

FREELY SPEAKING

FREE MINDS
FREE PEOPLE

Vol. 4, No. 2

October 2006

Six pages

SKIRMISHES

A capitulation

• The Christian Right had a bit of red meat thrown its way on Tuesday, Sept. 26, when the House of Representatives passed legislation that bars the awarding of court costs and legal fees to plaintiffs in cases involving the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Overwhelmingly supported by House Republicans, the bill passed with a 244 to 173 vote. 218 Republicans and 26 Democrats voted to pass the measure. Only six GOP members voted against it. The bill, called the "Public Expressions of Religion Protection Act," now goes to the Senate where it is considered unlikely to pass—that's according to the ACLU's Washington legislative office. Critics of the legislation say if it should become law, this bill would make Establishment Clause cases the only area of constitutional law in which legal fees are restricted.

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Freethought Day at Disney

October 21, 2006

<http://www.spacecoastfreethought.org/disney/>

Think about it!!!

We want a big turnout for Freethought Day at Disney. The Space Coast Freethought Association is hosting this event and advertising it far and wide. We have an email list devoted to it at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FreethoughtDayatDisney/> where you can find up-to-the-minute information on our plans.

So far our schedule looks like this:

9:30 a.m. Grab a FastPass to Big Thunder Mtn. Railroad or Splash Mtn. Meet at Laughin' Place playground at the Splash Mtn. exit for a **photo op**. Then play in Frontierland.

12:15 p.m. Check in for **lunch at Liberty Tree Tavern**. (Make "advance reservations" now at 407-939-3463. Check in is actually 15 minutes prior to your reservation; Try to get one around 12:30 to 1 p.m. and we can all meet up in the area.)

3:30 p.m. Meet at Auntie Gravity's in Tomorrowland for **ice cream and photo op**.

6:30 p.m. Meet at The Pinocchio Village Haus in Fantasyland for **dinner** and head to the Haunted Mansion afterward.

Other activities:

The SpectroMagic parade at both 8 and 10 p.m. travels through Frontierland, Liberty Square, the Hub in front of the Castle, and down Main Street (or vice versa).

See **DAY** on page 2

HAPPENINGS

The Space Coast Freethought Association holds its October meeting from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. on October 1 at Melbourne Public Library, 540 E. Fee Ave., Melbourne. This meeting will be in the large conference room - on the right as you enter the library. This month's topic is "The Art and Science of Baloney Detection."

SCFA meetings are free and open to the public. Come and join the conversation about the need for a wall of separation between government and religion and the importance of freedom FROM religion.

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Our next **Adopt-A-Road** cleanup will begin at 9 a.m. on October 8. We meet in the parking lot of the Atlanta Bread Company Restaurant, located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Palm Bay Road and Stack Boulevard.

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The Space Coast Freethought Association will hold its second annual garage sale fund-raiser at the Narciso residence in Palm Bay from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m. on October 7. For more information about the garage sale and how you can take part, see page 2

See **HAPPENINGS** on page 3

DAY (from page 1)

Wishes Nighttime Spectacular fireworks is park-wide and begins at 9 p.m. Gather in front of Cinderella's Castle to see Tinker Bell fly towards Tomorrowland during the show. Mickey's Toontown Fair, Tomorrowland and Liberty Square are other good viewing areas.

We're all planning to wear lime green shirts so we can recognize each other in the park. If you purchase a shirt without the logo on it, get some fabric paint and decorate it with the words "Freethought Day at Disney" and/or "Think About It!" You can purchase special commemorative shirts through Café Press here: <http://www.cafepress.com/freethoughtday>.

Grab your Mickey ears and meet us there!

SCFA's Second-Annual Garage Sale Fundraiser

When: Saturday, October 7, 2006

Where: Golf Vista Ct. in Palm Bay

Space Coast Freethought Association holds its annual Fundraiser Garage Sale on October 7 this year from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m. Bring your donations any time before the sale and come shop for goodies to raise money for the association's activism and social activities.

So far the donations look great! We've got a beautiful solid wood TV table, a chest of drawers, a portable punching bag, Legos, toys, stuffed animals, books, clothing and much more.

Space Coast Freethought Association, Inc.

The Space Coast Freethought Association is a Florida nonprofit corporation, based in Brevard County. To join the online discussion group go to:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SpaceCoastFreethought/>

Our mailing address is:
Space Coast Freethought Association, Inc.
PO Box 60448
Palm Bay, FL 32906-0448

For more information, contact President Dianna Narciso by email at catspah@cfl.rr.com. or visit our website at: <http://www.spacecoastfreethought.org/>

If you'd like to volunteer your time, we have several options for you. You can clean out your house and donate items. You can join us for the prep party on Friday, October 6 where we'll organize and price the items. You can work at the sale anytime on the 7th. And you can offer to haul unsold items to Goodwill after the sale is over.

Let us know how you'd like to help!

For directions to the garage sale or to volunteer your services, contact Dianna Narciso at catspah@cfl.rr.com.

We are,
therefore
we think!

CONNECTIONS

<http://richarddawkins.net/>

This is the newly launched web site of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. The site contains information about Dawkins' latest book, *The God Delusion*, as well as a variety of scientific topics. Dawkins will be contributing columns to the site and there will be a newsletter forthcoming.

<http://www.theonion.com>

On a lighter note, *The Onion*, which bills itself as "America's Finest News Source" is really the Daily Show of online publications. Their satirical look at subjects great and small has gored more than a few sacred cows over the years. Always good for a laugh, or, at a minimum, a good chuckle.

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>

THOMAS is named "in the spirit of Thomas Jefferson." Run by the Library of Congress, this web site is the place to go to find out what your congressional representatives and senators are up to.

Freely Speaking is the newsletter of the **Space Coast Freethought Association, Inc.** It is published monthly and distributed free as a pdf file. Print copies are available to members on request.

Freely Speaking is published and edited in Palm Bay, Fla., by George A. Ricker on behalf of the SCFA. All contents © 2006 by the **Space Coast Freethought Association, Inc.** unless otherwise indicated. Copyright of any reprinted material remains with the original publisher.

Freely Speaking invites articles which promote freethought and church-state separation and announcements relating to groups and activities which do the same. Email submissions to gricker@cfl.rr.com with the subject heading "newsletter submissions." Inquiries about *Freely Speaking* should be directed to George Ricker by email or by mail to: SCFA, PO Box 60448, Palm Bay, FL 32906-0448 - att: newsletter.

Humor in Religion

Particular Atheist

When I told the people of Northern Ireland that I was an atheist, a woman in the audience stood up and said, "Yes, but is it the God of the Catholics or the God of the Protestants in whom you don't believe?"

-- Quentin Crisp

Join us!!!

Become a dues-paying member of the Space Coast Freethought Association.

Annual memberships are \$15 for individuals, \$25 for couples and

\$10 for seniors (65+) and students.

Applications are available at our meetings, online and by mail on request.

Join the fight against religious extremism and for separation

between government and religion.

If you would like to comment on an item in our newsletter or on the activities of the Space Coast Freethought Association, write a letter to the editor and email it to George Ricker at gricker@cfl.rr.com. Please use the subject heading "Letter to the editor." Letters should be no more than 200 words long and will be subject to editing. They must be signed. If you prefer to mail your letter, send it to *Freely Speaking*, Letters to the Editor, PO Box 60448, Palm Bay, FL 32906-0448.

SPACE COAST FREETHOUGHT ASSOCIATION

A non-prophet organization

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

Thanksgiving Pot Luck and Book Talk

**November 18
at 6 p.m.**

Start planning now for Space Coast Freethought Association's Thanksgiving potluck dinner. Turkey, stuffing, and all the fixins. Dig out those special family recipes to share! And finish that great book for the book discussion! Who says atheists have nobody to thank? We'll be thanking each other for the great food and company!

For information on all of our events, join the SCFA discussion list at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SpaceCoastFreethought/> or the SCFA announcement list at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/scfa_announce/.

You can also contact SCFA through our website at <http://www.spacecoastfreethought.org/> or contact Dianna Narciso at catspah@cfl.rr.com.

SCFA store open at CafePress

How would you like to buy a tee-shirt or a button with the Space Coast Freethought Association's logo on it?

Check out the new "Space Coast Freethought Association" store at cafepress.com. You'll find the site at: <http://www.cafepress.com/scfreethought>

SCFA Board of Directors (officers)

Dianna Narciso (President) ...George Ricker (Vice Pres.)
Cameo Cramer (Secretary) ...Toni Sweeney (Treasurer)
Doug Cramer ...Mike Sweeney...Charles Trantham

HAPPENINGS (from page 1)

The Humanist Club at Barefoot Bay holds its next meeting from 2 to 4 p.m. on October 14 at the South Mainland Library, 7921 Ron Beatty Boulevard, Barefoot Bay. Contact George Oertel at 772-664-0170 for more information.

Church/State Separation Update by Doug Cramer

National

Free Thinkers of Colorado Springs joins the Air Force Academy Special Programs in Religious Education (9/4)

- Free Thinkers hopes to start work at the academy with weekly discussions and bring in prominent scientists, leading authors and academics. Academy leaders have been accused of using the religious education program to impose Christianity on cadets. Air Force graduate Mikey Weinstein, a lawyer in Albuquerque, N.M., is suing the Air Force over claims that academy officials have illegally forced evangelical Christian views on cadets.

House Judiciary Committee passes bill cutting off attorneys' fees in church-state cases (9/7)

- The so-called "Public Expression of Religion Act" targets those who stand up to church-state infringements by government officials. The measure, H.R. 2679, denies legal fees and out-of pocket expenses to plaintiffs who win lawsuits under the First Amendment Establishment Clause, which bans the government from promoting religion.

Byrd's prayer amendment picks up steam (9/8)

- Republican lawmakers are lining up to back Democratic Sen. Robert C. Byrd's proposed constitutional amendment aimed at guaranteeing prayers in the classrooms and at school functions from legal challenges.

AU files lawsuit against taxpayer funding of "Bible-based" marriage education (9/12)

- The Northwest Marriage Institute, a fundamentalist Christian organization, received two federal grants worth \$97,750 in 2005. A \$50,000 Compassion Capital Fund grant came from HHS and a \$47,750 sub-grant came from the Institute for Youth Development, an intermediary organization that distributes "faith-based" funds for HHS.

Wiccan Sign Allowed on Soldier's Plaque (9/14)

- The widow of a soldier killed in Afghanistan won state approval Wednesday to place a Wiccan religious symbol on his memorial plaque, something the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs had refused. "The VA still has not determined yet if a Wiccan symbol can go on the headstone," said Tim Tetz, executive director of the Nevada Office of Veterans Services. "But we have determined we control the state cemetery and that we therefore have the ability to recognize him for his service to his country."

Florida

Flagler County school district allows FCA to invite students to religious events (9/3)

- The Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) visited four Flagler County schools this week to host secular character development assemblies featuring BMX bike stunts, skateboarding and magic tricks, then gave out tickets and fliers inviting students to the nighttime events.

Atheists sue over Jacksonville "Day of Faith" rally (9/4)

- It cost the city of Jacksonville more than a hundred thousand dollars to put on its "Day of Faith" anti-violence rally. Now a national atheist group is taking the city to court to get that money returned to the taxpayers. "If you watch the tapes and the coverage it was endorsing religion. There were congregations, they prayed, there were choirs singing. It was all about god on the city's nickel," says Jacksonville attorney Lisa Lovingood.

How to spot a monkey trap—and avoid it

By George A. Ricker

In parts of Asia, and other places in the world as well, indigenous people use a method for trapping monkeys that is simplicity itself.

To make the trap, you must first hollow out a gourd, leaving an opening just large enough for a monkey's open paw to go through. Place a sweet treat—or some other food monkeys are partial to—inside the gourd, then attach a vine to the gourd and stake the other end of the vine to the ground somewhere out of sight.

An unsuspecting monkey smells the treat inside the gourd and reaches in to collect it. However, the opening, which was just large enough for the critter's open paw to go in, is too small to allow its clenched paw to pass back through. No matter how much the monkey yanks, he cannot escape as long as he tries to hang on to the treat.

Meanwhile, the hunter who set the trap comes along, collects the monkey, and, presumably, heads back home in search of a cooking pot and a fire. There will be monkey meat tonight.

I first read about monkey traps in Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Pirsig's version of the trap uses a hollowed out coconut and rice, but the principle is the same.

A 'values' trap

The trap works because the monkey is focused on obtaining the food inside and doesn't understand that the price of trying to obtain that particular morsel will be its own freedom, its own survival. Monkeys are programmed by evolution to forage and grab food wherever they find it. It's not that the monkey is stupid. It's just that letting go seldom occurs to it.

Somehow, the image of the monkey, desperately yanking and hauling, trying to pull free but still clutching that handful of food as the hunter approaches closer and closer, has stayed with me through the years. The monkey is caught by its own rigid values, not by the physical structure of the trap.

And before you start complimenting yourself on your own superiority as the representative of a more evolved species, you might want to rethink your assumptions. People get caught in monkey traps all the time. I'll bet the streets of any city are full of them. You may have been caught by one or two yourself. I know I have.

Usually the traps that catch us are more subtle. After all, people are smarter than monkeys. Aren't we?

Some people traps

The big monkey trap, the one which dooms the monkey and can snare us if we aren't careful, is short-term thinking—the inability to place immediate events into the context of what is in our long-term interest.

If the monkey thinks about it, his obvious choice will be to let go of the rice and get the heck out of there. After all, a free monkey will have another shot at food. Captured monkeys have no freedom to make such choices. Alas, monkeys, like some people, have no ability to look beyond the moment.

All of which leads to a subcategory of the short-term thinking monkey trap. It is the decision-making monkey trap.

People often seem paralyzed by making decisions, even simple ones. It is not that most of the decisions people are asked to make are that momentous. The reason for the paralysis is that many people are scared to death of taking the responsibility for making a mistake.

"Better to make no decision at all than to make a bad one," they think. That attitude just reinforces the short-term thinking trap.

The trick then becomes to avoid making decisions, to shift the burden to someone else so that if things go wrong, you won't be held accountable. Indecision becomes a prize in itself, a way to avoid responsibility.

A variation of the decision-making monkey trap is the one created when you refuse to acknowledge that the decision you made *was* a bad one. People in authority positions seem especially prone to that one.

They have the rice of that bad decision clutched tightly and can see the consequences closing in. But still they hang on, convinced that if they let go, they somehow will lose more than if they just admit the mistake and move on.

Better to let go.

Lots of traps for the unwary

There are all sorts of monkey traps out there. Life is full of them. It's a veritable minefield of snares for the unwary, waiting to make monkeys of us all. Some are hidden. Others are easy to spot. But all of them depend upon our static thinking, our inability to see the true nature of a situation.

You see people yanking and hauling on that fistful of rice all of the time, desperate to escape the danger they see approaching, but unable to release what is really only a trinket in order to gain the greater prize.

So here's hoping you learn to spot the monkey traps life puts in front of you and to beat them when you can.

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Godless in America: conversations with an atheist

by George A. Ricker is now available at book retailers everywhere. For more information go to:

<http://www.godlessinamerica.com>

BCC hosts 'First Amendment' discussion

By Joan Joesting, Ed.D.

On September 19, 2006, on the Melbourne Campus of Brevard Community College there was a discussion in the auditorium called "Celebrate the US Constitution: First Amendment."

It began with the moderator, professor of history Lynn Spencer, presenting an introduction.

In case one doesn't know what the First Amendment is, it is as follows: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Spencer proceeded to give a history of the First Amendment stating that the basis of all our freedoms is based on English law as it was in the 1700's. At that time, there were chiefly three restrictions on freedom of speech. Seditious speech was speech expressed against the government, libel against people, and blasphemy against God.

From 1791-1917, in the US there were two laws enacted to restrict freedom of speech. In 1791, the Alien and Sedition Act was passed. In 1917 limits on freedom of speech were written because the nation was at war and our government wanted to ban military information being given to the enemy.

Since 1917, the arguments for and against freedom of speech have not stopped.

Some freedom of speech is not protected by the First Amendment such as yelling "fire" in a crowded theater. Death threats are not considered free speech.

Many freedom of speech arguments came with the Cold War and Senator Joe McCarthy's "communist witch hunt."

The best defense against bad speech is good speech.

With the Viet Nam War there was the flag burning that is still a controversial issue in 2006. Burning the flag is a method of expression of freedom of speech. This writer vividly recalls all the demonstrations during the Viet Nam War, the Pentagon Papers, etc.

Spencer concluded his remarks by saying, "I'm glad I'm teaching in the United States as I have freedom of speech."

Matt Reed, assistant managing editor of Florida Today and correspondent for USA Today explained what the First Amendment means to a modern newspapers. It gives them the freedom to publish any information without prior restraint.

Modern newspapers are being challenged by the Internet, text messages, etc.

Reed listed three things that Florida Today is working on: to strengthen investigative reporting; to

enhance human conversation via email that fuels "the market place of ideas;" and to compete with small newspapers like The Hometown News and the talk radio stations.

State Representative Mitch Needleman spoke next and told us he was in law enforcement before elected to public office and had to deal with all the protests against the local abortion clinic, an example of the First Amendment in action. He described the US Constitution as the "gateway to the future and that no one can restrain the voice of the American people."

After Needleman spoke there was a brief question and answer period.

SPEAKING OUT: *SCFA members in print*

The Ledger—September 20, 2006

Thomas Jefferson Taught Nation to Let Minority Have Its Say

A letter "Offending the Majority" Thursday asks why does our American government yield to a minority, regarding God, when the majority are Christians?

The reason is because our government represents all the people. The only way to do this is for our government to be secular and neutral to all religions. When it comes to human rights, the majority does not rule. If this were the case, we might still have slavery, for example. This is what our Constitution stands for, protecting the rights of the minority from being trampled by the majority.

The writer has it all wrong. Secularists are not trying to take over our country. Instead, it is Christians who are trying to turn our country into a theocracy.

Secularists want religious freedom for all by having a neutral government. Some Christians seem to think that religious freedom means having our government endorse their religion only. Why is this? Does their God need our government's help?

CHARLES EUGENE
Titusville

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