

# THE ATHEIST VOICE

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE METROPLEX ATHEISTS  
MARCH 2006, VOLUME 4, NUMBER 2

## SOCAS

# Legion campaigns for bill limiting establishment clause

## Flashline

### AMERICAN ATHEIST

Meeting recently in Washington, DC for its annual convention, the American Legion said that it would launch a new effort on behalf of H.R. 2679, the 'Public Expression of Religion Act.' The proposed statute, introduced in March, 2005 by Rep. James Hostettler (R-IN), would amend Section 42 of the United States Code. The introduction states:

'To amend the Revised Statutes of the United States to eliminate the chilling effect on the constitutionally protected expression of religion by State and local officials that results from the threat that potential litigants may seek damages and attorney's fee.'

Under Section 2 of PERA, the bill provides:

'(b) The remedies with respect to a claim under this section where the deprivation consists of a violation of prohibition in the Constitution against

the establishment of religion shall be limited to injunctive relief.'

'(b) Attorneys Fees - Section 722(b) of the Revised Statutes of the United States (42 USC 1988) is amended by adding at the end of the following: 'However, no fees shall be awarded under this subsection with respect to a claim described in subsection (b) of section nineteen hundred and seventy nine.'

The legislation would amend the Civil Rights Attorney Fees Act to stop courts from awarding legal fees or damages to any individual or group which successfully brings suit under the Establishment of Religion clause of the First Amendment. Supporters of the measure argue that organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union have reaped enormous compensation from such actions, costs which are ultimately paid by taxpayers. They add that the mere threat of

*Continued on page 5*



ACLU

The court decision involving the removal and payment of legal fees for the removal of the cross placed in Mohave National Preserve as a veteran memorial 1934, has sparked the American Legion's push for eliminating awarded damages and legal fees.

## SOCAS

# New group fights for religious freedom for those in uniform

## Rob Boston

### AMERICANS UNITED

Albuquerque businessman Mikey Weinstein yesterday announced the launch of a new non-profit group called the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF).

Weinstein's son, Curtis, attends the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. Curtis Weinstein reported incidents of anti-Semitism and official bias toward evangelical forms of Christianity to his father. While investigating the matter, Mikey Weinstein uncovered troubling evidence of a too-close-for-comfort relationship between branches of the

military and Religious Right-style evangelicals. (See 'Kingdom of Heaven?' June 2005 Church & State.)

Weinstein, an Americans United member, was further angered when the Air Force, under pressure from Religious Right groups, backed away from guidelines that would have cleared up some questions about proselytizing by chaplains and superior officers. To rectify matters, Weinstein says his new group will work full time to make certain that religious and philosophical freedom is respected in the military.

A press release from the group reads, 'The Military Religious Freedom Foundation will serve as a watchdog organi-

zation - educating the public and the media on issues related to the separation of church and state within the Armed Forces, and litigating when necessary.'

The release quotes Weinstein as saying, 'I created the Military Religious Freedom Foundation so that others could join in the fight to assure that our Armed Forces preserve the Constitutional guarantee of the separation of church and state and ensure that junior officers and enlisted personnel are protected from coercive proselytizing and evangelizing by their superiors.'

He adds, 'The Military Religious Free-

*Continued on page 7*

## THE BACKSIDE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

# The Voice of the People's Freedom

ED WALLACE

His name was Benny Bache, and he died so you and I could enjoy a free press. What's more important, Benny's story shows that in the past two hundred years nothing has really changed in this country, other than our guaranteed freedoms.

Benny Bache was born in the Colonies. As a young man, he lived in Europe for nine years and was educated in the finest French and Swiss schools.

In 1790 his beloved grandfather died, leaving Benny a printing press as part of his inheritance. Benny, against the advice of friends who suggested he become a book publisher, decided instead to edit his own Philadelphia newspaper. First, he called it the General Advertiser, then the Aurora General Advertiser and then simply the Aurora.

It was a good decision, for within the year the Bill of Rights was officially adopted. And its first provision was that Congress should make no law abridging the freedom of speech or of the press. There was a small problem. Although Bache was the darling of Philadelphia's upper-crust society and had an impeccable Revolutionary heritage, he didn't care much for the presidency of George Washington. Bache accused him of wasting public funds, nepotism, treating the office of the Presidency more like a monarchy and needlessly seeking war against France.

More and more, Benny found himself believing in Thomas Jefferson's view of how this nation should be built. Benny would write of Washington's administration, 'All governments are more or less combinations against the people, and as rulers have no more virtue than the ruled.'

Things became more heated for Benny when Washington showed neutrality in the war between England and France in 1793. After all, Benny reasoned in print, wasn't it not too long ago that France came to our rescue in our own Revolution against England, and without them wouldn't we still be a colony? Benny also defended the rights of the average Frenchman during their revolution, claiming that tyrants should be overthrown.

It might have had some effect; Washington refused to run for a third term. And, in his final speech to the nation, Washington said, 'We should not have excessive partiality for one foreign nation and excessive dislike of another.'

And with that, Washington was gone and John Adams was in. That only made things worse for Benny, who immediately launched what he felt were justifiable attacks on Adams's love of the pomp and circumstance and the grandeur of the office. Of course, in his anger at Adams, Benny was setting up Adam's defenders, the Federalist newspapers, to take on Jefferson, calling him a coward in the Revolution, an enemy of the Constitution and an atheist. Noah Webster, sounding a lot like the Rush Limbaugh of his day, wrote about all Democratic Republicans this way: 'They are the refuse, the sweepings of the most depraved part of mankind from the most corrupt nations on earth.' We later bought Mr. Webster's dictionaries by the thousands, but that isn't the way Webster's dictionary defines a 'democrat' today.

Adams won the presidency; Jefferson became his vice president. Bache was just getting started; once elected, Adams would be called old, querulous, bald, blind, crippled and toothless in the Aurora's pages. Now in spite of its political sensationalism,

Benny's paper was losing money, lots of it: In fact, from 1790 to 1798, he would lose \$20,000. That was a lot more money in those days than it is now, but he kept at it. He believed strongly that the press had a duty to inform the citizenry if the government was not operating in the manner and fashion laid out by our founding fathers and which our own revolution had been devoted

to creating. His wealthy friends in Philadelphia started to view him as a pariah.

Now, to be fair, not all of what Bache's wrote about Adams was true. But much of what he had written had been completely accurate, including Adams's secret plan to have close presidential races decided in private, without voters' knowledge or consent - and his passion for being treated in a manner befitting the king of America.

*Abigail Adams, wife of the president, went into a self-righteous frenzy any time someone mentioned one of Benny's articles about her husband. Abigail would write that Benjamin Bache was expressing the malice of a man possessed by Satan, and was a lying wretch, adding that his abuse leveled against the Government of the United States could plunge this nation into Civil War.*

The Federalists put their most rabid smear artist on Benny, William Cobbett, who published the Porcupines Gazette. Cobbett wrote that Benny Bache was the prostitute son of oil and lamp black, who should be dealt with like a Turk, a Jew, a Jacobin or a dog - and that his newspaper should be suppressed.

Abigail Adams, wife of the president, was more direct: She went into a self-righteous frenzy any time someone mentioned one of Benny's articles about her husband. Abigail would write that Benjamin Bache was expressing the malice of

a man possessed by Satan, and was a lying wretch, adding that his abuse leveled against the Government of the United States could plunge this nation into Civil War.

Now, it should be noted that just like today, publishers were just as vicious toward Adams' position, particularly Thomas Jefferson. But the Democratic Republicans, who felt that a free press had the right to print any opinion, simply shrugged off printed criticism. Benny was so hated by 1797 that, when he was attacked and seriously beaten on the Philadelphia waterfront, John Adams gave his attacker a diplomatic posting to France.

Still, Abigail Adams had her way. She

# METROPLEX ATHEISTS

## Officers

John Hattan – Chair  
Carolyn Holland – Vice Chair  
Deanne Dice – Secretary  
Colin Swards – Treasurer

## Board of Directors

John Hattan  
Colin Swards  
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

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.

pushed her husband to stop the bad press he was getting; and in 1798, the Sedition Act was passed, violating the First Amendment by restricting the press. Thomas Jefferson knew that the law was aimed at his friend from Philadelphia.

Benny Bache was arrested before the Act even became law; his bail was set at a phenomenal \$4,000.

Other publishers who had dared print any opposition to Adams were also arrested and imprisoned - 17 of the 20 Democratic Republican-aligned papers, in all. Between his paper's losses and the crushing \$4,000 bail, Bache was destitute. And then came a miracle, in the form of the American public.

Now, in spite of the fact that subscribing to the Aurora cost \$8 a year - a large sum in those days - Americans by the hundreds signed up for subscriptions. More important to Bache, even his dead-beat subscribers started paying their past-due bills. Suddenly, the Aurora became the most popular paper in the country, solely because the public realized that the administration was trying to shut down private citizens' freedom of speech.

Adams had made a serious mistake, targeting Benny and other dissenting publishers. He'd forgotten that the American public would demand the truth. Things didn't work out in Benny Bache's favor, however. That September, yellow fever spread through Philadelphia; Bache could

no longer afford to flee to the countryside to avoid catching the disease. On Monday morning, September 10, 1798, Benny Bache was dead. He was just 29 years of age. The revolution for the free press in this country led to Jefferson's winning the White House on the next election. One of his first official acts was to pardon all the publishers that had been arrested under the Sedition Act and refund their fines with interest. He also let it be known that a free press would always be an American institution. Jefferson wrote this about our media: 'I praise them for sparking a revolution in the public mind, which arrested the rapid march of our government towards Monarchy.'

The Aurora was still being published, kept alive by Benny's wife. The First Amendment still stood. But there's one more part of this story: Benny's full name. For he was born Benjamin Franklin Bache, grandson of Ben Franklin; and it was his grandfather's willing his printing presses to his grandson that created the Philadelphia Aurora.

One last gift from a Founding Father, given to the right man, his grandson, it reminded us all that truth is more important than any political administration's dignity. Benjamin Franklin Bache was the real father of a free American press. He just didn't live long enough to see the impact his child has had on his country since then.



The convention will also include:

'Camp Quest: A Summer Away Camp for Atheist Kids'

'How to talk about Atheism'

'Leaving the Fold: Ex-ministers Speak Out'

'Religion, Science, Secular Humanism and Well-being'

'Selling Atheism'

and panels on Atheist Parenting, Lobbying for Separation of Church and State, and Secular Meditation.

[www.atheistalliance.org/conventions/2006/index.php](http://www.atheistalliance.org/conventions/2006/index.php)

## COLUMN

# Invasion of Piety: KY lawmakers should flunk religious test

Rob Boston

AMERICANS UNITED

In a conservative church, being asked if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal savior is to be expected. But in political discourse, the question is more than a little jarring.

The issue of 'religious tests' for public office recently came to a head in Kentucky, where Jeff Sharp, county attorney for Barren County, is working with a church youth group to ask all Kentucky legislators and legislative candidates one question: 'Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?'

The Louisville Courier-Journal reported that 15 have replied so far, all saying yes. But not everyone is happy with the survey. Rep. Kathy Stein, a Lexington Democrat, has filed a resolution asking the House of Representatives to ignore the survey and its 'theocratic tendencies.'

Stein, who is Jewish, called the survey an 'intimidating, bullying letter' and added, 'This is doing what the Constitution prohibits, and that is offering a religious test for public officials. That's the long and short of it.'

Stein is referring to Article VI of the federal Constitution, which bluntly states that 'no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.'

Sharp's effort is a privately run affair spearheaded by his Baptist church. He is allowed to ask legislators and would-be legislators what they think about God. But the latter are under no obligation to answer and, in fact, should not do so. Legislators are expected to represent all of their constituents, not advance a religious agenda.

The Founding Fathers understood this principle. Many colonial governments had religious qualifications in their state constitutions, such as requiring office-

holders to be 'Trinitarian Protestants.' The founders rejected religious tests at the federal level, recognizing them as regressive and counter to the spirit of religious liberty. Eventually, most religious tests withered away in the states as well. The few remaining, which required public officials to profess a belief in God, were declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1971 case *Torcaso v. Watkins*.

There was a time when many conservative religious leaders understood the danger of religious tests as well. Colonial-era Baptist minister John Leland once observed, 'If a man merits the confidence of his neighbors in Virginia - let him worship one God, twenty Gods or no God - be he Jew, Turk, Pagan, or Infidel, he is eligible to any office in the state.'

Leland's words stand in strong rebuke to Sharp's misguided campaign. This is one test no legislator should try to pass.

## SECTARIAN VIOLENCE

# Islamic world must end violence before blasting 'insulting' cartoons

AMERICAN ATHEISTS

The continued riots and demonstrations by Islamic activists over a series of 'blasphemous' Danish cartoons clearly shows the need for Muslims to put their own house in order before threatening the west.

Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists, said that nations must not be swayed by extremist religious interests, especially when freedom of the press and other liberties are at stake. 'First Amendment rights, and the right of individuals to express their opinions in democratic societies, must never be squelched in the name of religious doctrines,' said Johnson.

'Muslims need to realize that Islamo-Fascism institutionalizes the oppression of women, promotes intolerance, wages violence against working class people and intellectuals, and does not serve as a role model for promoting enlightened, free and progressive societies.'

Johnson added that while some may find critical cartoons or writings 'offensive,' anti-Semitic and anti-American cartoons are often printed in the Islamic press. 'We have a blatant case of selective indignation here,' said Johnson. 'And as for the freedom of expression in the West, where's the concern for instance when the Italian government tries to punish writers like Orianna Fallaci for their opinions?'

'Open societies require discussion and debate, not firebombs, blasphemy laws and threats of assassination.'

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, said that all governments should condemn violent Islamists for exploiting 'blasphemous' portrayals of Muhammad to inflame, riot, kill and terrorize. 'We should also demand an apology from Islamic leaders who have supported this kind of outrageous behavior,' said Mr. Silverman. 'And we need to expose the deafening silence of so-called moderate Muslims for not aggressively speaking out when extremists insult other ethnic, religious or political groups.'

## Are you searching for Atheists on the internet?

Join in the discussions at the DFW Atheist Talk group.  
[groups.yahoo.com/group/DFWatheistTalk/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DFWatheistTalk/)

## Legion – From page 1

lawsuits is having a ‘stifling effect’ on religious practices, specifically the public display of the Ten Commandments and other sectarian symbols on public property.

Attempts to outlaw or discourage litigation over church-state separation issues are occasionally introduced in Congress and state legislatures under the pretext of protecting religious freedom and ending ‘excessive’ attorney fees. A proposal by Rep. James DeMint of South Carolina disallowed ‘attorney fees in any action claiming that a public school or its agent violates the constitutional prohibition against the establishment of religion by permitting, facilitating, or accommodating a student’s religious expression.’

In Maryland, a state version of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (HB 966) contained a provision deleting compensation for attorneys pursuing First Amendment cases. Neither measure was enacted into law.

The American Legion became interested in the issue as result of litigation over a six-foot Christian cross erected in 1934 as a veteran’s monument at the Mohave National Preserve. In 2001, the American Civil Liberties Union filed suit arguing that the cross violated the First Amendment as a ‘religious fixture’ on public property. A federal judge eventually ordered the monument dismantled, and attorneys received \$63,000 in compensatory fees.

At its 2004 gathering, the Legion approved a resolution to keep the memorial, warning: ‘There is nothing in the law

to prevent groups like the ACLU from filing Establishment Clause lawsuits against ... sacred grounds and then receiving taxpayer-paid attorney fees.’

In a statement announcing its ‘National Awareness Campaign to Stop Abuse of the Taxpayer,’ Legion commander Tom Bock said that the original intent of the U.S. Code awarding legal fees was ‘intended to help the poor obtain legal counsel in claims of real, tangible violations of civil right.’ He added that the ruling in the Mohave cross case was ‘a very dangerous precedent,’ and called for ‘a ground swell of public demand on lawmakers to pass PERA in the 109th Congress.’

To launch the campaign, the Legion has issued a printed and pdf file document, ‘In the Footsteps of the Founders – A Guide to Defending American Values’ which has already been sent to all members of the U.S. Congress. The conservative worldnetdaily.com web site claimed ‘many legislators expressed surprise at the size of the attorney fees sought and gained by the ACLU and indicated support for the bill.’

The guide stated: ‘There simply is no reasonable basis to support the profiteering in attorney fee awards ordered by judges in these cases. The very threat of such fees has made elected bodies, large and small, surrender to the ACLU’s demands to secularly cleanse the public square.’

Commander Bock cited other cases along the Mohave cross dispute, including legal actions involving the Boy Scouts of America. The American Legion press release noted: ‘Bock believes that stopping the flow of millions of dollars of taxpayer

money to the ACLU and other organizations should remove or seriously decrease the incentive for them to pursue self-enriching suits against American values.’

Attorney Eddie Tabash who has been involved with state-church separation issues said that the ‘Public Expression of Religion Act’ was ‘patently unconstitutional,’ and was simply another strategy to discourage litigation over government practices that violated the First Amendment.

Ellen Johnson, president of American Atheists, added that the Hostettler bill ‘is not for the benefit of the taxpayer, but for government and religious leaders who insist on eroding the wall of separation between church and state.’

‘They know, as do we, that most attorneys are simply unable to work on long-term, complex litigation if they don’t receive some compensatory fee,’ Johnson said. ‘We’re not talking about donating a few free hours ‘to the cause.’ These cases require an enormous amount of time and effort.’

Johnson said that governments are often quite willing to squander taxpayer funds in order to defend their unconstitutional practices.

‘Whether it is school prayer or defending a religious monument in the public square, state and local governments are frequently very short-sighted and belligerent when caught doing something that violates the First Amendment,’ Johnson said. ‘If the Legion and Representative Hostettler really wish to save all of us some money, they should work to stop unconstitutional practices that promote religion.’

**THE 32<sup>ND</sup> NATIONAL  
CONVENTION OF  
AMERICAN  
ATHEISTS**

**The San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter  
101 Bowie Street – San Antonio, Texas  
April 14-16, 2006**

The American Atheists National Convention comes to San Antonio, Texas for a weekend of exciting and informative events including a blockbuster line-up of speakers, social activities, panels, workshops and much more!

This year’s convention takes place at the premier destination hotel in historic San Antonio – the elegant Marriott Rivercenter in the heart of the city’s famed ‘River Walk’ area. The Rivercenter features excellent service, rooms (at a special tourist rate!) with spectacular views of the skyline, the full complement of amenities, and much more. And you’re just a step away from historic sites like the Alamo and San Antonio’s famed River Walk with its many restaurants, shops and other attractions. We’ve arranged special rates for conventioners allowing you to arrive early, leave late and take advantage of the AA room rate.

[www.atheists.org/convention/](http://www.atheists.org/convention/)

## COLUMN

# Religious extremism great advertisement for atheism

Annie Laurie Gaylor  
FFRF

Religious extremists are doing such a good job of demonstrating the harm of dogma and religion all by themselves that there is really very little left for rationalists to do. Rev. Pat ('take out Chavez') Robertson calls down God's wrath on the pro-evolution voters of Dover, Penn. Next he deems Ariel Sharon's stroke an example of divine punishment.

The notorious Rev. Fred Phelps of Topeka, Kansas, a one-man argument for atheism, switches from picketing the funerals of AIDS victims with his loathsome 'God Hates Fag' signs, to demonstrating around the country at funerals for soldiers who have died in the Iraq and Afghan wars. Their deaths, you see, are 'God's punishment' for U.S. tolerance toward homosexuals. His ugly picket signs read: 'Thank God for IEDs [improvised explosive devices],' 'Thank God for 9/11,' 'Thank God for Body Bags,' and 'Thank God for Dead Soldiers.' Phelps even protested at the memorial service for the 12 West Virginians who died in the Sago Mine!

Because of just this one religious fanatic (and his congregation, largely his extended family), midwest legislatures are now

debating bans on protests at funerals, such as the bill passed last week by the Wisconsin legislature.

For doing what good cartoonists are supposed to do—equal-opportunity satirizing of orthodoxy—Muslims around the world are in a frenzy of protesting.

Furor has erupted in Europe and throughout the Muslim world over the relatively tame cartoons by Danes last fall on the subject of Islam or Mohammed. (Sample: suicide bombers line up in heaven as the gatekeeper cries: 'Stop, stop, we ran out of virgins!') The reprinting of the cartoon series by European newspapers last week sparked the storming of the Danish embassy in Indonesia, the arson of the Danish Embassy in Lebanon, and the burning of the Danish and Norwegian embassies in Syria. It has even resulted in the firings of news staff in France, Jordan and elsewhere. Palestinian marchers chanted that cartoonists and editors 'should have their hands cut off.'

It may be forbidden for practicing Muslims to depict Mohammed, but the rest of us still have free speech rights. These outraged Muslims ultimately seek censorship of critical views of religion (blasphemy laws couched as anti-hate speech) through government. It is dispiriting to see the British Foreign Minister and former Pres.

Clinton joining in the criticism, and alarming to see some newspaper staff eating their own in their haste to distance themselves from threats.

Without religion, and without the unrelenting social pressure to kowtow to its dogma and demands, think of the problems our planet would be free of! How can anyone assess the number of religion-made problems, and look over these religion-bred fanatics in action, and not wonder about the value of religion and blind faith in it?

That religion is the number-one instigator of war, divisiveness, and violence, is so very obvious, yet so pointedly ignored. One has only to look at those claiming to know God's will, to see religion's harm. Most terrorists and instigators of political violence in the world today claim a pipeline to their deity, from the 9/11 suicide bombers to many warmongering ('God Bless America') politicians. Uganda's guerrillas—who have slaughtered, raped and maimed tens of thousands, and abducted 25,000 children—call themselves the 'Lord's Resistance Army.' Is this a coincidence? What kind of advertisement is that for 'the Lord'?

Personally, I would be happy if religion would quit trying so hard to make atheism look good. The world would be a lot safer.



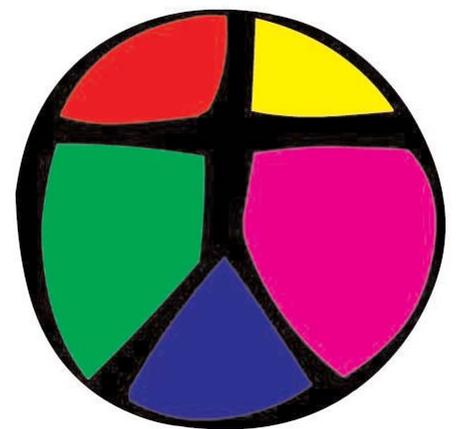
## *Attention DFW area Atheists and Agnostics!*

Scheduled services are held every third  
Sunday, July 17th from 11:00 am to 12:00

pm

414 N. Main Street, Suite 13  
Grapevine, TX 76051

[www.dfwfellowship.org](http://www.dfwfellowship.org)



## Uniform – From page 1

dom Foundation is established on the premise that religious faith is a constitutionally guaranteed freedom that must never be compromised, except in the most limited of military circumstances, because of its fundamental importance to the preservation of the American nation and the American way of life,' he added.

The MRFF's advisory board contains a number of distinguished individuals from military and civilian life. They come from a variety of religious and philosophical backgrounds but share the

same goal. That goal is not to eradicate religion in the military but simply to make certain that the rights of all are protected and that no one is coerced or made to feel uncomfortable on account of what they believe or do not believe about God.

A cliché holds that there are no atheists in foxholes. As a matter of fact, there are. Foxholes also contain Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and members of many other faiths alongside Christians from a broad range of denominations. Americans join the military because they want to serve their country and defend it from potential enemies. A person who

never goes to church can do this job just as well as someone who goes every week. The military must respect both alike.

Members of the military swear an oath to 'support and defend the Constitution.' That Constitution, in its First Amendment, ensures religious liberty by establishing the separation of church and state.

It is ironic that the Military Religious Freedom Foundation had to be formed. The military, as one of the key defenders of our rights, is the last institution that should need a lesson in basic civics.

*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.



Edward Penton

**NOW LEASING**  
Apparently 'Big God' was not big enough and is now leasing space back to the mortals in Plano, Texas.

## SOCAS

# Lawmakers thwart Governor's effort to fund religion

Jeremy Leaming  
AMERICANS UNITED

Despite fevered lobbying, Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue has failed again to convince the state's legislature to amend the state constitution and gut its provision for church-state separation.

For several years now, Perdue has been pressuring lawmakers to approve a proposal that would allow for public funding of religious work. The amendment is needed, he says, because Georgia's Constitution states, 'No money shall ever be taken from public treasury, directly or indirectly, in aid of any church, sect, cult, or religious denomination or of any sectarian institution.' He says that this prevents faith-based groups from providing social services, despite the fact that the Georgia Supreme Court recently affirmed

that these organizations may use state money so long as they use it only for non-sectarian purposes.

Earlier this week, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives failed to muster the two-thirds majority vote needed to approve HR 1345. The proposed amendment needed 120 votes; it garnered only 95. A two-thirds majority is required in both chambers before being submitted to citizens for their approval. Perdue's so-called 'Faith and Family Services Amendment' has failed before, and now it has done so again.

Opponents of Perdue's effort, including Americans United for Separation of Church and State, argued that the Republican governor is bent on opening the door for funding all kinds of religious work, such as vouchers for religious schooling. In a March 15 editorial, The

Macon Telegraph agreed, saying the real purpose of Perdue's proposed amendment 'was to open the door for school vouchers.'

Americans United Georgia Chapter President Jeff Selman and Mara M. Zonderman, AU's state legislative counsel, worked hard to urge Georgia lawmakers to block Perdue's ignoble cause.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution editorial page also celebrated the proposed amendment's defeat. The paper noted that religious organizations, such as religiously affiliated hospitals already receive state support provided they don't use public dollars to promote their religious beliefs or attempt to convert citizens seeking public services.

'In other words,' the editorial stated, 'no taxpayer subsidized sermons with the soup, no Bibles with the beds.'

*Metroplex Atheists:  
No fire and  
brimstone required*

[www.metroplexatheists.org](http://www.metroplexatheists.org)

**2006 FFRF High School Senior Essay Competition****First Prize: Blanche Fearn Memorial Award – \$2,000****Second Place – \$1,000****Third Place – \$500**

*‘Why ‘Intelligent Design’ (Creationism)  
Should Not Be Taught in Public Schools’*

**Eligibility:** High school seniors in North America who are college-bound in fall 2006. (Currently-enrolled college students should enter the College Essay Competition.)

**Topic:** ‘Why ‘Intelligent Design’ (Creationism) Should Not Be Taught in Public Schools.’ You may address this from a scientific, historic, or legal perspective, or include your experiences encountering creationism or debunking Genesis. (For background, you may wish to consult Darwin, Scopes trial history, or the Dover, Penn. decision by Judge John Jones III.)

**Requirements:** Essay should be 3-4 typed, double-spaced pages with standard margins. Choose your own title. Include paragraph biography identifying the college or university you will be attending, intended major and interests. Provide permanent and campus addresses, phone numbers and email. Please staple. Don’t include a resume.

**Deadline:** June 1, 2006. Winners will be announced in August 2006. Winners will be asked to provide a photograph suitable for publication. By entering our contest, winning students agree to have their essays printed in full or in part in *Freethought Today*, the Foundation’s newspaper, and later posted online at our web site. Eligible entrants will be offered a complimentary freethought book.

*Who was Blanche Fearn? She was a longtime member and benefactor of the Foundation who died in 1995. Although she never had the opportunity to attend college, she was a lifelong learner. As an elementary-school student in the early 1900s she bravely objected to prayers at her public school. She maintained an interest in the separation of church and state throughout her life.*

Mail essay, postmarked no later than June 1, 2006, to:

High School Essay Competition  
FFRF, Inc.  
PO Box 750  
Madison, WI 53701

**2006 FFRF College Essay Competition****First Prize: Phyllis Stevenson Grams Memorial Award – \$2,000****Second Place–\$1,000****Third Place–\$500**

*‘Why I am an Atheist or Agnostic’  
‘Growing Up A Freethinker’ or ‘Rejecting Religion’*

**Eligibility:** Currently-enrolled college students. (High-school seniors enrolling in college this fall should enter High School Essay Competition.) The contest is open only to North American students or students enrolled in North American colleges or universities at least through December 2006.

**Topic:** Write about growing up a freethinker (atheist or agnostic), or why you reject religion, using a personal (biographical), or philosophical approach, or describing why you choose reason over faith. Experiences in rejecting religion in a religious society may be included.

**Requirements:** Essay should be 4-5 typed, double-spaced pages with standard margins. Choose your own title. Include paragraph biography identifying the college or university you are attending, year in school, major and interests. Provide permanent and campus addresses, phone numbers and email. Please staple. Don’t include a resume.

**Deadline:** July 1, 2006. Winners will be announced in September 2006. Winners will be asked to provide a photograph suitable for publication. By entering our contest, winning students agree to have their essays printed in full or in part in *Freethought Today*, the Foundation’s newspaper, and later posted online at our web site. Eligible entrants will be offered a complimentary freethought book.

*Who was Phyllis Grams? She was an early activist member of the Foundation. A retired high school teacher, she was a fearless plaintiff in a state/church lawsuit in her conservative town. Ms. Grams died in 1996.*

Mail essay, postmarked no later than July 1, 2006, to:

College Essay Competition  
FFRF, Inc.  
PO Box 750  
Madison, WI 53701

# 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:** 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

**Place:** Humanist Hall  
414 N. Main St.  
Grapevine, TX

month. For information visit:

[www.dfwfellowship.com](http://www.dfwfellowship.com)

**Time:** 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

**Place:** Humanist Hall  
414 N. Main St.  
Grapevine, TX

philosophy of objectivism

**Date:** Thursday, January 19

**Time:** 6:30 p.m.

**Place:** Humanist Hall  
414 N. Main St.,  
Grapevine, TX

## 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](http://atheists.meetup.com)

### DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP BRUNCH:

**What:** Sunday brunch without the gospels

**Date:** Second and fourth Sunday of the month.

**Time:** 10:15 AM – 11:30 AM

**Place:** TBA

### GAME DAY / POTLUCK

**What:** Bring a covered dish to share and your favorite games

**Date:** Sunday, April 30

**Time:** 2:00 p.m.

**Place:** Humanist Hall  
414 N. Main St.  
Grapevine, TX

### 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)  
400 E. Abram Street  
Arlington, TX

### DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP STUDY GROUP

**What:** Explores classical mythology

**Date:** Second and fourth Sunday

**Time:** 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

**Place:** Humanist Hall  
414 N. Main St.  
Grapevine, TX

### METROPLEX ATHEISTS 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/](http://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

### DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP:

**What:** All the things you want in a church, without the gods

**Date:** First and third Sunday of the

### DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP STITCH 'N BITCH

**What:** Knit, vent and dish. All levels of knitters (and other crafters) welcome

**Date:** Second and fourth Tuesday

**Time:** 6:30 p.m.

**Place:** Humanist Hall  
414 N. Main St.  
Grapevine, TX

### DFW ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP OBJECTIVIST LECTURE

**What:** For those interested in a better understanding of Ayn Rand's

To have your events listed email:

*The Atheist Voice Editor at*  
[editor@metroplexatheists.org](mailto:editor@metroplexatheists.org)

## METROPLEX ATHEISTS

COME  
JOIN US

EVERY THIRD SUNDAY  
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

[www.metroplexatheists.org](http://www.metroplexatheists.org)

## March 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 J. Gilligan's	2	3	4
5 DFWEF	6	7 D/P AMD	8 J. Gilligan's	9	10	11
12 Brunch Study	13	14 D/P AMD Stich	15 J. Gilligan's	16	17	18
19 MA, DFWEF & MARG	20	21 Atheist Meetup	22 J. Gilligan's	23	24	25
26 Brunch Study	27	28 D/P AMD Stich	29	30	31	1

## April 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
2 DFWEF	3	4 D/P AMD	5 J. Gilligan's	6	7	8
9 Brunch Study	10	11 D/P AMD Stich	12 J. Gilligan's	13	14 Conventions	15 Conventions
16 MA, DFWEF, & Conventions	17	18 Atheist Meetup	19 J. Gilligan's	20	21	22
23 Brunch Study	24	25 D/P AMD	26 J. Gilligan's	27	28	29
30 Game Day						

## May 2006

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

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

For more information, please visit our website: [www.metroplexatheists.org](http://www.metroplexatheists.org)

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

*The Atheist Voice* Editor: [editor@metroplexatheists.org](mailto:editor@metroplexatheists.org)

*THE ATHEIST VOICE*  
c/o Metroplex Atheists  
414 N. Main St., #13  
Grapevine, TX 76051

Deliver to:

*WHY DO WE FIGHT?*

'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