

THE ATHEIST VOICE

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE METROPLEX ATHEISTS
MAY 2008, VOLUME 6, NUMBER 3

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Don't believe in God? You are not alone

PHILLYCOR

These words are being seen on Interstate 95 north of Philadelphia. Greeting out-bound drivers near the Westmorland turnoff, they are part of a highway billboard that features an image of blue sky and clouds with the words superimposed over. The striking message raises a question . . . and maybe some eyebrows.

The billboard was placed by a coalition of local and national humanist and freethought organizations, including the American Humanist Association and its independent marketing adjunct FreeThoughtAction, Atheist Alliance International, the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia, the Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia, and Temple University Secular Students.

This billboard was timed to coincide with the National Day of Reason, celebrated by humanists each year on the same date as the National Day of Prayer--which this year falls on May 1, the 75th anniversary of the first Humanist Manifesto.

Speaking at a press conference held this



morning at the Ethical Humanist Society of Greater Philadelphia, Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association, said: "Traditional religious billboards have abounded in the past. Something nontraditional like this is therefore needed to stimulate thinking."

Joe Fox, president of the Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia, added: "The point of the billboard is to make nontheistic people, such as atheists and agnostics, aware that they aren't alone."

Continued on page 7

SOCAS

Religious Right seeks two-day Ten Commandments confab

Rob Boston

AMERICANS UNITED

Gas is inching up to \$4 per gallon, rice has doubled in price, home foreclosures continue to spiral and more than 80 percent of Americans think the country is on the wrong track.

What's to be done? According to the Religious Right, it's time for a Ten Commandments Weekend!

Bill Murray, chairman, founder and possibly the only member of something called the Religious Freedom Coalition, is carping because House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid

won't schedule a vote on a resolution authorizing a Ten Commandments Week-end that lauds the Decalogue as the source of our country's laws.

"But with Nancy Pelosi in charge of the House and Harry Reid in charge of the Senate, we can't have a voice," Murray grouched to One News Now. "We can't get these out and open and celebrate the Ten Commandments."

Why not? If members of Murray's church want to celebrate the Commandments and erect them for all to see, no one's going to stop them. He could even stick them up in his back yard or make tiny versions into paperweights. Be creative. Knock yourself

out, Bill.

But that's never enough for these Religious Right types. They seem to think that if the government doesn't get in on the act, it doesn't count. Will people really value the Commandments more because the House and Senate direct them to?

I can think of two reasons why Pelosi and Reid might be unwilling to spend much time on this matter. One, the resolution is dishonest. The Ten Commandments are not the source of American law. Our laws were informed by many sources - Roman, Byzantine, the Napoleonic Code, European

Continued on page 8

THE BACKSIDE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

We'll Get Together for a Cross Burning

ED WALLACE

It was Friday, April 1, 1921. Although the day had started out as just another fine spring day in Dallas, Texas, an anonymous phone call to a reporter for the Dallas Times Herald was about to change everything.

The reporter was told that if he really wanted a great story, that evening he was to stand on the corner of Main and Ervay and wait for further instructions. The reporter ran down to the street and shortly thereafter was put into the back of a car, where he was blindfolded and driven along with five other cars to Hutchins Road, six miles south of downtown.

There he was let out, surrounded by men wearing handkerchiefs; and from the back of another car, Alex Johnson, a young African-American who worked as an elevator operator at the Adolphus Hotel, was yanked out, a noose around his neck, already pleading for his life.

The masked group had kidnapped him from his home on Roseland Street for this demonstration of mob power. His shirt was ripped off him as one man said, "Nigger, you have confessed to the crime, but we have decided not to hang you."

A gun was pushed into his side as the man continued, "If you cry out, you'll be shot." Instead of being hanged, Johnson was lashed 25 times with a bullwhip. And then another member of the mob walked up with a small paintbrush and a bottle of acid and burned the letters KKK on his forehead. Johnson would forever be marked, the first victim of the Ku Klux Klan's coming to Dallas in 1921.

The story made the Times Herald the next day, quoting Sheriff Dan Harston as commenting, "As I understand the case, the Negro was guilty of doing something he had no right to do. There will be no investigation by my department." Criminal District Court Judge Robert Seay said, "Maybe it will be a lesson." Judge Work commented, "If enough people hear of this, it may do some good." Johnson's alleged crime? A liaison with a white woman.

The Ku Klux Klan had its revival in 1915

in Atlanta, inspired by the racist movie, *Birth of a Nation*. William J. Simmons believed that his new, updated version of the Klan could be the national voice for morality. In fact, the Dallas Klan had been organized just a few months before the Johnson whipping; but within two years, the Klan would come to control virtually all of Dallas. Its appeal was simple - patriotism, or their version of it, morality, Native Americans for white Americans, and fundamentalist Christianity.

Bertram G. Christie formed Dallas Klan No. 66 in late 1920; and within four years it was said to be the biggest group in the nation. Those whom the Klan wanted to indoctrinate into their order would be met at church or their workplace; they would be handed a copy of the Ten Commandments and the American Constitution and invited to a private dinner, where they would be indoctrinated into the Klan's mission. It's a good bet that few members read the Commandments or the Constitution they were given, for one commandment is Thou Shall Not Kill; and the Constitution doesn't suggest that mobs take the law into their own hands.

We now know that many Dallas leaders were involved in this group: Louis Turley, our police commissioner, Elmo Straight, chief of police, 91 other officers (about 60% of the police force), 12 attorneys, eight doctors, Dallas Power and Light officials, the Democratic party chairman, our tax collector and the head of the local Ford factory. One list created in 1922 even suggests that R.L. Thornton was one of the Klan.

Henry Wade, who would one day be Dallas' District Attorney, remembered the night when the Klan came to his home to suggest that his father, a Rockwall attorney, join up. Wade's dad told the Klansmen that he had no intention of joining, and

then said he viewed the Klan as a threat to decent society and law and order. The Klansmen suggested that one night they would come to his house again, to tar and feather him. Wade simply replied, "You'd better be ready to kill me; I'll have my shotgun ready." Henry Wade would remember that night when his father stood up to the Klan forever.

Six weeks or so after Alex Johnson's flogging the Klan held their coming-out party, on a Saturday night in downtown Dallas. Marching out of the old Majestic Theater in single file came all 780 of them, dressed in their robes, bearing the American flag and a burning cross. Many carried torches; every 20th marcher carried a sign, some of which read, "We Stand for White Supremacy," "All Pure White," "Pure Womanhood," "Parasites Go."

As they began their walk the city's lights went off, just to dramatize the event. It was covered in the local papers; and the next day, a Sunday, preachers around town started singing the praises of the Klan and its motives.

Dr. T.O. Perrin told his congregation, "The hand of God may be working through the Ku Klux Klan, to make the country better socially and economically."

Others were just as positive in their remarks. But things were about to slide out of control. Philip Fox resigned as the managing editor of the Dallas Times Herald to become the head of public relations for the Klan at their national headquarters in Atlanta.

But, like any other group, the Klan endured power plays for control; Fox wound up shooting an attorney from a rival Klan.

During the murder trial that followed, Dallas Mayor Louis Blaylock testified to Fox's character, as did Congressman Hat-

"Those whom the Klan wanted to indoctrinate into their order would be met at church or their workplace; they would be handed a copy of the Ten Commandments and the American Constitution"

Continued on page 4

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

Officers

Terry McDonald – Chair
Randy Word – Vice Chair
John Hattan – Secretary
Colin Swards – Treasurer

Board of Directors

John Hattan
Colin Swards
James Hardwick
Richard 'Dick' Hogan

Librarian

Linda Sharlow

Editor

Edward Penton

Membership Chair

Shelly Hattan

Sergeant at Arms

John Hattan

AAI Representatives

Colin Swards
Larry McHam

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.

Statement Regarding Ellen Johnson

A specially called, and properly noticed, meeting of the five Boards of Directors that together comprise American Atheists, was held on April 29, 2008.

All members of the five boards were personally present via telephone at that meeting, including the President Ellen Johnson.

By a majority vote of the Board of Directors of American Atheists, Inc, and by a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors of two of the other four corporations, Ellen Johnson was involuntarily removed from the office of President of American Atheists, Inc. and from the office of President of the other four corporations.

The bylaws of each of the five corporations permit the removal of the President by a majority vote of the Board of Directors.

Out of deep respect for Ellen Johnson's many services to American Atheists, in deference to her privacy, and with the desire that her Presidency be remembered favorably by history, American Atheists asks that this statement be accepted without calls for further explanation.

Be assured that the action taken was in the best interests of the organization and of its membership.

Frank R. Zindler,
Acting President

Metroplex Atheists New Business Meeting Time

**METROPLEX ATHEISTS HAS MOVED THE TIME OF ITS
REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING TO 1:00 P.M. THE
MEETINGS ARE STILL HELD ON THE THIRD SUNDAY OF
EACH MONTH.**

**THIS MEETING WILL BE CONDUCTED AT:
GRAPEVINE FIRE HALL
SOUTHWEST CORNER OF HUGHES AND MERLOT AVE,
GRAPEVINE, TX**

Klan – From page 2

ton Sumners and many journalists from this area.

The Dallas Morning News had a different opinion of the rise of the Klan in North Texas. In an editorial written by Alonzo Wasson about their coming-out party in downtown Dallas, the News said, "Those who marched through the streets were the exemplars of lawlessness, their actions were a fit subject for a grand jury."

The piece was titled, "Dallas slandered." George Dealey, president of the Morning News, walked down to Wasson's office saying he had enjoyed the editorial, but added, "I believe it would be better to hold a conference when breaking new ground on editorial policy." Didn't matter.

George Dealey and the Dallas Morning News were about to launch their crusade against the Klan, one that almost destroyed the newspaper.

The very night the Dallas Morning News published that editorial, John Moore, who happened to be white and was a dispatcher at the Union Terminal, was being released by Sheriff Harston into the hands of the Klan. His alleged crime: assault on a 12-year-old girl.

Like Alex Johnson, Moore was taken to a remote location, this time the Trinity River Bottoms west of town, and whipped; as with the first flogging, a reporter from the Times Herald was there as a witness. Moore was dumped at Akard and Main, another object lesson on morality for all to witness. Again, no one in law enforcement thought anything wrong with this action. Mayor Blaylock told the media, "I believe Moore got what he justly deserved."

And so the whippings continued, often with the person being tarred and feathered afterward. Then in late 1921, the New York World started running a series of 21 articles, showing the real nature of the Klan nationally, the floggings, terrorist actions against minorities, the lynchings of many

people who actually had been innocent of any crime, but were killed just on the suspicion they might be guilty. Again, the Dallas Morning News reran all 21 anti-Klan articles from the World.

And all that happened was that the membership rolls of the Klans, both in Dallas and nationwide, grew substantially. One south Dallas preacher responded to the News and its articles, saying he had investigated the Klan, observed their tactics and wholeheartedly approved of their methods. Reverend R.H. Tharp, pastor of a local Baptist church, told his flock that the Klan's whipping post methods were "the only appropriate tactics" to use on those who were "intent on ruining our womanhood."

It is estimated that upwards of 13,000 of our citizens had by then joined the Klan. But in spite of that, many in Dallas realized that the Klan was damaging the image of our city and its dynamic growth and fostering hate - not to mention that the Klan was denying many people the right to their day in court.

Yet, at first, no one had the courage to stand up to this group. If you said anything against the Klan's activities, you were branded as someone who opposed America and opposed the Bible - and you were someone who must believe in the rights of the immoral.

Next week: A Klansman gets away with murder. The Klan takes over virtually every elected post in government, leading citizens try to stop them and end their reign of terror. The Dallas Morning News is targeted for extinction, and the State Fair of Texas has the largest attendance ever when it starts inducting people into the Ku Klux Klan. Then, just as suddenly as the Klan came to power, it's over. We'll see why, in the end, America turned away from the so-called morality of the Ku Klux Klan.

The Ku Klux Klan had come to Dallas in late 1920, whipped their first victim, Alex Johnson, in April of 1921, and burned their

initials on his forehead with acid so no one would forget. Within a couple of years their membership rolls had swollen to 13,000. Each new member was handed the Ten Commandments and the Constitution - which, apparently, none of them ever read - as the Klan's guiding principles.

The Dallas Morning News had come out against the Klan. But the Times Herald's manager - just in case the Klan turned on them, hurting their advertising revenues - decided to take a more journalistic view of things.

And no individual in Dallas could come out against the Klan, for anyone who attempted to do so was publicly denounced as anti-American, anti-religious, anti-motherhood and immoral. That's if they weren't kidnapped, whipped, tarred and feathered.

But then came an incident after which the average citizen could remain silent no longer. In the spring of 1922, an African American was leaving the home and business of Phillip Rothblum, an Austrian who had lived in Dallas for over a decade, a picture framer by profession. J.J. Crawford, a 24-year-old Dallas Police officer and member of the Klan, attempted to shoot the "suspect," but missed, killing his partner, Leroy Wood.

Rothblum had witnessed the event; one month later, two men came to his door, saying they were police and asking him to come downtown. Not believing their story, he resisted; the struggle was so great that two of his teeth were knocked out. He was blindfolded, driven out of town and whipped, but during that beating his blindfold slipped - and he recognized one of his assailants as Dallas Police Officer J. J. Crawford. Rothblum was told he had to leave Dallas by 6:00 the next day; he was so frightened that he sold his business and moved within the time allotted.

But, before he left, the Times Herald interviewed him, noted the savage beating he had taken and then questioned the Dal-

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

las police, who claimed that it must have been neighbors, who objected to his immoral conduct. Two weeks later the Klan abducted Frank Etheredge, who ran a local lumberyard, took him to Hutchins, lectured him on his morality and whipped him.

District Attorney Maury Hughes, a Klansman himself, broke ranks and decided to try Officer Crawford for the shooting incident in front of Rothblum's home; they found Rothblum in St. Louis, and he returned for the trial. On the stand, Rothblum stated flatly that he knew Crawford well, and not just from the night he'd shot his partner dead; Rothblum had once sold him a picture that Crawford had never paid for, in spite of numerous attempts to collect.

The defense simply painted Rothblum as a man who paid Negroes and Mexicans to sleep with his wife, a man of low moral character. On the first ballot, the jury acquitted Crawford of the crime.

That was enough. Four hundred influential Dallas residents, led by former judge C.M. Smith Deal, came out against the Klan and told how they had infiltrated the Sheriff's and Police Departments. They allowed their names to be published in the papers, and the mayor was forced to demand that all city employees resign from the Klan immediately.

Governor Pat Neff sent a telegram suggesting that the Texas Rangers move into Dallas and clean up this mess, writing, "For some reason, your law-abiding people have been forced to bend their knees to the lawless element in your city." At an anti-Klan rally held in April at City Hall, 5,000 people attended, but the Klan's own newspaper, Texas 100 Percent American, called the meeting a bust.

This citizen action group took to speaking across North Texas against the Klan, though Richardson and Lancaster told them not to bother coming to their towns. But the Klan paper was right: In spite of 5,000 showing up to an anti-Klan rally, 100 citizens were said to be joining the Klan daily. Four days after the Dallas County Citizens League was formed, 2,300 new Klansmen were accepted; and that summer another 3,500 joined in a ceremony at Fair Park.

In the 1922 Democratic primary, the

Klan's candidates won every race and took control of the courthouse. With that, the Citizens League wilted away.

The Dallas Morning News continued to write about the Klan's crimes. The Klan in turn branded them a Catholic-owned paper. And in that action they betrayed the real truth: Yes, the Dallas Klan didn't just target blacks, they were after anyone they judged to be less moral, at least according to their version of morality. But more than anything else, they hated the Catholic Church.

And, because the Dallas Morning News had the guts to write the truth, it became the Klan's newest target. Letters flooded the paper demanding to know how many Catholics worked there; the Klan boycotted the paper's advertisers; businesses owned by the Klan canceled their ads.

Klan members canceled their subscriptions and threatened those who distributed the paper. The Morning News's cash on hand went from \$200,000 to nothing, yet George Dealey wouldn't budge: "Our conscience will not permit us to change front, even if 50% of our readers quit." The daughter of the late Col. A.H. Belo came to town for conferences on the problems, but the paper stood firm.

Then came the municipal elections of 1923, another landslide for all the Klan-endorsed candidates. Now they controlled virtually everything. The kidnappings, beating and threats continued.

But it would be unfair to discuss the Klan without mentioning their finest moment: They raised \$80,000 for the Hope Cottage, a home for abandoned children. In fact, it was often the charitable actions that the Klan members performed nationwide that gave them at least a degree of respectability; after all, they always denied their darker side.

Then came the State Fair's Ku Klux Klan day, which saw record-setting attendance. The rodeo performers wore their hoods and gowns; there was a football game between the Fort Worth and Dallas Klans and a speech on the Menace of Immigration. There were 25,000 people that weekend watching 5,600 men swear allegiance to the Cause.

And so it would seem that the self-anointed morality police, operating outside the law, torturing some people and lynch-

ing others, were at their peak. Decent people feared them. Anyone who suggested that they were the least likely to show the best side of what America stood for was targeted. The Klan's illegal activities were rarely investigated, and businessmen who didn't believe in the Klan's position saw their businesses targeted.

For three decades Dallas had been a city on the go, our civic leaders carefully planning their expansive vision of what Dallas could be; yet now, some of the city's civic leaders were found to be Klansmen. Others, such as Stanley Marcus' father, Ben Cabell, Alex Sanger, Leon Harris, George Dealey and Glenn Pricer, would stand up to them. Three years of a massive wave of enrollment, three years of torturing those they disapproved of - and suddenly, it was over.

There were many reasons. First, the Klan tried to get Felix Robertson elected governor and failed. The national media continued to write about the Klan's wave of terror; and the many decent citizen members, who had joined the Klan because they honestly did believe in morality and Americanism, started to realize that they didn't believe it as much when the Klan had no regard for the law.

The more respected business leaders quit first; they understood that the Klan was destroying the growth of the city - just as, in the sixties, our most famous outspoken conservatives were told to shut up after Kennedy's assassination, because it was hurting Dallas's image nationally. And so this story finally ended in 1925, when the head of the Klan in Indiana was convicted of abducting, drugging and raping his secretary, who committed suicide. The image of the Klan as moral leaders of the nation was blown apart.

Within the year the Dallas Klan, once thought to have had 13,000 members, watched membership rolls drop to 1,200. Meetings which had once hosted 3,500 Klansmen had to beg to get 150 to show up. They kept their office near Fair Park until 1929; with the death of the Klan and a restoration of real law and order, Dallas started growing again.

But, had it not been for George Dealey and the Dallas Morning News refusing to buckle under, who knows which direction Dallas might have taken?

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Humanists come out against bias

David A. Niose

AMERICANS UNITED

Rep. Pete Stark (D-Calif.) has come out of the closet, but not in the way we typically use the term. Stark, who, last fall, accepted the Harvard Humanist Chaplaincy's "Humanist of the Year" award, is the first congressman in history to openly acknowledge his atheism.

The lawmaker's public disclosure of non-belief comes at a time when books by so-called "New Atheist" authors - Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Tufts professor Daniel Dennett and Christopher Hitchens - are topping bestseller lists. Considering America's reputation for religiosity, this popular emergence of atheism and humanism is intriguing. A 2006 University of Minnesota poll found that atheists are the most distrusted group in America, ranking below gays, Muslims and recent immigrants. More Americans (48 percent)

would be unwilling to vote for an otherwise qualified atheist than any other group.

Stark's status as the only open atheist in Congress evidences the perceived public bias against nonbelievers. Representing a liberal Bay Area district, perhaps Stark sees little risk in stepping out as an atheist, but, to date, none of his colleagues are willing to join him. (The Secular Coalition for America, the group through which Stark came out, confirms that numerous other legislators have privately acknowledged their nonbelief, but the SCA will not "out" any of them without their consent). Somewhat like gays of a generation ago, atheists today are unlikely to suffer overt discrimination so long as their atheism is kept relatively private. But should one publicly express one's atheism, particularly in a political context (by objecting to government-sponsored prayer, for example), then the scorn of the majority will quickly be felt.

Historically, as a class, atheists cannot claim that the public's prejudice against them is as widespread, harsh or blatant as that experienced by racial minorities and women, but the distorted and irrational prejudice against atheists nonetheless runs deep and has a price. By exalting religiosity and scorning nonbelief, the public and the media help to validate the religious right and its agenda. Progressives should take interest in today's identity politics of atheists and humanists. Higher visibility for atheists and humanists can help to debunk the myth that nonbelievers are immoral and thereby weaken the religious right's claims of moral superiority. With religious fanaticism motivating terrorists abroad, and religious conservatism having an alarming impact on public policy at home, the nontheistic community sees the time as ripe for an emergence. As such, one must wonder whether Stark will be the sole congressional nontheist for long.

Our Local Atheists in Foxholes:

WWII & Korea:

James Hardwick (Ret), Navy

Korea:

Chris Gregory, Air Force

Viet Nam:

Randall Gorman (Ret), Air National Guard

Iraq:

Brian McIntosh (Ret), Marines

Shawn Ruzek, Marines

Deanne Dice

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.

SOCAS

Judge panel rules that coach's actions endorses religion

AMERICANS UNITED

The 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously rejected a legal challenge filed by Coach Marcus Borden of East Brunswick High School. Borden said he wanted to bow his head and "take a knee" with players before football games while allegedly voluntary prayers were recited by students.

The court, noting Borden's 23-year history of organizing and leading prayers with players, said his actions, would be construed by a neutral observer as promoting religion.

"Public schools have the right and responsibility to protect students from religious coercion," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Parents, not public school staff, have the right to determine what religious exercises, if any, their children take part in."

Borden's actions came under scrutiny

when parents complained about his prayer practices. At one point, the coach allegedly told athletes who did not want to participate in the prayers that they could wait in a bathroom. After some cheerleaders voiced concerns about Borden's promotion of religion, they were attacked and called obscene names on a student-run blog.

After a lower court ruled in Borden's favor, Americans United agreed to represent the East Brunswick Public Schools. AU Assistant Legal Director Richard B. Katskee argued the Borden v. School District of the Township of East Brunswick case before the 3rd Circuit.

The three-judge panel held that the school district's policy prohibiting staff participation in student prayer was not unconstitutional, rejecting Borden's claims that the policies violated his constitutional rights.

"We find that, based on the history of Borden's conduct with the team's prayers,

his acts cross the line and constitute an unconstitutional endorsement of religion," wrote Judge D. Michael Fisher. "Although Borden believes that he must continue to engage in these actions to demonstrate solidarity with his team, which is perhaps good for a football team's unity, we must consider whether a reasonable observer would perceive his actions as endorsing religion, not whether Borden intends to endorse religion."

Continued Fisher, "[I]n Borden's case, the conclusion we reach today is clear because he organized, participated in, and led prayer activities with his team on numerous occasions for twenty-three years. Thus, a reasonable observer would conclude that he is continuing to endorse religion when he bows his head during the pre-meal grace and takes a knee with his team in the locker room while they pray."

The appellate panel said the school policy on religion was necessary to ensure the separation of church and state.

Billboard – From page 1

At the same press conference, Margaret Downey of Pocopson, president of Atheist Alliance International, highlighted the positive results that occur when nontheists find each other and become involved with other like-minded individuals.

Sally J. Cramer, president of the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia, declared: "Atheist and agnostic Americans have been made to feel marginalized. It's time to change that. We're here and we have a place at the table."

"We want people to know there's a serious

and meaningful alternative to the religious right that has been dominating American religious discussion," Fox added. "After all, a lot of people are frustrated with the power that traditional faiths have wielded, and they don't know where to turn to find others who share that frustration. Now they will."

The billboard will be up for three months and is one of a series that will appear around the country, raising the public profile of humanists and freethinkers. The billboard is backed by an active Web site at www.PhillyCOR.org that sets forth the larger mission of the effort and offers ways that individuals can get involved. An

image of the billboard appears on the site, but people can also phone 1-800-NEW-REASON. Either way they will be able to learn more about the national and Philadelphia organizations behind the effort.

"Once people have phoned or logged on, they can go further to learn more or just stop right there," Cramer said. "No door-to-door evangelist will ever visit, and there are no pop-ups on the Web page. Our only aim is to reach those who really want to learn more."

The billboard is large and clear--20 feet tall by 60 feet wide--and strikingly easy to see on the right side of the roadway.

"You can't miss it," Cramer concluded.



SOCAS

Church leaders respond to call for end to pulpit politicking

American United
ROB BOSTON

The Alliance Defense Fund has announced a plan to persuade clergy to defy federal tax law and preach about candidates from the pulpit the weekend of Sept. 27-28.

The ADF claims that religious leaders are being gagged because they can't tell their congregants which candidates to vote for or against. As we've pointed out before, there are a number of problems with this claim. For starters, many people sitting in the pews aren't interested in receiving this type of advice from pastors. They can decide for themselves whom to vote for, thank you very much.

More importantly, most people don't go to a house of worship to receive a list of endorsed candidates. This might surprise the ADF, but most people go to a house of worship to get closer to God.

It's not surprising, therefore, that religious leaders are increasingly speaking out

against the ADF's crass stunt. J. Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, put it well when he told the Associated Press that partisan activity can "compromise the essential calling to spread the Gospel."

"The church can't raise a prophetic fist at a candidate or at a party when it's locked up in a tight bear hug with that candidate or party," Walker said.

Another prominent Baptist, Bruce Prescott of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists, told "Ethics Daily," the blog of the Baptist Center for Ethics, "Preachers who want to turn their churches into political action committees need to play by the same rules as all the other political action committees in our country. They need to give up their tax-exempt status. They should not expect American taxpayers to subsidize their political activities. Nobody gets a tax deduction when they make contributions to other political organizations."

Larry McSwain, professor of ethics and leadership at McAfee

School of Theology in Atlanta, agreed.

"The IRS rules are fair and nothing is more unfair than to scream for separation with one voice while asking for the benefits of government support with another," McSwain said. "Church members should give their money freely and without tax exemption if they want their pastor to be a partisan political voice."

Evangelical leader Os Guinness was also unimpressed by the ADF plan. Guinness told American Prospect blogger Sarah Posner that the ADF's campaign is "a sign of Christian weakness, not of strength." He referred to the time of Alexis de Tocqueville, a Frenchman who wrote about the power of evangelical churches in America in pre-Civil War America.

"Pastors did not need to politically engage, because they taught the Bible, and their lay people carried it out in public life....," Guinness said. "It's precisely because we have such a weakness of faith integrated

with life that you have to call pastors to actually electioneer....Good pastors can preach the entire Bible all the time without any constitutional problem."

We've pointed out before that polls show Americans overwhelmingly supporting the IRS regulations that curb pulpit-based partisan politicking. So who does the ADF speak for? Mostly, the power-mad TV preachers who founded the group and their Religious Right cohorts. It speaks for a band of pastors so deluded they actually believe Americans are burning to hear every pearl of partisan political wisdom that drops from their lips.

Thanks, but no thanks. Americans have no need for a band of scofflaw pastors breaking federal law, and most religious leaders are more than happy to abide by the IRS regulations. If the ADF insists on proceeding with this stunt, I suspect there will be little sympathy for the pastors foolish enough to go along with it.

Confab – From page 1

Common Law, etc. Many of these systems of law had religious components, but those features long ago were discarded in America, where separation of church and state is the law of the land.

Thus, in this country, you can worship a "false" god, make graven images to your heart's content, ignore the Sabbath, be jealous of your neighbor's cool stuff, diss your mother and father and take the Lord's name

in vain. The commandments that are reflected in our laws are common-sense things that all orderly societies ban: perjury, stealing, killing.

Secondly, Congress has probably shelved this resolution because it's a waste of time. There are more pressing things to deal with. Polls show Americans are worried about the economy, their jobs, gas prices, home mortgages and so on. The polls don't show people clamoring for a Ten Commandments Weekend.

The obsessions of the Religious Right don't make for good public policy. They are frequently parochial concerns that would either encourage government to impose a religious agenda or "symbolic" acts that have the effect of telling some Americans that they are little more than second-class citizens.

Leaders of Congress used to spend a lot of time tossing these bones to Murray and his ilk. They are no longer doing so, much to the benefit of our nation. Get over it, Bill.

Looking for speakers to discuss Atheism?

To arrange a speaking engagement, please email the Metroplex Atheist Director:

director@metroplexatheists.org

SOCAS

FFRF challenges state subsidy of child evangelism group

FFRF

The Madison, Wis.-based Freedom From Religion Foundation, a national organization of freethinkers working to keep church and state separate, today filed a lawsuit in Dane County Court seeking to force the school district in Rio, Wis., to charge rent to the Child Evangelism Fellowship Group. The evangelism group, part of an international bible-based Christian ministry seeking to convert boys and girls, regularly holds religious meetings targeting elementary students on school property at the end of the school day. The school district also sends home flyers publicizing the after-school evangelism.

The lawsuit was filed in the circuit courtroom of Michael Nowakowski, Dane County, Wis., case no. 08CV1861.

A Foundation parent asked the national watchdog group to complain on his behalf more than a year ago. The Foundation and its attorneys have engaged in protracted and fruitless negotiations with the public school district over its failure to abide by constitutional dictates.

Art. 1, Sect. 18 of the Wisconsin State Constitution, prohibits the appropriation of any money from the state treasury for the benefit of religious organizations. The section was amended in the early 1970s to allow public school buildings to be used by religious organizations during non-school hours, upon payment of "reasonable compensation."

The Foundation, along with taxpayer plaintiffs Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, Foundation co-presidents and Wisconsin residents, names as defendants Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent of Public Instruction (DPI), and Mark McGuire, district administrator of the Rio Community School District.

The legal Complaint alleges that money drawn from the Wisconsin state treasury and distributed by the DPI is being used unlawfully by local school districts for the benefit of religious organizations. The Complaint notes that the Rio Community School District "insists that it will not charge reasonable compensation . . . despite the challenging economic circumstances facing the District."

The Foundation Complaint points out that the distribution of religious literature directed to "children as young as 5 years old" is also being done with state appropriations. The distribution "requires the time and resources of paid school personal, who are trying to satisfy academic requirements with already limited resources."

"School-sponsored distributions of religious material carry the stamp of official endorsement and they constitute a benefit to religious organizations, which rely on school districts to freely promote their activities," wrote attorney Rich Bolton in the complaint.

The lawsuit seeks a judgment declaring that the appropriations by the DPI are being used unconstitutionally, and for an order enjoining the defendants from continuing to disburse or use such appropriations in violation of the Wisconsin Constitution. The Foundation also seeks an order requiring the defendants to establish rules, standard and oversight to ensure that future appropriations are not made or used to support religious organizations in violation of the Wisconsin Constitution.



ATHEISTS ARE COMING TO A RESTAURANT NEAR YOU

Since you can't come to a Metroplex Atheist event, why not have Metroplex Atheist events come to you?

We now have a Metroplex Atheists Meet-up Group on www.meetup.com. Over the years we've had many folks lament that they couldn't come to a MA social event because of time/location of our normal Wednesday get together.



Why not start one of your own?

If you have a good meeting place and you're willing to show up to be somewhat of a host, then just contact Metroplex Atheists and we can put an announcement out on the web.

All it takes is for you to say, "Hey, why don't we meet at X?" and show up!

We'd like to have a number of social groups that meet informally (because, let's face it, the business meetings are only just so much fun). The real fun lies in meeting other like minded people.

Where do YOU want to meet up?

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 – 2:00 PM
Place: TBA

Social Meetings

DALLAS / PLANO ATHEIST MEETUP DAY:

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

MA ATHEIST MEETUP:

What: 'My dinner with Atheists,' social time with a bunch of heathens
Date: 2nd, 3rd, 4th, (& 5th) Wednesday
Time: 6:30 PM – 9:00 PM

Place: J. Gilligan's Bar & Grill (Meet on the grill side)
 400 E. Abram Street
 Arlington, TX

MA ATHEIST MEETUP:

What: 'My dinner with Atheists,' social time with a bunch of heathens
Date: 1st Wednesday of the Month
Time: 6:30 PM – 9:00 PM
Place: Blue Danube
 2230 West Park Row
 Pantego, TX

INFIDEL'S BASH - SUMMER SOLSTICE PARTY

What: Join us for a fun and food with fellow atheists.
Date: TBA
Time: TBA
Place: TBA, <http://www.metroplexatheists.org>

To have your events listed email:

The Atheist Voice Editor at
editor@metroplexatheists.org



TEMPTED?
www.metroplexatheists.org

May 2008

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

June 2008

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

July 2008

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

***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
 7100 Boulevard 26 , Suite 304
 Richland Hills, TX 76180

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?