

THE ATHEIST VOICE

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE METROPLEX ATHEISTS
MARCH 2008, VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2

SOCAS

Lawsuit over prayer at graduation ceremonies in Texas is settled

AMERICANS UNITED

A Texas public school district and Americans United for Separation of Church and State have settled a lawsuit involving a policy that allowed students to vote on prayer at graduation ceremonies.

The settlement follows a ruling by U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks that found the Constitution prohibits public schools from holding student votes on whether to have prayers during commencement.

Judge Sparks approved today a settlement between Americans United and the Round Rock Independent School District that provides, in part, that the school district may not hold or conduct any student elections on including prayer or other religious communications at graduation ceremonies.

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United, applauded the settlement.

“Religious liberty is too precious to subject to a majority-rules vote,” said Lynn. “This lawsuit was designed to prevent school officials from meddling in what



ought to be personal religious matters.”

Although Sparks dismissed some portions of Americans United’s lawsuit on behalf of Round Rock parents and students, he agreed that the charge of constitutional rights violations could proceed. Sparks, however, strongly urged both par-

ties to settle the case.

The settlement in *Does v. Round Rock Independent School District* also provides that Sparks retains the power to enforce the school district’s promise not to conduct or

Continued on page 7

PUBLIC RELATIONS

War of the Billboards: “Imagine No Religion” shows its power

AMERICANS UNITED

It is hard to credit how one little freethought billboard could create such insecurity by religionists! The Freedom From Religion Foundation’s pretty billboard, with its wistful, John Lennon-inspired message, “Imagine No Religion,” has been attacked by not just one, but two billboards in Chambersburg, Penn. The Foundation image was placed in December for six months in three rotating spots in Chambersburg, Penn., thanks to the generosity of a Chambersburg-area Foundation member seeking to make a

freethought statement in a religion-drenched area.

The first salvo came from the billboard company itself. After moving the Foundation’s billboard to its second contracted site, the company put up its own billboard message repudiating our “Imagine No Religion” billboard. Kegerreis Outdoor Advertising’s own billboard, in capital letters, states: “In God We Trust.” The company then had the bad manners to add this disclaimer:

“The previous sign posted at this location does not reflect the values or morals of our company”!

The saleswoman, apparently feeling local heat for accepting the billboard, told the area newspaper, *Public Opinion*, that she had been “deceived” into believing the Madison, Wis.-based Freedom From Religion Foundation is a local church! Given our up front name and our up front message (and our Wisconsin address), the Foundation could hardly “deceive” anyone that it is actually a stealth Pennsylvania church, even if we had tried (which, needless to say, we didn’t). The newspaper has said it will run a story quoting the Foundation’s response

Continued on page 9

THE BACKSIDE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Empires Lost

ED WALLACE

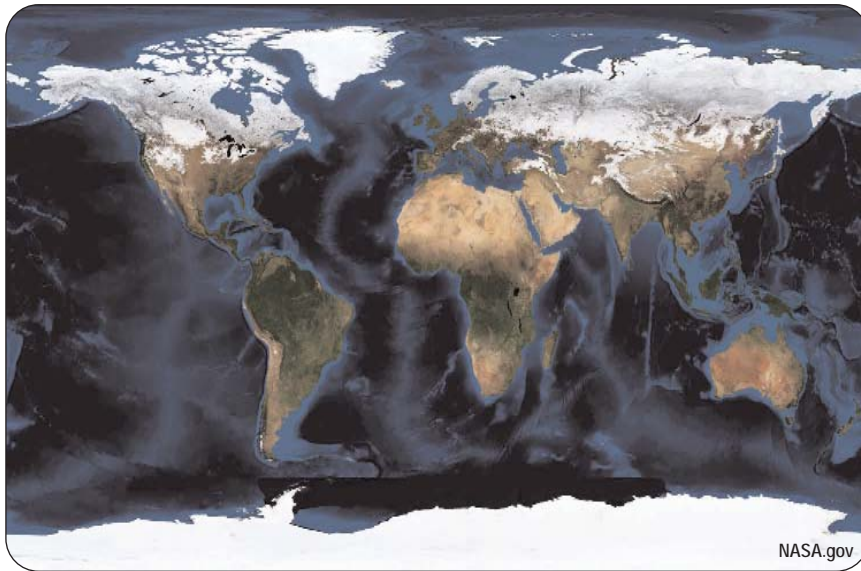
If a history book written 100 years in the future were brought back through time, we might read in it something like this: “If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world when the condition of the human race was at its most happy and prosperous, and the empire fell, which period would it be?”

In such a history book from the future, here’s how one great and wealthy nation fell. We know because in its end days, one of its citizens wrote this and left it behind. “The middle class of people were squeezed out of existence, due to ever increasing taxes in order to maintain roads, public works and welfare, and for an ever stronger military to protect their assets both at home and abroad. Farmers also lost their existence, finding it impossible to make a living growing and selling crops. “Yet in this time of prosperity for virtually everyone, a time like nothing the world had never known before, more poor people than ever came to depend on the nation to provide for their most basic needs.

“There were demands on the local cities to build more highways and better water systems, demands that municipalities spend their taxpayers’ money to build more and more stadiums, so the populace could have its sports and be entertained. The citizens, once voracious readers, rarely borrowed a book from their libraries anymore.

“A populace that had once known true political freedom threw it all away in order to feel security in their world – the security to enjoy their material goods. “A radical religion and its followers were flooding out of the Middle East, trying to destroy

this nation’s belief in its deity; and at the earth’s far corners, terrorist attacks against the nation became virtually constant. Ever more taxes were funneled into military forces that had to keep growing, though in time even the world’s largest military force couldn’t stop attacks growing daily in volume and ferocity. “And that nation fell from greatness, never to rise again.”



Sound familiar? It should, but I’m not talking about America, I’m paraphrasing from the book, *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. That radical religion coming out of the Middle East was not the Islamic faith, it was Christianity – and the terrorists attacking the Empire included the Jewish Zealots to the east, the German barbarians to the north and the Scots in Britain. Hence the reason Rome built Hadrian’s Wall – to keep the Scots off their backs in England.

This isn’t strictly a story about American history, but maybe you’ll agree that it’s related. I went looking for the world’s former empires, powerful nations, each in its time the superpower that America is today, to find out exactly why they crumbled. Here’s the scary part: It’s virtually the same story, every time.

The empire’s name doesn’t matter. In the Roman Empire, Ottoman Empire, Byzantine, French, Spanish, Russian and, most

recently, the British Empire, the basics are virtually the same. Along the way, I found a few surprises. This was one: Which empire was the world’s most powerful in the 16th century? That’s right, during the same period as the original colonies in America – which were Spanish, by the way. Most would probably would have said the British Empire. But I would have been wrong: It was the Ottoman, and it had spread across much of Eastern Europe by then, although the Moors had been defeated in Spain by that time. The Ottoman Empire was the first to stay popular by determining which policies were being taken well and which ones it should soft-pedal... by polling the public.

And another surprise. Are you of a Protestant faith? Well, if you haven’t hugged a Muslim today, you should. According to scholars of history, if it hadn’t been for the Muslim conquest of many parts of Europe, we’d all be Catholic. Why? Because the Catholic Church was the avowed enemy of the Ottoman Muslims. At that same time, the Protestant religions were breaking away from the Church’s corruption, cruelty and endless greed. And it was the Ottoman Empire’s money with which new countries, primarily made up of anyone who wouldn’t kiss the Pope’s ring, stayed alive long enough to become self-supporting. Many historians believe that our separatist Christian faiths couldn’t have survived with the protection and financial backing of the Ottomans. This early form of foreign aid kept a potentially hostile country – and the enemy of your enemy – on your side.

Of course, the Ottoman Empire fell, but it lasted until the end of the First World War, when the Allies defeated the Turks in the

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.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Research indicates decrease in religious affiliations

Flashline

AMERICAN ATHEIST

Americans who embrace no particular religious faith can take comfort from a new survey released by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life which takes stock of current demographics about American beliefs. American Atheists President Ellen Johnson said that the results of the new study show that those unaffiliated with religious groups and ideology now represent 16.1% of the population.

“Many of these people consider themselves to be skeptics when it comes to religion, and use terms like Atheist, Freethinker, Humanist, Bright, Rationalist or some other label to describe their lifestyle and personal philosophy,” said Johnson.

“The study indicates that the segment of Americans ‘unaffiliated with any particular religion’ has grown faster than any other category.”

The survey of 35,000 adults find that Protestantism is on the brink of becoming

“a minority religion,” and that faith groups are competing for followers in a “competitive market place.” More than 1/4 of American believers have abandoned their childhood religious beliefs in search of something else.

“We’re encouraged that as a group non-religious Americans are thriving, and that more believers are obviously questioning the dogmas of their religion and starting to think for themselves.”

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, said that the study confirms the growing diversity of the American religious landscape, and the need for government to remain neutral in respect to religion.

“Record numbers of people seem to be questioning their faith. The best response from government is to treat religious belief as a private affair, not favor one religion over another, and not favor religion over non-religion.”

Results of the survey can be found: <http://www.pewforum.org>

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**

Empire – From page 2

desert. And yes, the Muslims in Bosnia that we protect today are the last remnants of the Ottomans. That enlightened empire – which once ruled European capitals, controlled most of the world's trade lanes and enjoyed unimaginable wealth – fell just like the Romans, for the same reasons; they just took longer to do it. Again, it was uprisings at the far corners of their empire. While they never recovered, today they are a member of NATO. As I recall, it was terrorist attacks against the Spanish in the Caribbean and the Philippines that drained that country's treasuries; we finished off the Spanish Empire just 104 years ago. By the way, most history books don't use the term "terrorist attack" to define battles against empires. History recalls those incidents as peasant uprisings, or guerilla warfare. Same thing.

While I don't want to say that what I've uncovered is the entire story – it will take a year to digest it all – it is amazing that there are so many commonalities to the end of days for each one of those empires.

Great wealth for the nation, ever larger militaries to protect that wealth, a formerly well read and informed population grown apathetic, demanding to be entertained. A swollen government growing ever larger, spawning a bloated bureaucracy, and the public demanding that the state do more and more for citizens. And finally, attacks against the empire in which the public surrenders political freedoms and civil rights in return for promised security – culminating in crushing debt, caused by over-taxa-

tion to meet all the empire's citizens' demands.

Yes, at the height of all those problems, peasants – terrorists, today – attack the empires at their most far-flung, most difficult to defend locations around the globe. And those attacks become relentless. Scary, huh? The Jews, Scots and Germans fight the Romans; the Spanish and Italians, among others the Ottomans; Kenyans, Indians and South Africans take on Britain, which loses her colonies. Spain gets run out of the New World, Peter the Great's Russia collapses, France loses all of its colonies – well, you get the idea.

It should also be pointed out that most of these empires' military forces did well when confronted by another nation's armies. But against peasants who'd had enough of a foreign power's telling them what to do, they didn't fare so well.

I have no conclusions today on this story. It's merely a cautionary observation taken from history. One that no one else has brought up to you, so I thought I would.

But I will bring up one last point: These empires fell because the hardliners in each of their societies were given free reign – but it wasn't the hardliners' fault they went too far. Nor was it the fault of the intellectuals, or liberals as we call them today. It seems that often it happened when the voice of the moderates, all those many in the middle, fell silent – when they forced little, if any, debate to take place on what to do. And that may be the real reason that great empires have so consistently fallen throughout history: The voice of the average man was silenced – by the average man himself.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Atheist / Baptist dialog initiated in Grand Prairie

Terry McDonald

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

Metroplex Atheists were invited to attend a Christian/Atheist Dialog at Summit Baptist Church in Grand Prairie on Feb.9, 2008. The dialog was conducted mostly in a question and answer format with Pastor Derward Richardson, PhD asking questions and Terry McDonald, Metroplex Atheist Chairman, answering.

Pastor Richardson's reason for initiating the event was to allow his congregation to hear an atheist defend his reasons for rejecting supernatural beliefs. Pastor Richardson believes that atheists are able to defend their positions more rationally than most Christians and he wanted his congregants to learn how to become more rational when defending their beliefs.

Terry's purpose for participating in the event was to demonstrate to a number of practicing Baptists that atheists are normal, moral, people, different only in their rejection of the supernatural world.

Many members of Metroplex Atheists attended the event along with members of the North Texas Church of Freethought. Zachary Moore, PhD, of that church made a video of the dialog which can be viewed on his website: www.drzach.net

The event was about two hours long with a break after the first hour when the hosts served delicious buffet refreshments. The cordial interaction between the Christian hosts and the atheist visitors, at the break and after the event, indicated that the goals of both groups were met.

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

COLUMN

Robert Skolrood: Reflections on life and how not to live it

Rob Boston

AMERICANS UNITED

We get only one shot at this life, and it is a shame that some people choose to use theirs pursuing schemes to take away the rights of others.

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. Equally tragic is living your life in a constant state of inner turmoil.

I thought about this recently after reading an obituary in *The New York Times*. The obituary was for a man named Robert Skolrood. The name was familiar to me, but I have to admit I hadn't heard it in awhile.

Back in the mid-1980s, TV preacher Pat Robertson decided he wanted a form a legal group that would press his crabbed vision of church-state relations in the courts. He put together something called the National Legal Foundation and tapped Skolrood to run it. For whatever reason, Skolrood and Robertson did not get along, and Robertson soon abandoned the group. A few years later, Robertson founded a much more prominent legal organization called the American Center for Law and Justice.

The National Legal Foundation stumbled

on post-Robertson, pushing the Religious Right's agenda in the courts. Skolrood argued in favor of religious displays on government property and sought to remove books from the public schools for allegedly promoting "secular humanism."

Like many of his Religious Right cohorts, Skolrood was rabidly homophobic and sought to curtail the rights of gay people. He helped draft a Colorado constitutional amendment curbing gay rights that was later struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court. Similarly, Skolrood helped write a Cincinnati City Charter provision denying gays certain rights.

How shocking it was, then, to read in the obituary that Skolrood was arrested in 2002 at a well-known gay cruising spot after making advances toward a male undercover officer. Skolrood was accused of exposing himself and grabbing the genitals of a Roanoke County police detective working undercover at an overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Skolrood denied the charges but pleaded no contest to a charge of disorderly conduct and agreed to pay a \$125 fine. The *Roanoke Times* reported that during the trial, Magistrate Judge Glen Conrad told Skolrood, "That area has been notorious for problems of an unsavory sort. There's

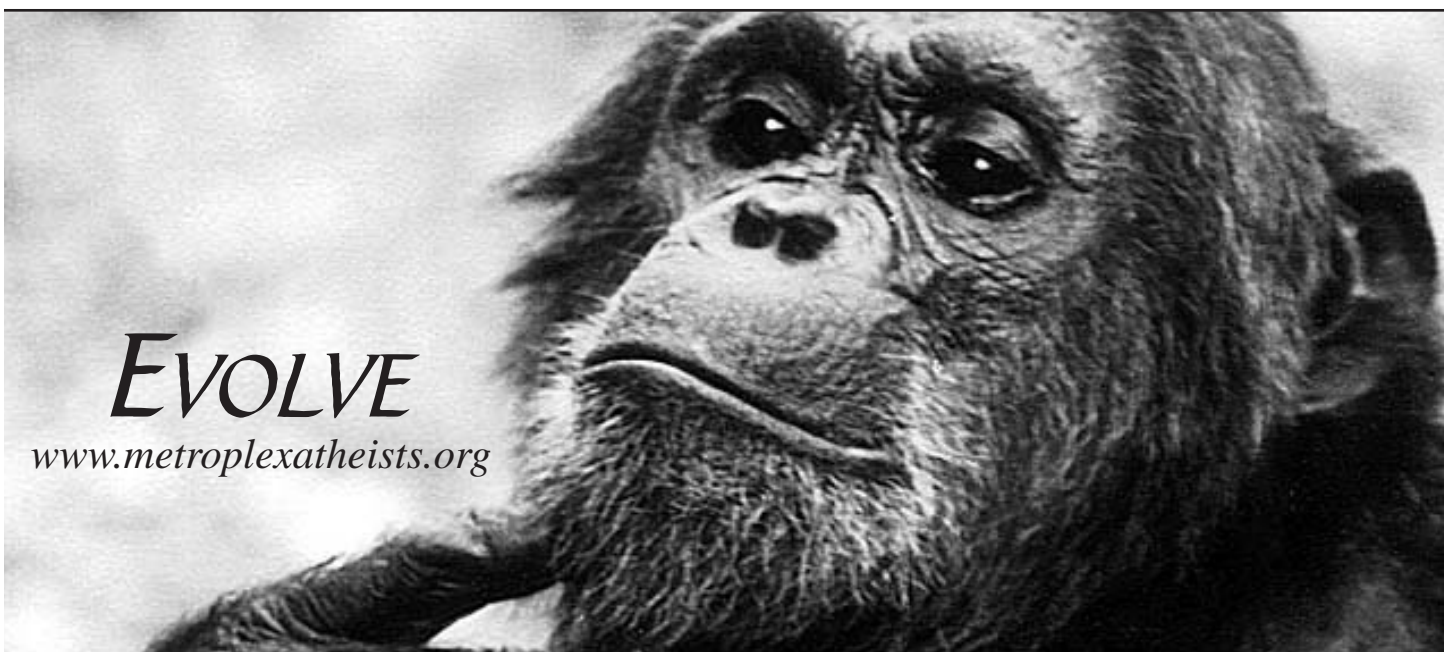
no question that you shouldn't have been there."

But perhaps I should not have been so shocked. How many times have we heard this story before? One of the saddest things about politically charged Christian fundamentalism is that it forces some people into a box. That box is tiny, cramped and dark. It allows no lights or truth to enter. It denies introspection. It forces people to live a lie.

Reading Skolrood's obituary, one gets the sense of an individual who dedicated his life to seeking ways to use the raw power of the state to promote a harsh and intolerant brand of Christianity. That is bad enough. We get only one shot at this life, and it is a shame that some people choose to use theirs pursuing schemes to take away the rights of others.

To live that way is indeed a wasted life. It is worse than what Socrates warned us against, because such a life is consciously examined but deliberately put on the wrong road anyway. It is a life of self-loathing and lashing out at others because of an inability to reconcile what one is with what an extreme theology demands one should be.

Better an unexamined life than one so sadly squandered.



SOCAS

Suit aims to allow pharmacies to use religious belief to withhold prescriptions

AMERICANS UNITED

A Washington State Board of Pharmacy regulation that requires pharmacies to dispense all medications in a timely manner does not trample on religious freedom rights and should be upheld, Americans United for Separation of Church and State has told a federal appeals court.

Attorneys with Americans United filed a friend-of-the-court brief in a case pending before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit. In the brief, AU asks the appellate panel to send the decision back to the district court for consideration.

“Allowing pharmacists to put their religious beliefs between doctors and patients is a prescription for disaster,” said Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans

United. “These regulations are simply designed to make sure that pharmacists do the job they are paid to do.”

The Washington pharmacy board acted after several incidents came to light in Washington and other states of pharmacists refusing to fill prescriptions for birth control pills, emergency contraception and other medications.

In its brief, AU notes that the state’s pharmacy regulations accommodate objecting pharmacists. A pharmacist can, for example, pass a prescription along to a colleague at the same store.

The AU brief asserts that the regulation does not single out religious beliefs, noting that some pharmacists have refused to fill prescriptions for reasons that have nothing to do with religion. Requiring pharmacies

to fill prescriptions in a timely manner is a neutral regulation that does not single out religious beliefs for negative treatment, AU says.

“Given the Board’s broad intent to preclude all personal objections from impeding access to medications, it is no surprise that the regulations do not target religious conduct for unfavorable treatment,” reads the brief. “A pharmacy owner whose personal objection to dispensing a drug is based on his religion is treated no differently than a pharmacy owner whose personal objection to dispensing is motivated by secular concerns.”

Americans United filed the brief in the *Stormans, Inc. v. Selecky* case in conjunction with the American Humanist Association.

Our Local Atheists in Foxholes:

WWII & Korea:

James Hardwick (Ret), Navy

Korea:

Chris Gregory, Air Force

Iraq:

Brian McIntosh (Ret), Marines

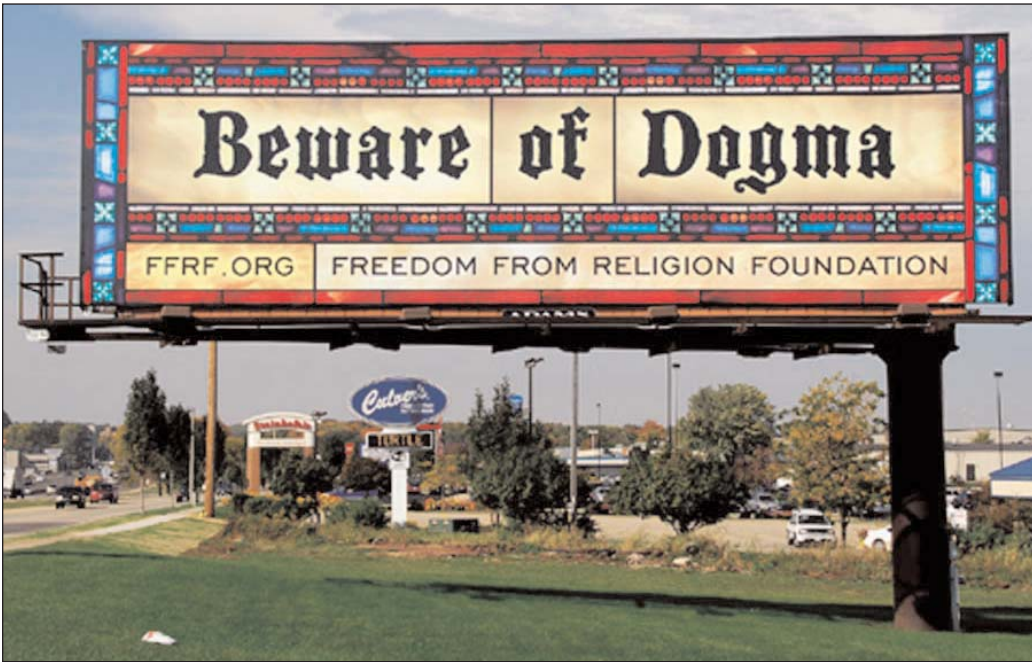
Shawn Ruzek, Marines

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.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

“Beware of Dogma” billboard design wins Addy Award

A “Beware of Dogma” billboard designed with a stained-glass motif last fall for the Freedom From Religion Foundation won an “Addy” award for Adams Outdoor Company in late February.

“Congratulations for this well-deserved award to the talented graphic artist and the wonderful team we worked with at the Adams Outdoor Co.,” said Foundation co-presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, based in Madison, Wis., is a national association of freethinkers (atheists, agnostics) that has been working since 1978 to keep church and state separate.

Graduation – From page 1

lead further student elections on prayer at graduation ceremonies. Round Rock officials could hold such elections only if certain future court decisions specifically permit school districts to conduct student votes on prayer at graduation.

Americans United filed the lawsuit last August, challenging the district’s policy of allowing seniors to vote on whether to include prayer in graduation ceremonies. In 2007, students at three of the district’s four high schools voted in favor of prayer. Americans United charged in its lawsuit

that school officials organized, oversaw, and attempted to manipulate the votes on whether to include prayer.

Sparks noted in his ruling that the Supreme Court has forbidden schools to impose prayers through student elections. He rejected arguments by the school district that graduations are not covered by this rule, explaining that a federal appellate decision allowing student-voted prayer at graduations has been overruled by the Supreme Court.

Attorneys at Americans United were pleased that a settlement in the case was reached.

“Our goal all along was to prevent students from being subjected to religious exercises based on the will of a majority,” said Ayesha N. Khan, Americans United legal director. “Today’s settlement ensures that Round Rock will not be facilitating a process that abridges students’ religious liberty rights through a ‘majority rules’ vote.”

In addition to Khan, the lawsuit was litigated by Senior Litigation Counsel Alex J. Luchenitser, Litigation Counsel Heather L. Weaver and Madison Fellow Jessica L. Wolland of Americans United, and Texas civil rights attorney Robert F. Andrews.



SOCAS

ACLU sues Louisiana school board – again

Rob Boston

AMERICANS UNITED

There are certain things you can count on. The sun will rise in the east and set in the west. Old Faithful will erupt. And, every few years, the American Civil Liberties Union will sue the Tangipahoa Parish School Board in Louisiana.

The members of this board seem to be having difficulty grasping the concept of separation of church and state. It's a long-running problem. For some reason, school board members don't seem to understand that their job is to oversee the education of young people, not meddle in their religious lives.

In the 1990s, the ACLU sued the board on behalf of anonymous plaintiffs who were upset over prayer policies in the schools. Parents complained that youngsters were routinely pressured to take part in prayers at football games and other school events. In one case, a football coach instructed the players to bow their heads, touch someone

nearby and recite the Lord's Prayer.

The ACLU won that case. A few years later, the board got the bright idea to paste a disclaimer in its science books, warning the kids about evolution. The board lost that one, too.

Now the board is back in court again. This time, the issue is prayer before board meetings. In August 2007, the board adopted a policy stating that clergy from "religious congregations with an established presence in the local community" will be invited to give invocations prior to school board meetings. The board president gets to decide who makes the cut, essentially giving him veto power over the prayers.

"Yet again the Tangipahoa Parish School Board has indicated that it favors some residents over others, and would rather waste taxpayer money on litigation than follow the law," Marjorie R. Esman, Executive Director of the ACLU Foundation of Louisiana, said in a press release. "The Constitution does not permit school boards to endorse or

promote religion, because the government must remain neutral to religion. The Tangipahoa Parish School Board is well aware of this bedrock legal principle, but chooses to flout the law rather than to obey it."

This new lawsuit marks the seventh time the ACLU has sued the Tangipahoa board. Many of the lawsuits have been filed on behalf of anonymous plaintiffs. They fear reprisal if their names were made public.

Located northwest of New Orleans across Lake Pontchartrain, Tangipahoa Parish is a thin sliver of land with a population of about 113,000. According to its Web site, the parish was created in 1869 by taking land from four surrounding parishes. Its slogan, prominently featured on the site, is, "More than a great place to live."

Hmmmm. It can't be that great, since the parish school board seems intent on violating citizens' constitutional rights. If the parish wants to live up to that slogan, it has some work to do. It can start by getting its public schools out of the religion business.

SOCAS

IRS asked to investigate Houston church that endorsed Congressional Candidate

AMERICANS UNITED

Americans United for Separation of Church and State today asked the Internal Revenue Service to investigate a Houston church whose pastor issued a letter of endorsement for a congressional candidate.

In a letter to IRS officials, Americans United says that Steve Riggle, pastor of Grace Community Church, may have violated federal tax law by endorsing U.S. House of Representatives candidate Shelley Sekula Gibbs.

"Clergy may endorse candidates as private citizens," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans

United. "That's not what happened here. Riggle's endorsement letter twice identifies him as senior pastor of Grace Community Church, conveying the clear message that the church supports Gibbs' campaign."

Riggle's letter of endorsement was widely distributed by the campaign and carries the line, "Paid by and authorized by the Shelley Sekula Gibbs for Congress Campaign Committee."

In the letter, Riggle calls on people to vote for Gibbs, writing, "I have pastored in the 22nd District for 24 years. It is not often I endorse a candidate for office. I want to know if they represent my values. I have thoroughly discussed the issues of life, marriage and family with Shelley over

the years.... I'm convinced that Shelley has the experience, knowledge and values that fully prepare her to meet the challenges we confront in Washington, D.C."

In a letter to the IRS, Americans United Executive Director Barry W. Lynn wrote, "Nowhere in the letter does Riggle state that he is speaking as a private citizen. The letterhead twice identifies him as senior pastor of Grace Community Church. No attempt is made to distance the church from this endorsement. Although the IRS permits pastors to endorse candidates as private citizens, it cautions that pastors must not do so in their official capacity as congregational leaders."

Looking for speakers to discuss Atheism?

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

director@metroplexatheists.org

Billboard – From page 1

to this absurd allegation.

Smelling publicity (and a chance to raise money), an obscure religious group in Virginia next jumped into the fray, erecting a billboard in the Chambersburg area showing an obedient little girl in front of an enormous flag, which screams out the question: “Why Do Atheists Hate America?” Their website’s inflammatory statement reads:

“The nation’s largest atheist group wants you to imagine a world without the Pledge of Allegiance, without faith, without patriotism, and without America as we know it. However, In God We Trust is standing up to them with a new advertising campaign that exposes how much the radical Atheist movement hates America and everything our nation stands for.” (Their statement subtly ends with a “Donate” button!)

To its great credit, Public Opinion, the Chambersburg daily, editorialized that the religious group’s defensive billboard “goes a bit overboard.” As the editorial

observed, “the group’s obvious desire to one-up the ‘Imagine’ sign—which made no judgments and specified no belief systems—[was revealed] with a judgmental, inflammatory and inherently unprovable attack upon atheists’ patriotism.

“Imagine no religion. We would be that much closer to creating a paradise on earth if we could get rid of the baggage of superstition and religion”

So while we support In God We Trust’s right to expression, that doesn’t preclude us from exercising our own right to characterize this particular message as manipulative pandering and craven defensiveness. We seriously doubt the religious of Franklin County are so insecure in their beliefs as to need this kind of reinforcement, so this strikes us more as simple playground taunting.

“What happened to turning the other cheek, anyway?”

The head of the religious organization responded with a letter to the Public Opinion trying to defend its billboard by saying: “How is ‘Imagine No Religion’ different from ‘Imagine No Christians’ or ‘Imagine No Jews’?” How dishonest. Our billboard does not say “Imagine No Religionists” or “Imagine No Christians,” or imply any threat.

It simply says: Imagine no religion. We would be that much closer to creating a paradise on earth if we could get rid of the baggage of superstition and religion. Instead of investing our best energies—misdirecting them—to religion and to an unknown god, a god that does not exist, we could put all of our energies into this world, and into making this world a better place.

It’s fascinating that both rebutting billboards turned to the motto “In God We Trust,” misguidedly adopted by Congress in the 1950s as a national motto. To be accurate, the motto “In God We Trust” should really read “In God Some of Us Trust.” The true harm of its adoption is the hateful treatment of the nonreligious that it inspires by excluding those of us who are nonreligious from “We the People.” Such exclusion disenfranchises America’s nonreligious, and makes us easy targets of theocrats who tie good citizenship to belief in a god.

The laughable overreaction to our simple sign, “Imagine No Religion,” shows that we are on to something, something which clearly can shake up religionists and make the public think. The first step in freeing the world from dogma is to be able to imagine a world without it. We look forward to taking our freethinking billboard campaign around the country!

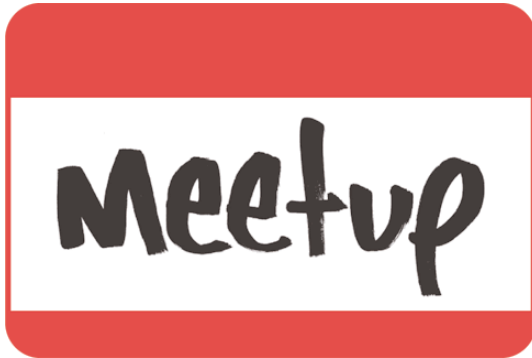


TEMPTED?
www.metroplexatheists.org

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

THE 34TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN ATHEISTS:

What: Join us for a weekend of workshops, panels, talks by noted speakers and other activities. Minneapolis is also one of the premier tourism destinations in this part of the nation, so you'll want to consider making your Conference visit an extended weekend.
Date: March 21–23, 2008
Time: TBA
Place: Minneapolis, MN
<http://www.atheists.org/conference>

To have your events listed email:
The Atheist Voice Editor at
editor@metroplexatheists.org

Are you searching for Atheists in the metroplex?

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

March 2008

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

April 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Atheist Meetup Day	2 Blue Danube	3	4	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			

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

***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?