

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER EVENTS

DADE&BROWARD: September 15, 2:00 at the Broward County Main Library, 8th floor, 100 S. Andrews Ave. Ft. Lauderdale. Adimatha Israel will speak about *Truth, Beliefs and Convictions*. Admission is free, but seats are limited. **Non-Prayer Breakfast** at 8 am every third Tuesday of the month at **Denny's Restaurant**, 16751 NW 67th Avenue, Hialeah, (entrance, New Testament Boulevard). For directions call 305-821-7032.

Specific meeting information and activities published in **NEWSNOTES**, included in all newsletters. FMI: Patrick Bens, 305/940-0442 or 954/929-0441. atheist1@bellsouth.net

YOUR NEXT EDITION of *Secular Nation* will have a new editor, a new look and a new, larger audience.

The new editor is Lois Lyons, a professional journalist and a dedicated freethinker. Lois's journalistic experience includes extensive writing and editing of business publications; book editing (especially in scholarly books), and free-lance writing.

Atheist Alliance Report

Secular Nation new inside and out

—*Bobbie Kirkhart*

Lois is an outspoken atheist and a long-time member of Atheists United.

At the March 2002 convention in Dallas, the AAI board voted two important changes pertaining to *Secular Nation*. The first is that the magazine will have a full-color, slick cover. Dave Faroe, who does our web graphics, will design the cover. Also at the convention, a committee headed by Joe Zemel was set up to get *Secular Nation* placed in libraries across the country. Individuals and organizations are needed to sponsor this endeavor.

Atheist Forum

Hillsborough County residents can see the *Forum* live on Tuesday nights, 10:30 on Channel 20. The show is re-run the following day at 1:00 p.m. on Channel 19, City of Tampa only.

TAMPA BAY: Pinellas County—First Sunday of each even-numbered month (Feb., Apr., etc.), 1:00-3:30 at the Pinellas Park Library, 78th Ave N & 52nd Street.

Tampa—First Sunday of each odd-numbered month, 1:00-3:30, Platt Library, 3910 S. Manhattan Ave., Tampa.

Optional dinners follow all meetings at nearby cafeterias. Be sure we have your e-mail address to receive meeting and event reminders.

NOTICE: Due to Labor Day weekend, there will be **NO MEETING IN SEPTEMBER**

FMI: Ed Golly, 813/839-7567, AthAIFLE@aol.com.

Public Access TV funding cut

TAMPA—The Hillsborough County Commission voted 4-3 on August 1st to withhold \$355,000 in annual funding for public access TV. That's where we produce the *Atheist Forum*.

Spearheaded by Commissioner Ronda Storms, the cut would allow funding for a traffic light, a recreation center, and neighborhood grants for fireworks. In other words, money for the public's freedom of speech is going up in smoke.

In the meantime, the commissioners have granted an increase of \$200,000 for the government channel, apparently concluding that the government is the only entity which should be given a forum and to hell with the people.

The real issue is Storm's objection to a single Public Access program which is critical of her. An obviously firm believer in government censorship, Storms learned that commissioners can't legally object to program content. So she created the funding smokescreen. The station budget is about \$900,000. Of that, the city kicks in \$540,000 which at this time is not threatened. But losing the county contribution, while not meaning the end for Public Access, would be significant.

It's not over yet. The board will hold a public hearing on the budget in September and other commissioners can see clearly through Storm's pettiness. For the *Forum* to continue, we should have our own full production crew and anyone in the Tampa Bay area can assist. If you would like to become involved, contact Ed Golly at (813) 835-1500 or e-mail: AthAIFLE@aol.com.

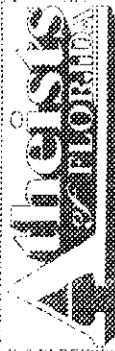
Are you on our mailing list because you signed up at the Ralph Nader rally? If so, this is the final mailing you will receive unless you join Atheists of Florida. Simply fill in the coupon on page 7 and mail it in. Join the community of reason today!

Atheists of Florida

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Who's smiling now?

Florida vouchers unconstitutional

This is news? We've known it all along
LEON COUNTY—When Gov. Jeb Bush signed Florida's voucher system into law in 1999, he did it "with a smile"—an obvious smile of contempt for both voucher opponents and the state constitution. But on August 5th, Circuit Judge P. Kevin Davey ruled in Tallahassee that Florida law clearly prohibits use of public money in church schools. He then issued an injunction barring any students from using vouchers to attend private school this year. We can only imagine how Shrub looked with the smile wiped from his face.

While 703 students have accepted tuition vouchers for this school year, roughly 8,900 students in 10 public schools were eligible because their schools received failing grades twice within four years. Those schools are in Escambia, Miami-Dade, Orange and Palm Beach counties. Private schools are held to no tests or state overview of their curricula.

In his decision, Davey wrote that Florida law is "clear and unambiguous...with scant room for interpretation or parsing" in prohibiting public money from being used by a church, sect or religious denomination or in the aid of any sectarian institution.

Davey's ruling comes just six weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that voucher programs don't run afoul of the separation of state and church clause in the federal Constitution. But the Florida Constitution goes further and forbids the flow of public dollars, either directly or indirectly such as through a voucher program, to religious or sectarian schools, Davey wrote.

Although the governor portends to be the

"education governor," the primary litigant against his "Opportunity Scholarships" was the 122,000-member Florida Education Association—that would be the teachers. "Vouchers violate the Florida Constitution by taking taxpayer dollars from our struggling public schools and diverting them to private and overwhelmingly religious schools," said Maureen Dinneen, president of the association. She called on the governor and Legislature now to "get on with the business of making every public school the best it can be."

Instead, the governor plans to appeal the decision, wasting more tax dollars in his botched effort to dismantle the public school system and convert education to religious indoctrination.

The voucher case is so important to Bush and state education officials that they hired Tallahassee lawyer Barry Richard to argue the case instead of the Attorney General's Office, which normally defends the state in lawsuits. Richard represented Dubya during the 2000 election challenges and now is paid \$425 an hour to handle the voucher case.

During a hearing in July, Richard argued that vouchers don't violate the state Constitution because parents, not the government, choose where to send their children. Davey saw through that convoluted logic, saying such an interpretation "would amount to a colossal triumph of form over substance."

In fact, the section of the Constitution that Davey referred to was amended in 1968 largely through the efforts of former Rep. Jim Redman of Plant City. Redman has said he was concerned about increased efforts to funnel public money to private schools and didn't want to see religious schools cashing checks intended for public schools.

But Davey's ruling struck down the entire statute, including parts that allowed parents to use vouchers to send their children to private, nonreligious schools or to transfer their children out of a failing school and into a better public school in the district.

Voucher myths exposed in related article, page 4

Excerpts from the ruling

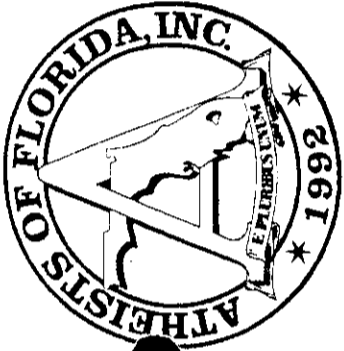
"It cannot be logically, legally or persuasively argued that the receipt of these funds does not aid or assist the institution in a meaningful way. The entire educational mission of these schools, including the religious education component, is advanced and enhanced by the additional financial support received through operation of the Opportunity Scholarship Program."

"While this court recognizes and empathizes with the salutary purpose of this legislation—to enhance the educational opportunity of children caught in the snare of substandard schools—such a purpose does not grant this court authority to abandon the clear mandate of the people as enunciated in the Constitution."

Secular schools can never be tolerated because such schools have no religious instruction, and a general moral instruction without religious foundation is built on air. Consequently, all character training and religion must be derived from faith...we need believing people.

—Adolph Hitler

Atheists of Florida
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Bush choice to head Florida's child welfare agency criticized for religious article

TALLAHASSEE—Gov. Bush's choice to head Florida's troubled child welfare agency came under fire the very day following his appointment for his links to a published article that said spanking that causes bruises and welts is OK and married women shouldn't have careers.

Jerry Regier, appointed August 15th as secretary of the Department of Children & Families, defended himself against the criticism. He said he was a co-chairman of the group that released the 1989 paper but he did not write the paper and does not support its positions. He said he broke his relationship with The Coalition on Revival, Inc., about a year after the article was published because of the group's extreme interpretations of the Bible. "It is not my position that corporal punishment should result in welts or bruises," Regier two-stepped in a statement. "My own wife of 34 years is a registered nurse, and I am extremely supportive of her career. I support women in the work force as well as women holding an equal role in marriage."

When Bush appointed Regier, who had worked in his father's administration in the early 1990s, he said the agency needed to get down to work instead of spending all its energy reacting to problems. Instead, Bush and Regier found themselves on the defensive when Democrats and some child advocates criticized the new appointee for his involvement in a 1989 article titled *The Christian World View of the Family*. The article says Christians shouldn't marry non-Christians, couples should only be allowed to divorce in cases of adultery or abandonment, and premarital sex and masturbation should be not be "accepted as 'normal' or legal."

"These writings show that Jeb either didn't do his homework and thoroughly review Regier's background before he made this appointment or he agrees with the

extreme positions his appointee has taken regarding women and families," said Florida Democratic Party Chairman Bob Poe. Regier responded that he did not exercise editorial control over the paper's content. "Rather, as a family advocate, I was asked to serve as a co-chairman of the group that released the paper," he said. Bush defended his choice and said his background was thoroughly checked. Bush

said he did not know about the paper before appointing Regier, but accepted that Regier had distanced himself from it. "He doesn't share those extreme views," Bush said, unwittingly conceding that the Bible expresses extreme and improper views on child rearing.

Regier, 57, was named to replace Kathleen Kearney, who resigned just two days earlier amid a series of high-profile cases that have shaken confidence in the department.

Court date set for Ten C's hearing

In two-and-a-half months Alabama's Chief Justice will find himself in court facing a federal judge—this time as a defendant. October 15th is the date set for Chief Justice Roy Moore to answer charges that he violated the law when he placed the ten commandments monument in the state Judicial Complex.

In a speech on August 1st to the Christian Coalition, Moore neglected to mention the two lawsuits filed against him, but he did talk about the monument on the very anniversary of the monument's unveiling.

Yes, it was a year ago that Moore stunned even workers in the Judicial Complex by unveiling what was probably one of the best kept secrets in state government. The man who became known as the Ten Commandments Judge unveiled a monument in granite with, among other quotes, the Ten Commandments on it. And Moore is still defending what he believes is his right to publicly display a belief in god. "You see we think that the sovereignty of God is forbidden out there (in the world). Well, I would like somebody from the ACLU or the Southern Poverty Law Center or anybody else to show me how that's possible."

It didn't take long after the unveiling for the ACLU and the Southern Poverty Law Center as well as a group of African-American lawmakers to oppose the monument. Members of that group brought excerpts from one of Martin Luther King's speeches they wanted placed in the rotunda too, but they were turned away. However, the critics haven't gone anywhere. Maggie Garrett with the ACLU observes, "Placing the Ten Commandments there is placing the government's stamp of approval on a religious creed."

As a result, Judge Moore is facing two lawsuits—one filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center and the other by the ACLU. Garrett says they feel strongly about their positions, too. "Many courts have visited this issue of the ten commandments being put up by governments and the courts have consistently held that it's unconstitutional."

Judge Moore appears confident he will win in court citing history and law that he feels are on his side. "Separation of church and state was never meant to separate the recognition of God from the state. It was meant to keep the state out of the church, not out of government."

Chief Justice Moore also defended the 'Under God' clause of the pledge of allegiance, which was ruled unconstitutional in July by a Federal Appeals court in California. **A**

NEARLY EVERY POLITICAL AND SOCIAL "cause" organization has done it—gays, blacks, women, even the Promise Keepers. Groups of every ideological persuasion have spoken out and demanded "a seat at the table" by mobilizing their supporters for a march or demonstration in our nation's capital. Now, a coalition of groups and individuals calling themselves "Godless Americans" will hold a peaceful March on the Capitol Mall in Washington, DC on Saturday, November 2, 2002.

"Godless Americans" to march on Washington in November, 2002

The March is a "coming out" event for people who are Atheists, Freethinkers, Secular Humanists, Rationalists—people with no religious beliefs and who embrace no religious creeds—according to Ellen Johnson, President of the Godless Americans March on Washington Task Force.

Actually all Americans are "godless" but there are

virtually millions who actually realize it. The latest American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) reflects that nearly 13% of the population has no religion. That adds up to over 30-million of us, a figure larger than most American religious denominations. And it's time for us to be heard!

The goals of the march include demanding equal rights for Atheists and other nonbelievers in the workplace, when seeking public office, or being asked to give testimony; an end to discrimination against "Godless Americans" by groups like the Boy Scouts; an end to "prayer bullying" and coercive religious proselytizing in public schools; abolition of any government subsidies for religious groups (including the defeat of Dubya's "faith-based initiative"); and restoration of the secular "E Pluribus Unum" as the "national motto of a free and secular people."

The Godless Americans March on Washington will feature speakers, entertainment and other events in the nation's capital.

"It's our first big step in 'coming out' as a group in the American political and cultural landscape that needs to be heard—and will be heard—in this great discussion we call democracy," said Johnson.

So far, over eighty organizations have endorsed the GAMAW March, including Atheists of Florida. Several members have already begun making plans to attend. Contact A of F president Ed Golly for more information ASAP if you are interested in joining us. E-mail: Atha1FLE@aol.com, or phone (813) 835-1500.

In Washington, the official hotel and welcome event banquet venue for the Godless Americans March:

Join us in the nation's capital at the official hotel of the Godless Americans March on Washington—the Hilton Garden Inn, Arlington Courthouse Plaza, located at 1333 North Courthouse Road, Arlington, Virginia 22201.

You may secure a special (and really incredible!) rate of only \$89 plus tax per night—and there will be a "Meet 'n Greet" Welcome Dinner, buffet style on Friday night, November 1. The special room rate runs from Thursday to Sunday night so you can make a "mini-vacation" out of this. That's good especially if you're coming from distant points. King/Double/Queen \$89 per night. Extra person charge: \$15 per night for third person. Room tax is 4.5% with Occupancy tax of 5.25%. Cut off date for this special rate is October 18, 2002. Reservations made after that date will be accepted only upon availability, standard rates.

Please note that this \$89 rate is really spectacular. Most DC Metro lodging costs from upward of \$125 night. One final item here: **We expect all of the rooms and available seats to go fast! We urge you to make your room reservations and reservation payment for the Welcome Buffet Dinner as soon as possible! When the rooms "go," you're at the mercy of other hotels!**

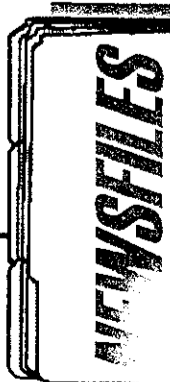
- Convenient to the Washington Metro Line and transportation to the Capitol Mall, White House and other points of interest!
- Less than ten minutes from Washington National Airport via memorial Drive!
- Located near major DC attractions!
- Facilities and services include Great American Grill for breakfast and dinner, evening room service, Pavilion Lounge with separate cocktail lounge, indoor heated pool and Fitness Center, 24-hour Pavilion Pantry Convenience Mart, complimentary garage parking, valet and self-laundry, salon. No charge for children under 18 when they occupy the same room as parents or grandparents, so bring the family!
- Rooms include refrigerator, microwave oven and coffee maker, hair dryer, iron/ironing board, wireless internet service, speakerphone with data ports, Cable TV with comp HBO and Lodgenet Entertainment, free USA Today at your door!

You must make your reservations directly through the hotel. Contact Julie Duchin, Director of Sales at 703-528-4444, or via e-mail through jduchin@hgcourthouse.com. "Regular" reservations at this new hotel will not be taken until September, but anyone participating in the Godless Americans March can register early through Ms. Duchin.

A special "Meet 'n Greet" Welcome Buffet Dinner at the Hilton Garden Inn will begin at 8 pm on Friday night, November 1, 2002. Everyone participating in the Godless Americans March on Washington is welcome.

* Rate for the buffet dinner is \$32 per person (includes all taxes, gratuities)

* Space is limited for this Welcome event, so mail in your reservations (see below for details) as soon as possible! As with the rooms at the Hilton, seating for this Friday night Welcome buffet event are limited! Send check or money order at the rate of \$32 per person to: AMERICAN ATHEISTS, PO Box 5733, Parsippany, NJ 07054-6733. Be sure to include your full name, postal mailing address, phone number and e-mail if possible. Reservations for the buffet banquet are on a first-come basis.



still consider them above the law

PHIA—Misleaders of Roman Catholic religious orders decided that they abusive priests should be kept away from children but not expelled, a less restrictive plan than the zero-tolerance policy bishops adopted earlier this year. The policy is not mandatory. The orders rejected decisions to remove offenders from all church work and, in some cases, the priesthood, considering that approach too harsh. Instead, they felt they should be guided by the Catholic belief in redemption for sinners. We found no mention made of plans for legal prosecution.