (front) and back row, left to right, Patricia Vigder, Sammi Lawrence, Gary Hale, Wes Prichard, Cheryl Prichard and Ron Furr.

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."

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FFRF places full-page ad in NY Times

The Freedom From Religion Foundation placed a full-page advertisement in the March 28 New York Times that coincided with the nationwide "No Kings" marches.

The ad warned against the growing influence of Christian nationalism in American government and calls on citizens to reaffirm the nation's foundational principle: that there are no kings — only laws, and a Constitution that applies equally to all.

"America was founded on the rejection of monarchy and the embrace of Enlightenment ideals," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "We're reminding the public that no political leader is above the law, and no religion should be imposed through government."

The "No Kings" marches, in which



about 8 million people participated in hundreds of cities around the country, were organized in response to increasing concerns about authoritarianism and the erosion of democratic norms. FFRF's ad underscores the role of secular governance in protecting individual freedoms, including religious liberty and the right to nonbelief.

The advertisement features bold, symbolic imagery and a clear message: In the United States, sovereignty belongs to the people — not to religious authority or political strongmen.

IT PAYS TO COMPLAIN

Serving his country without 'god'

By Dr. Jon Hauxwell

In 1977, I applied to become a commissioned officer in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, serving as a medical officer in a PHS agency — the Indian Health Service.

To complete the appointment affidavit, I was required to sign the oath of office, which contained the boilerplate "so help me God."

Before I submitted it, I crossed out the "God" reference and appended a notarized statement to the effect that the phrase constituted a violation of the U.S. Constitution, succinctly outlining my reasons for that assertion. (I also added to the standard patriotic jargon a notation addressing the whole purpose of my enlistment — patient care, which was somehow not important enough to be included in the original.)

It's long been difficult to recruit physicians to live and work on a remote Indian reservation. In addition, it can be hard to find doctors with the skill set who would produce good results in an emergency/ambulatory care facility 100 miles from the nearest medical center, perpetually underfunded, understaffed, undersupplied, underequipped and overwhelmed. No CT scanner down the hall.

In the end, the feds decided to ignore my hubris — in this and several other matters — and they hired me. I believe they got their money's worth.

Having majored in a foreign language and grown up in a monetarily poor household, I was used to improvisation and making do with not quite enough. I could offer insightful medicine, innovative workarounds and a friendly greeting



Dr. Hauxwell and his son Justin participate in a "Gourd Dance" in a July 4, 1988, powwow near Lama Deer, Mont.

in my patients' native tongue.

During our career on the reservation, we raised our kids biculturally, participated in traditional ceremonies and regularly danced. I retired as a captain O-6, never having worn the mandatory uniform.

But that wasn't all.

My resisting of embedded references to a deity occurred in another setting — the courtroom.

I often testified in county and federal courts as an expert medical witness for having provided treatment for victims of violent crime. The first time was in a county proceeding. Wishing to avoid promoting a deity in order to testify, I approached the clerk of court and told her that acknowledging a god's supportive role would amount to opening my testimony with a lie.

I added, "However, in deference to the season [it was December], I'd be willing to say 'so help me Santa Claus.'" She was not amused.

In the end, and thereafter, when I was instructed to raise my hand and affirm my truthful intent by petitioning a god for help, I merely answered "I will tell the truth," rather than the customary "yes." Nobody ever objected.

Dr. Hauxwell is a Lifetime member from Kansas.

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



Huffman, Cohen add more sizzle to line-up!

U.S. Rep. **Jared Huffman** and author/blogger **Kate Cohen** have joined FFRF's amazing line-up of speakers for its annual convention at Milwaukee's Baird Convention Center in mid-October.

Register online at ffrf.us/con26register or by completing the form on the back page of this issue.

The formal conference encompasses more than two full days, Oct. 15–17, preceded by “early-bird workshops,” a complimentary reception and an opening-evening speech by Rep. Huffman on Thursday, Oct. 15. The convention is followed by the annual membership and state representatives meetings on Sunday morning, Oct. 18, ending by noon.

FFRF offers a discounted room block at the Hilton Milwaukee Hotel, 509 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee of \$229 plus taxes per night. Book online: ffrf.us/con26reservations or phone 800-774-1500 noting you're with the Freedom From Religion Foundation, and providing our group code “90N.”

Huffman, D-Calif., one of the founders of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, previously spoke at FFRF's 2018 convention in San Francisco, where he accepted FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award. He also gave video remarks at FFRF's 2022 convention. He'll be speaking about his book, coming out in late August, called "No Prophets: The Fight to Save Democracy from Christian Nationalism."

Cohen has spoken at the FFRF conventions in 2023 (Madison, Wis.) and 2024 (Denver). At the 2023 convention, she won FFRF's Freethought Heroine Award for, in part, writing the book, "We of Little Faith: Why I Stopped Pretending to Believe (And Maybe You Should Too)."

Other previously announced speakers include novelist **Percival Everett**, author of the powerful book "James," which won the 2025 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction and is a retelling of "Huckleberry Finn" from the point of view of the enslaved James (not "Jim"). The distinguished professor of English at USC will receive FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award, reserved for public figures who make known their dissent from religion. "James" was published in March 2024 to great critical acclaim, and Everett will sign copies of his book. "American Fiction," the feature film based on his novel "Erasure," was released in 2023 and was awarded the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay.

Jennifer Welch, an atheist who co-hosts the "I've Had It" podcast, which reaches over 3 million listeners a month and has 150 million+ monthly views on its YouTube Channel, will speak on "I've had it with Christian nationalism." Welch greets listeners to "I've Had It" as "Patriots, gaytriots, theytriots, Blacktriots and browntriots." A New York Times interview noted that she became a "natural ally" with the marginalized after growing up an atheist. Welch also co-hosts the daily news series IHIP News and is the co-author of "Life Is a Lazy Susan of Sh*t Sandwiches." Welch will also receive FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

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

Marriage Equality." Other honorees will include two Texas teachers of integrity, who quit their jobs rather than display Ten Commandments posters in their public school classrooms: **Gigi Cervantes**, a high school theatre and activating teacher in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and **Johnny Cotton**, a band leader and teacher for 42 years in the Carthage ISD. They will receive a "First Amendment Heroine" Award and "First Amendment Hero Award" respectively.

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

The Henry Zumach Freedom From Fundamentalism 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 the work of allies.

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

Randi Weingarten, president of the AFT, a union of 1.8 million individuals, will be speaking and signing copies of her new book, "Why Fascists Fear Teachers." Prior to her election as AFT president in 2008, Weingarten served for 11 years as president of the United Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2, worked as a lawyer on Wall Street and taught history at Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn. Weingarten was included in Washingtonian's 2022 Washington's Most Influential People.

Weingarten holds degrees from Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations and the Cardozo School of Law.

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

Forrest Valkai, a popular Oklahoma-based biologist, science educator and popular content creator known as the Renegade Science Teacher, will also speak.

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 libertarian who has been imprisoned for "insulting Islam."

The conference will end with an after-dinner keynote address by **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."

FFRF will be offering "early-bird" workshops on 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. In addition, leaders from FFRF's grassroots chapter program will lead a workshop providing an overview of the benefits of starting an FFRF chapter in your area. That will be followed by a complimentary late afternoon reception, then Rep. Huffman's evening address.

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, the drawing for "clean" (pre-"In God We Trust") currency and several optional group meals and complimentary receptions.

Sign up today at ffrf.us/con26 or turn to the back page.

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By Dan Barker

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IN THE NEWS

Establishment Clause not for states, Florida AG says

Florida won't enforce a portion of its constitution that bars using public funds for religious institutions, Attorney General James Uthmeier stated April 2.

Uthmeier says the state constitution's ban on funding for religious institutions violates the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees the free exercise of religion. The move opens the door to the possibility of religious charter schools and state-funded scholarships for religious universities.

Uthmeier's legal opinion argues the First Amendment's clause preventing the establishment of a particular religion only applies to the federal government, but states are free to impose their own state religion.

FFRF has sent a formal letter to Uthmeier demanding that he reverse course and fulfill his duty to uphold Florida law. The state/church watchdog is calling the memo a breathtaking abuse of office and warning that it represents a direct attack on both the rule of law and religious freedom.

"Uthmeier does not get to pick and choose which parts of the Florida Constitution he feels like enforcing," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "His refusal to uphold this clear constitutional provision is not only legally baseless, but also a dereliction of duty."

Bible readings may be part of Texas reading list

The Texas State Board of Education gave preliminary approval April 10 to a mandatory list of books, including readings from the bible, that all public schools will teach starting in 2030 for millions of students.

The majority-Republican board voted 9-5 to approve the reading list, which the group will have a chance to revise ahead of final approval set for June. All five Democrats on the board voted against the list.

Supporters of the list have said they believe the biblical material will help students better grasp the influence of Christianity in U.S. history. Meanwhile, at least one critic called the original list and its biblical material "a lawsuit waiting to happen," while many stressed the importance of students needing to see themselves reflected in the books they read.

Muslim father sues over Texas voucher program

A Texan whose children attend an Islamic school in Houston sued Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and Comptroller Kelly Hancock, alleging that schools for Muslim students are being excluded from the state's new voucher program.

The program, introduced by the state's Legislature in 2025, created a \$1 billion fund for private school financial aid. But since Texas Education Freedom Accounts opened for applications on Feb. 4, none of the state's accredited private Islamic schools has been listed among those eligible for reimbursement through the program.

The "blanket exclusion of a group of private schools on the basis of their religious affiliation is a clear violation of the U.S. Constitution,"

Daley reminder



Photo by Bob Elmore

FFRF's Metropolitan Chicago Chapter set up a display on April 1 at the Daley Center Plaza in Chicago to counter Easter activities there. Each year, the chapter erects a banner display to protest a Catholic prayer shrine, cross and worship service taking place annually on the city plaza during the Christian "holy week." FFRF thanks chapter members for their work in setting up the display, pictured from left to right: Brian Emerick, Bob Hunter, Jeff Kramer and Manuel Beltran. (Not pictured are Steve Foulkes, who also assisted with the setup, Tom Cara and Bob Elmore, who took the photos.)

said Mehdi Cherkaoui, a father of two whose children are enrolled at the Houston Qu'ran Academy Spring, a private and accredited school excluded from the program. Cherkaoui, a lawyer who represents himself, filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court on March 1.

In December, after Gov. Greg Abbott designated the Council on American-Islamic Relations, a civil rights group, a "foreign terrorist organization" and a "transnational criminal organization," Hancock sent a letter to Paxton inquiring about the legality of excluding schools with ties to "foreign terrorist organizations" and "transnational criminal organizations." The attorney general responded by saying his office had full authority to exclude schools from the program.

Supreme Court: No ban on 'conversion therapy'

The Supreme Court on March 31 sided with a Christian therapist, rejecting a Colorado law that prohibited mental health professionals from trying to change the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ minors.

"This is a disappointing decision, which likely will lead to further harm to children," says Freedom From Religion Foundation Legal Director Patrick Elliott. "This case continues the trend of the Supreme Court favoring religious litigants under the guise of free speech."

The court's decision has implications for more than 20 other states

that have similar laws barring so-called conversion therapy, which critics say is ineffective and potentially dangerous for young people.

In its decision, the court said the law, as applied to talk therapy, impermissibly interferes with free speech.

"Colorado may regard its policy as essential to public health and safety," Justice Neil M. Gorsuch wrote for himself and seven other justices from across the ideological spectrum. "But the First Amendment stands as a shield against any effort to enforce orthodoxy in thought or speech in this country."

Only Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson dissented, reading a lengthy summary of her opposition from the bench.

Colorado's statute, adopted in 2019, prohibits "any practice or treatment" that tries to change a minor's "gender expressions or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attraction or feelings toward individuals of the same sex."

In its friend-of-the-court brief, FFRF argued that this case was yet another example of the Supreme Court improperly allowing religious litigants to use hypothetical and even insincere legal injuries in support of lawsuits designed to strike down laws based on nothing more than religious or ideological objections.

Crisis pregnancy center misdiagnosed pregnancy

Days after a Texas crisis pregnancy center gave Kaylee Hall an ultrasound and a clean bill of health, she was rushed into emergency surgery for a life-threat-

ening ectopic pregnancy. An OB-GYN who works with Abundant Life Pregnancy Resource Center told the Dallas Morning News that they didn't do anything wrong because their ultrasounds are "for educational purposes only."

Republicans claim CPCs [crisis pregnancy centers] can replace the real clinics their policies are shuttering and conservatives are pushing (and passing) legislation that prohibits state regulation of the centers.

In 2023, a Massachusetts woman sued the CPC that failed to diagnose her ectopic pregnancy. She ended up needing life-saving surgery after her fallopian tube ruptured. And last summer, NBC found that top anti-abortion groups have directed CPCs not to provide ultrasounds, lest they reveal ectopic pregnancies and miscarriages, and tip women off that they need emergency abortions.

These fake clinics are getting more funding than ever: Texas gave CPCs \$140 million in 2024, up from \$5 million in 2005.

Judge: Ban remains on pastor endorsements

A federal judge on March 31 rejected a settlement that would have lifted an IRS ban on pastors endorsing candidates, saying the court had no authority to approve an agreement.

Judge J. Campbell Barker of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas also dismissed the lawsuit filed by the National Religious Broadcasters, a Christian communicators group, and two Texas churches that was at the heart of the anticipated settlement. The plaintiffs had argued that the ban on endorsements violated their religious liberty. Under the IRS rule, known as the Johnson Amendment, tax-exempt nonprofits are barred from taking sides in political campaigns.

In dismissing the case, Barker said courts are barred from "providing declaratory relief with respect to federal taxes," and therefore the court could not approve the settlement, as it required the court to make a decision that affected the plaintiffs' tax status.

He also wrote that there was a simple solution for churches that want to avoid being penalized for endorsing candidates: "Put differently, if the plaintiffs here gave up their 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, none of the harms they allege could occur."

Ten Commandments in schools now law in Ala.

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey on April 10 signed into law a bill requiring public schools to display the Ten Commandments.

The legislation requires each local board of education in the state to display the Ten Commandments, along with a context statement, in each history classroom serving students in grades 5 through 12. The display would have to be donated or purchased with donated funds. Per the legislation, the commandments would also have to be displayed in a common area of each school that serves only fifth-grade students or above. It goes into effect on October 1.

"In Alabama, we proudly remember that we live in one nation under God," Ivey said in a statement.

FFRF VICTORIES

By Greg Fletcher

California

FFRF helped put a stop to Huntington Beach’s unconstitutional financially backed “Constitution Alive! Constitutional Defense” course, which was being run by an overtly Christian organization.

A Huntington Beach resident informed FFRF that in late August 2025, the Huntington Beach website and Facebook page advertised a “Patriot Academy” course titled, “Constitution Alive! Constitutional Defense,” by Rick Green. FFRF learned that this was the second instance of the course in 2025 at the Huntington Beach Public Library. Reportedly, Patriot Academy was not paying rent, as the class was a “city-sponsored program” initiated by the city’s Celebration Committee. Typically, third parties renting library space must pay for rentals pursuant to the library’s fee schedule.

According to the FFRF complainant, although the course was being presented as an academic and objective presentation of the U.S. Constitution, it was promoting explicitly religious ideology, including the claim that the United States is a Christian country. Patriot Academy’s own website explicitly advertises: “YOU can be part of the solution by starting the restoration of Biblical & Constitutional principles in YOUR community.” The organization makes blatantly religious claims, such as “God has blessed America with a strong biblical foundation,” and advocating “faith-based constitutional politics.”

“When the city advertises and sponsors an explicitly religious event via its official social media, and gives the organization behind it special rental terms, it displays clear preferential treatment for religion over nonreligion, and, in this case, Christianity over all other faiths,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to Mayor Pat Burns.

Despite FFRF’s letter, Burns never responded or addressed the resident’s concern in a formal manner. However, the individual who first brought the issue to FFRF’s attention kept in contact after the incident, bringing news that change had occurred.

“I’m happy to report that the city of Huntington Beach is no longer hosting Patriot Academy in our public library,” they wrote. “It is also not promoting it via the city calendar as it did in 2025. I am certain your warning letter played a major role in stopping them from sponsoring this seven-week course.”

California

FFRF, alongside the ACLU of Southern California, the national ACLU, and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, prevented the Kern County Board of Education from passing a motion that would force county schools to display the Ten Commandments.

The board scheduled a meeting to consider the measure at its meeting in Bakersfield on Nov. 13. The proposal would require the Ten Commandments to be displayed alongside other documents, such as the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights in five of the district’s six alternative education schools. The board was also considering whether to hire the Christian nationalist Liberty Counsel to represent the board.

FFRF and its allies stood up to stop the motion from passing.

“Requiring students of faiths that do not recognize the religious symbolism of

Supporting the trans community



Photo by Daniel Dossey

On March 31, which was Trans Day of Visibility 2026, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers vetoed five anti-transgender bills. Gov. Evers, second from right, is shown here with FFRF Action Fund staff, from left, Ryan Dudley, Daniel Dossey and Ryan Jayne, who were all invited to the veto-signing ceremony. FFRF had been vocal about defending the trans community against Christian nationalist attacks and was supportive of Gov. Evers’ vetoes.

the Decalogue to be forced to come into contact either in school lobbies, classrooms or other places in schools with a religious display that is of no religious significance to them and daily observe the Ten Commandments demonstrates a clear preference for those religions that revere the Commandments,” the joint letter states.

Thanks to the combined efforts of the organizations, the motion did not succeed. Thanks to an article posted by the youth-led media outlet Kern Sol Media, news of the failed motion came nearly a month after the FFRF-signed letter. “The Kern County Board of Education decided not to move forward with a proposal that would have required the Ten Commandments to be displayed in classrooms at several county schools,” author Haley Duval wrote.

Colorado

James Irwin Charter Schools in Colorado took comprehensive action to remove creationist lessons from all charter schools in the district, thanks to a letter from FFRF.

A concerned parent reported that James Irwin Charter Middle School (JICMS) was introducing creationism in its eighth-grade science curriculum. Per an email sent to parents by the “Science Lead” at JICMS, “During eighth-grade year in our evolution unit, per the guidelines in the charter of our school, we teach intelligent design and evolution. We present a creationist theory and an evolutionist theory regarding natural selection, adaptation and evolution.”

FFRF pointed out that teaching creationism is unlawful, as the school would be teaching religion instead of teaching scientific fact.

“A public charter school telling students that creationism is an accepted

scientific theory on the same footing as evolution undoubtedly interferes with parents’ rights to determine their children’s religious or nonreligious education,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district.

James Irwin Charter Schools Chief Executive Officer Rob Daugherty responded with comprehensive steps detailing the school’s action to remove the religious lessons and fortify a science-driven education. Daugherty wrote that steps included:

- “Verification across all James Irwin campuses that intelligent design is not included in science curriculum elsewhere in the network.”
- “Implementation of additional guidance and training for school leaders and instructional staff regarding the appropriate handling of questions related to religion, creationism or intelligent design when they arise in classroom discussions initiated by students.”
- “Presentation of a formal board action to codify this clarification within our curriculum governance framework to ensure consistent compliance moving forward.”

Florida

The Seminole County Public Schools system in Florida made sure that two schools would no longer be giving preferential treatment to two local churches through sports teams and signage, thanks to FFRF’s advocacy.

FFRF received reports of continued instances of Action Church representatives being granted access to public school students and facilities. Action Church appeared to have a recurring presence at the Friday games with the Hagerty High School football team. Several Facebook posts from the Action Church – Community Benefit Facebook page detailed Pas-

tor Ben DiLecce “serving” the Hagerty High School football team, or “sharing an encouraging word.” One post from Oct. 23, 2025, showed student-athletes kneeling in front of the pastor.

Additionally, FFRF learned that Authentic Church was leaving a large sign on Winter Springs High School property outside of the church’s rental hours. The sign read, “This way to Authentic Church,” and the community member that reported the sign sent FFRF a photo of the sign when the church was not using the school.

“As the district is aware, public schools may not show favoritism toward religion over nonreligion, or one religion over all others,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote.

Due to FFRF’s letters, the district took action to correct the violations. In an email from the Seminole County Public Schools Staff Attorney Kalae Menard, Menard confirmed that the assistant superintendent retrained the principals of Winter Springs High School and Hagerty High School. There was also a meeting for the principals of each of the district’s principals held at the district office in January 2026. “At that time, the principals were retrained on the district’s policies related to engagement with religious groups and board policy. . . Moreover, the assistant superintendent of high schools has been directed to work with the principals of Winter Springs and Hagerty to inform Action Church and Authentic Church of the district’s policies related to engagement with religious groups.”

Florida

In Tampa, Fla., FFRF took action against a religious assignment in the Hillsborough County Public Schools system. A parent reported that on Feb. 11, their child’s chorus teacher at Barrington Middle School required his entire sixth grade chorus class to write the following sentence 50 times during class instructional time: “God destroyed the Earth by flooding seas for being evil and disobeying God’s commands.” According to the parent, the teacher gave the entire class the assignment as punishment for being disruptive during a previous class period, and the assignment was subject to class-wide enforcement until everyone had finished it.

The parent explained: “This incident made me feel deeply disturbed and alarmed as a parent. I was especially troubled that the sentence students were forced to write effectively equated the authority of the teacher with God’s authority and labeled normal sixth-grade behavior as ‘evil.’ This framing is emotionally manipulative, inappropriate and harmful for children, particularly when imposed by an authority figure in a public school setting.”

“Here, [the teacher] reportedly admitted to forcing his entire sixth grade chorus class to write a religious declaration, and he did not provide his students with any context as to why or how this sentence was possibly relevant to chorus,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the school district’s legal counsel.

FFRF’s work paid off. The Hillsborough County Public Schools parent informed FFRF that the principal at Barrington Middle School emailed her confirming that the assignment would be discontinued and that the teacher would not force students to write religious messages going forward.

Florida

In the Orange County Public Schools system in Orlando, a parent reported that a Stone Lakes Elementary School teacher had been reciting prayers every morning in front of her first-grade students during the school’s “moment of silence.” The parent stated that the teacher prayed out loud, often beginning with “Dear Jesus,” and prayed for students “to avoid ‘wounds and sins.’” Students were not allowed to begin speaking until she had finished her daily prayer, thereby forcing her students to sit and listen to an overtly Christian prayer every morning during what was supposed to be a moment of silence.

The parent expressed concern because their child had begun asking them questions at home, such as whether they are Christian. The parents are raising their child in a non-religious home and were disturbed by the classroom prayers. Additionally, the first-grade class reportedly included at least a few students who have Muslim families, as well, and the parent was concerned about how these prayers were impacting minority faith students, as well.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the school system’s legal counsel with FFRF’s constitutional concerns.

FFRF learned via an open records request that the school had taken action, providing the teacher with a written correction and verbal coaching to stop the prayers.

Florida

FFRF’s action helped bring an end to the Sarasota County Schools’ intermingling of a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) representative’s role as chaplain to the North Port High Schools baseball team.

FFRF learned that North Port High School was permitting an adult representative from the fellowship to minister to the baseball team as a religious chaplain. A Feb. 8 post from the official Sarasota County FCA Facebook account tagged the high school’s team, writing that they “are praying over each coach and player by name.”

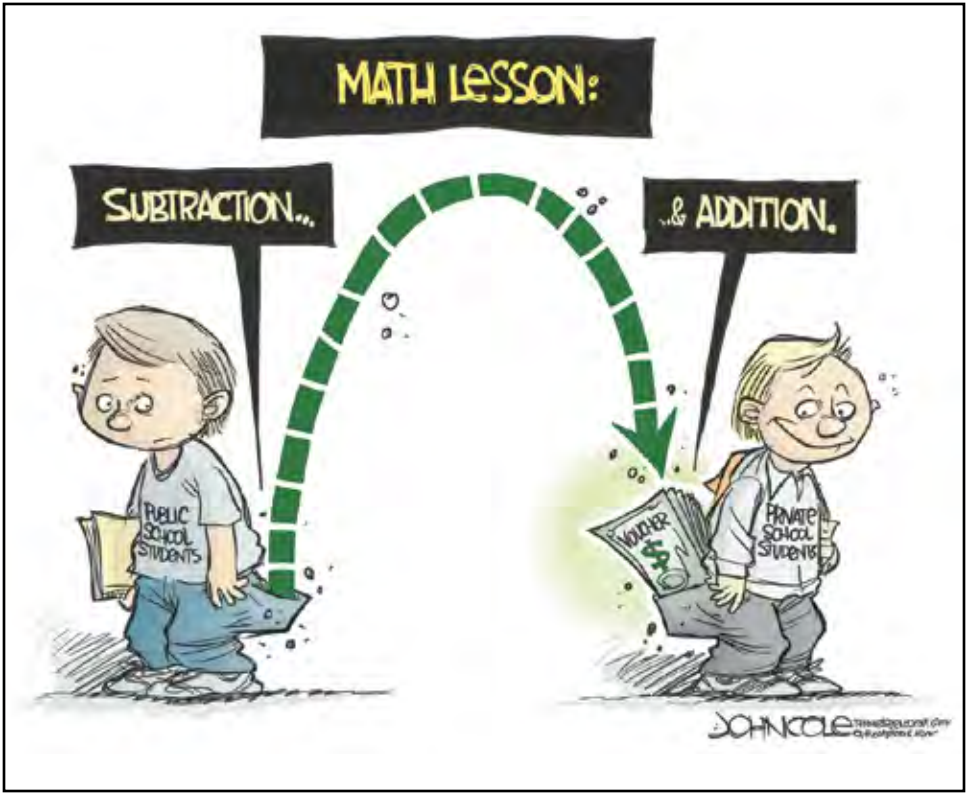
FFRF knew that action was needed to put a stop to the district’s constitutional misconduct.

“A public high school allowing an outside adult to act as a religious adviser to other people’s children is unconstitutional and particularly troubling for those parents and students who are not Christians or do not subscribe to any religion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to Patrick J. Duggan, the district’s legal counsel.

Duggan made sure the district would take corrective action, and ensure students of all beliefs, or none at all, felt safe to play baseball at North Port. “Please note the ‘chaplain’ has not had and will not have moving forward any affiliation with the team. Any miscommunication about what role FCA is able to play within our schools and regarding our teams and students has been clarified consistent with legal standards,” Duggan wrote. “I understand that the ‘chaplain’ took it upon himself to delete the social media post (on an account the school district has no affiliation with or control over).”

Kansas

Due to FFRF’s advocacy, Riverton USD 404, a Riverton, Kan., school district, is taking steps to ensure that students will not be performing in-



herently religious stories.

A concerned community religious leader reported that Riverton Elementary School’s Dec. 18, 2025, school-sponsored Christmas concert ended in a nativity scene play and an administrator-led prayer. Fifth-grade students were dressed up as biblical characters and performed a “traditional Christian Nativity scene” as part of the school’s concert. The scene depicted the biblical story of Jesus’ birth from the New Testament, an undeniably religious story. After the scene, the school’s principal “asked parents, students and all there to join him in prayer,” according to the community member. They further explained, “I’m a believer in religious freedom. I am a religious leader in the community, but I do not think public government-funded schools are the appropriate place to hold prayer and perform a representation of a religious story.

FFRF agreed, and wrote to the district to uphold the separation of state-sponsored educational events from religious beliefs.

“Additionally, [the principal] allegedly led students and everyone else present in a prayer while acting in his official capacity as a school administrator,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote. “The prayer and nativity play both violated students’ First Amendment right to be free from coercive government-sponsored prayer and religious indoctrination while participating in their public school’s music program.”

After FFRF’s letter, Superintendent Kevin Cooper responded via email. While Cooper alleged that there was not a prayer led by the principal, he did confirm that certain portions of the district’s programming were going to be evaluated to more closely adhere to the Constitution. “There are aspects of the program that will definitely require us to take a look and make adjustments as we move forward in programs,” Cooper wrote.

Kentucky

FFRF’s work saw the Logan County Detention Center reaffirm its commitment to keeping inmates from being forced to participate in religious revivals.

A community member reported that the Logan County Detention Center had been hosting religious “revivals” for inmates. County commissioners and other officials were promoting

these religious worship events, and the purpose of the revivals and other events were to “save” inmates’ souls, and the detention center’s head jailer spoke about “how many ‘souls were saved’” at County Fiscal Court meetings.

Additionally, a Dec. 16, 2025, post from the official Logan County Detention Center Facebook account read, in part: “The first night of revival at the Logan County Detention Center was a huge success. Inmates braved the cold weather for some great testimonies, some wonderful worship music and a great message.”

FFRF stood up to protect the rights of inmates from religious coercion.

“Detention Center and Fiscal Court employees and officials can practice their personal religion any way they wish when acting in their personal capacities,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote. “However, they are not permitted to use the machinery of the government, and taxpayer money, to promote their personal religion to inmates or the wider community.”

The county took FFRF’s letter seriously and agreed to correct their mistake. “After receiving your letter, Judge Baker and I met with Jailer Josh Toomey to discuss the matter,” Logan County Attorney Joseph E. Ross wrote. “Following that discussion, Jailer Toomey agreed to remove the Facebook post in question in order to alleviate any concerns your organization may have.”

Ross also confirmed that the religious service, and all religious services conducted at the detention center, were conducted to be consistent with the First Amendment. The gathering occurred outside the normal daily schedule, was entirely voluntary and no inmate was coerced or required to attend. Additionally, Toomey stated that he respects the religious beliefs of all inmates, and their constitutional right to refrain from religious participation, and extends the same access to other denominations if requested by religious leaders and/or inmates.

Minnesota

FFRF has ensured that contracted bus drivers in Minnesota’s Milaca Public Schools system will no longer hand out to students religious messages attached to candy canes.

A parent of a Milaca Elementary School student reported that on Dec. 22, 2025, their child’s school bus driver gave students “WWJD” (What Would Jesus Do) bracelets and a piece of paper

with a candy cane tied to it. The paper had a religious message, with the candy cane making the letter “J”: “Jesus is my Savior who gave his life for me. Because of Him each of us can ever more be free. Jesus is the greatest gift the world has ever seen. So I’ll talk of Him at Christmas time, and all the days in between.”

The parent expressed their frustration to FFRF about school bus drivers passing out religious messages and bracelets to students, because they are not raising their children to believe in religion.

“In this case, the district violated parents’ trust by allowing a school bus driver to distribute religious messages and bracelets to students while acting in their official role as a school employee,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to Superintendent Dave Wedin. “This not only violates students’ First Amendment rights, it violates parents’ constitutional rights to direct their children’s religious or nonreligious upbringing.”

Due to FFRF’s intervention, the district has thankfully worked to correct the issue. An email from Superintendent Wedin reported that the district had conducted an internal investigation to prevent further incidents.

“By working [with the contracted bus company], we were able to identify the individual involved,” Wedin wrote. “The company has addressed the matter appropriately with the driver to prevent any future occurrences.” Wedin also reported a proactive effort of speaking with other contracted transportation providers to reiterate the district’s secular expectations.

Oregon

FFRF is pleased to report that the Hermiston School District in Oregon will no longer allow contracted bus drivers to broadcast religious radio programming to students.

A parent of a Sunset Elementary School student reported that on Oct. 2, 2025, a school bus driver played Christian talk radio over the bus speakers while students were on board. The religious radio station was loud enough for students, including the child of FFRF’s community contact, to hear. The parent stated that their family is not religious, and that the child came home upset by what they heard. The parent further explained that the Christian radio program made their child “uncomfortable” because they do not teach those religious beliefs at home.

FFRF learned that the district contracts a private company, First Student, in order to supply school bus drivers for the district’s students. However, these bus drivers act under the direction and supervision of the district while driving district students, even if the drivers are technically employed by a third party. While First Student is a private employer and the school bus drivers are private employees, they are paid with public money and are transporting students while on contract with the district.

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

District Superintendent Tricia Mooney followed up with FFRF’s letter, confirming that the district heard FFRF’s call and took appropriate action. “Although we cannot discuss personnel matters, this matter has been reviewed and resolved,” Mooney wrote.

Trump’s AI image has Christians beside themselves

By PJ Slinger

Blasphemy!

That was the sound of Christian religious leaders when President Trump posted an AI image on April 12 of himself as Jesus, allegedly healing a bed-ridden man.

Well, blasphemy, as we all know, is a victimless “crime.” When someone yells “blasphemy!,” what I hear is “How dare you say anything bad about my imaginary god!”

To Trump supporters, this president seldom, if ever, does anything wrong. That’s why it was surprising to see the quick backlash from Christians, many of whom have been OK with Trump’s policies that go in direct contradiction to what Jesus supposedly stood for, such as helping the needy, welcoming immigrants, turning the other cheek and promoting peace.

But, really, of all the things Trump has done, THIS is what is gets Christians upset? Posting an AI image?

“I don’t know if the president thought he was being funny . . . or what possible explanation he could have for this OUTRAGEOUS blasphemy,” wrote Megan Basham, a prominent conservative Protestant Christian writer and commentator, as reported in the Washington Post. “But he needs to take this down immediately and ask for forgiveness from the American people and then from God.”

And this, from writes Ross Douthat of the Washington Post: “The compounding offense isn’t against religious identity. It’s a violation of the first and sec-



PJ Slinger



This AI image was posted by President Trump on April 12 and taken down the next day after sparking Christian outrage.

ond commandments, where the offended party is Almighty God.”

Um, I think God is probably doing all right on his own . . . mostly because he’s make-believe. However, if one assumes he’s real, in the compendium of

grievances and harms done throughout history by humans, I’m guessing an AI image is pretty low on the list of godly slights.

But, let’s get back to the indignation.

David Brody, an evangelical journalist with the Christian Broadcasting Network, said of the AI image: “This goes too far. It crosses the line.”

Rev. Tony Suarez, a longtime advisor of Trump, said it’s “an offense to allude or depict that a human can compare to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Brilyn Hollyhand, a conservative Gen Z political commentator and outspoken Christian, said in a video posted to X that “comparing yourself, even jokingly, to Jesus . . . undermines the very value that many of us hold dear. This is gross blasphemy.”

“It’s more than blasphemy. It’s an Antichrist spirit,” former Congress member Marjorie Taylor Greene posted to X.

Bowing to pressure, Trump did remove the “offensive” image and then claimed he wasn’t trying to depict himself as Jesus, but as a doctor or a Red Cross worker.

Jon Stewart joked about Trump’s “doctor” response on “The Daily Show” on April 13, saying “Do you even care about lying to us anymore? Is it over? Has this relationship gone stale? Your lies used to have a real spark: ‘They’re eating the cats and dogs.’ ‘Venezuela stole the 2020 election.’ And now the best you’ve got is: ‘Oh, it wasn’t Jesus. I’m a doctor.’ You need to find your happy place, and fast. We expect better lies, sir.”

And, finally, regarding the AI image, Sean Feucht, a conservative Christian activist and Trump supporter, said, “There’s no context where this is acceptable.”

Well, except maybe in Freethought Today.

PJ Slinger is editor of Freethought Today.

Arkansas

Continued from page 1

cessive government entanglement with religion” and that the monument was “discriminatory and coercive.”

Arkansas lawmakers passed the Display Act in 2015, spearheaded by then-state Sen. Jason Rapert, to install a privately funded Ten Commandments monument on Capitol grounds. The monument was first installed in 2017, destroyed a day later, and replaced in 2018. Lawsuits followed immediately, challenging the display as an unconstitutional government

endorsement of religion.

The court agreed, emphasizing both the inherently religious nature of the Ten Commandments and the state’s clear preference for Christianity. Evidence showed that Arkansas officials rejected requests from non-Christian groups seeking equal access to place their own monuments, reinforcing the court’s conclusion that the state engaged in unconstitutional religious favoritism. The decision distinguishes Arkansas’ display from monuments upheld in other contexts, noting that this stand-alone religious monument does not reflect a broader historical tradi-

tion but instead advances a specific religious message.

“The state of Arkansas has no business telling citizens which gods to worship — or whether to worship at all. The First Commandment is a direct violation of the First Amendment,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We are delighted the court recognizes that placing a biblical monument at the seat of government violates one of our most fundamental constitutional protections.”

FFRF Senior Counsel Sam Grover adds, “This ruling reaffirms that the government must remain neutral when

it comes to religion. That neutrality is essential to protecting the rights of all citizens, regardless of their beliefs.”

The plaintiffs in the case reflect a broad cross-section of Arkansans. Anne Orsi — longtime member of FFRF — is an agnostic atheist. Eugene Levy is a rabbi. Gale Stewart is an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.. Teresa Gryder is a Wiccan. All of them have the necessity and occasion to visit the Capitol grounds regularly, and come into contact with the biblical monolith.

The order to remove the monument is stayed pending appeal.

Public School

Continued from page 1

outside that faith would effectively be excluded on the taxpayer’s dime because the school would promote the beliefs of a specific religion. And Ben Gamla’s application further states that the school may base employment decisions on religion.

The public school families are seeking to join the lawsuit, The National Ben Gamla Jewish Charter School Foundation Inc. v. Drummond, to oppose Ben Gamla’s effort to force Oklahoma to authorize and fund an unconstitutional religious public charter school. They object to their tax dollars funding a public charter school that will indoctrinate students into a particular religion, in violation of Oklahoma and federal law and our nation’s longstanding commitment to the separation of church and state. They also object to public funds being diverted from their nonreligious and inclusive public schools — which already face serious resource limitations — to a religious school that plans to discriminate based on religion. These taxpayers are asking the U.S. District

Court for the Western District of Oklahoma to allow them to participate in the case in order to safeguard their interests in public education, religious freedom and church-state separation.

“My family is Jewish. We know firsthand that people of all faiths are best served when public schools don’t impose one idea of religion over others,” says Kara Joy McKee, a proposed intervenor and parent of a public school student. “A religious public charter school would undermine religious freedom and drain tax dollars from schools that are welcoming to students of all faiths, families and backgrounds.”

Ben Gamla’s lawsuit was filed less than two weeks after Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond filed a lawsuit in state court arguing that the Oklahoma Statewide Charter School Board intentionally and improperly manipulated the administrative record of its denial of Ben Gamla’s application in a manner designed to aid Ben Gamla’s litigation position. Concern about statements by a majority of the board’s members expressing disagreement with state law prohibiting religious public charter schools is one reason that the proposed intervenors are seeking to participate in Ben Gamla’s lawsuit.

Texas

Continued from page 1

does SB 10 compel financial support for religious institutions.”

They argued that the Kennedy v. Bremerton decision permitting a coach to pray by himself on the football field after high school games has changed the precedent.

Eight judges dissented, writing four different dissents. Seven wrote that “legislation requiring the permanent fixture of religious rules in public-school classrooms, with no ‘educational function,’ violates [the] most basic First Amendment principles” and that “the Establishment Clause ‘was intended to erect a wall of separation between church and state.’”

Judge Irma Ramirez, a Biden appointee, said the 1980 precedent, Stone v. Graham, ruling unconstitutional a similar law in Kentucky, has not been overturned and may only be overturned by the Supreme Court.

FFRF and the other organizations representing the plaintiffs issued the following statement in response to the decision:

“We are extremely disappointed in [this] decision. The court’s ruling goes against fundamental First Amendment

principles and binding U.S. Supreme Court authority. The First Amendment safeguards the separation of church and state, and the freedom of families to choose how, when and whether to provide their children with religious instruction. This decision tramples those rights. We anticipate asking the Supreme Court to reverse this decision and uphold the religious freedom rights of children and parents.”



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OVERHEARD

Far from being a sign of resurgent faith, Christian identity politics is a symptom of religious decline. . . The fact that Americans are growing more secular and less religiously literate has made religion more salient as a marker of political difference, even as invocations of it become less informed.

Matthew Schmitz, in his column, “The unreligious religiosity of Christian identity politics.”
Washington Post, 3-27-26

The defense secretary’s rhetoric is a disservice to soldiers of all faiths and none, who swore to defend a godless and secular Constitution. . . [Pete] Hegseth is the figure they feared, an ideologue who admits he is more dedicated to his own dogma than he is to our democracy.

Jason Benell, president of Iowa Atheists and Freethinkers, in an op-ed titled, “I fought for our Constitution, not a crusade.” For his outspokenness, FFRF Action Fund named Benell it’s “Secularist of the Week” on March 27.
Des Moines Register, 3-22-26

Public funds should go to public schools. Proponents of this nationwide voucher expansion have implored me to support and opt into this program, insisting the program will benefit public school students, families and schools, too . . . My decades of experience and public education in the state with the first and oldest modern voucher program tell me the opposite will be true.



Tony Evers

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers, on why he became the second governor at that point to opt out of the nation’s first federally funded voucher program, a tax credit benefiting donors and students choosing private schools, passed by Congress last year. Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz rejected the tax credit about the same time.
Wisconsin State Journal, 3-31-26

Overall, the public records show that Murphy, as Cardinal Bernard Law’s top deputy in Boston for almost eight years, was involved in almost one-third of the priest sexual abuse cases at the heart of the scandal there.

A Newsday story cited in the obituary of Willam F. Murphy, 85, who died in February, and denied being involved in the handling of priests accused of abusing minors. He was second in command under Cardinal Bernard Law, who resigned after the Boston Globe’s major exposé of priest abuse there.
New York Times, 4-2-26

No amount of rigorous academic research or testing ever seems good enough to quell Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s doubts about vaccines. Yet for products he favors, anything goes. The hypocrisy is especially rank as RFK pushes the Food and Drug Administration to loosen restrictions on peptides, an experimental fad among wellness influencers who scorn traditional medicine.

Washington Post editorial titled “RFK Jr.’s hypocritical quackery.”
Washington Post, 3-24-26

The current administration seems to have concluded that those rules against government endorsement of religion are no longer operative. One might also argue that the email risks impermissible coercion of employees.

James Nelson, a law professor at the University of Houston who specializes in religion and speech rights in the workplace, in response to USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins’ email to all

USDA employees on Easter that was overtly Christian, including “Jesus has been raised from the dead. And God has granted each of us victory and new life.”
Washington Post, 4-9-26

Christian nationalism had embedded itself too deeply in the MAGA movement and the evolving Trump administration for Hegseth’s version of it to stand out as boldly as it should. He has faded into the crowd of holy rollers.

Frank Bruni, in his column, “Pete Hegseth’s gospel of carnage.”
New York Times, 4-13-26

On Christianity’s highest holy day, we saw a president who claims to be Christian sending a message full of profanity and describing an attack on civilian infrastructure that would bring massive suffering and even death to ordinary people, while mocking the religion of Islam. . . . All the perils of Christian nationalism came together and were shown to us with clarity this Easter. It is undeniable.

Jim Wallis, in the column, “How Easter turned to blasphemy at the White House.”
Religion News Service, 4-13-26

Look, President Trump, I know the Vatican’s been critical of your policies, but you gotta remember that you and the Catholic Church both historically care deeply about the same thing — covering up sex scandals.

Jon Stewart, host of “The Daily Show,” when discussing the “feud” between Trump and Pope Leo.
Comedy Central, 4-13-26



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3rd annual secular legislative panel

‘I will never give up the fight’

The following is a condensed transcript (edited for clarity) from the Third Annual Secular Legislative Panel held at FFRF’s national convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Oct. 18, 2025. To watch the full panel discussion, go to ffrf.us/con25.

Mickey Dollens: Welcome to the third annual secular legislative panel. My name is Mickey Dollens. I’m the FFRF Action Fund regional government affairs manager, and I’m going to be joined with my colleague Ryan Dudley, our state policy manager.

We are honored to be here with Rep. Heather Meyer, who serves Kansas House District 29. Rep. Meyer’s childhood experiences shaped her commitment to public service and her career as a clinical social worker. In 2021, she made history as Kansas’s first openly bisexual legislator. She is a strong advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, reproductive freedom, state/church separation and affordable health care. Rep. Meyer serves on several key committees, including House and Federal and State Affairs, Health and Human Services, Elections and Insurance, and is dedicated to ensuring government works for all Kansans.

Ryan Dudley: Next up we have Rep. Monique Priestley. She represents Vermont House District Orange-2. She’s winding down operations as executive director of the Space on Main, a nonprofit community center she founded in 2017. With over two decades of experience in technology and digital media, Rep. Priestley has combined her professional expertise with a passion for public service, serving on numerous local boards. First elected in 2022, she serves as clerk to the House Commerce and Economic Development Committee, as well as the vice chair of the Joint Information Technology Oversight Committee.

Mickey Dollens: Our third lawmaker joining us today is Rep. Andy Smith. He represents Minnesota House District 25-B. He was first elected in 2022. He’s a small business owner and a community builder. He and his wife, Anna, co-founded Gray Duck Theater and Coffeehouse and Garden Party Books to build community connection through movies, books and coffee. Raised in a conservative evangelical Christian home, Andy once held very restrictive views on issues such as abortion, but now strongly supports the right for individuals to make their own reproductive decisions.

It is an honor to have you all here. Ryan and I will be taking turns asking you questions, and I’m going to start by asking you to tell us a little bit about yourself and what was the defining moment that first made you decide to run for office?

Rep. Meyer: It really all started when I was younger. I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes when I was 12, and I had a single dad. I grew up with him supporting our family on his own. He was also a type 1 diabetic, and I saw the way that the health care system just did not work for us. I lived without insurance nearly all of my youth and adult life, and it really affected our health outcomes, and certainly my father’s. I lost him when I was 22 years old, when he was 47.

I took those experiences and it led me into advocacy on a lot of different fronts, namely health care reform. I believe in Medicare for all. I think we absolutely need to provide free health care for everyone because we know that healthy communities start with healthy people.

Beyond that, I came out as bisexual when I was in my late teens. So that was in



Photo by Chris Line

The full panel included moderators Ryan Dudley, left, and Mickey Dollens, who is also a seated Oklahoma legislator, right, and state representatives Monique Priestley, Heather Meyer and Andy Smith.

the late 1990s, early 2000s. That really affected and shaped how I viewed the world. That, of course, led me into doing community health work. I spent the majority of my early career working with indigent and marginalized populations, in the health care setting, trying to get them connected with benefits.

That led me to working with people who are living with HIV, which is something that I’m very passionate about. I recently graduated with a masters of social work degree back in May. It was a little crazy to go to grad school and serve in the Legislature and work two jobs outside of it and raise kids at the same time. But, you know, we do what we need to do. So, now, I’m practicing clinical therapy and serving in the Kansas Legislature. That is really kind of what shaped my worldview.

Rep. Priestley: My career has always been in tech, whether it’s hardware or software, ever since I was a kid. I was wiring my high school and doing websites and things like that to working at a software company and now I’m leading tech policy in Vermont and kind of across the country.

I grew up in the church, which I would say instilled a strong sense of community in me, but then when I was 13, I was like, wait, I don’t actually believe any of this. What am I doing?

And that was just it. So I stopped going to church with my mom and family. I still had that sense of community — we always volunteered at the food shelf and the church, and we organized parades and public readings. My mom worked at the public library, so we organized a lot of things. I was always her helper. So, all of my free time as a kid, as a high schooler, as a college student, as an adult, has been spent volunteering for the local health care clinic and on conservation and public safety and chambers of commerce and just all of the things, which led me to turning a retail store into a community space.

At one point I did a leadership pro-

gram, and I had imposter syndrome. I was doing a leadership program where we had to survey a bunch of people. Most of the feedback was like, I hope that Monique somehow figures out that she’s not just a voice for herself. She represents all of us. We need her to own her power. And that was incredibly strong. It’s making me tear up because it was a very strong moment. When our secretary of state asked me to run, I was like, I can’t say no to this.

Rep. Smith: I have a bachelor’s from Moody Bible Institute and a master’s of divinity from Westminster Seminary, which is probably not something that you normally see at this conference.

But you all know what exvangelicals are, and that’s what I am. A large part of running for office is both a burden of past belief and past hurt that has been caused by a system that I was a part of for a long time. But, the more specific reason, being a small business owner, we were hosting a panel on health care in Minnesota, and our local rep came and spoke. Afterward, I caught up with her and asked her a question about one particular program. It’s our MinnCare program, which is sort of our basic health plan that tries to fill in some of the gaps. I asked why we don’t just expand that program to allow anyone to be able to access it.

I remember very clearly that she said back to me: “Well, that’s just not how it works.”

I didn’t say this to her at the time, but I have since said this to her: “But why not? We can’t keep going the way that we have been going.” And it felt, in that moment, important for people to run for office who wouldn’t normally. And now, four years later, I’m here.

Mickey Dollens: Many nonreligious people would like to run for office, but they think they have to fake faith in order to win. What would you say to someone who doubts they’re qualified to run just because they’re nonreligious?

Rep. Smith: It is so ingrained in our American mindset of who runs for office. If you ask a Democrat for their perfect idea of a politician, it’s probably JFK, right? If you ask a Republican who runs for office, it’s Ronald Reagan, right? White religious guys who are generally handsome. That’s what you have to be.

The simple answer is that we cannot continue to have our leaders just reflect those experiences in the world. That is not the way for our country to flourish. I think much more important than your connection to a religion is your connection to the community that you’re representing. That is what makes you qualified, and that’s



Photo by Chris Line

Rep. Monique Priestley talks about how being an atheist influences her worldview as an elected official.

what is going to lead you to lead well, to make good decisions.

I think sometimes we think that because we fit in this or that category, we shouldn't lead. So, you should not think that you need to be a particular way to run for office. The most important thing is being connected to your community. That's what makes you a leader.

Rep. Priestley: I've just openly been atheist and humanist, but it's not something that comes up too often. I'm not generally asked about it. I think probably I'm just assumed to be Christian or something. There's a lot of Christian nationalists in our statehouse right now in Vermont.

But at one point, there was a group that was in our cafeteria, and they'd put little notes kind of all over the tables inviting people to participate in prayer. And that's fine. Like, it's the statehouses for everybody. But, I was sitting at a table, and I had a colleague come over and he asked, "What do you think about all this?" And I said, "I'm an atheist. I don't think about it." And he just looked at me. He's a little bit older, kind of a quiet guy, former science teacher. He's said something like, "You're kind of brave about it. Being atheist, isn't that scary?"

And I said, "Larry, that's a core fundamental aspect of who I am as a human. I can't change that. I don't want to. I can't pretend. There are elements to each of us, like as you were saying, that we're all representative of different populations in the building."

That's why it's beautiful. But, at its most fundamental level, we're representing different populations. And for me, if I can represent people who have secular beliefs, and who don't agree with religion being involved in our laws and our public schools, then I want to be there for them.

Rep. Meyer: We all have a lot of intersecting identities. I'm an open agnostic and secular humanist. I have been since I was a child. I did not grow up in the church.

I want people to know that, yes, it can be scary to put yourself out there. But people understand and love authenticity, and we all deserve representation. If I can be a voice for those who feel voiceless right now, then I'm going to, because I know that there are people all over my state who look at me and they say, "Wow, I didn't know that someone like that could possibly run for office, let alone keep her seat through a couple of elections." And, in Kansas, of all places. I mean, I am openly progressive. I do not hide. Everyone knows who I am and how I feel, but I'm respectful about it and I respect other people's beliefs, as well. I would prefer they respected mine a little bit more, but we're working on it.

It is our duty and our responsibility as nonreligious and secular people to show the world who we are, what we can be, and what our real ethics and values are and where they come from, which is from caring about humanity.

Mickey Dollens: What do you think are some of the biggest threats to state/church separation today within Christian nationalism?

Rep. Priestley: Education. I'm sure a lot of people in this room, if not all of you, understand this, but, generally, the public does not realize that when it comes to the discussion about how we fund our schools and how the kind of infrastructure of our schools is like in Vermont, we're unique in that our property taxes are heavily tied to the school budgets.

That means, when the schools are costing too much, then the property taxes go up and then everybody gets angry. That was kind of weaponized for us this year in a way that the governor, who I'm sure is pushing school choice in order to fund religious schools, brought in our new secretary of ed, a woman who was running independent



Photo by Chris Line

State Reps. Andy Smith (Minn.), Monique Priestley (Vt.) and Heather Meyer (Kan.) enjoy a light moment during their panel discussion on Oct. 18, 2025, in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

and religious charter schools in Florida.

And so, yeah, it's a whole thing. And I don't think people realize that when the governor is getting everybody angry about property taxes and blaming it on the lack of school choice, that what he's trying to get them to do is be on the side of school choice no matter what.

I think that is a danger to students who are LGBTQ and trans, and fear of prayer in school and just all that kind of stuff. I think it's dangerous because of how stealthy it is.

Rep. Meyer: Kansas has been having a battle about school choice for a few years now, and it is all driven by religious organizations. It's religious organizations trying to take our tax dollars and give it directly to the church, whatever religion it is and how wrong that is.

But, in addition, in our state, we have failing rural school districts because so many people are leaving the rural areas because the jobs aren't there anymore because we have a water crisis with the Ogallala aquifer. But school choice is a real problem with equity and religion. I really do think that school choice is one of the biggest fights that we have. They are really trying to slide it under the radar. Heritage Foundation and all those different dark money groups are pushing it, pushing it really hard.

But, in our state, we also have a lot of issues with religious groups coming in and trying to destroy our safety net programs, which is something I'm very passionate about, given my history and my work. For instance, we have one committee called the Welfare Reform Committee. I used to be ranking on that committee until we lost some seats, and I needed to move over to health. But that committee is headed up by one of the biggest Christian nationalists I've ever seen in my life. Even the Atlantic magazine did an article on the church that is in his city, Saint Mary's. I think it's Saint Pius X or something like that. They're a big time Catholic cult. And the pope even said that they aren't allowed to be part of the church anymore. They're that extreme. So, he heads up the Welfare Reform Committee, which is a newer committee where they determine what safety net programs are going to look like, what cuts are going to be made, how to approach waste and fraud, which there isn't a lot of and, basically, how we're going to punish poor folks just for being poor because, as I said earlier, their belief is that they don't believe in and Jesus, Christianity or whatever.

They think that we have to punish the poor. So, this man uses this committee to push his wild right-wing, Christian nationalist extremist agenda into state government and dismantle our safety net programs. I was able to stop almost every single bill out of that committee, thankfully. But it's still going on.

There are a lot of different areas where we have to be cognizant of how Christian nationalism affects our more marginalized groups. But also the covert ways in which they are trying to infiltrate the system.

Rep. Smith: I might just add more broadly that evangelicalism is inherently

authoritarian. It views the world as one entity, and it's patriarchal. The authority is structured very poorly. It is incredibly easy, even for the most innocent grandma in Kansas, to buy into this whole system that denies even their own humanity and their own choices in reverence for this authority. We saw it very clearly at the Charlie Kirk memorial a couple of weeks ago. Of course, his assassination was awful, but that funeral service was a Christian nationalist revival, connecting a certain kind of American patriotism to a certain kind of American Christianity and making that one. And I think that that's not a maybe specific issue, but the viewpoint of the world and their view toward politics and society is so easily ingrained in authoritarianism.

And it's certainly going to take a long time for us to untangle that in our society.

Mickey Dollens: We have a few personalized questions now. Rep. Smith, this first one is for you. You and your wife, Anna, love movies and books, so much so that you co-founded an independent movie theater and bookstore. Is there a particular film, show or book that you think captures what's happening to state/church separation right now in America?

Rep. Smith: There's a Japanese film called "Harakiri," which was made in the 1960s. It's an incredible film, and sometimes it's easier to see the flaws in other societies rather than our own. That film examines the honor culture of Japan at the time of the samurai and how that honor system is imposed on particularly the poor, the working class. And they are expected to follow it perfectly. And then the ruling class is abusing it for their own power and to preserve their own ability to rule. And it's a fantastic film, one of the best films ever made. If you haven't seen it, I strongly recommend it.

Ryan Dudley: Rep. Priestley, New England has a long history of colonial era religious influence and civic life. Even today, those patterns sometimes still surface in small towns. Through your work, have you ever had pushback to religious extremism or as a result of religion?

Rep. Priestley: I see this show up in my town all the time. Right now, it goes to all

levels, not just the state legislature. It actually starts at the local level, which is the hardest and scariest bit because, it's somewhat easy to get into local office, and then easy to rise through the ranks because a lot of people don't want to lead.

It is so crucial at our local level, there's clearly kind of like Christian authoritarianism, very Trump-ish, kind of like leadership of our Selectboard right now.

Andy mentioned Charlie Kirk, and we had a memorial on our town hall steps the other day. To a certain extent, they need to be able to do what they need to do and grieve. But at the same point, they really took over the town hall again. It felt more like an act on behalf of the town and the leadership views, which is really scary and had a lot of people kind of messaging me asking what I was going to do about this.

I actually sat down with the organizer of the event, and I asked if it was going to turn into a rally. We had a really good conversation. But, we definitely do not agree on anything at all — except for community. So, we did have a conversation where I think both of us were hearing the concerns from either side about whether this should go on.

Mickey Dollens: Rep. Meyer is the first openly bisexual legislator in Kansas. Your visibility is groundbreaking in a state where religious extremism and politics are often deeply intertwined. Can you share a moment when a constituent reached out to you to say you made them feel empowered, and why representation matters?

Rep. Meyer: I've had several people and families across the state reach out to me over the years — through letters, through emails, through phone calls, through text messages, thanking me for fighting for their children, thanking me for standing up for them. It makes me kind of teary because it is so important to hear from those children in those families who feel so very alone and isolated and attacked.

When I go to speak at the well on these issues, we have a podium in the front. Of course, I'm addressing my colleagues, but I know how they're going to vote. So, the most important thing for me is to always address the audience. I'm speaking directly to these children and to these families and I tell them, "I love you, I see you, I care about you."

It just makes a huge difference for these families to know that there is someone who's going to put it all on the line and fight for them, no matter what. I said before and I'll say it again: I will lose my election over this if that has to happen. But I will never give up the fight. These kids and these parents need us. They need us to use our privilege to fight for them. They see that and it fills them with joy and love and it really helps them figure out how to move forward and how to grow up in a world that so often wants to hurt them.



Photo by Chris Line

Rep. Andy Smith gestures while responding to a question.

Henry Zumach Freedom From Fundamentalist Religion Award

Defending today, building for tomorrow

This is the (edited for space) speech given by Nancy Northup on Oct. 17, 2025, at FFRF's national convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C. She was introduced by Liz Cavell, FFRF's deputy legal director. To watch the speech (or any of the FFRF convention speeches), go to ffrf.us/con25.

Liz Cavell: I have been given the lovely task of presenting this year's Henry Zumach Freedom From Fundamentalist Religion Award, also known as the FFRF FFRF Award. It's endowed by our member and state/church activist Henry Zumach. Hank couldn't be here today, but he's well known to FFRF as one of our plaintiffs for a second successful iteration of a lawsuit that was challenging the Ten Commandments monument in a public park in La Crosse, Wis.

Since 2017, Hank has put money into this fund every year, which has now grown to over \$1 million. He created the fund with FFRF so that the fruits of this fund can annually recognize and reward major activism by allied organizations that take a stand against religious intolerance and bigotry, and that work to keep it out of our laws and our social policy.

The award amount started at \$10,000, but has quickly grown, thanks to Hank's generosity, to \$50,000. Recipients in the past have included Americans United, the ACLU, Planned Parenthood and the Human Rights Campaign.

This year's recipient is the Center for Reproductive Rights. It's a global human rights organization of attorneys and advocates working to ensure reproductive rights are protected in law as fundamental human rights. The Center for Reproductive Rights has secured groundbreaking victories in national courts, U.N. committees and regional human rights bodies.

Here to accept the award is Nancy Northup, the president and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights. Nancy is no stranger to FFRF. She received the FFRF Forward Award in 2019. That is reserved for individuals who are moving society forward. Nancy graduated magna cum laude from Brown University, got her J.D. from Columbia Law School. She's held adjunct appointments at NYU Law School and Columbia Law School, and previously was the founding director of the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice.

Please welcome Nancy Northup.

By Nancy Northup

Thank you so much. It is such a pleasure to be here with you and such an honor on behalf of the Center for Reproductive Rights to be accepting the Henry Zumach Award for Freedom From Fundamentalist Religion. I am delighted and amused as I was the first time I had an opportunity to address this conference. Delighted, because I am a fierce advocate for the separation of church and state, and amused, because, well, I'm really a big church lady.

I have attended [Unitarian] church all my life. That is where you will find me on almost every Sunday morning. But, I am a church lady who is passionate about the separation of church and state, about how our freedoms, and importantly in the work I do, the freedom to make decisions about our own bodies depend on it. I am grateful for this award and for the

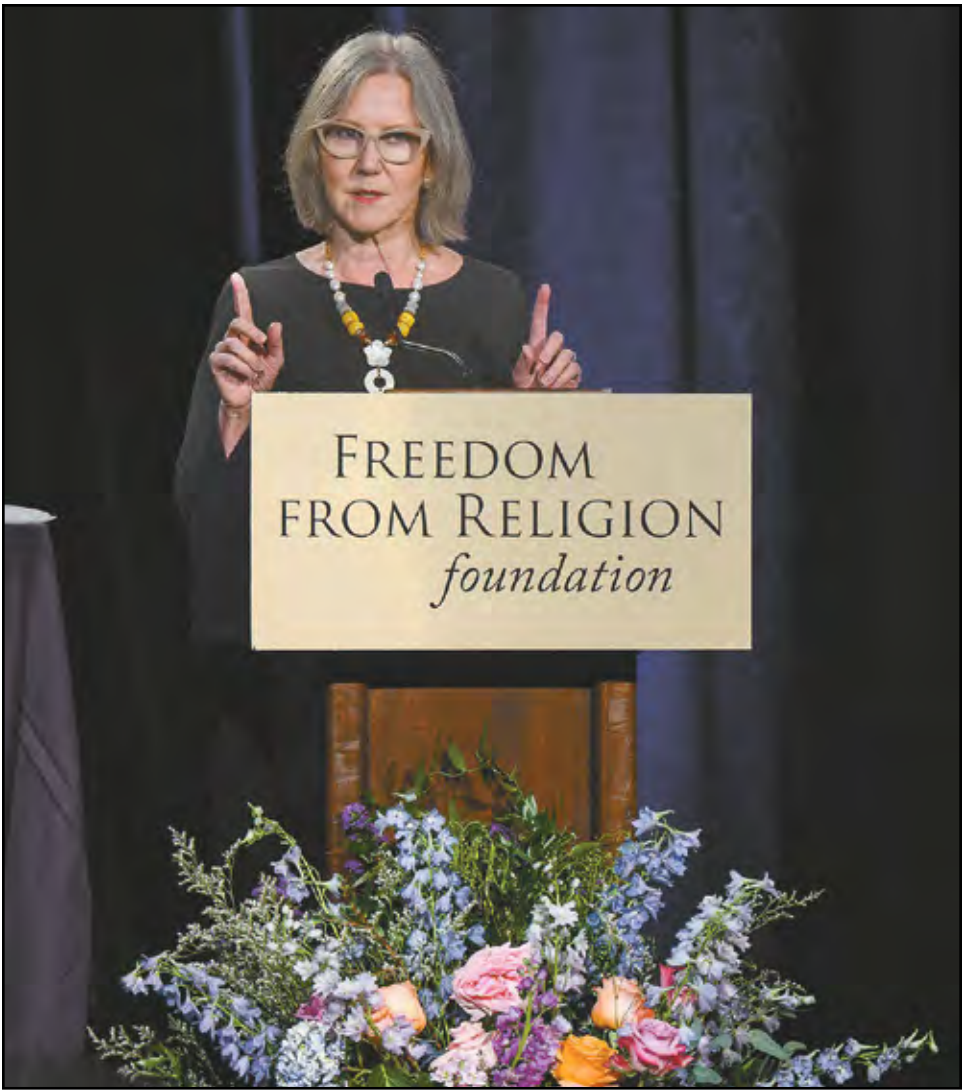


Photo by Chris Line

Nancy Northup, president and CEO of Center for Reproductive Rights, speaks at FFRF's national convention in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Oct. 17, 2025.

passion that you all bring to protecting our fundamental liberties.

I have to say, I'm already reminded this morning of what I thought when I was here the last time, which is that you are not only an irreverent crowd, you are a really fun crowd. So, it is so good to be with you and the energy that you have.

As you heard, our mission at the Center for Reproductive Rights is to ensure that reproductive rights are protected in law as fundamental human rights by governments around the world. Today, I'm going to speak to you about the state of reproductive rights and specifically about abortion rights in this country. I can't think of a more relevant place to be speaking to you from than right here in South Carolina.

This state has one of the most extreme abortion bans in the country. It bans abortion after six weeks, which is before most women know that they're pregnant. For some South Carolina lawmakers, this is not even enough. It's not extreme enough. They have recently introduced a bill banning abortion entirely — no exceptions for rape, incest or fatal fetal abnormalities. It would equate abortion with homicide, meaning that anyone who helps a woman to access an abortion, be it a doctor or a family member, even a clergy member, could face felony charges up to 30 years in prison.

If that sounds extreme, it's because it is. These are the stakes not just for South Carolinians, but for all Americans. So, how did we get here?

Dobbs ruling

In June of 2022, the center had a case before the Supreme Court called *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. The case challenged a Mississippi law banning abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy. That was a flat-out violation of the decision in *Roe v. Wade*, which, of course, in 1973 recognized abortion as a right that all women could access prior to fetal viability.

And, in the *Dobbs* decision, the Supreme Court did something that it had never done before. It took away a settled constitutional individual right.

Now, you might be thinking, wait, the Supreme Court reverses itself in constitutional decisions, it seems, with frequency. But prior decisions by the Supreme Court in this regard were to extend liberties. You think about the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, where the court rejected its prior ruling upholding racial segregation, or the decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003, when the court rejected its prior ruling of upholding the criminalization of same-sex marriages and relationships.

But what they had not done before until June of 2022 was taking away a settled constitutional individual liberty that had been guaranteed to the American people. That is exactly what the *Dobbs* ruling did. It stripped away the right to make decisions about our own bodies, our own health, and therefore, our futures. It was the single biggest setback for women's rights in American history, and we can't let that be forgotten.

I think sometimes the mistake that we make is to move on. We can't let these decisions be forgotten. We have to be as dogged in making America remember how bad these decisions are as our opponents do. *Dobbs* should be relegated to the trash heap of notoriously unjust Supreme Court rulings.

Now, let's talk about the injustice that has been unleashed in the years since that ruling in the *Dobbs* case. In the wake of *Dobbs*, more than a dozen states banned abortion entirely or imposed bans like the six-week ban in South Carolina. Again, that is so early that it might as well be a total ban. Thankfully, some of these extreme bans have been blocked by courts in litigation, including litigation brought by the Center for Reproductive Rights.

If you live in certain parts of the country, particularly in vast swaths of the South, you are literally locked in, in state after state after state, where abortion is banned.

And let me be clear about what "banned" really means. It means that those states have written into law that abortion is a crime punishable by sentences up to life in prison. This has been the harsh reality since 2022, and these abortion bans have inflicted deep and terrible pain on people who are living in these states, and especially people of color, people living in rural areas, those struggling to make ends meet, and others who already face barriers to health care.

And now, since Jan. 20 [2025], we face the possibility that the United States government will use the immense power of the Department of Justice to come after abortion providers, their staff and anyone who has been helping women to access abortion care in banned states.

I know about this immense power because I started my legal career as a prosecutor in the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. It sends chills down my spine to think that the power of the DOJ could be turned on doctors for providing health care to patients.

Maria Rojas' story

We have already seen this at the state level. I want to tell you about our client Maria Rojas in Texas. Maria is a talented midwife who, until March of this year, was running a network of clinics in the Houston area. Her clinics provide comprehensive maternal and family health care from prenatal monitoring and routine check-ups to vaccinations, home visits and hands-on care throughout pregnancy and childbirth. Maria's clinics primarily served low-income, uninsured and Spanish-speaking communities. They were trusted and much-needed community spaces. It's important to note these clinics were not abortion clinics. Maria is a midwife. Her job and practice were about helping women deliver babies. But, in March, Maria was pulled over by the police in Waller County, Texas. They accused her of attempting to perform illegal abortions, a crime in Texas that carries a sentence of up to 99 years in prison. They put Maria in jail that day.

On Oct. 8, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton escalated his scare campaign, arresting eight people allegedly linked to Maria and branding them in a press release as a cabal of abortion-loving radicals. These aggressive tactics achieve their aim, even if everyone is ultimately found to be not guilty, because the power to investigate itself when you make something a crime is the power to destroy.

Our lawyers rushed to Maria's aid. We

represent her in the civil case that Texas has filed to shut down the clinics. Our lawyers met with Maria in jail and, working closely with her criminal counsel, we did get her out, and now we will continue to fight these unjust charges against her. It is the Center's top priority at this moment to defend and protect patients, providers and helpers.

We are fighting every day for women like Maria, and, thankfully, we do that work with another factor that has been at play to support Americans who live in banned states. I want to turn our attention to that. I want to turn our attention to something that has revolutionized abortion care and made the post-Roe world very different from pre-Roe America.

Medication abortion

This revolution in abortion care is medication abortion. What is medication abortion? It's abortion by two pills: mifepristone and misoprostol. They were both approved by the FDA for use together 25 years ago. Millions of women have used it worldwide and study after study after study show that medication abortion is safe and effective. The pills can be taken at home to end a pregnancy up to 10 weeks by the FDA's regulations.

No doctor's office, no clinic, just medical care on your own terms with a health-care professional just a phone call or computer screen away.

What percentage do you think of abortions in the United States are done via medication abortion? What's your guess? Well, it's 63 percent, which is very high compared to where it was just some years ago. That number has been increasing year over year, which means that more people have been able to end their pregnancies safely and conveniently and privately. That is what many women in states with abortion bans are doing right now. Medication abortion has become nothing less than a lifeline in post-Roe America. It's the one thing that is standing between women and the full force of these criminal abortion laws.

Imagine a woman who is sitting at her kitchen table in a state with an abortion ban. Her local clinic closed three years ago after the Dobbs ruling. The nearest clinic is now over 200 miles away. She can't take time off from work, can't leave her children and doesn't have the money to travel out of state. So, she opens her phone or her computer and finds a trusted abortion provider online, out of state. A few days later, a small plain package arrives in the mail. Inside are the two medications approved by the FDA, the same ones that have been used safely by millions of women for over 25 years. In the privacy of her home, she takes the pill and ends her pregnancy safely.

Plenty of people are living this story that I've just told you. Around 10,000 people a month get abortion pills by mail in states where there are abortion bans. Last year, one in four abortions in the United States was a result of someone receiving abortion pills in the mail. Before the fall of Roe — as I said right now, it's one in four — before the fall of Roe was one in 20.

That tells you something about what's going on and this availability of medication abortion enrages anti-abortion extremists. That's why they are looking for every way they can to shut it down, both in banned states, but also nationwide.

Earlier this year, Dr. Maggie Carpenter of New York became the first doctor known to be criminally charged for providing abortion pills to a patient in a state with an abortion ban. Dr. Carpenter has been indicted in the state of Louisiana. Now, fortunately, the governor of New York, Kathy Hochul, has rejected Louisiana's request to extradite Dr. Carpenter.

And Gov. Hochul is able to do that because New York, like many other states that



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Deputy Legal Director Liz Cavell presents Nancy Northup with the 2025 Henry Zumach Freedom From Fundamentalist Religion Award.

believe in the right to abortion, passed a shield law after Roe v. Wade was overturned. This shield law makes clear that New York will not cooperate with criminal prosecutions or civil lawsuits coming from ban states that go after New York abortion providers. Dr. Carpenter has been very outspoken about why she is taking a stand at this critical time.

Intimidation campaign

Now, the intimidation campaign, unfortunately, doesn't end with targeting doctors like Dr. Carpenter or midwives like Maria Rojas. In addition to wielding the criminal law, anti-abortion extremists are using civil lawsuits in an attempt to destroy lives. The group Texas Right to Life put out an advertisement recruiting husbands and ex-boyfriends to file lawsuits over their partner or former partner's decision to have an abortion.

Friends, neighbors and family members are being dragged into court simply for having helped someone they love get the care that they need. But, at the Center for Reproductive Rights, we are pushing back on these civil lawsuits — and winning. For example, we represented the family member of a woman in Texas who went to Colorado to have an abortion. It was unacceptable that she had to leave her state, but it was perfectly legal for her to do so.

It is legal to leave a banned state and go to another state to get abortion care where abortion is legal, and you are allowed to have your loved ones help you do that. They had been targeted with a wrongful death suit by her abusive ex-partner, but we were able at the Center for Reproductive Rights to get that suit dismissed. We will keep on fighting those kind of lawsuits.

Those lawsuits, the criminal cases, they have a point that they are trying to make. The message is clear: Anyone who dares help will be a target. But we are not afraid. We will not back down from fighting unjust laws. I have every confidence that the people in this room feel just the same way.

While I've talked so far a lot about what's happening in states with abortion bans like the one we're gathered in today, it's also important for you all to know that the threat to abortion access, as I said before, really is nationwide. Even if you are

in a state like California or Illinois or New York, which are strong protectors of abortion rights, you need to listen to this.

The administration may try to ban abortion nationwide. And how could they do this? Well, let me introduce you to Anthony Comstock.

Comstock law

A law passed in 1873 was pushed by and named after Anthony Comstock, and it prohibits the mailing of so-called obscene items. The Trump administration may try to misuse the Comstock Act to ban the mailing of medication abortion. Taken to its extreme, the government could attempt to use the Comstock Act to restrict brick and mortar abortion access, and even to restrict communications between patients and their doctors.

This administration has been systematically implementing Project 2025. They've already accomplished half of the radical plans in that playbook. Enforcing the Comstock Act is in Project 2025. We all need to take this threat very, very seriously.

If that weren't enough, there is another strategy that they're using to attempt to cut off access to medication abortion nationwide. This strategy involves perverting the science-based decision making of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In 2022, anti-abortion groups filed a lawsuit challenging the FDA's approval of mifepristone, even though it had been on the market and safely used by millions of women at that point for over 20 years.

That litigation is ongoing and has now been moved from Texas to Missouri. But the case is part of a broader effort outlined in Project 2025 to undermine the FDA's science-based decisions on medication abortion. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. echoed that goal of undermining the approval of medication abortion when he was running for president and said he would restrict access to mifepristone, if elected. And now, under the pressure from anti-abortion groups and their political allies, the FDA is indeed reevaluating mifepristone with the clear goal of restricting access even in states where abortion remains illegal.

Last week, 51 Republican senators urged Kennedy and the FDA commis-

sioner to end telemedicine prescriptions of mifepristone everywhere, not just in banned states, and to suspend its distribution as an imminent hazard. We are fighting back and have filed multiple lawsuits of our own against the FDA. With those cases, we are trying to first and foremost ensure that medication abortion is not further restricted. We're also trying to figure out what is going on behind closed doors in Washington. The integrity and the processes of the FDA must not be challenged and used for political ends.

What I've outlined for you today is pretty bleak, but it does reflect the harsh realities that we all need to be clear-eyed about, of the state of reproductive rights and specifically abortion rights in this country. But, at the core, this truth remains: It is a basic right and dignity to control your body, your health, your family and your future.

The Center for Reproductive Rights has always been and will always be there to protect these fundamental freedoms. I promise you that. I guarantee you that.

I want you to take heart in this: The American people do not want this in state after state after state. They have stood up to restrictions on abortion rights and when been given the opportunity at the ballot to themselves express what they want in their state constitutions, they have said we don't want these restrictions. And not only that, we actually want abortion rights guaranteed in our state constitutions.

Take the state of Kansas. It is a deep-red state, and we won a constitutional right from the Kansas Supreme Court some years ago that guaranteed very strongly, more strongly than the Supreme Court had under Roe v. Wade, the constitutional right to abortion under the Kansas State Constitution. And I have to say, I loved that decision because it was 180 pages long, and it did everything from quoting the Magna Carta to Abraham Lincoln.

In 2022, the Kansas Legislature tried to have that stripped out of the Kansas Constitution and say there is no right to abortion in the Kansas Constitution. They sent that to the voters, and they strongly and firmly rejected the notion that they were going to vote their rights out of their Constitution. The Kansas voters said, hell no, we're going to keep it in our Constitution.

And that clarity at the ballot box from voters in Kansas has been seen throughout the country. And not just in reliable blue states like California and Vermont, which enshrined abortion rights into their state constitutions post-Roe, but also in swing states and red states. The voters by large margins — we're talking about 57 percent, 58 percent — are putting abortion rights in their constitution. They are putting the words "reproductive freedom" or "reproductive autonomy" right there in letters, right in their constitutions. These have passed by these large margins in states like Missouri, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, Arizona and Ohio. Americans are making it clear they want to make their own decisions about their reproductive health care.

That is where I want you to look. That is where I want you to give the strength and the optimism about what can happen in the future. Because each vote is a story of courage and conscience. Each ballot cast is a reminder that no matter how fierce the opposition, the majority of Americans do stand for reproductive freedom. And voters are not the only people who are standing up.

Going back to talking about the fight over the FDA approval of mifepristone, over 600 pharmaceutical companies, including big names like Pfizer, have publicly supported the FDA's approval of medication abortion. Companies have stepped up to ensure their employees in banned states

Poetic license



Jack Church



Bill Blakeslee



Bill Blakeslee (previous plate)



Matthew Dyer

FFRF recently asked members to send us photos of their personalized license plates if they referenced atheism, freethinking, secularism or FFRF. If you have a freethinking license plate (or see one in the wild), please send a photo to editor@ffrf.org and we will publish it in a future issue of Freethought Today.



George Iddon



John O'Hara



Stephen Van Eck



Jeff Tingle



Freethought TV launches on Apple TV and iPhone

Freethought TV, the Freedom From Religion Foundation's free secular streaming channel, is now available to more than 150 million iPhone users and 30 million Apple TV owners across the United States. The highly anticipated debut on Apple's platforms marks a major milestone for Freethought TV, which proudly offers "Free content for free minds."

"Every time we've announced a new platform that carries Freethought TV, the response has often been, 'Yeah, but when's it going to be available on Apple?'" says Dan Barker, co-president of FFRF. "Well, that day is finally here — and we couldn't be more excited. This expansion means our programming, which upholds the separation of religion and government while celebrating freethinkers, can now reach nearly everyone."

Designed for smart TVs, streaming devices and mobile platforms, Freethought TV delivers a robust lineup of original and archival programming. New series include "Secular Spotlight" and "Freethought Radio in Studio," alongside full seasons of flagship shows such as "Freethought Matters" and "Ask an Atheist." The platform also features speeches from FFRF national conventions, showcasing prominent celebrities, authors and activists, as well as musical performances and seasonal specials.

In a major content expansion, FFRF has recently migrated its entire archive of more than 600 videos to Freethought TV, creating a comprehensive hub for secular media and commentary.

Looking ahead, FFRF plans to offer live coverage of key events, including the Congressional Reason Reception — widely recognized as the freethought community's counterweight to the National Prayer Breakfast.

The Freethought TV app is easy to install and includes user-friendly features such as closed captioning and customizable watchlists. For more information or to download the app, visit: freethought-tv.ffrf.org.

Northup

Continued from page 13

can travel to get abortions in other states where it's legal. And more and more people are sharing their stories, speaking out and refusing to stay silent. And every act, big or small, is part of a wave of courage.

Even as we are defending today, we are building state constitutional protections and we have to keep working toward the ultimate goal, which is federal legislation that protects the right to access abortion care. This is possible in the not-so-far-off distant future. We have already had the House twice in the previous Congress pass the federal right to abortion in passing the Women's Health Protection Act. The Senate had 49 supporters for this legislation.

Do not let people tell you it is not possible. It is possible. And we have to make Americans realize that even if the Supreme Court has abandoned for now the recognition that abortion is a fundamental right, Congress has the power to restore it nationwide, and we need to make sure and



Nancy Northup

keep talking about it and keep pushing them to do it until they do it, because we will make that a reality through congressional legislation. I want everyone in this room to please help us do that.

Know your rights, speak up

What else can you do? The first thing you can do, of course, is make sure that you and your circle of supporters and friends and family know their rights. What are the reproductive health policies in your state? Who are the elected officials? Where do they stand and do they know where you stand?

So, speak up. Make your support for reproductive freedom visible. Share why you care. I always say the most important thing: Don't tell other people what to think. You're a bunch of freethinkers. You don't need to tell other people what to think. You don't want them telling you what to think. But do tell them why you care, why it's important to you. Use your power and your spheres of influence. That is how you are an agent for change. And I don't care what age you are; I don't care what your profession is. Everyone has a sphere of influence, so use it.

I also know that people in this room are super committed. I know that you are willing to be vocal in the defense of rights, and I know that you are bold champions for freedom and justice. That is why I am

so honored to bring back to my staff the Zumach Award on behalf of the Center for Reproductive Rights. It means a lot for us to get this from you.

As I said in my opening, I'm a church lady, so I hope you'll give me some grace as I close by quoting a theologian, the Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman.

Dr. Thurman was a philosopher, theologian, Christian mystic and an inspiration and spiritual adviser to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders. Dr. Thurman's words, which I want to share with you, speak not just to his moment in history, but also to ours. When people asked him at that time, that similar time of moral reckoning for the nation: What is it that I should do?

Dr. Thurman responded, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

That is what this work is about. Keeping alive the belief that freedom and dignity and equality are worth fighting for. So, let's go do that. Let's go do that together.

Thank you so very much.

Photo by Chris Line

CHAPTER UPDATES

FFRF Kentucky Chapter

A broad-based coalition of secular and faith allies in Kentucky recently secured a significant victory for state/church separation by helping stop House Bill 829, legislation that would have dramatically expanded “released-time religious instruction” (RTRI) in public schools.

HB 829 sought to move Kentucky from a “may” state, where local school boards can choose whether to allow RTRI programs, to a “shall” state, effectively requiring districts to accommodate outside religious instruction during the school day. While RTRI programs can be legal under narrow conditions established by the 1952 Supreme Court case *Zorach v. Clauson*, they remain controversial due to their real-world impact on instructional time, student equity and school operations.

In Kentucky, those impacts have become increasingly visible through the expansion efforts of LifeWise Academy, a national organization promoting off-campus bible instruction for public school students during the school day.

Recognizing the stakes, a coalition of advocates mobilized quickly. FFRF’s Kentucky chapter worked in close coordination with partners, including Christians Against Christian Nationalism, Kentucky Citizens for Democracy and the Kentucky Council of Churches, along with FFRF Regional Governmental Affairs Manager Mickey Dollens, to raise awareness about the bill’s implications, representing both secular and faith perspectives.

Together, these groups engaged in grassroots outreach, legislative education and direct advocacy. Constituents contacted lawmakers, coalition members met directly with legislative leadership, and coordinated social media efforts helped elevate public



Photo by Shutterstock

awareness and engagement around the issue.

At one point during the legislative session, language from HB 829 was proposed for insertion into an unrelated bill, House Bill 253, an example of how controversial policies can be advanced without full public debate. That effort ultimately failed after significant public pushback. Lawmakers, including the Speaker of the House, received a surge of calls from constituents expressing concern, and in discussions with our advocates, the speaker indicated that the volume of opposition, along with sustained public engagement, contributed to the decision to remove the language from the bill.

One of the coalition’s central messages was simple: While RTRI programs may be legally permissible, they are not educationally neutral. Removing students from class time each week creates disruptions for teachers, widens inequities among students and introduces logistical and supervision challenges for school districts. These concerns are best evaluated at the local level, where school boards are accountable to their communities.

That message resonated. HB 829 ultimately failed to advance, preserving Kentucky’s current “may” framework and protecting the authority of local school boards to decide what is appropriate for their students.

This outcome also reflects a broader truth about defending state/church separation: It is most effective when people of diverse perspectives, including religious allies, come together around shared values of fairness, local control and respect for individual conscience.

The Kentucky coalition’s success demonstrates that even well-funded national efforts can be countered through coordinated, community-based advocacy.

For now, Kentucky remains a state where local communities, not outside organizations or state mandates, make decisions about whether to allow released time religious instruction programs.

That’s a win for public education, and a win for the constitutional principle that our public schools should serve all students equally.

Upstate New York Freethinkers



Upstate New York Freethinkers board members meet with Portuguese secular leaders in Lisbon. Pictured (from left) are João Lourenço Monteiro, president of Associação Ateísta Portuguesa (AAP); Rui Rodrigues; Jeffrey Galante, secretary of Upstate New York Freethinkers; Paulo Ramos; and Mário David. The gathering included members of the AAP and Associação República e Laicidade (ARL).

While vacationing in Portugal, board members of Upstate New York Freethinkers were welcomed at two separate meetings with leaders of each of the country’s most significant secular organizations. They connected first with ARL President Ricardo João Gaio Alves, who leads an organization similar to FFRF, and member Alvaro Martins. The first gathering happened at the Monument to the Marquis of Pombal, whose 18th-century expulsion of the Jesuits mirrors ARL’s modern fight against the Vatican Concordat — a 2004 treaty for Catholic taxpayer-funded religious education, discriminatory tax exemptions and guaranteed public media airtime. Beyond legal advocacy, ARL promotes a secular republic and maintains an online following of over 2,000 supporters.

At a second meeting, board members met with AAP President and Lisbon Assembly member João Monteiro. The group included a physicist, banker, computer scientist and a social security administrator who noted FDR’s influence on their system. João gifted the visiting board his co-authored book, “Não se deixe enganar” (Don’t Be Fooled), a guide to skept-

tical thinking, along with materials from the AAP’s Tomás da Fonseca tribute congress, which featured Cambridge, Stirling and Leicester university experts.

Attendees were heartened by Mário David, an AAP member celebrating his official apostasy (apostasy) — a formal cancellation of baptismal records. This act prevents religious institutions from using “inflated” baptismal numbers to claim financial subsidies, social authority and political influence.

These meetings remind us that secular rights are never permanently won; the “backsliding” of authoritarianism in Portugal was discussed, including recent anti-trans legislation in Lisbon modeled after the U.S. We look forward to reuniting with these friends and encourage chapter participants to seek out local freethinkers whenever they travel.

Upstate New York Freethinkers is planning our 3rd Annual Chapter Gathering at the Albany Institute of History and Art (Capital District) on Sept. 20. All FFRF members are welcome. For the latest updates, please visit unynyft.org/gatherings.

Visit unynyft.org/Donate to support our work. Email info@unynyft.org. Call/text 585-454-9921.

Ozarks Chapter of FFRF



Members of the Ozarks Chapter had a table at the Bentonville Farmers Market where they could interact with the public.

The Ozarks Chapter of FFRF completed a roadside cleanup on March 29, and then enjoyed our return to the Bentonville Farmers Market on April 11.

Our chapter is also proud to announce our 2026 Secular Speaker Series! Joining us this year will be:

- Saturday, July 18 — Sam Grover (FFRF senior counsel)

- Saturday, Aug. 22 — Hemant Mehta (“The Friendly Atheist”)
 - Saturday, Sept. 26 — Sam McGuire (American Atheists)
 - Thursday, Oct. 22 — Fish Stark (American Humanist Association)
- Times and ticketing information will be available soon. Please visit ozarksffrf.org/events/ for more information.

New Hampshire – FFRF



The New Hampshire-FFRF Chapter participated in the March 28 No Kings Day rally at the state Capitol. Several members were there to answer questions and hand out cards with information on the chapter.

Christianity’s war on democracy

By Gary Nowacki

So many of my friends are outraged, depressed and flummoxed by our current political state. Most spend a large portion of their time and energy ranting and focusing on the latest indignities. A common refrain is “Did you see the latest news?” Yet few are willing or able to peel the onion, moving past symptoms and into root cause analysis.

When I respond, “Yes, terrible news, almost as terrible as Christianity’s war on democracy,” they often freeze, caught completely off guard, apparently by an argument they’ve either never considered or that makes them extremely uncomfortable. You may be reacting the same. Let me lay out an analysis and argument for the very real possibility of the United States replacing democracy with theocracy.



Gary Nowacki

The catalyst

It would be naïve to assume or argue that religion only factored into recent American politics. Southern leaders frequently justified slavery through religion. The violent persecution of indigenous peoples likewise was justified through a religious lens. But when the Civil War ended or the “West was won,” American Christians did not emerge with a unified political worldview. In fact, for the first 200 years of American history, Christians never coalesced around a unified and dogmatic political framework. The key reason? No single political policy angered a majority of Christians, giving them a purpose, enemy and rallying cry.

Until Jan. 22, 1973.

With the Supreme Court sanctioning a woman’s right to an abortion, Christian churches began to vocally enter political discourse by the late 1970s. Catholic priests and evangelical ministers slowly started a withering drumbeat that continues to this day: Abortion is not only wrong, it is the absolute murder of unborn children. In fact, many Christian voters today identify as one-issue voters who will make their ballot box decision solely on whether a candidate is staunchly anti-abortion or not.

And, the overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022 has done nothing to calm this religious zealotry. Here’s an excerpt from an October 2025 New York Times interview of influential evangelical minister (and self-described Christian nationalist) Doug Wilson:

“I don’t want to take any guidance at all from the secular society around us. And the reason I don’t is they killed 60 million babies.”

Laying the foundation

Until Ronald Reagan, U.S. presidents, whether Democrat or Republican, went about their business, keeping religion very much in the background. While they were almost all Christians (not surprising for a majority-Christian nation), their public nods to religion were mostly just that — nods. TV news would show a brief clip of the



President Reagan speaks at the Dallas Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast in Aug. 23, 1984.

president and family attending Christmas or Easter services. And, of course, the obligatory “God Bless America” closed many speeches. Then back to the nation’s business, with politics conducted in a nonreligious framework. If Jesus or God had opinions on tax policy, foreign entanglements, immigration, crime or the interstate highway system, they left those opinions at the doorstep of the White House and Capitol Hill.

Even Jimmy Carter, widely considered one of the most religious of all presidents, kept his religiosity separate from politics. (One could call it “separation of church and state,” which now seems like a quaint guardrail.)

But the seeds of change were sowed by Carter’s successor, Reagan. He specifically reached out to conservative Christians, both rhetorically and at key events. His “shining city on a hill” language was code that America was not just a great nation, but a great Christian nation. During his first successful presidential campaign in 1980, Reagan addressed 15,000 religious leaders at the Religious Roundtable’s National Affairs Briefing. He made clear overtures to endorse their cause, with leaders of the emerging Christian right, such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, in the audience.

If you believe, as I do, that harbingers of a theocracy include suppression and criminality of homosexuality, sanctioned prayer in public schools, public display of the Ten Commandments, and criminality of abortion, you cannot ignore a holy (unholy?) trinity like Reagan-Falwell-Robertson.

Reagan continued outreach to the Christian right whose leaders began to feel they had finally found a home in the Republican Party. This started a massive demographic shift toward religion dictating which party one belongs to and votes for. We are now starting to live with the results.

The decline of Christianity

Roe v. Wade became the first seminal event for many Christians who believed the federal government was not ruling in alignment with one of their core religious beliefs (that fetuses are fully human and must be protected by God’s laws). The next critical federal government affront for Christians was the legalization of gay marriage in 2015. And federal government institutions like the U.S. military giving the OK to any troop that is not clearly heterosexual simply rubbed salt into the wound. Conservative Christians are not only psychologically repulsed by all of this, but also quick to sift through scripture to support their opinions with the word of God.

What made all this much worse, and even a crisis-inducing existential threat for conservative Christians, was that it happened against a backdrop of long-term religious decline in the United States.

According to data from Pew Research and Gallup, 90 percent of Americans identified as Christian in the 1990s. That percentage dropped significantly to 78 percent in 2007 and continued dropping, to 71 percent in 2014, 64 percent in 2020, and 62 percent in 2024. While Pew notes that the decline has slowed in recent years, any conservative Christian can project the mathematics to a dreaded day in the future when fewer than half of Americans will identify as Christian. As conservative Christians began to understand that the country will someday no longer be a “Christian nation” statistically, they decided desperate measures were needed to formally institutionalize and structure the country around Christian law, permanently remaking the United States into a theocratically controlled “Christian nation.”

Now, if only they could find a president who would partner in this major project.

Enter Donald Trump

During the 2015-16 primary campaign, Donald Trump began to gain some traction across the political right. But many conservative Christians were hesitant to back a man who had so many clear markers of repugnant personal behavior. His offensive rhetoric (e.g., calling female detractors “pigs”), his personal history of marital cheating and on sexualizing women and his unapologetic demeanor all flew in the face of the Christian concept of grace.

But, a huge percentage of Christian leaders and believers quickly coalesced around Trump based on two crystal-clear campaign pledges: First, his Supreme Court nominees would be staunchly anti-abortion, setting the foundation for the overturn of Roe v. Wade; and second, he would defund Planned Parenthood. After 43 years of living under what they saw as the scourge of abortion rights, for the first time Christians saw a clear and palpable pathway to winning their war.

Trump didn’t just make these promises and then move on to other matters. He took the highly unusual step of publishing his list of Supreme Court nominees. Then he met repeatedly with Christian leaders.

“I think that he understood that his best and likely only chance to win the nomination and ultimately the presidency was to compete for and win the support of voters of faith,” said Ralph Reed, chairman of the Faith and Freedom Coalition, in 2016.

And win he did, setting new benchmarks for not only conservative Christian voters, but for all Christian voters. Let’s review some critical arithmetic.

As noted, Christianity is on long-term decline, but Christians still constitute a majority of the population and an even higher percentage of the electorate. (They vote more reliably in presidential elections than non-Christians.) In fact, in the 2024 election, Christians made up 72 percent of all voters and they gave Trump 56 percent of their votes.

A specific group voting 56 percent for one candidate may not seem like a big deal, but it is when that group makes up more than seven of every 10 voters.



NEW!

Secular Spotlight is our revised weekly YouTube show!

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

 [ffrf.us/youtube](https://www.youtube.com/ffrf)

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

So, here's the arithmetic: When Christians were done voting, Trump led Kamala Harris by 40 percent to 31 percent, a 9-point lead. This left the remaining 28 percent of the electorate (members of non-Christian religions, Nones and atheists) to close this massive gap. They closed most of the gap (total popular vote ended up 49.8 percent Trump, 49.3 percent Harris), but obviously not enough: Christians 1, non-Christians 0.

Jan. 6, 2021

All of us remember the violence of the Capitol Hill insurrection, resulting in nine deaths (counting the suicide deaths of four police officers in the wake of the attack). Here's a Christian-led runup to and justification for the violence and attack on the rule of law.

The conservative evangelical pastor Greg Locke, the founder of the Global Vision Bible Church in Mount Juliet, Tenn., wrote, "We are one election away from losing everything we hold dear." The war against democracy, Locke explained, is "against everything evil and wicked in the world. It is a rallying of the troops of God's holy army. This is our day. This is our time. This means something for the Kingdom. As a matter of fact, THIS MEANS WAR."

Christian symbols, banners and messaging were prominent in the attacks on the Capitol — crosses, "Jesus Saves" signs, even images of Jesus wearing a MAGA hat.

The war continues

Beyond winning two elections in large part due to Christians, Trump, MAGA and the Republican Party are working to permanently ensure the Christian vote is a long-term electoral advantage.

While both Democrat and Republican presidents have a long history of interacting with faith leaders (every president since Eisenhower has attended the National Prayer Breakfast), Trump has moved aggressively to marry Christianity to the Republican brand. In one initiative, Trump signed an executive order in February 2025 creating the White House Faith Office. An article by NPR noted that Trump said he wants to root out "anti-Christian bias," announcing that he was forming a task force led by Attorney General Pam Bondi to investigate the "targeting" of Christians.

As Americans are slowly moving away from Christianity, what better way to marry your party to conservative Christians than by creating a fictional anti-Christian monster that only the

Republican-led state can fight against?

Many progressives operate under the assumption that when Trump is gone, his Republican successors will no longer be able to ride his coattails, that they will have to start from square one to win the next presidential election. This logic ignores the strength and durability of the Christian-Republican marriage. It also incorrectly fantasizes that, after Trump, the Republican party will abandon its core MAGA philosophy and return to something like Eisenhower Republicanism.

Over the long-term, America is very likely to follow the path of many Western democracies where belief and religious power have already faded into irrelevance. But it will take generations before Christianity declines in the United States to the point of electoral insignificance.

In the meantime, the next Republican nominee — whether JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Nikki Haley or whoever — will continue to have the ironclad support of conservative Christians and very likely will receive the majority of Christian votes cast at the ballot box.

At its heart, MAGA will continue to focus on weakening and even dismantling democratic institutions and constructs (voting rights, independence of universities, a free press), preserving and hardening its power, and promoting Christian nationalism.

War on democracy

The very nature of liberalism calls for an open mind, a willingness to dialogue with opponents, and respect for civility and process. This is laudable in normal times.

These are not normal times. Here's our own president at conservative leader Charlie Kirk's funeral: "I hate my opponent and I don't want the best for them."

And to best sum up the entire landscape, here is Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller at the funeral: "We are on the side of God. We will defeat the forces of darkness and evil."

Many progressives have become "Nones" or barely practicing Christians. But many more still attend church services. Regardless, almost all my liberal/progressive friends are loathe to identify or accept Christianity as the driving force in the destruction of our democracy.

The first rule of winning a war is to identify the enemy. In this case, the enemy is not any one person or even a wider group of individuals, or even many Republican and administration members. The enemy is the organization, move-



Shutterstock image

President Trump addresses the "March for Life" in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 24, 2020. He was the first president to address in person the country's biggest annual gathering of anti-abortion campaigners.

ment and framework in toto.

One of the most shocking misidentifications of the enemy I've experienced is among my liberal female friends, specifically on the issue of abortion. Like me, I'm sure you've heard the refrain that removing a woman's right to an abortion is all about "men trying to control women's bodies." This trope and line of thinking is not only wrong, it is egregiously harmful because the actual enemy is allowed to operate in the shadows with no repercussions. So, who is preventing abortion rights? Men and women who are devout Christians.

For decades of polling, men were only slightly more opposed to abortion than women. In other words, a female stepping into the voting booth was only slightly less likely to vote for anti-abortion candidates than their male counterparts. This small gender gap has grown in the last three years, after the reversal of Roe v. Wade, but it is too late — the battle has already been lost.

Rank-and-file Republican voters don't care much about liberals' lack of ability to correctly identify their true enemy. But have no doubt, seasoned Republican operatives relish nothing more than Jesus continuing to be the man behind the curtain. Because if progressives finally wake up and correctly identify the root cause and enemy . . .

What can be done?

Firstly, three words: Empty the churches.

At some level, all organizations must operate as (even though churches would certainly be offended by this moniker) a business. One doesn't have to watch wealth-driven Christians like Joel Osteen to realize any and every church has bills and expenses. And, for most churches, attendance and the collection plate are key to not only covering the monthly nut, but for relishing the energy of presence embodied in larger groups. If the significant minority of Christians who are vehemently opposed to MAGA, Project 2025 and Christian nationalism simply never set foot in their parish church again, clergy would notice and react to the decline. Fast.

If you doubt this, look at the recent pivot taking place in the Catholic Church. After years (decades) of not-so-subtle instructions on how their flock should vote to save the unborn,

which enabled the election of Donald Trump, priests have recently seen an emptying of pews in areas with significant Hispanic populations due to Trump's harsh immigration policies and his proxy ICE. Not only priests operating in their churches, but bishops concerned about the financial health of their diocese have spoken up and even marched in protest.

So, if Christian clergy can quickly pivot when faced with a policy-driven attendance crisis, trust me, they will pivot again when faced with permanent attendance decline. And, at some point, sensing a final existential threat, they may even throw in the towel on political proselytization and go back to where they mainly operated for the first 200 years of this democracy: religious proselytization.

Many of my progressive and liberal friends don't want to empty the churches. They argue that Christianity is not the problem, it's the subset of Christians who have been led away from the key teachings of Jesus (liberals love to post memes on social media about how Republicans are not following the teachings of Jesus). I might buy into this argument if only 10 percent or 20 percent of Christian voters had become enthralled by MAGA and Trump. But, as noted in the math above, a clear majority of Christians backed Trump in two elections.

To my liberal and progressive friends, a simple question: "When you no longer recognize or agree with the club you joined long ago, why are you still a member of that club?"

Secondly, liberals should engage in frequent open dialogue on this whole topic. The more prevalent the narrative that Christianity has declared war on democracy, the faster discomfort on this topic will fade and the easier it will be to discuss. The more often an issue is discussed, the more readily it can be identified and named as a legitimate problem. And, when a significant portion of progressives agree on that definition of the problem, only then can concrete plans and actions blossom.

The next time you find yourself in a group of liberal friends who are shouting into the wind about the latest horrific political news, the destruction of our democracy, don't be afraid to reply: "Yes, it's terrible news, almost as terrible as Christianity's war on democracy."

Gary Nowacki is a board member of FFRF's Denver chapter and recently retired as CEO of a successful software company.



Photo by Associated Press

During the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, Christian symbols, banners and bibles were prominently displayed.

Ishmael Jaffree — A First Amendment champion

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

I was so sorry to just belatedly learn that FFRF’s premiere “Freethinker of the Year,” Ishmael Jaffree, died two years ago. His death was only locally reported. But Jaffree was a Supreme Court Establishment Clause victor and national hero whose life and achievements should be known and celebrated.

In fact, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, way back in 1985, created our “Freethinker of the Year” award, which recognizes activists who bring and



Photo by Chris Line
Annie Laurie Gaylor

win state/church litigation, just for Jaffree. He had spoken at our 1982 national convention when he first started his court challenge of school prayer practices and a prayer law in Alabama. When his legal fight reached the U.S. Supreme Court and resulted in a resounding ruling in his favor, we knew we needed to give him and other activists like him very special recognition.

As my father, Paul (“Jody”) Gaylor, said in introducing Jaffree at our 1985 national convention in Minneapolis, “It took a great deal of courage and tenacity for Jaffree to start his case and carry it through the courts for four years.” My father was usually happy working behind the scenes, taking photographs that documented FFRF’s early days and serving as number-one volunteer. But that year, so admiring of Jaffree’s achievements, he made a rare request to be allowed the privilege of introducing the new award and its remarkable first recipient.

As my father’s introduction noted, Jaffree was a Legal Services Corporation attorney in Mobile, Ala. He was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on March 28, 1944, as Frederick W. Hobbs. As a child, he evangelized on Cleveland street corners, “exhorting sinners to get right with God,” according to a People magazine story (June 24, 1985).

He attended schools in Cleveland, Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland State University and battled his way into Cleveland-Marshall Law School. At Cleveland State University, he was influenced by a Black atheist professor named Jaffree. He shed what he considered his slave name to become Ismael Jaffree. “I started considering myself an Existentialist. I no longer believed the Christian faith was the faith and that Jesus Christ had blue eyes and white skin,” according to People magazine. At his 1985 convention acceptance speech, Jaffree said he realized he’d been conditioned to judge people “by what they believe, and not by what they are.” He called himself an agnostic and noted that the term agnostic probably saved him some extra harassment because the Mobilians thought that was some kind of a religion!

He married a B’hai follower and got her to agree to a pact: She would not try to inculcate their children with her religious beliefs if he would not inculcate them with his nonbelief.

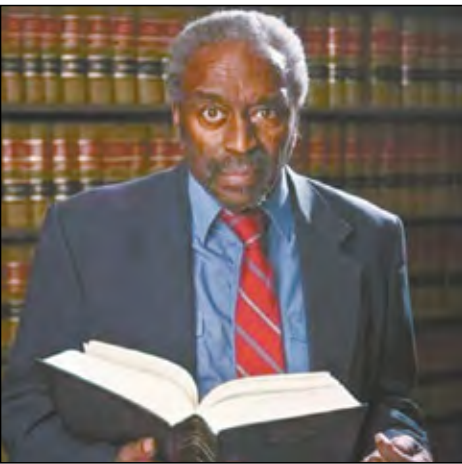
“We would wait until they were old enough to understand the difference between fact and fiction, fact and fantasy, understand esoteric concepts such as a belief in a god or the non-existence of a god, and let them choose for themselves,” he explained in his acceptance speech (published in Freethought Today, November 1985).

“So you can imagine how incensed I was,” he told convention-goers, “when I



Photo by Wikimedia Commons
Ishmael Jaffree, left, and his attorney Ronnie Williams, pause on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court building in 1985 after the court heard arguments on the legality of an Alabama law mandating a moment of silence “for meditation or voluntary prayer.”

IN MEMORIAM



Ishmael Jaffree

learned from my little 5-year-old that his school teacher was leading the class in various forms of Christian-oriented religious practices in the public schools.”

At the time the legal fight began in 1981, the couple had five children, later having a sixth. He discovered that two of his other kids were also being fed daily doses of the Lord’s Prayer and grace at lunch, and an occasional bible reading. He took his complaint through the proper channels, protesting the practice first with teachers, then principal, then superintendent. When he got no results, he sought action in the federal district court, filing suit in May 1982, about a year after he first started addressing the violation.

In response, Alabama Gov. Fob James endorsed school prayer at a statewide news conference in June 1982, then introduced legislation authorizing teachers to lead classes in prayer and meditation. The law passed about seven or eight days later. The law’s language even included a prayer written by the governor’s son, Fob James III, which began: “Almighty God. You alone are our God. We acknowledge You as a Creator and supreme judge of the world. May your justice, your truth and your peace abound this day. . .”

Jaffree added that law to his challenge, along with a 1981 silent prayer law, plus a suit against the teachers. As my dad put it in his introduction, “He sued just about everybody.”

Jaffree had very bad luck because Judge W. Brevard Hand, a rabid born-again, was chief judge, and assigned himself the case, taking it over from another judge. How-

ever, following Supreme Court precedent, Hand initially did enjoin the statutes. After Hand’s ruling, the governor told teachers to do whatever their hearts dictated with respect to religion. Jaffree and his attorney tried but failed to hold the governor in contempt. Jaffree, receiving no support from the ACLU or even the local Unitarians, persevered in his costly challenges.

During the November 1982 trial — and over the objections of both sides — Hand allowed over 600 people to intervene and essentially take over the trial, alleging the so-called evil religion of secular humanism was being taught in the schools. The trial became a circus. A series of ministers with area radio programs testified against secular humanism, which, during the 1980s, was a favorite punching bag of the religious right. A string of so-called experts testified that the Supreme Court was in error when it decided the Schempp case against bible reading and recitation in the schools. In the end, Hand handed down an infamous decision, siding with the intervenors. Hand insisted that states could go their own way and establish the religion of Christianity or any religion they wanted to, Constitution be damned.

After that decision, some of the school officials and the teachers in Mobile had what Jaffree called “a field day”: “They called the media in and led children in prayer right in front of the media. My children started crying because their teachers immediately reinstituted the practice of prayer during the public schools.”

His children had been distressed about the case because, of course, they lost their friends and were persecuted. There was massive harassment of this brave Black family living in a mostly white neighborhood in Mobile. Jaffree had promised the children that he was going to win the case, “and here they were forced to endure not only the humiliation from their classmates but sit and listen to the teacher instructing the class on some form of religious activity.”

He and his attorney immediately asked the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to issue an injunction to enjoin Hand’s decision. The circuit refused, so they appealed to Judge Lewis Powell on the Supreme Court, who issued an injunction. Ultimately, the appeals court ruled in his favor. The Supreme Court granted cert on one part of the case and agreed to hear the silent meditation part. “We sold Justice [Sandra Day] O’Con-

nor on the idea that the state, at the very least, in sponsoring the silent meditation for prayer statute, when they already had in existence a silent meditation statute, was clearly giving the appearance of sponsoring religion,” Jaffree noted. O’Connor became part of the 6–3 majority decision in Jaffree’s favor, handed down on June 4, 1985.

Unbelievably, even after this ruling, Hand took steps to keep alive the phony lawsuit against secular humanism, which held up Jaffree’s attorneys’ fees and costs, which in those days came to more than \$10,000 (about \$30,000 today). When the 600 plaintiffs pursued a suit against the school board, Jaffree fortunately was able to extricate himself from that continuing challenge.

During questions after Jaffree’s acceptance speech, an FFRF member asked if he’d do it all over again. Yes, he replied, “I would do it because I’m absolutely committed to the idea of separation of church and state. There’s no question that my religious view is a minority, and unless people like me are willing to challenge these cases, then we don’t have a chance.”

Jaffree died at age 80 on July 30, 2024. His online obituary noted that he “truly lived a life of no regrets.” Aside from his freedom of conscience heroism, Jaffree was an exemplar. In practicing law for over 45 years, he represented thousands of indigent and poor clients. His obituary mentioned, “He was, above all, a freethinker, reveling in his tendency to go against the grain. He was passionate about two things — helping the poor and his loving family.” He left behind his wife of 49 years, Moselle Jaffree, their six children and six grandchildren.

When Dan and I managed to chase down Jaffree 32 years after his appearance at our conference and interviewed him remotely for our radio show on April 17, 2017, we asked after his children, who had gone through so much. He told us that all six had come to take some pride in their father’s fight, and he, in turn, proudly recounted how they were all high achievers, including two attorneys and a physician among them.

Dan quipped at the end of the interview how very appropriate it was that Jaffree’s last name ends with “free.” He replied, “I am the ultimate freethinker in the whole state!”

He was truly a quiet and unsung free-thought hero. His legacy must be remembered, revered and preserved.

Annie Laurie Gaylor is co-president of FFRF.



Photo by Paul Gaylor
In 1985, Ishmael Jaffree earned FFRF’s first Freethinker of the Year award, which he accepted at FFRF’s annual convention in Minneapolis.



Join the Revival of Reason

Celebrating 15 years of Black Nonbelievers, the 2026 Revival of Reason conference will be held June 12–14 in Atlanta at the Freethought Hall and Pavilion.

FFRF is a major sponsor of the event, and FFRF’s Outreach Coordinator Charis Hoard is a speaker. FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker will also be in attendance.

Featured speakers include Chris Cameron, Candace Gorham, Hemant Mehta (The Friendly Atheist), Cynthia McDonald, Mandisa Thomas, Kellie King (Detroit Atheist Queen) and more.

To sign up for the conference, go to blacknonbelievers.org/revival-of-reason-2025.

FFRF keeps working for you!

Here’s a look at a few of the issues and policies that FFRF is currently involved in, whether via amicus court briefs, letters to districts or statements of purpose. Go to ffrf.org/news-releases to read more about each of these issues.

Conversion therapy ruling
The March 31 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Chiles v. Salazar has handed another victory to litigants who continue to use our courts to mold the law to reflect their religious beliefs. In its friend-of-the-court brief, FFRF argued that this case was another example of the Supreme Court improperly allowing religious litigants to use hypothetical and even insincere legal injuries in support of lawsuits designed to strike down laws based on nothing more than religious or ideological objections.

Religious Liberty Commission
FFRF castigates the final hearing of President Trump’s so-called Religious Liberty Commission in mid-April. Commissioners repeatedly denigrated state/church separation, with Commission Chair and Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick calling it “the biggest lie that’s been told in America since our founding.”

FFRF is putting the commission on notice that it will contest any unconstitutional proposals.

Control of federal elections
FFRF denounces Trump’s reprehensible executive order that carries out his threat to seize control of the federal elections before the midterms. As FFRF has long maintained, voting is a secular issue

and a state/church issue, because a vibrant and fully enfranchised electorate is the best guarantee to protect our secular Constitution and secular government. Restrictive voting laws are a tool of Christian nationalists seeking to seize power.

Florida’s school ‘prayer hotline’
FFRF warns that a newly announced Florida Department of Education complaint system threatens to undermine constitutional protections.

In a letter sent to Florida Education Commissioner Anastasios Kamoutsas, FFRF outlined serious concerns about the department’s new reporting process, which invites parents and community members to file complaints alleging that prayer or religious expression is being restricted in public schools. FFRF is cautioning that this encourages religious activity in public schools while ignoring the right of students to be free from religious coercion.

Utah schools’ bible mandate
FFRF disavows a newly enacted Utah law that will require public school students — beginning as early as third grade — to study bible passages as part of the state’s social studies curriculum.

Under HB312, signed into law in March by Gov. Spencer Cox, Utah public schools must incorporate selected bible passages referenced or “alluded to” in U.S. historical documents into required classroom instruction for students in grades three through 12.

THEY SAID WHAT?

When you talk about climate change, I don’t get upset about it, I don’t get worked up about it. It’s because my faith is not in climate change. It’s not in scientists dictating what we should and should not do to save the environment. Because my faith is in Jesus Christ, right? He’s the same today, tomorrow, and forever. Yesterday. And so, um, you know, if you’ve read the Good Book, you know how it ends. It’s not with climate change.

Minnesota state Rep. Mary Franson, during a meeting of the House Capital Investment Committee, of which she is a co-chair. Rep. Jamie Long responded to her by stating: “Rep. Franson’s extreme remarks have no place in any arena of serious policymaking. . . For a co-chair of the committee charged with making these critical investments to turn a blind eye to this reality, and undermine the critical planning necessary to protect our infrastructure, is deeply concerning.”

YouTube, 3-24-26

[They] will be seen among the highest ranks because of their divine calling.

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, after stating that chaplains will display their religious insignia while retaining their rank as officers. He also called on God to “break the teeth of the ungodly.”

USA Today, 3-26-26

I don’t think they’re aliens, I think they’re demons anyway, but that’s a longer discussion. I mean, every great world religion, including Christianity, the one that I believe in, has understood that there are weird things out there, and there are things that are very difficult to explain. And I naturally go, when I hear about sort of extra-natural phenomenon, that’s where I go, is the Christian understanding that, you

know, there’s a lot of good out there, but there’s also some evil out there.

Vice President JD Vance, discussing UFOs on conservative commentator Benny Johnson’s podcast.

The Hill, 3-28-26

It is an important issue to know for certain that your soul is secure and will spend eternity in the presence of God.

Evangelist Franklin Graham (and son of Billy Graham), in an Oct. 15, 2025, letter that Trump shared on Truth Social on March 29.

New York Post, 3-29-26

The word “teleportation” was not mine. It was used by someone else in the conversation reaching for language to describe something with no easy name. The more accurate biblical terms are “translated” or “transported” — not new ideas for people of faith.

Gregg Phillips, a top official at the Federal Emergency Management Agency, who claimed that he once teleported to a Waffle House in Rome, Ga.

New York Times, 4-3-26

In the military, there’s a saying there are no atheists in foxholes. There aren’t any on tops of rockets, either.

Astronaut Victor Glover, pilot of the Artemis II mission that performed a fly-by of the moon in early April, as quoted in a 2023 article in the Christian Chronicle and reprinted in Focus on the Family’s Daily Citizen website.

Daily Citizen, 4-1-26

The pendulum is swinging. Gen Z is turning back to God.

Anthony Gross, a 22-year-old “content creator,” as quoted in the article, “Why Catholicism is drawing in Gen Z men.”

Washington Post, 4-2-26



Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people who he hath chosen for his own inheritance. — Psalm 33:12

May God continue to shed his grace on our great nation.

Department of Homeland Security post on X. FFRF responded: “A government agency shouldn’t promote religious messages — period. When officials invoke scripture, they exclude millions who don’t share those beliefs. Government must serve everyone equally, not endorse religion. Patriotism doesn’t require piety.”

X, 4-12-26

Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!! Open the fuckin’ Strait, you crazy bastards, or you’ll be living in Hell - JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah.

President Trump, on an Easter Sunday tirade on his Truth Social account.

Washington Post, 4-6-2

[The F-15E fighter jet was] shot down on a Friday — Good Friday. [The pilot hid] in a cave, a crevice, all of Saturday.

[Then, the airman was] flown out of Iran as the sun was rising on Easter Sunday. A pilot reborn, all home and accounted for, a nation rejoicing. God is good.

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, comparing the rescued American pilot to Jesus’ alleged crucifixion and resurrection.

New York Times, 4-6-266

Mr. President, no one has paid the price like you have paid the price. It almost cost you your life. You were betrayed and arrested and falsely accused. It’s a familiar pattern that our Lord and Saviour showed us. But it didn’t end there for him, and it didn’t end there for you.

Paula White-Cain, a prominent Pentecostal televangelist and President Trump’s spiritual adviser, during an Easter lunch event at the White House comparing Trump to Jesus.

New York Times, 4-6-26

Happy Easter — He is Risen indeed! Today we celebrate the greatest story ever told, the foundation of our faith, and the abiding hope of all mankind.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, in an email sent to the roughly 10,000 employees of the USDA. FFRF sent a formal complaint.

Washington Post, 4-9-26

Would it not be a good recommendation that every school, every university, every business, has to have that one sheet on the bulletin board about protecting people’s religious liberty, and that the separation of church and state is the biggest lie that’s been told in America since our founding?

Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, a Republican and the chair of the President Donald Trump’s Religious Liberty Commission, at a hearing at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C.

Religion News Service, 4-14-26

LETTERBOX

Everyone benefits from science and technology

I hate to see Christian nationalists actively squandering the lead our country used to have in science. They have had their lives enriched, and in some cases saved, by science and technology.

Do they realize that Covid vaccines and treatments were not invented by reading the bible and praying?

Pennsylvania

Omniscient, omnipotent deity is indefensible

It has been nearly 25 years now, but one of the most vivid images I have of the aftermath of 9/11 was that of a nearby church overflowing with worshippers on the following Sunday, all flocking there to pray for the victims and their families, to pray to the very “god” who, according to Deuteronomy 20:16–17, is omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent. So, to translate, they were in effect praying to the very being who is all good and loving, knew in advance that the tragedy would happen, and completely empowered to stop it, did nothing. I found myself wondering why all those drawn to the church weren’t cursing out that “god” instead of imploring him/her for mercy and support.

The same is true after every tragedy, man-made or natural.

But when they actually are confronted, religious people often turn to the concept of God, who it is said created free will to justify the existence of evil in the world. That is the easy “comfort food” fallacy that many of them use to defend the indefensible.

My questions to them are: If you were God and all-knowing, all-loving and all-powerful, would there have been a Holocaust? World wars? 9/11? Any of the other nearly daily tragedies?

Is the answer to blame them all on “free will” and get a pass on responsibility?

When I see one of these seemingly ubiquitous gatherings of mourners holding candles and offering up prayers in memory of tragic victims of senseless natural or human-caused violence and destruction, I can’t help but compare the scene to praying for help to the arsonist holding the gas can and matches at an inferno. But then again, after all, the fire was the result of free will.

New York

What’s with all the tales from ‘the other side’?

Lately, I’ve been seeing a lot of “back from the dead” first-person stories on the internet relating how the storyteller “died,” went to heaven and met Jesus (who, of course, knew them instantly by sight and vice versa) and who subsequently told them they had to go back and finish their lives on Earth.

These people always describe heaven in rich storybook detail, as well as Jesus himself, who never seems to look remotely like the historical Jesus who scholars generally agree was a first-century male from Galilee with olive-toned skin. Those individuals who allegedly died then eagerly

Getting out to get out the vote



Photo by Daniel Dossey

FFRF Legal Fellows Kyle Steinberg and Charlotte Gude (and Daniel Dossey, who took the photo) spent an afternoon on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus handing out “How to Vote in Wisconsin” guides prior to the spring election.

shared their description of Jesus as a tall, slender, pale-skinned male with long dishwater blonde hair and blue eyes (nearly the exact depiction of how countless artists from the Renaissance onward painted him).

In addition, the individuals who allegedly died and returned to Earth often relate that hell is the most ghastly place one can imagine! Apparently, they were also granted a peek at the other side of the “afterlife” and a second chance to return to Earth to live a better life.

And, finally, there are the ever-popular first-person tales about how recently or long-dead souls are constantly visiting Earth, and how you probably know (or at least knew) some of them in life. According to those who take everything as gospel, these beings allegedly stand next to you in line at the DMV, a rock concert or the grocery store, often making room for your aforementioned guardian angel just in case there’s trouble brewing up the line.

Illinois

Why all the unearned adoration for the pope?

Thank you for sending out the blog (“Advice to Pope Leo: Physician heal thyself,” by Annie Laurie Gaylor on freethoughtnow.org) about the pope and his willful neglect in acknowledging the bloody history of the Catholic Church. I have become very concerned recently that many people, even non-Catholics, and perhaps even some atheists, will ease back on their condemnation of the Catholic Church as a result of this new pope and his vocal dissatisfaction with the Trump administration.

With the appointments of Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis (though not Benedict as much), people expressed optimism that the Church would improve its ideology and image to change with the times, particularly as it pertains to its centuries of misogyny, homophobia and the sexual abuse of children by its clergy. Of

course, no surprise to us, nothing had changed. Now, they are renewing this hope with Leo.

But, we all know, no pope, or anyone else in the Church hierarchy, can be trusted to ultimately do the right thing, no matter what we hear come out of their mouths. And, I would emphasize this distrust of any pope that comes from the Archdiocese of Chicago!

It also angers me to no end to see the news media provide so much attention to, and coverage of, papal declarations. I have deplored MSNow Rachel Maddow’s recent announcement that she has once again become a member of the Catholic faith, the religion she was raised with, had lapsed from, but has now re-entered. My guess is this being due mainly to an admiration of this new pope. Honestly, I will never understand how anyone in the LGBTQ community could feel comfortable having any association with an organization that has worked harder than no other to curtail the rights of those within that community. And, then, hypocritically protects its own pedophiles.

A pope is a person who generally has the adoration of a fairly hefty percentage of the world’s population, uttering faint words of love, hope and peace, yet never resulting in anything that ever becomes morally actionable by his followers. He is put on a pedestal to be revered, but, in reality, commands no actual power to do any good in the world. One would think

that, after all this time, most people would begin to question why it is they even pay him any mind.

I will always continue to do what I can to educate people that the Catholic Church has been, and will likely continue to be, a dangerous criminal cult.

Thank you again, and please keep up the great work!

Tom Cara
Wisconsin

Barker’s debate opening was concise, compelling

I give sincere gratitude and kudos to Dan Barker for his outstanding opening statement in the Feb. 6 debate, “Does the God of the Bible Exist?”

As a longtime atheist often called on to informally refute religious claims, I find Dan’s statement to be one of the most concise, clear and compelling arguments I’ve heard. He seamlessly weaves together numerous biblical examples that undermine the case for God without it sounding like a laundry list. He incisively preempts the most common main argument of the apologists: “But I can explain! You need to interpret the bible correctly!” And, finally, he drives home the unforgivable cost of their beliefs with the real-world human tragedy of Kara Neumann. So powerful.

There are many ways to argue against God’s existence. This is now going to be my way. Thanks Dan!

Minnesota

A poem for all of us busy atheists

I thought you might enjoy this Poetry Month poem!

The Busy Atheist

I gave God up for Lent one year
And never asked him back.
I found more things to tackle
Than I ever could attack.
Plans to hatch and calls to make
Instead of “thoughts and prayers,”
I had a shitload of work to do
And hardly enough hours.
Go visit the sick, bake that cake,
Start a movement for health care,
My eyes and ears, my arms and legs
Were in high gear, aware.
And finally, at the close of day
When the sky lit up as it should
I bowed my head and closed my eyes
And said, “Damn, girl — you’re good!”

Virginia

ffrf

ACTION FUND

Become an advocate!

Keep religion out of our laws and social policy



Sign up at FFRF Action Fund, FFRF’s legislative arm. Receive action alerts about legislative issues affecting you and other freethinkers. Learn more: ffrfaction.org/join-us/

Paid for by FFRF Action Fund

Great American Freethought Songbook



FFRF members and guests arrive in the Freethought Hall lobby on April 13.



Dan Barker and Darcie Johnston began a 7-month concert series titled, “The Great American *Freethought* Songbook with Dan and Darcie.”



Jeff Wong visits with his wife Pam Olson and vocalist Darcie Johnston prior to the concert.



A full house turned out to Freethought Hall's Charlie Brooks Auditorium to listen to Dan and Darcie.



Darcie sings “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man” from the musical “Showboat,” featuring music by freethinker Jerome Kern.



Dan regales the audience with tales of Jerome Kern's life and music. Find out more and how to stream at ffrf.org/freeconcerts.



Dan accompanies on the piano while Darcie sings a tune by Jerome Kern. The first installment of the series was based around the music of Kern. The May 11 event will feature songs by Irving Berlin, who was not religious.



Darcie belts out ‘The Way You Look Tonight’ from the movie “Swing Time,” which featured Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Watch on FFRF's YouTube channel or Freethought TV.

Photos by Chris Line

The image shows the logo for the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF). The logo consists of the lowercase letters "ffrf" in a white, serif font, enclosed within a dark blue square. To the right of the logo, the text "FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION" is written in a large, blue, serif font. Below this, the contact information "P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • ffrf.org" is displayed in a smaller, blue, serif font.

Crossword answers

What Is a Freethinker?

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

Cryptogram answer

I feel as I always have, that the Earth is the home and the only home of man, and I am convinced that whatever he is to get out of his existence he must get while he is here.

— Clarence Darrow

FFRF convention, Oct.15–18

Destination: Milwaukee!

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

General schedule

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

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

Friday, Oct. 16 — Saturday, Oct. 17
Registration will reopen on Friday at 8 a.m. in the Baird Center Ballroom foyer and registration will continue throughout the conference.

The formal convention programming begins in the Baird Center Ballroom on Friday at 9 a.m. and continues through Saturday evening.

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

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

Registration

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

T-shirt

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

Optional group meals

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

Friday Dinner

Chicken: Citrus & herb-marinated airline chicken with oven-roasted tomato and onion jam, roasted garlic confit, fingerling potatoes and seasonal roasted vegetables with rosemary jus (GF). \$65

Pork: Roasted garlic-crusted pork tenderloin with Door County cherry glaze,



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

brown sugar-whipped sweet potatoes and charred asparagus (GF). \$65

Vegan/Veggie: Roasted eggplant & squash ratatouille with tomato and saffron purée, toasted pine nuts and aged balsamic (contains nuts, GF, V, VEG). \$65

Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast

Regular: Fluffy scrambled egg bake with bacon, spinach and wild mushrooms; served with crispy fingerling potato hash and thick cut Applewood smoked bacon (GF). \$40

Vegan: Chickpea tostada. Blackened chickpea and tofu tinga tostada with refried beans, avocado, pico de gallo and micro cilantro; served with toasted breakfast potatoes (GF, V, VEG). \$40

Veggie: Egg white frittata. Feta cheese, spinach and oven-dried tomatoes; served with a side of sweet potato hash \$40 (GF, V).

Saturday Dinner

Chicken: Dijon roasted airline chicken breast with pretzel crust, whole grain mustard cream sauce, pickled mustard seed, garlic whipped Yukon potatoes and haricot vert tossed in a lemon vinaigrette (GF). \$65

Fish: Miso & honey-glazed salmon, with lemon grass-scented basmati and forbidden rice, tamari-glazed bok choy and stir fry vegetables (GF). \$65

Vegan/Veggie: Pan-seared roasted cauliflower steak with pecan and caper salsa over housemade lemon herb roasted garlic hummus and single estate olive oil (GF, V, VEG). \$65

Hotel booking

FFRF’s discounted hotel room block will be at the Hilton Milwaukee, 509 W. Wisconsin Ave., which is connected to the Baird Center via ADA-accessible skywalk.

We encourage you to book your room soon. Reservations must be made on or before Tuesday, Sept. 22 (unless the block sells out before then), to receive FFRF’s discounted rate of \$229 plus taxes per night.

If you need an ADA-accessible room, please indicate your needs when making your reservation. Check-in time is 4 p.m., and check-out time is 11 a.m.

Book your room online or by phone:
Online: ffrf.us/con26reserve
Phone: 800-774-1500. **State that you are with the Freedom From Religion Foundation** and provide our group code “90N” when booking.

Cancellation policy: One night’s room rate plus tax will be charged for all no-shows and for reservations canceled within 48 hours of arrival.

Find out more at ffrf.us/con26
We look forward to seeing you in Milwaukee in October!

FFRF

National Convention

MILWAUKEE

OCTOBER 15–18, 2026

CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: ffrf.us/con26

REGISTRATION FEES	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___	\$100 \$___
Spouse or Companion (Non-member accompanying member)	___	\$105 \$___
Youth (ages 17 & under; must be accompanied by a paid adult)	___	Free \$___
College Student with ID	___	\$25 \$___
Non-member	___	\$160 \$___
☐ Or, I will join FFRF for \$40 (and save \$20)	___	\$140 \$___

OPTIONAL MEALS / EVENTS

No programming will occur during group meals. Meals are offered for socializing and convenience. FFRF does not make any money on the meals, and charges the hotel’s prices which includes a 23% service charge. Please specify your ADA needs and dietary requirements below.

Thursday, October 15th

Thursday Afternoon Workshops [must indicate to attend] ___ Free

Check box if attending ☐ Registrant 1 ☐ Registrant 2

Evening Welcome Reception [must indicate to attend] ___ Free

Check box if attending ☐ Registrant 1 ☐ Registrant 2

Friday, October 16th

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

Registrant 1 ☐ Chicken ☐ Pork ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan

Registrant 2 ☐ Chicken ☐ Pork ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan

Saturday, October 17th

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

Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan

Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan

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

Registrant 1 ☐ Chicken ☐ Fish ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan

Registrant 2 ☐ Chicken ☐ Fish ☐ Vegetarian/Vegan

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

Quantity

Cost

Optional Commemorative 2026 Convention Logo T-shirt (Cream)

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

Size(s)_____▶ Total \$_____

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

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

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

Name of Registrant 1

Pronouns (optional)

Name of Registrant 2

Pronouns (optional)

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

Address

City

State / ZIP

Phone*

Email*

Credit Card Number

Expiration Date / Security Code

Billing Name / Signature

*Contact information for in-house use only

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