

THE ATHEIST VOICE

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE METROPLEX ATHEISTS
MARCH 2005, VOLUME 3, NUMBER 2

LEGISLATURE

Former staffer blasts faith-based effort

AMERICAN ATHEIST

A former White House operative said earlier this month that President Bush has failed to implement his controversial faith-based agenda to subsidize churches, mosques, temples and other religious groups operating social services, and that the goals of the program “remain unfulfilled in spirit and in fact.”

David Kuo, who served as deputy director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives made the remarks in a column published on the beliefnet.com web site where he is a Contributing Editor.

Kuo also was Special Assistant to the President, and speechwriter for Bush during his tenure as Governor of Texas. Earlier in his career as a beltway operative, he crafted speeches and policy statements for former Congressman J.C. Watts, a key Capitol Hill conservative who was among the staunchest



© AFP/CORBIS

supporters of the faith-based initiative.

“It (the faith-based initiative) was more than a bunch of promises,” Kuo wrote in his editorial titled “Shooting from the Heart.”

“It was a new political philosophy of

aggressive, government-encouraged (but not government controlled) compassion that simultaneously rejected the dollars-equal compassion of the 'War on Poverty'

Continued on page 9

SCOTUS

Court takes up religious “special rights” law

AMERICAN ATHEIST

The U.S. Supreme Court is scheduled to hear the CUTTER v. WILKINSON case next week which could prove to be a crucial test of the controversial Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA).

Though not as visible as cases involving display of the Ten Commandments on public property or the presence of “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance, the issues in CUTTER are more far reaching and could seriously alter the role of the Establishment Clause in protecting the separation of church and state. Prisoners in Ohio charged that state corrections officials violated RLUIPA by not catering to

their religious beliefs and practices. At issue is whether the state must use extraordinary standards when deciding policy relevant to such religion-based practices.

“This heightened scrutiny gives an advantage to religious inmates and ministries, and elevates religion above other constitutionally protected rights,” said Ellen Johnson, president of American Atheists. She added that religious extremists, including “Christian Identity” white racists and Muslims have used the Act to organize and spread propaganda under the veneer of theology and protected religious rights.

The U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals found that RLUIPA violated the Establishment Clause by requiring the government

to give special treatment when religious groups and practices were involved.

“The implications of RLUIPA go far beyond the walls of our prisons,” said Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists. “The statute is responsible for growing litigation where churches and other religious groups are ignoring everything from land use laws to environmental restrictions that everyone else is required to obey.”

Mr. Silverman added that there while conditions in prisons need to be improved, “RLUIPA is aimed at giving special privileges to religious inmates. There are better ways to protect the civil rights of incarcerated people.”

EDUCATION

What Is Wrong With Prayer In Our Schools?

Jon Nelson
ATHEIST ALLIANCE

One of the hottest issues affecting the separation of church and state concerns school prayer. Those advocating school prayer insist that the rights of god-believing students are being violated when they are not allowed to pray out loud to the god they believe in. Those of us who disagree with this notion point out that all children have the right to silently pray to themselves in our schools. Unfortunately, this does not satisfy prayer advocates; their purpose is to force all students to participate in a religious ritual, whether they are willing or not. It is in fact nothing more than a shameless attempt at coercion.

School prayer advocates often insist that all they want is to have a “non-sectarian” prayer. Yet this is impossible; no prayer can be constructed that does not have theological and theistic assumptions and implications for a particular religious creed.

Any legislative effort to make these prayers public not only violates the principle of separation between church and state, it is also a deliberate formula for creating prejudice against those who have different faiths, or no faith.

Aside from the Constitutional problems, the push for prayer in the public schools ignores a fundamental question that must be raised: If forced school prayer is not a vehicle for enforcing conformity of thought on religion, what is the point? Is it supposed to have some physical effect? If so, then this raises the issue of whether there is any validity in prayer. This is a key question. If our public schools are supposed to teach students to think and reason, shouldn't the efficacy of prayer be objectively verifiable? After all, our schools teach chemistry rather than alchemy, and



astronomy rather than astrology. Shouldn't we make a concerted effort to determine if prayer actually works, as believers contend, before demanding that it become part of the school curriculum?

Here is a simple test that should solve the problem once and for all. Those who believe in the power of prayer should jump at the opportunity to silence their critics once and for all.

Since terrorism is incompatible with the traditional notions of an all-good, all-powerful and all-knowing god, let all those who believe in this god pray for an end to terrorism on a certain day, a day of their choice. Let the leaders of the various world religions get together and agree upon a date for this prayer. If these leaders are concerned with the issue of terrorism and truly believe in the power of prayer, this would be a marvelous opportunity for them to show their love of humanity. It would also give them a powerful weapon

against those skeptical of religion.

Moreover, if the god they believe in actually exists, and possesses the traits believers insist he possesses, then he could not fail to act and grant their requests. After all, he possesses the power, wisdom, and moral excellence to do so, doesn't he?

Even if terrorism were to cease after this concerted prayer effort, this would not necessarily prove the efficacy of prayer. There could be many non-religious factors in why terrorism ceased on that particular day. Nonetheless, if this were to occur, it could prove to be a powerful propaganda weapon for religion in general.

On the other hand, if terrorism continues beyond the agreed upon date, this would prove either that prayer does not work, or that the god people believe in, even if he exists, does not respond to our requests.

Do believers in prayer possess the honesty

Continued on page 7

Do you know of any Church/State separation violations?

Some things to look for are the posting of the ten commandment in public (government) buildings including public school buildings, city parks, municipal buildings, and libraries.

To voice your concerns, please email the Metroplex Atheist Director:

director@metroplexatheists.org

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

Officers

David Croft – Chair
Vincent Lundgren – Vice Chair
Shelly Hattan – Secretary
Colin Sowards – Treasurer

Board of Directors

John Hattan
Colin Sowards
James Hardwick
Sammi Ruth Fowler
Richard “Dick” Hogan

Librarian

Linda Sharlow

Editor

Edward Penton

Membership Chair

Shelly Hattan

Sergeant at Arms

John Hattan

AAI Representatives

Sammi Ruth Fowler
Colin Sowards

About

Metroplex Atheists is affiliated with both American Atheists and Atheist Alliance International and is organized exclusively for charitable, educational, and scientific purposes, including, for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

LEGISLATURE

The National ID Trojan Horse

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a national ID bill recently that masqueraded as “immigration reform.”

The bill does nothing to address immigration policy, however, nor does it propose deporting a single illegal alien already in our country. It does nothing to address the porous border between the U.S. and Mexico, which is the fundamental problem. In reality, the bill is a Trojan horse. It pretends to offer desperately needed border control in order to con a credulous Congress into sacrificing more of our constitutionally protected liberty.

Supporters claim the national ID scheme is voluntary. However, any state that opts out will automatically make non-persons out of its citizens. The citizens of that state will be unable to have any dealings with the federal government because their ID will not be accepted. They will not be able to fly or to take a train. In essence, in the eyes of the federal government they will cease to exist. It is absurd to call this voluntary, and the proponents of the national ID know that every state will have no choice but to comply. Federal legislation that nationalizes standards for drivers' licenses and birth certificates creates a national ID system pure and simple.

It is just a matter of time until those who refuse to carry the new licenses will be denied the ability to drive or board an airplane. Such domestic travel restrictions are the hallmark of authoritarian states, not free republics.

This bill establishes a huge, centrally-coordinated database of highly personal information about American citizens: at a minimum their name, date of birth, place of residence, Social Security number, and physical

and possibly other characteristics. The bill even provides for this sensitive information of American citizens



Ron Paul, M.D.
REP. TEXAS 14TH
CONGRESSIONAL
DISTRICT

www.house.gov/paul

to be shared with Canada and Mexico! Imagine a corrupt Mexican official selling thousands of identity files, including Social Security numbers, to criminals!

This legislation gives authority to the Secretary of Homeland Security to expand required information on drivers' licenses, potentially including such biometric information as retina scans, finger prints, DNA information, and even Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) radio tracking technology.

Including such technology as RFID means the federal government, as well as the governments of Canada and Mexico, could know where American citizens are at all times.

What will this mean for us? When this new program is implemented, every time we are required to show our drivers' license we will, in fact, be showing a national identification card. We will be handing over a card that includes our personal and likely biometric information, information which is connected to a national and international database. This will further degrade our precious privacy, which is the hallmark of a civilized society. As Ayn Rand said, the “Savage's whole existence is public.”

A national ID card will have the same effect as gun control laws: criminals will ignore it, while law abiding people lose freedom. A national ID card offers us nothing more than a false sense of security, while moving us ever closer to a police state. The national ID proposal should die a well-deserved death in the Senate, and it should be denounced as authoritarian and anti-American.

Nuts in the news

Atlanta, GA

U.S. District Judge Wingate sentenced Rev. Louis R. Jones to three years in prison, twice what was recommended, saying the defendant lied to him and his congregation about his criminal past and academic titles.

When Wingate announced the prison term, the defendant's wife fell to the floor and other relatives burst into tears. Jones didn't speak when given the opportunity, but when his wife fainted, he shouted to the judge, "I am not the same person."

Jones used a false Social Security number on two loan applications at Jackson banks to get \$51,884 in 2001. In addition to the prison sentence, Wingate ordered Jones to repay the money.

Wingate said Jones claimed to have a bachelor's degree and implied he had a doctorate because he used "Dr." before his name. Wingate also determined Jones' congregation was unaware of a prior felony conviction and five misdemeanor convictions. The 1993 felony charge was for armed robbery, but it was reduced to aggravated assault. "He lied to the court, just flat out lied," added Wingate.

Wingate directed harsh words at Jones before announcing the sentence. "You got those people at the church all excited over you, and you don't deserve it. You just don't deserve it," Wingate said. "You sat there and you did try to cross words with me. You wanted probation. You wanted me to send you back to your congregation without them knowing anything about you."

Michigantown, IN

central Indiana pet shop owner says a turtle that was the only animal to survive an October fire has developed an image of Satan's face on its shell.

Bryan Dora says it looks like the devil wants us to know that he was there.

Dora says he can see a goatee and a pair of pointy horns on the shell of the palm-sized red-eared slider turtle named Lucky.

He says Lucky is healthy and its behavior hasn't changed.

Investigators could not determine the cause of the fire, which destroyed the A-Dora-ble Pet Shop and several other businesses in Frankfort, about 40 miles northwest of Indianapolis.

Dora has produced a DVD of the turtle's story that he plans to auction on the Internet. He will also offer the winning bidder the chance to buy Lucky off-line.

Baton Rouge, LA

A minister pleaded not guilty to stalking charges in district court on Tuesday. Rev. Charles Richardson is accused of stalking a woman for more than a year. She is confined to a wheelchair.

Richardson has been suspended from his position as district superintendent of the United Methodist Church pending the outcome of the charges.

Karen Roy, who is paralyzed from the waist down, said neighbors began seeing a man parked on her street early in the mornings during the summer of 2003. She also said she saw someone watching her from several different cars bearing no plates in May 2004.

Roy filed police reports in Gonzales and Baton Rouge as a result. On one occasion Roy said deputies questioned Richardson after her brother chased him from the parking lot of Gonzalez Middle School, where she works.

Rochester, NY

Father Michael Volino is currently under house arrest. He's accused of receiving and possessing child porn from May of 2004 until his computer was seized in January.

Volino spent time with a local Boy Scout troop and that he got a warning from the local diocese.

There are no allegations that Father Volino ever sexually assaulted a child and the leader of the local boy scout council says that while Father Volino did have close contact with a Boy Scout Troop, there have been no complaints that he did anything wrong. "We try to be very proactive in making sure youngsters are safe," said Larry Pritchard, Monroe County Boy Scout Troops Executive Scout.



Brookfield, WI

It was just another weekend service for churchgoers in this Milwaukee suburb when, without warning, they began to be gunned down by one of their own.

Terry Ratzmann, a buttoned-down churchgoer known for sharing homegrown vegetables with his neighbors, walked into the room and police said he shot 22 bullets from a 9 mm handgun within a minute.

When it was over, seven people, including the church's minister and his teenage son, were killed, and four others, including the minister's wife, were wounded.

Continued on page 8

Are you searching for Atheists in the metroplex?

Join in the discussions at the DFW Atheist Talk group.
groups.yahoo.com/group/DFWAtheistTalk/

LEGISLATURE

Faith-based fiasco: Department Of Justice backs bias

Sam Felder
AMERICANS UNITED

In 2003, more than a dozen workers at the Salvation Army in New York City filed a lawsuit against the group's new practice of discriminating on the basis of religion. As in many civil rights cases, attorneys with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) civil rights division joined the case. Oddly enough, they joined in support of the Salvation Army instead of the employees accusing the group of discrimination.

The workers are challenging attempts by the Salvation Army to require employees to divulge information about their faiths, including the churches they attend and their religious leaders. This hostility to minority religions was accompanied by a change to the mission statement. All job postings and job descriptions now state that the top goal of the social welfare operation is "to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination." The previous mission statement was "to empower each person who enters our doors to live

with dignity and hope," and contained no religious references, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Protections against discrimination were removed from the handbook and an effort was made to compile a list of homosexual employees.

Instead of denying the charges, the Salvation Army has defended itself as a religious organization. With the help of the DOJ, they are claiming exemption from civil rights laws even though they are heavily funded by tax dollars and some clients are required to use their services by court order.

This case is the latest in a new trend for the DOJ civil rights office. Three years ago, the department launched a new unit aimed at protecting the rights of religious groups and individuals. Some cases, such as defending the right of a Muslim schoolgirl in Oklahoma to wear a traditional head covering are consistent with what average Americans understand religious liberty to mean.

That kind of case, however, is far from the primary focus of the government's

new legal team. Eric Treene, formerly of the right-wing Becket Fund, wields tremendous power in selecting which cases will be pursued.

Like the Salvation Army case, many cases are designed to advance the goals of the Religious Right.

The unit has supported the Child Evangelism Fellowship's efforts to start after-school Good New Clubs, investigated a school that prohibited distribution of religious material during school-sponsored holiday parties and threatened a biology professor who required students to accept evolution as a core principle of biology in order to receive letters of recommendation.

Using government lawyers as advocates for the Religious Right corrupts the purpose of the civil rights division. The work of this new division betrays the legacy of the civil rights movement and the founding fathers. Defending the Salvation Army's efforts to use government money to discriminate on the basis of religion does not protect religious liberty; it violates the establishment clause.

WWII & Korea:

James Hardwick (Ret), Navy

Iraq:

Brian McIntosh (Ret), USMC

Shawn Ruzek, USMC

To the "Atheists in foxholes"
proudly serving the United States:

Thank you for your unselfish
sacrifice so that we may
all live in a safer world.

RATIONALLY SPEAKING

God did it, or did He?

In 1755 a great earthquake struck the city of Lisbon, in Portugal. As a result, roughly 100,000 people died, in the process sparking a new debate about an old and deep theological dilemma: if (the Christian) God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, how could this happen? The answer, such as it is, has always been that we simply can't understand how such calamities fit into God's plan, but they do, so we should simply have faith in the supreme being and not be as "arrogant" as constantly questioning His plans.

Of course, any human being who deliberately causes the death of thousands, regardless of the stated motive or "higher" purpose, is branded as a horrible criminal, hunted down and prosecuted to the full extent of human law. Rational people feel rather frustrated by this sort of nonsensical double standard, and one defense against the irrationality of the world is, as Mel Brooks once said, a good sense of humor. If anything good came out of the Lisbon earthquake was that it inspired the French philosopher Voltaire to write what became a classical masterpiece of world literature, *Candide*. In it, Voltaire makes fun of the simplistic attitude that we live "in the best of all possible worlds," as affirmed by one of the main characters, Dr. Pangloss (loosely based on the philosophy of Leibniz), and clearly implied by theological "explanations" of natural disasters.

Recently, I have witnessed two more examples of "Pangloss' syndrome," one in response to an event publicized throughout the world, the other while attending a religious gathering celebrating a rite of passage. The scopes of the two episodes are wildly different, and yet they reflect the same irrational, and highly dangerous, attitude about what happens in the world and why.

The largest event was, of course, the tsunami that caused two hundred thou-

sand people to die in southeast Asia. For several days after the tragedy there was a serious debate in the media, eerily similar to the one that moved Voltaire's pen: how could God allow such a tragedy to occur? Christian theologians, Jewish rabbis, and Muslim clerics all gave the same answer:



Dr. Massimo
Pigliucci
ATHEIST ALLIANCE

we don't know, but it must have been for a higher good. Some of these self-appointed experts about nothing went so far as to claim that perhaps the people who died were in fact somehow undeserving, and that the tsunami was God's punishment for their sins. A colossal and outrageously insulting instance of blaming the victim, if ever there was one! It is hard for me to imagine the degree of mental gymnastics that one must perform in these cases

to save one's cherished pet religious views. This sort of events must cause an almost unbearable degree of cognitive dissonance, and one has to be particularly skilled at fooling oneself in order not to perceive the sheer absurdity of the whole plot. And yet, it seems to work for hundreds of millions of people the world over. This attitude "explained" Lisbon, the tsunami, the 9/11 attacks on the US, and essentially anything else bad that happens in the world: it is either our own fault, or it is for the pursuit of God's inscrutable (but certainly supremely good) plan.

The same bizarre logic applies in reverse, of course: just in the same way as God is never responsible for anything bad happening to us, He takes all (or most) of the credit whenever something good happens. A good gig if you can get it! The second example I witnessed falls into the category of "God did it (because it's good)." I was at a religious ceremony celebrating an important rite of passage for a young girl, followed by a feast at which everybody was having a jolly good time. At one point, the father of the girl took the

microphone and told us a very poignant story: his daughter had actually been born very prematurely, and both her and her mother had barely survived the ordeal. Moreover, the girl had been in desperate conditions in the hospital after birth, and the doctors had little hope that she would make it. However, some doctor had the daring and brilliant idea of trying a new experimental drug, after having asked the parents' permission. It worked, and the result was the beautiful young woman that we were now celebrating.

Had the story ended there it would have been a wonderful and moving tale of human compassion and ingenuity. But of course the father had to go on and add that, although he was sure the doctors had some merit for the final outcome, really this was a clear example of a miracle, a direct intervention of God to save his child. There are so many things that are simply wrong with all of this that it is, again, hard to imagine how perfectly normal, functional, people can sincerely embrace this sort of "reasoning." To begin with, why does God get the credit for solving the problem, but not for creating it in the first place? Second, isn't such an unwarranted shift of credit insulting for the doctors who did the actual hard work and took on a huge responsibility in case of failure? More generally, if we all (including doctors) adopted such attitude, wouldn't that spell the end of any attempt to better humanity's condition? If it's all in God's hands (why does He need hands, anyway?), then why bother? Which is, of course, exactly the attitude of so-called Christian scientists (an oxymoron of grotesque proportions), who leave their children to die because they think that all disease is the result of poor faith and can be cured only by restoring the latter.

I am no Voltaire, and this essay is no *Candide*. Therefore, I will leave it to the great French Enlightenment writer to make a final comment: "Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd." We would find ourselves in a much better world if more of us lived by such words.

Prayer – From page 2

and integrity to put their beliefs to this test? Or do they have ulterior motives, such as those suggested earlier, that they are not disclosing?

If these believers cry out, as they surely will, that “you cannot test god,” then they are tacitly admitting that belief in god and prayer is purely subjective. And, if they cannot be objectively proved, then they have no place in the school curriculum, for beliefs in god and prayer would be no more intellectually justifiable than belief in witches, fairies, ghosts or other supernatural agencies. While people have every right to believe in whatever their imaginations can conjure up, they do not have the right to insist that everyone who disagrees with them give up their valuable learning time to accommodate beliefs that have no foundation in provable fact.

Believers will no doubt trot out the old “free will” argument at this point. They will claim that since we humans have free will, anything bad that happens to us is our own fault, or is the result of human evil. This argument is a classic religious red herring. It doesn't matter if we have “free will” or not. God still is supposed to stop evil when he sees it occurring. What kind of parents would fail to stop their children from doing evil acts if they knew in advance what they were going to do?

Shouldn't we at least hold god to these standards, if not higher ones? After all, his morality is supposed to be so vastly superior to human morality.

Moreover, how does the believer account for the countless natural evils that occur in the world, including earthquakes, tornadoes and floods? How do believers account for the various diseases that cause untold pain and suffering? To see the foolishness and evil of what such believers are saying, one need only to visit the nearest children's hospital to see the many suffering and deformed babies that their god has created. Would they say to the mother that their baby's suffering is due to sin? Only people who have divested themselves of all human sentiment could argue in this way. Yet that is exactly where the free will argument must lead.

If deprived of their preferred sectarian prayers, religionists then fall back on the argument of having a “moment of silence” in the schools. They insist that children have the right to pray in school. No one should be misled by this tactic; students already have that right. The entire issue has become a political football tossed about by the religious right-wing. Many of their attempts to legislate religious belief have positive sounding titles. For example, Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Oklahoma) in October 2001 introduced the “Religious Speech Amendment.” This was Istook's third attempt to introduce

mandatory school prayer. In 1998, he introduced the benevolent sounding “Religious Freedom Amendment” which conveniently ignored the fact that the First Amendment to the United States Constitution already guarantees freedom of and from religion. Istook's earlier amendment, although receiving a 224-203 majority, was defeated due to the necessary two-thirds majority requirement. However, the fact that it received the number of votes it did shows that the majority of the members of the House of Representatives either does not understand or does not appreciate the First Amendment to the Constitution they have sworn to uphold.

The inevitable results of such legislation would be to force school sponsored prayer on all students. It would also increase divisiveness and animosity between different religious groups and encourage their fighting among themselves for governmental largesse.

The school prayer issue is nothing more than a concerted effort by Christian extremists to force everyone else to listen to their particular prayers to their particular god. The “moment of silence” is a means for them to introduce their real agenda in an underhanded, sub-rosa manner.

God believers have the right to believe in anything they choose. They do not have the right to force it on everyone else. To do so is more than a rude imposition of their particular religious values. It is downright un-American.

Attention DFW area Atheists and Agnostics!

The Humanist Church
of North Texas HAS MOVED

Scheduled services are now held every third
Saturday at 11:30 a.m. within the
Religious Education Building
of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Oak Cliff

3839 W Kiest Blvd
Dallas, TX 75233

www.humanistchurch.org/



Nuts – From page 4

Ratzmann, 44, then shot himself; he sat slumped against the back wall with four rounds left in his gun, police said.

Ratzmann was not known to have threatened anyone and had no criminal record, police said. Waukesha County supervisor Andrew Kallin, who led the vigil, could only offer a prayer. “The Lord works in mysterious ways.”

Jacksonville, FL

A woman in Massachusetts believes she has a “holy roaster” in her kitchen. Susan McGuinness claims the burnt label on her pan looks like an image of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus. She spotted the “Metal Miracle” Sunday as she put the pan in the dishwasher. She now says she won’t ever wash or cook with the pan again. Susan may sell the pan on eBay.

Burbank, CA

NBC, praying for new hits as it weathers a post-“Friends” ratings slump, may soon be bringing Jesus to prime time, not as a biblical miracle worker, but as a modern-day private savior for a pill-popping priest. That’s the scenario for “The Book of

Daniel,” one of several pilot dramas developed at NBC as possible additions to its 2005-2006 schedule and showcased on Thursday for a gathering of advertisers.

“Daniel” is one project that NBC Entertainment President Kevin Reilly said he is particularly excited about, citing it as a prime example of his big new watch word in program development -- “fresh.”

“I like that it’s slightly provocative,” he told Reuters. “We did realize that we’re in uncharted waters. ... It certainly stirs people’s passions and stirs opinions, and if we do it right, with quality, I think there’s millions and millions of people who would say, ‘Hey, that’s what I’ve been looking for on television.’”

Boston, MA

The Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, in a cost-cutting move in the wake of its priest-sexual-abuse settlement, announced in 2004 that it would close several churches and schools, including Our Lady of the Presentation in the struggling neighborhood of Oak Square. Rather than sell the school to an eager community group at market price, the archdiocese is converting it into offices for processing marriage annulments.

PAKISTAN

A powerful bomb explosion in southwestern Pakistan killed at least 30 worshippers and injured many others.

Local officials say the bomb ripped through a religious gathering in a remote town of southwestern Baluchistan province. Dozens of people were also injured in the powerful explosion and authorities are expecting the death toll to go up.

Witnesses say thousands of Shiite Muslims had gathered for an annual pilgrimage at the shrine of a Muslim saint in Fatehpur town and many were having their evening meals when the bomb went off.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. Provincial authorities have condemned it as an act of terrorism. An investigation is under way but police officials say it is premature to suggest as to who was behind the deadly bombing.

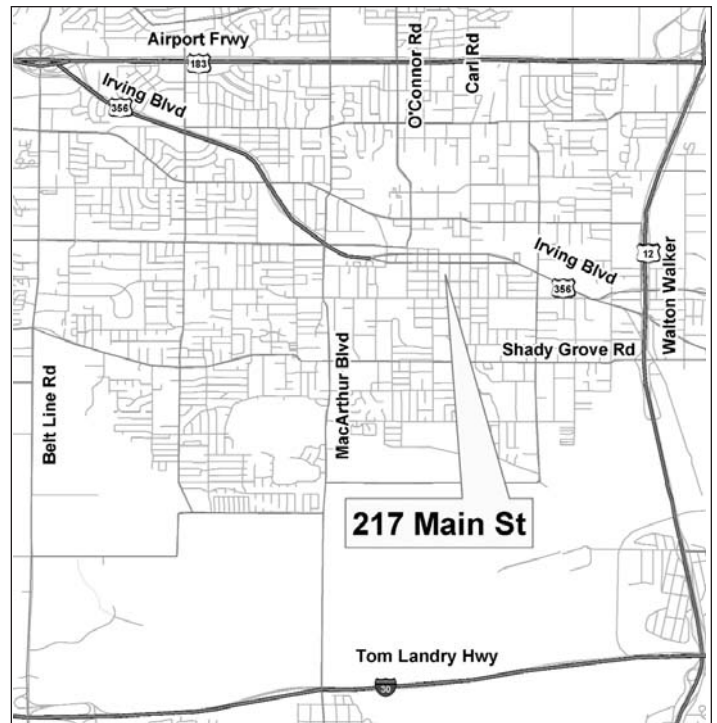
Since the start of the year, the resource-rich province has scene bloody clashes between security forces and tribal militants fighting for more autonomy.

But there is no indication the attack is linked to the fighting at a town elsewhere in the province that left dozens of people dead, including government forces.

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

COME
JOIN
US

EVERY THIRD SUNDAY
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM



Faith – From page 1

mindset and the laissez-faire social policy of many conservatives. It was political philosophy of the heart as much as the head ... (It) was a dream come true for me..."

Indeed, when congress had the opportunity to enact portions of the faith-based initiative scheme, officials voted down the legislation. Sixth months after the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was established, lawmakers stripped a tax incentive scheme that would have allowed deductions for contributions to churches and other religious outreaches from a \$1.6 trillion spending bill. Other spending cuts slashed over \$6 billion from plans that would have established faith-based funding schemes for prisoners, at-risk youths and other programs.

Kuo blamed these and other shortfalls on "frenzied knee-jerked" Democratic opposition and what he termed "Hackneyed church-state scare rhetoric. And, he charged, there was "Capitol Hill gridlock (that) could have been smashed by minimal West Wing effort."

Washington Post writers Alan Cooperman and Jim VandeHei described Mr. Kuo's remarks as "a rare breach of discipline for an administration that places a high premium on unity among current and former officials."

They also noted that Kuo's decision to go public and take aim at Bush policies was the second time a former ranking White House insider criticized the faith-based policy. Ex-WHOFBCI director John DiIulio left his post after only seven months, and told *Esquire Magazine* in 2002 that the Bush administration was more focused on the politics of the faith-based initiative than the possible outcomes. He branded unidentified White House operatives as "Machiavelli's."

In a statement to news media, American Atheists president Ellen Johnson charged that Kuo "is not only skewing the truth about the sheer size and significance of the faith-

based initiative, he is also insulting those who have legitimate concerns that this experiment is fleecing the taxpayers and violating the separation of church and state."

Johnson noted that while Congress has failed to grant any funding for the Bush religion-based plan, the president used his power of Executive Orders to make available over \$60 billion in potential grants from a dozen major federal agencies including the Departments of Health and Human Services, Justice and even Agriculture.

Johnson said that the plan by-passes congressional authority and constitutes "the biggest transfer of public money from the treasury to the coffers of organized religion."

Despite his lament that the Bush administration has not fulfilled its agenda to help the needy and carry out its much-touted faith-based initiative, Kuo wrote that he continues to have "deep respect, appreciation and affection for the president."

"No one who knows him even a tiny bit doubts the sincerity and compassion of heart."

The Post, however, noted that Kuo would not definitively say whether Bush really believed in the controversial program, saying only that he would "let the column speak for itself."

Kuo was less circumspect, however, when discussing the political aspects of the federal faith-based initiative, and its capacity to mobilize a religious base of potential voters and evangelical groups under the banner of "compassionate conservatism."

Indeed, the Bush effort in the last presidential election consisted of a two-pronged strategy to woo religious voters.

The faith-based initiative proved popular with black ministers who perceive the program as an entitlement vehicle to operate social programs and still convey a religious message.

White evangelicals have been less enthusiastic, concentrating more on Bush's embrace of "values issues" like abortion, gay marriage, chastity promotion, display of the Ten Commandments on public property and "bringing

morality back into American life." "Conservative Christian donors, faith leaders, and opinion makers grew to see the initiative as an embodiment of the president's own faith," Kuo opined. He warned that influential evangelical gurus like James Dobson of Focus on the Family "weren't anti-poverty leaders, they didn't care about money."

"The Faith-Based Office was the cross around the White Houses' neck showing the president's own faith-orientation," wrote Mr. Kuo. "That was sufficient."

Kuo, however, was more strident with those opposing the Bush faith-based plan, charging that "Secular liberal advocacy and interest groups attacked every little thing the faith initiative did." He cites the case of Boston's Old North Church which received a preservation grant from the Department of the Interior under the guise of protecting an historic site.

Dismissing the concerns of church-state separationists, Kuo added that "The net effect of all the jabbering was the appearance that great progress was being made."

Kuo praised some components of the initiative, though, and noted that in the period 2002-2004, over 15,000 clergy and other social service leaders attended conferences throughout the nation organized by the WHOFBCI that encouraged religious groups to apply for government funding. He notes that many of these events were "held regularly in (political) battleground states, were chock-full of vital information and gave thousands of groups invaluable information about government grants."

While noting that the conferences, largely unnoticed by the news media, were "hardly pep rallies," they nevertheless conveyed "a resounding political message to all faith-oriented constituencies: President Bush cares about you."

Mr. Kuo said that this effort did not, as some charged "buy minority votes" since "There wasn't enough money around to buy anyone."

"We have to wonder how many votes could have been purchased had the initiative lived up to Kuo's expectations and

Are you searching for Atheists on the internet?

Join in the discussions at the DFW Atheist Talk group.
groups.yahoo.com/group/DFWAtheistTalk/

UPCOMING EVENTS

Business Meeting

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING:

What: Meeting to decide general business of the group and to discuss current events
Date: Third Sunday of the month
Time: 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM
Place: Heritage Park
 217 Main St. at Second St.,
 Irving, TX

400 E. Abram Street
 Arlington, TX

HUMANIST CHURCH OF N. TX:

What: All the things you want in a church, without the gods
Date: Third Saturday of the month
Time: 11:30 a.m.
Place: Unitarian Universalist Church of Oak Cliff
 3839 W. Kiest Blvd,
 Dallas, TX

Date: Fourth Monday of the month
Time: 6:00 p.m.
Place: TBA, for location visit:
DallasBrights.org

Social Meetings

ATHEIST MEETUP DAY:

What: Meet with other local Atheists to talk about your beliefs
Date: Third Tuesday of the month
Time: 7:00 PM
Place: TBA; For locations near you visit: *atheists.meetup.com*

MA READING GROUP:

What: The Metroplex Atheists Reading Group discusses selected books. Come join in, even if you didn't read the selection. For the latest book, visit:
www.metroplexatheists.org/read/
Date: Third Sunday of the month
Time: After the regular meeting
Place: Heritage Park
 217 Main St. at Second
 Irving, TX

Media

ATHEIST NETWORK:

What: Atheist internet radio. To listen visit: *www.atheistnetwork.com*
Date: TBA
Time: TBA
Place: Wherever you have access to broadband internet

J. GILLIGAN'S:

What: "My dinner with Atheists," social time with a bunch of heathens
Date: Every Wednesday
Time: 6:30 PM – 9:00 PM
Place: J. Gilligan's Bar & Grill (Meet on the grill side)

DALLAS BRIGHTS:

What: For those with a naturalistic world view

Events

NATIONAL DAY OF REASON:

What: Atheist answer to the NDOP
Date: May 5
Time: TBA
Place: TBA

To have your events listed email:

The Atheist Voice Editor at
editor@metroplexatheists.org



TEMPTED?
www.metroplexatheists.org

March 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 J. Gilligan's	3	4	5
6	7	8	9 J. Gilligan's	10	11	12
13	14	15 Atheist Meetup	16 J. Gilligan's	17	18	19
20 Reg. Meeting & MARG	21	22	23 J. Gilligan's	24	25	26
27	28	29	30 J. Gilligan's	31		

April 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3	4	5	6 J. Gilligan's	7	8	9
10	11	12	13 J. Gilligan's	14	15	16
17 Reg. Meeting & MARG	18	19 Atheist Meetup	20 J. Gilligan's	21	22	23
24	25	26	27 J. Gilligan's	28	29	30

May 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31	1	2	3 J. Gilligan's	4	5 NDR NDP Protest	6
7	8	9	10 J. Gilligan's	11	12	13
14	15	16 Atheist Meetup	17 J. Gilligan's	18	19	20
21 Reg. Meeting & MARG	22	23	24 J. Gilligan's	25	26	27
28	29	30	1 J. Gilligan's	2	3	4

***THE ATHEIST VOICE* is a bi-monthly publication of Metroplex Atheists.**

For more information, please visit our website: www.metroplexatheists.org

To submit an article or letter to the editor, please email us.

The Atheist Voice Editor: editor@metroplexatheists.org

THE ATHEIST VOICE
c/o Metroplex Atheists
3333 Southlake Park Rd.
Southlake, TX 76092

Deliver to:

“Because we must. Because we have the call. Because it is nobler to fight for rationality without winning than to give up in the face of continued defeats. Because whatever true progress humanity makes is through the rationality of the occasional individual and because any one individual we may win for the cause may do more for humanity than a hundred thousand who hug superstition to their breasts.”

— Isaac Asimov, when asked why he fights religion with no hope for victory

WHY DO WE FIGHT?