

# FREELY SPEAKING

FREE MINDS  
FREE PEOPLE

Vol. 1, No. 3

November 2003

Four pages

## SKIRMISHES

### The "Evangelical" White House

• Writing in the Oct. 26 issue of the New York Times, Reporter Elisabeth Bumiller notes that a religious coalition which includes Charles Colson, the "born-again" Christian and Watergate felon and David Saperstein a Reformed rabbi, along with many members of the Christian Evangelical community has exerted considerable influence in the Bush White House.

Bumiller writes, "Administration officials and members of Congress say the religious coalition has had an unusual influence on one of the most religious White Houses in American history."

While there's no question Bush cares about many of the issues the evangelicals care about, it's also worth noting, according to the same article, that white evangelicals accounted for about 40 percent of the votes Bush received in the 2000 election.

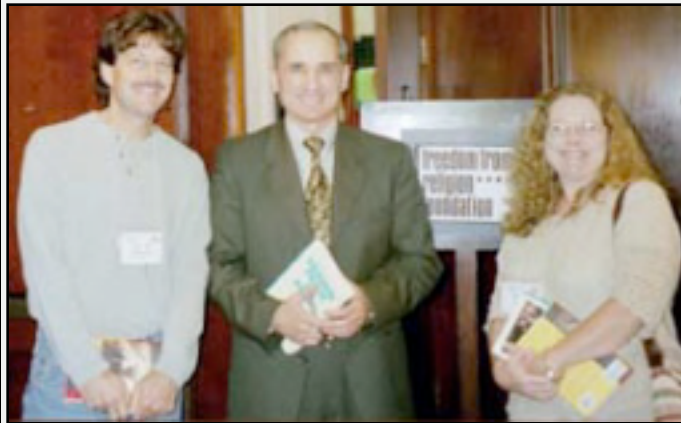
Who knows? If Bush has enough support from these folks, maybe he'll actually get more votes than his opponent next time.

### Bless America?

• According to the Reno Gazette Journal, "God" has been cut out of signs at Sparks City Hall — with scissors.

City Attorney Chet Adams performed the surgery on several signs that stated "God Bless

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Charlie Trantham and Dianna Narciso of the Space Coast Freethought Association met up with Dan Barker (he's in the middle) of the Freedom From Religion Foundation at the FFRF's convention in Washington D.C. last month.

## FFRF convention news

By Charlie Trantham

Dianna and I had a wonderful time at the convention. It was truly an enjoyable experience. Some of the speakers included the following:

**Helen Thomas** (perhaps my favorite) is a pioneering journalist who became the first woman officer of the National Press Club, the first woman president of the White House Correspondents Association, the first woman member and later woman president of the Gridiron Club. She started out as a copy girl for the *Washington Daily News* back in the 1940s.

Since 1961 she has covered the White House. She is well educated and has received many awards. I have seen her on TV in the press groups asking questions of the President of the US. She gave a wonderful speech about her dealings with all the presidents starting with Eisenhower. She had many interesting and behind the scenes things to say about each president — Nixon, Johnson, Carter, Bush 1, Reagan, Clinton. It was fabulous. She also mentioned that Bush 2, along with his administration, is by far the biggest pusher of the Christian movement she has seen (do it our way or the highway... you're either with us or against us...!)

**Alan Dershowitz** is the Felix Frankfurter Professor of law at Harvard Law School. A graduate of Brooklyn College and Yale Law School, he joined the Harvard Law School faculty at age 25 after clerking for judges David Bazelon and Arthur Goldberg. Called "the best known criminal lawyer in the world" he has defended many famous clients and takes half of his cases pro bono. He is author of 18 novels. Dianna and I bought *America Declares Independence*, which he wrote about what our founding fathers wanted to achieve with the Constitution and Bill of Rights. He gave a wonderful, insightful, and humorous speech

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## HAPPENINGS

The Space Coast Freethought Association will hold its monthly gathering in the park from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on November 9th at Wickham Park.

Topics for this month's meeting may include: more discussion of the activities the group would like to undertake, discussion about a change of venue, and information from members about what they've been doing - attending speeches, conventions and so on.

Those attending should bring chairs, something to drink and sun screen.

Turn right after entering on the south side of Wickham Park. We usually set up shop near the first big pavilion on the left. Look for the SCFA sign to get a fix on our location.

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Dianna Narciso has launched "Florida Writes for the Wall," a letter-writing project for Floridians who wish to make their thoughts known regarding separation of state and church and the rights of atheists and freethinkers.

Narciso says, "Somehow, I always had the notion that blasting off letters to the editor of one's local paper was the pastime of the elderly. When our voices no longer have strength to be heard over the crowd, when our bodies can no longer hold imposing stances, we resort to making

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VIEWPOINT

# Meeting provides model for atheist outreach

By Luke Setzer

On October 22, I drove three hours to Gainesville to see Dr. Edwin Locke of the Ayn Rand Institute speak to a packed auditorium at the University of Florida. Two hundred people attended the lecture entitled "Post-Modernism vs. Religion vs. Objectivism: Which Is the Proper Code of Morality for Living on Earth?"

Locke argued that only Objectivism, the philosophy of Ayn Rand, provides a code of morality suitable for living successfully and happily on earth. Objectivism holds that reality is real, that reason is man's only means of knowing it and that one should act in one's own rational self interest, with rationality being the highest virtue. Life is the objective standard of morality.

In contrast, Post-Modernism holds that objective knowledge is impossible and that morality is simply subjective opinion dictated by one's culture; for Post-Modernists there is no objective basis for preferring, for example, freedom to dictatorship.

Religion asserts that reality is governed by supernatural forces, that knowledge is based on faith and that the highest moral act is one of self-sacrifice.

In his hour-long lecture, Locke showed that neither Post-Modernism nor religion can be practiced consistently and that neither is compatible with living successfully and happily in the real world.

For another hour, many questions from the audience followed, most aimed at

Locke's critiques of religion. When audience members raised the example of Mother Teresa as a moral paragon, Locke promptly pronounced judgment of her as a self-erected "scarecrow", a woman without moral substance. When asked how one can bypass the intellectual evasions of well-educated and otherwise rational Christians about the existence of God, he replied, "You don't."

Although few audience members appeared dissuaded from the views they held at the opening of the lecture, the event clearly provoked a great deal of thought in the room that night. I encourage the Space Coast Freethought Association to strive for this role model of a successful outreach effort by an atheistic organization.

## SKIRMISHES (from page 1)

America." Now the signs just say "Bless America."

Adams opined the signs are a better reflection of the true spirit of America.

"That's the beauty of freedom of religion," he said, "Anybody can bless America who wants. Any religion."

The action was greeted with mixed responses from city employees. Some understood the reason for the city attorney's action. Others said they were "offended" by it. And so it goes.

## CONNECTIONS:

some web addresses that may be of interest to freethinkers

<http://www.snopes.com/snopes.asp>

Home of the "Urban Legends Reference Pages," this site classifies and evaluates many of the urban legends that continue to be passed off as fact by some in our society. You'll find this a good site for checking out some of those bogus email stories that keep circulating on the web

<http://www.nationaldayofreason.org/>

Launched by the American Humanist Association and the Washington Area Secular Humanists, this web site is intended to serve as the focal point of an effort to recognize the National Day of Reason and as a platform to offer a criticism of the federally-sponsored National Day of Prayer. According to the website: "A consortium of leaders from within the community of reason has endorsed the idea of a National Day of Reason. This observance will be held in parallel with the National Day of Prayer, on the first Thursday in May (6 May 2004). The goal of this effort is to celebrate reason - a concept all Americans can support - and to raise public awareness of the persistent threat to religious liberty posed by government intrusion into the private sphere of worship."

<http://www.thehungersite.com/cgi-bin/WebObjects/CTDSites>

This doesn't really have anything to do with freethought per se, but "The Hunger Site" is an easy way to make a small contribution to easing world hunger. Just a mouseclick is all it takes. According to the site's founders, those clicks added up to about 2,717 metric tons of food distributed to hungry people around the world in 2002. This site also links to other sites supporting causes you may wish to support: the breast cancer site (promoting early detection of breast cancer); the child health site; the rainforest site; and the animal rescue site.

<http://hubblesite.org/newscenter/>

Here's a website that's literally "out of this world." The HubbleSite offers news releases, photos and information about the Hubble Space Telescope. It's designed for members of the media, but that's no reason to stay away. The photos alone make it worth a look

**Freely Speaking** is the newsletter of the Space Coast Freethought Association. It is published in the first week of the month and distributed free as a pdf file via email and/or by regular mail. Print copies may be available on request.

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**Freely Speaking** invites the submission of articles which promote freethought and church-state separation or may otherwise be of interest to our membership and announcements relating to groups and activities which do the same. Articles should be a maximum of 1,000 words and announcements a maximum of 100. All submissions are subject to editing and may be cut to conserve space. Email submissions to [gricker@cfl.rr.com](mailto:gricker@cfl.rr.com) with the subject heading "newsletter submissions."

# Space Coast Freethought Association

Founded by Dianna Narciso, the SCFA seeks to bring freethinkers of Brevard and surrounding areas together for social interaction, activism and community outreach.

To join the group go to: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SpaceCoastFreethought/>

For more information, contact Dianna Narciso by email at [catspah@cfl.rr.com](mailto:catspah@cfl.rr.com) or by telephone at (321) 952-1231.

**Free Minds — Free People**

## CONVENTION (from page 1)

**Betty Rollin** is a contributing correspondent for NBC news and has authored six books, including *First You Cry* about her breast cancer and mastectomy which was made into a TV movie starring Mary Tyler Moore. Her bestseller *Last Wish* raised consciousness over euthanasia, describing the suicide of her terminally ill mother. It was made into a TV movie starring Patty Duke and Maureen Stapleton and has been published in 18 countries.

Rollin gave an eye-opening speech about the battle, in Oregon, to allow terminally ill people to take their own lives in order to end their pain and suffering. It is so sad to realize that there are many people who have a horrible, painful end to their lives that sometimes lasts many months. The procedure to qualify has many tests. You must get more than one doctor to diagnose you as terminal within six months, there is a 15-day waiting period, after which you must resubmit your request in writing. Once you get the prescription, you must administer it to yourself by yourself (no one can help you).

Rollin said one of the interesting things for both the supporters of this and the groups that are against it, was that after five years of it being allowed in Oregon, many people have gotten the prescription, but only a few (129 in 5 yrs) have actually used it. What was really interesting was how so many cases showed that the terminally ill patients had a much better outlook, and a much better life at the end just because they knew that they now had the power to end their lives if and when they wanted to! It was very moving. Now that they have won, and Oregon residents can get the prescription necessary to take their own lives, Rollin is trying to get other states to follow.

One interesting note was that the biggest group against suicide for the terminally ill (which I call, "ending one's suffering during the last days of life") is the Catholic church, followed by other religious people who believe you have no right to take your own life.

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## HAPPENINGS (from page 1)

our feelings known through the written word to anyone who will listen. But here I am, just inside my forties, with the irresistible urge to tell the world exactly what I think of it. And why should I be alone?"

Florida Writes operates as an email list to its members. Join at <http://www.http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FloridaWrites>.

There you will find daily links to editorials and letters that need response. Feel free to post activism alerts and your responses. Volunteers willing to monitor local papers are always welcome.

### Got an announcement to make?

*The Space Coast Freethought Association welcomes announcements from other groups and organizations who are interested in promoting reason, freethought and the separation of church and state.*

*Please submit announcements of your group's meetings and activities no later than the last Friday of the month. All announcements should be emailed to: [griker@cfl.rr.com](mailto:griker@cfl.rr.com). Please do not send them as attachments but in the body of the email message. Please head all such messages "newsletter submission."*

*Announcements should not exceed a length of 100 words. All announcements will be subject to editing and may be shortened to meet space requirements.*

**Dan Barker**, author of "Losing Faith in Faith" is great and plays the piano. He and famous cartoonist Steve Benson, known for his ironic & outrageous newspaper cartoons debunking religion, did a neat show of piano music and cartoons they called Toons and Tunes. They ended with Barker singing "Imagine" by Beatle John Lennon (Imagine there's no religion. It's easy if you try...) while Benson showed a cartoon of Lennon with the World Trade Center buildings in the background. The first building had just been hit by a jet and the smoke, blowing through the sky, spelled out the word "Imagine."

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### Freethinkers say the darndest things

"The best defense against anything at all, including religion, is a sense of humor." **Natalie Angier**, prize-winning science writer for *The New York Times* and author of "Confessions of a Lonely Atheist."

"[That] proves the point that when people are of a certain mind a little thing like evidence isn't going to change their minds." **Betty Rollin**, when asked why other states haven't followed Oregon's lead in allowing physician assisted suicide.

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Also, **Michael Newdow** gave us an update on his lawsuit demanding the words, "under God" be removed from the pledge. A lawyer and ER surgeon, he talked about many lawsuits regarding religion and the separation of state and church. (At the time he was still waiting to hear regarding the Pledge, but on Tuesday, October 14, the Supreme Court announced it would take the case.) He pulled out his guitar, as usual, and did a superb job singing a very dynamic song about Judge Roy Moore's "nocturnal erection." He left us rolling in the floor laughing!

**Anne Laurie Gaylor** and her mother, **Anne Nicol Gaylor** who is president and founder of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, were also present and hosted the event. We had a non-prayer breakfast and instead of prayer we had a moment of bedlam, where everyone was allowed to express what ever they wanted and as loud as they wanted. It was quite a hoot as people yelled aloud things such as "THERE IS NO GOD," "SCIENCE RULES," and "GOOD MORNING FREETHINKERS," all at the same time. We also had a nice dinner banquet. The food and service were great.

Meeting people from all over (37 different states and some from the Virgin Islands) was exciting and interesting. Everyone was very polite and open to others. We also, for the first time, got to see the Jesus and Moses action figures, which one of the attendees found and purchased at a local toy store. What a hoot to read the package which stated the powers and abilities of Jesus, for example: able to walk on water...

This was only the second freethought convention I have been to. I find these gatherings to be full of knowledge, and they leave me intrigued and delighted. I highly recommend that every freethinker attend, at least, one.

# SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print

Tampa Tribune - Oct. 18, 2003

## Diverse Beliefs

Regarding "Tolerate Diversity" (Letters, Oct. 16):

Janice Davis is curious as to why atheists have a problem with the reference to her God in the Pledge of Allegiance. She says we ought to be willing to live with more diversity in our lives. I have an idea. How about if we change the pledge so all our schoolchildren must say "one nation, under Allah." Or how about "one nation, under Goddess"? Let's see the Christian parents live with diversity like that before they insist those of us without belief tolerate government-endorsed religion.

Dianna Narciso, Palm Bay

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Tallahassee Democrat - Oct. 22, 2003

## Founders' beliefs are irrelevant

In response to Ron Wright's letter ("Full-tilt wackos ruining country," Oct. 20), I am not a wacko. I'm an atheist parent, one of the nearly 14 percent of the American population that describes itself as nonreligious.

Why should my children have to acknowledge the Christian deity every day at school? Why should they have to risk ostracism by remaining silent or making up nonsense words instead? Why must my children mention a god at all when pledging loyalty to their country? It doesn't matter what the founders believed. What matters is the secular Constitution and its beginning words, "We, the people ..." "We, the people of the United States of America, are religiously diverse. Only a secular government can rightly and fairly represent us all.

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Pensacola News Journal - Oct. 29, 2003

## Your God

Gene Hubbard ("Just don't say it," Letters, Oct. 23) would like all secularists to move out of his country. Gee, I was born here and under the impression that this was my country too. I don't remember everyone electing Gene Hubbard king.

There are millions of people in this country who do not believe the Christian God exists. And there are plenty who do, who think church and state ought to remain distinctly separate. The pledge should be returned to its original form, "one nation, indivisible."

It is unconscionable to expect non-Christian and atheist children to acknowledge the Christian God each day in school. I don't expect people who disagree to leave the country. I expect them to recognize that being in the majority doesn't mean you get to force everyone else to pray to your God. -

Dianna Narciso, Palm Bay

Palm Beach Post - Oct. 27, 2003

## Post wrong to trivialize fight over 'under God'

Regarding the recent editorial on the Pledge of Allegiance case facing the Supreme Court ("Flagging a minor issue," Oct. 18), I wonder: If the phrase "... under God" is so trivial, why can't it be removed? If *God* is such an innocuous word, why not drop it?

Lashing out at the so-called "professionally offended" may score *The Post* points with the "professionally sarcastic," but it doesn't change the fact that millions of American children of nonreligious parents are coerced (whether by the government, their teacher or their peers) to acknowledge the distinctly Christian deity each day at school. I find the editorial belittling of this matter "professionally ignorant."

DIANNA NARCISO  
Palm Bay

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Florida Times Union in Jacksonville - Oct. 28, 2003

## PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE Protecting the minority

A letter writer ("Majority should rule," Oct. 20) points out that Christians haven't gone to court to make others believe as they do. She seems to think that removing the reference to her God in the Pledge of Allegiance would be forcing her to believe the way I do.

But does the Pledge of Allegiance say "One nation, under Allah?" or under Goddess, or Buddha, or Vishnu? What on Earth have Christians ever had to go to court about? Have the Upanishads been posted in a courthouse somewhere? Have city councils begun opening meetings with prayers to the goddess or Wiccan rituals?

The only people in this country who insist government should support their God are the Christian majority. The writer claims the majority should rule. Luckily, even for her, we have a Constitution designed to protect the minority from the majority. One day her people could be the minority. How will they squawk then?

DIANNA NARCISO  
Palm Bay

"I am an atheist out and out. It took me a long time to say it." **Isaac Asimov** (*Free Inquiry* - Spring 1982)

In "Speaking out" the Space Coast Freethought Association reprints letters from its membership that have been published in the media. If you have a published letter that has appeared in a newspaper, magazine or other media, please send a copy to gricker@cfl.rr.com with the heading "newsletter submission." Please include the date the letter was published and the name of the publication.