

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER EVENTS

MIAMI: Sunday, October 17, 2:00 - 4:00 pm. at the Broward County Main Library, 8th floor, 100 S. Andrews Ave., downtown Fort Lauderdale. Topic for discussion: *Must we bury Halloween?*
November — Meeting weekend falls concurrent with the Miami International Book Fair in which we will participate. FMI: Patrick Bens, 305/940-0442 or 954/929-0441
 e-mail: atheist1@bellsouth.net
Singles Happy Hour — each Wednesday from 4-5pm at the Caddyshack Pub & Grill, 315 S. 62nd Ave., Hollywood.

PALM BEACH: Sunday, November 21st (third Sunday of each month) at 2:30pm in Jupiter. Members are notified of place of meeting by postcard, or call Charles Schuster 561/627-6340 or 624-9359 schuster@gate.net.

TAMPA: October 30—no meeting. We will be participating in Circus McGurkis in Lakeview Park, 20th St. & 28th Ave. South in St. Petersburg. Our table will be situated alongside ACLU and Americans United and be open from about 7:00 am until 3:00. All members are invited to help participate. Contact Ed Corli—727/321-6217 or Jerry Moore—727/526-4223

Monthly Dinner—Wednesday, October 27th, cocktails at 5:00 p.m., dinner at 6:00 at Jimmy Mac's Waterfront, 5000 Gandy Blvd. in the private room just off the entry foyer. FMI on dinners: Ed Golly—813/839-7567 or Jerry Moore—727/526-4223

Saturday, November 27, noon - 1:30 in meeting room A or B of the Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Clearwater.

Letters *continued*

prejudices which had been inculcated in us from childhood. I have absolutely no objection to Mr. Schuster printing this as his own opinion, which he did later. If he wishes to parade his prejudices, that is fine by me, and indeed, I had a bit of nostalgia when I read his writings, because the arguments were almost identical to those of the German officers we took prisoner in Italy during WWII, who were filled with conspiracy theories of how the world was being taken over, etc., combined with total distrust of government. I noted he had a novel interpretation of history, but he is entitled to his beliefs, as long as they do not claim to be the official policy of the Atheists of Florida.

I doubt that any two people in our meetings agree completely with anyone else. I don't care, as long as we concentrate on eradicating

George W.

superstition. Mr. Schisler has done excellent work in creating a chapter, and for that he deserves praise. We come together to work for a common goal, to free people from superstition. I don't care if you believe that the UFO's abduct people, as long as you will join me to combat frauds. As long as we combine to educate people about superstition. I don't mind if you lecture me on the menace of the little green men from Mars. I do not wish to act as the Christians do, and set standards by which we judge how "true" an atheist is. I will work with anyone to protect our civil rights, even though we differ on everything else in the world. This is no time for divisiveness.

True, it would be wonderful if we all agreed on everything, and I admire those of us who are dedicated to democratic systems.

However considering that we are such a minority, we need to avoid making enemies and one of the ideas which is dangerous to us is the feeling that we are better than the next person.

—Jacques A. Musy
Valrico, FL

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10 October/November 1999



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Board of Directors holds special meeting

TAMPA The newly elected board of Atheists of Florida met Oct. 10 in Tampa. The special meeting allowed the recently elected board to meet each other and take care of some interim business. Fourteen of the 18-member roster attended.

Although the treasurer was unable to attend, our balances included \$1,330 for A of F and \$4,810 in the scholarship fund.

President Ed Golly announced that we will again participate in the Miami Book Fair International and thanks mainly to Kyoko Brogdon, all our expenses are already met.

We have a very large inventory of books in our library available for sale. All titles for sale are being compiled into a separate catalogue which we can use at outdoor events. We'll also continue to showcase titles in our newsletter or send the catalogue to anyone who requests it.

About two years ago we designed our own Web page, but determined it was too costly at that time to post it. Newly elected board member Jim Peterson disclosed that he is a professional Web page designer and will create a page for us and find a way to get it posted economically. This will link to the Atheist Alliance page which has been our only Internet presence to date. Several board members donated a total of \$450 to develop the page and register a domain name.

None of the Life Member funds ever received by Atheists of Florida have ever been spent. These funds are saved for the future of the organization. Currently, the funds are held in

bank certificates of deposit which draw very little interest. The board decided that when the CDs come due, we will transfer the funds into a Vanguard no-load Dow Jones 500 Index Fund, which is a mutual fund tied to the top 500 companies listed on the Dow. This should generate significantly better returns over future years.

Only one change was made to the bylaws. As it stood, we needed to have 10 members in a geographical area in order to start a chapter. But it's very difficult to generate these members if we have no presence in the area. The change allows any member to found a chapter with board approval. We can then assist with the financial start-up costs of advertising and a telephone line. Once the chapter grows to ten members, it may then appoint a member to serve on the board of directors. Although the board is set at 18 members it can accommodate up to 24.

Dr. James Williamson was elected to the one trustee vacancy on the Twain Scholarship Fund. The other trustees are: Rebecca Porto, M.D.; Charles Ross; Charles Schisler; and Christos Tzanetakos, founder. Tzanetakos writes, "With the explosion of science and technology over the past half-century reaching historical heights, Humankind remains plagued by antiquated ideas and superstitions (also ethnic identities) which divide our species, and threatens us with annihilation.

"With these thoughts in mind, the trustees of the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund have chosen this year's essay topic. (continued on page 2)



Board of Directors, standing left to right: Anthony Schlieffstein, chairman; Christos Tzanetakos; Ed Golly, president; Jennifer Gallo; Ed Corli; Dr. James Williamson; John MacKay, P.A.; Dominick Florio; Rebecca Porto, M.D.; Jim Peterson; Nan Owens. Front row: James Young; Steve Miles; Patrick Bens.

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church
 A Member Society of the ATHEIST ALLIANCE, the Democratic Alliance of Autonomous Atheist Societies

Atheists of Florida

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Membership dues

Life Member \$ 500.00
Sustaining 50.00
Couple 40.00
Individual 30.00
Student (under 25 yrs.) 10.00
Newsletter (out. of state) 10.00

Send newsletter correspondence to Tampa Bay Chapter, address above. The A of F newsletter is provided free to our members as a medium of exchange. Letters from our members are published on a space-available basis. Articles may be edited for clarity or length. Atheists of Florida, Inc. is a Member Society of the national Atheist Alliance.

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Newsletter Production:

Ed Golly
Printing & mailing (separately): Jerry Moore

Board from page 1

Breaking the Chains of the Past to Liberate the Future.

Entries are due by Dec. 31, 1999 and awards will be: First and second place—\$500. Third and fourth place—\$300.

Orlando will now have our next chapter of A of F. Jennifer Gallo will be director and set up our telephone line in the area. We will be placing advertising in some local publications and she will soon begin holding meetings.

Patrick Bens offered to form a committee to locate more permanent meeting facilities for A of F and the board approved. He will be assisted by Porto and Schiefelstein.

Also, the board approved the formation of an outreach committee chaired by Jim Young. This committee will organize and engage in board approved outreach activities which promote and nurture atheism.

The next meeting will be our regular Annual Board meeting probably in March of next year.

Readers Respond

So here comes the millennium. Even though it's not technically the beginning of the next century, it does generate a notable change of numbers on the calendar. Let's face it...it is a landmark.

Thirty, forty, or fifty years ago, the year 2000 seemed too far away for most of us to contemplate. But when we did think about it, what did we foresee? How did you picture the world of the year 2000 whenever you first really contemplated it? Would we have moon bases as Kubrick predicted in his Space Odyssey? Did you think we would utilize significantly different forms of transportation? Would we be wearing different wardrobes, or would the whole world be art deco? Did you think superstition would survive or war become obsolete? Or would Paul Erlich's scenario of an overpopulated resource-scarce world evolve?

Our basic question is this: What, in your opinion, is the most remarkable aspect of the world as we reach the year 2000?

Answer in no more than two paragraphs and we'll print the responses in our final newsletter of 1999.

We await your response at P.O. Box 130753, Tampa, 33611, fax to (813) 839-7567, or e-mail AthALFLE@aol.com

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Theory better than law

Published in the Daytona Beach News-Journal

The term "Law" as applied to science is a broad term and in many cases is misused when considering recent discoveries.

Einstein's Theory of Relativity applies to very high speeds, such as approaching the speed light and the

LETTERS



very small, such as atomic particles. This is where Newton's Laws break down. In this case a theory is much better than a law.

When information about gravity and evolution are compared it is quickly seen that the effects of gravity can be measured, but scientists have very little knowledge about what causes it.

On the other hand the effects of evolution can easily be seen and scientists know what causes it. In this case a theory is better than a law.

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The amount of new information about evolution that has been gathered since the technology to sequence DNA has been applied to almost all living things is astounding. Although only about ten percent of the evidence that supports evolution is from fossils the tremendous amount of new fossil evidence found in recent years and the advance in biochemistry have added even more credibility to acceptance of evolution to explain the diversity of life on the planet. I know of no major college or university in the world that does not accept evolution as an explanation for the diversity of life.

Ormond-by-the-Sea

Schisler revisited

Editor: I think both Charles Schisler and Charles Coryn have both missed the point. The point has nothing to do with whether Charles Schisler was factual in his article. The point and only point is... was such rhetoric appropriate literature to be published under the banner of atheism.

John W. Mackay, P.A.

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no vested interest in nor can it benefit from the dissemination of literature which might be interpreted as prejudiced. If some of our own view this literature as inappropriate, we surely should have enough sense to take a critical look.

I am sure that anyone with an agenda can easily assemble true facts with which to criticize jews, blacks, gays, women, the United Nations, our government, etc. But is that our purpose? Is that the appropriate theme of our literature? Is that what we call critical inquiry?

Critical inquiry is most certainly our goal, but that simplistic statement doesn't say it all. We'll avoid, like the plague, any subtle attempt to use critical analysis as an excuse to nurture prejudice. Charles Coryn, in answer to your question, "these are the ideas which are dangerous to Atheism" and of what all of us are to "Beware"

I think Florence Morgenroth and many others recognize that we need to stick to the kind of literature which appeals to free thinkers while simultaneously avoiding literature which might appeal to hate mongers.

In expressing these views, I wish to make it clear that I am not labeling Charles Schisler a hate monger, nor do I imply, it, I merely state that his article, whether intentional or not, would have appeal to them and they are not the type we wish to attract to Atheists of Florida.

Lakeland

Editor:

In the interchange between Florence Morgenroth and Charles Schisler recently printed in the newsletter, Mr. Coryn brings up an interesting question, to wit: "What ideas are dangerous to the cause of Atheism?"

I think there is a great danger in thinking of any particular group as being superior or inferior or trying to justify past history of rights or wrongs. Every example of a wrong done by people of one group can be balanced against good done by others of that group.

Originally, I complained that Mr. Schisler's diatribe was being distributed under the imprint of the Atheists of Florida, and I felt that only the Board of Directors could sanction their imprint, and no individual can speak for the entire group. Mr. Schisler wrote a letter to me but I did not respond. We met at a convention and I explained I would be glad to explain to him why I refused to respond to the letter, but he could not spare the time. His letter to me simply attacked me by impugning my intelligence, my motives and doubting my ability to detect truth, etc. I never respond to "ad hominem" attacks, usually caused when a person is confronted with something to which he does not have an adequate answer and takes refuge in anger. Religious people usually curse freethinkers because they are unable to answer our questions.

I realize that when we reject religion, and become freethinkers, we sometimes bring along (next page)

Minnesota Atheists, a member society of the Atheist Alliance, placed a 1/4-page ad in the Oct. 8 Minneapolis Star Tribune. It was designed to counter a particularly disgusting ad placed the previous Sunday by Christian organizations. This is the editorial sent by Marie Castle to media nationwide on behalf of Atheist Alliance. It was ignored in favor of endless columns inches of religious propaganda.

Minnesota Atheists respond to

—Marie Castle, president, AAI



Ventura

GOV. VENTURA'S STATEMENT about religion has brought screams of outrage from across the theological spectrum. It did not help at all that he qualified this statement by saying he was expressing his distaste for intolerant religions. It helped even less that Ventura went on to advocate legalizing prostitution and decriminalizing drugs. It got worse when he justified, but did not condone, the Tailhook incident.

This was not what organized religion, long secure from questioning, wanted to hear. But Gov. Ventura spoke his mind, and he did it honestly. The Bill of Rights says we have a right to express our

"Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers. It tells people to go out and stick their noses in other people's business. I live by the golden rule: Treat others as you'd want them to treat you. The religious right wants to tell people how to live."

—Gov. Jesse Ventura

opinions, but it is now clear that religious organizations cannot abide any opinion critical of them. Why Not? If they are convinced religion is not a sham and a crutch, shouldn't they welcome rather than prevent opportunities to prove it? Political beliefs, often as strongly held as religious beliefs, are not exempt from criticism.

Want to let the Governor know what you think of his comments? Write him:

Governor Jesse Ventura
Room 130
STATE CAPITOL
St. Paul, MN 55155-1622

So organized religion circles the wagons and beats the drums of propaganda, driving honesty back to the realm of lip service, the abode of all political virtues. And the politicians hear those drums and,

true to form, take up the beat, sacrificing honesty to political expediency.

Religionists who see bigotry towards them in Ventura's comments see no bigotry towards the non-religious in the Boy Scouts of America's slanderous policy for admission: "The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgment of His favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship."

They see no bigotry towards the non-religious in the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion insisting that god beliefs be part of the definition of patriotism and refusing membership to atheists; no matter how heroic their service record.

They see no bigotry towards the non-religious in the remarks by a Catholic official, (reported by the media on June 6, 1995) regarding the status of the Catholic Church in China: "If a person has no religious beliefs, he can't be a moral person. If he's not a moral person, he cannot live in a moral society."

They see no bigotry towards the non-religious in the statement made by former President George Bush in a campaign stop at O'Hare International Airport on August 27, 1988: "I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is on nation under God."

To borrow Sen. Trent Lott's criticism of Ventura: "Can you believe (any of the above) would say such an insensitive, bigoted thing?" Lott added, "The enemies

of organized religion are out there." Who? Anyone who raises honest questions about religion?

This is not one nation under God, it is one very pluralistic nation under the Constitution, which includes the right to freedom of speech. Ventura's speech raises issues that should be discussed openly—the Sacred Cow status of religion, the appropriate legal status of prostitution and drug use, the propriety of the methods used for military training. Ventura is not always right—some of his comments are incredibly ignorant. But he can be educated, as we all can, if the drumbeat of religious propaganda does not drive our society deep into an Inquisitorial mindset where dishonesty is the best—and safest—policy.

An editorial from the Los Angeles Times appeared in mid-April in the Tampa Tribune. It presented this rather compelling argument for the survival of religion.

HOW IN THE WORLD does it survive? So fascinated am I that a totally primitive, illogical idea completely devoid of any supporting evidence whatsoever survives in this modern world that I have become driven to atheist activism.

We really kinda knew it all the time or,

It's all in the genes

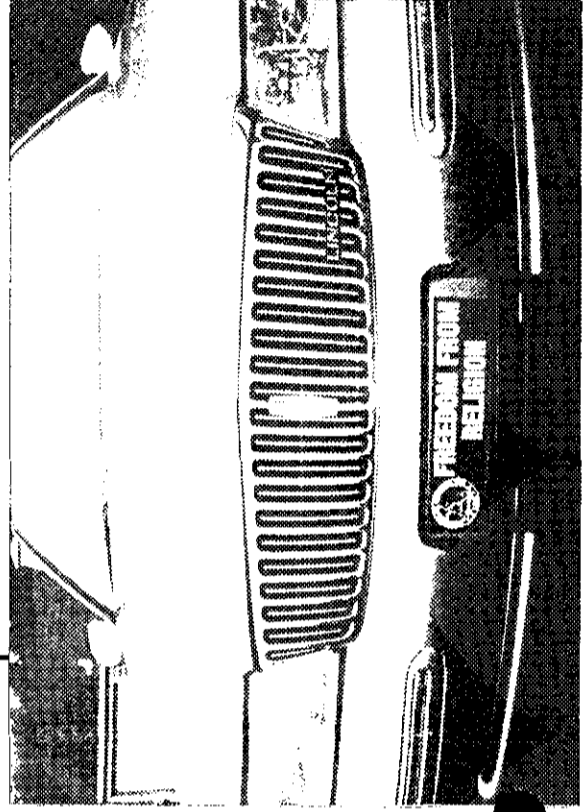
—Ed Golly

zarre, vacuous destructive idea from the human experience. In time, we will come to understand the nature of the origin of matter and energy and, consequently, ourselves. Steven Hawkins predicts the answer may come within 20 years. But in the meantime, we may have discovered the reason for its survival.

Geneticists have become so successful at unraveling the code of life, DNA, that their work is embraced not only as our best hope of curing cancer and other diseases, but as a means of understanding human behavior. Genes, many scientists believe, determine not only the shape of our bodies, but the contours of our emotions.

Could genes also be the determinant of human behavior? *The Nature Assumption*, a best-selling book published last year, contends that genes, not parenting, are primarily responsible for how children turn out.

That's why the emergence of a fast-growing but still little-known academic school of thought called memetics is welcome. Memetics is the science of memes, a word that biologist Richard Dawkins derived in 1976 from the word "memory" to refer to ideas, habits and beliefs that are passed from person to person by imitation. Memes, it is thought, ensure their survival by leaping from brain to brain, mimicking the way genes



A of F member Gerald Curo sports our sticker in Eastham, MA

propagate through sperm or eggs. What genes are to our bodies, memes are to the human culture and mind. Genetics and memetics have in common the notion that humans, like all animals, are influenced by forces that they don't consciously understand and that don't always act in their benefit.

Much in the way that viruses spread through a species, memetics sees ideas as a kind of virus, sometimes propagating in spite of truth and logic. Its maxim is: Beliefs that survive aren't necessarily true, rules that survive aren't necessarily fair, and rituals that survive aren't necessarily necessary. Things that survive do so because they are good at surviving.

Sound like religion? While the author never makes that particular connection, doesn't it deliver a perfect match to the scenario?

Religion is good at surviving because it has evolved that way. The irrational mind that is infected by religion allows itself to define the tenants of the religious belief to fit its needs instead of studying the religion to determine its specific requirements. The Bible, while remaining the best selling book of all time, simultaneously remains the least-read book of all time. Believers don't want to know what's in it; they want to believe what's in it in order to make it palatable. Each individual who believes in religion essentially creates a "designer religion" to fit his/her requirements.

What does religion contain to make it a survivable idea?

Basically, it's a "warm fuzzy." Much as we derive security from the protective parental figure through childhood, we seek to cling to this security blanket in adulthood by substituting a god in place of the parent. Survivability is a primary genetic trait of every being. Religion promises the ultimate in survivability—eternal, infinite life.

Memetics offers insights into how subconscious notions can sweep a population like a flu bug. So firm is religion's grasp on the human experience that even the social scientists who are beginning to employ memetics to engineer better public policies fail to attempt to utilize it to rid the world of the destructive nonsense called religion.

Memetics has been connected with genetics in the way it can absolve people of personal responsibility. In her book *The Meme Machine*, British professor Susan Blackmore argues that we humans are no more than "Meme machines." The author of the editorial maintains that this is an unrealistically extreme position and I agree, since many of us are able to eventually recognize the fallacy of religion and free our minds of it.

But unfortunately, it seems we have also had difficulty understanding the consequences of genetic and memetic input. We still naively think we can eliminate racism by simply legislating it away on paper. Similarly, we could never expect to cure the disease of religion in our lifetimes.

When Catholic and non-Catholic hospitals merge, women's health care services often get excoriated. Increasingly, services which can't be legislated out of existence are merged into oblivion.

The Hospitals that Stay Together Pray Together

"People are

already upset over

HMO

gate-keepers determine what services they may receive.

To add the

local

bishop is something that many people simply find unacceptable."

IT'S THREE IN THE MORNING. Your hands are shaking and your stomach feels as if it has a rock in it. A few hours ago, a masked intruder broke into your home. He raped you.

Now a kind policewoman is waiting with you in an examining room of Bayfront Medical Center in St. Petersburg.

The ER physician says you're okay, just a few bruises and bumps. They will heal. But aside from the other fears you have you're thinking about pregnancy. You want to make sure you prevent it. So you ask for a post-rape pill. The doctor tells you he'll be right back. You think he's gone to the hospital pharmacy to get one, but instead he's consulting with someone else about whether to give you the pill.

Thing is, he's not consulting with another doctor. He's asking a nun.

At Bayfront and other hospitals throughout the state and nation, decisions on reproductive rights, euthanasia, life support and other serious medical conditions more and more are being made not by qualified physicians but by the Catholic Church. And that has feminist and state-church separation groups outraged.

First some background. Catholic hospitals are the largest nonprofit health care providers in the nation. The Catholic Church owns five of the 10 largest hospital corporations in the country, according to an article by Jennifer Baumgardner in *The Nation*. That amounts to 800 hospitals and healthcare systems and more than 70 million patients.

In these lean financial times, the nonprofit Catholic hospitals are merging with nonprofit secular hospitals, as in the case with Bayfront in St. Pete. When that happens, the Catholic

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MARY BENNETT HUDSON

According to Catholics for a Free Choice, the Bayfront/St. Anthony's is one of 105 mergers that have occurred between Catholic and public or

non-sectarian private hospitals nationwide. In at least half those cases, reproductive health services were either dropped entirely or severely limited. CFC reports that there are now 91 counties in the nation where a Catholic hospital is the sole provider of health care, and 95% of those counties have a population where Catholics are in the minority. Eighty percent of the diocese served by BayCare is non-Catholic.

When Catholic hospitals contemplate mergers with secular hospitals, church officials insist that the new partners accept the directives. In a nutshell, the directives forbid hospitals from offering any services that contradict Catholic teaching. They specifically prohibit Catholic hospitals from offering abortion for any reason, vasectomies, tubal ligations and in vitro fertilization, or distributing any contraceptive device (even "emergency contraception" for women who have been raped or condoms for HIV-positive patients). The directives also state that the church is not bound to honor any "living will" or end-of-life instruction that a terminally ill patient may have signed.

Catholic hospitals draw government support through Medicaid and Medicare and accumulate huge amounts of money that is exempt from taxation. According to the California Women's Law Center, a group that has expressed alarm over the spate of mergers, the Daughters of Charity, the Catholic order of nuns that is the largest owner of Catholic hospitals in the country, had cash and investments totalling \$2 billion as of March of 1998.

Brackenridge Hospital in Austin, Texas, is a prime example of how a foreign theocracy can dictate your medical care here in America, regardless of your constitutional rights.

Last summer, a band of ultra-conservative Catholics assailed the city-owned hospital which was managed by the Catholic Seton Healthcare Network, and demanded that it stop offering sterilizations and birth control—even though the lease agreement between the church and the city stipulated that these services be offered. Austin Bishop John McCarthy had approved the arrangement, but the far-right Catholics attempted to go over his head, firing off a series of complaints directly to the Vatican. In response, Vatican officials instructed McCarthy to stop sterilizations and contraceptive distribution at the hospital.

McCarthy responded that the 30-year lease requires the facility to offer reproductive health care services (with non-hospital staff) and assured the Vatican that a "wall of separation" had been built between Seton and medical practices the church considers sinful. The dispute is ongoing.

At Bayfront, part of the BayCare health network, elective abortions are no longer performed, even in such cases as Down's Syndrome (The procedure is still performed when the life of a mother is in danger.) And some employees have reported no morning-after or post-rape emergency pills in the pharmacy since the

which went into effect for the first time this fall, has already been challenged in court by PFAWE, the NAACP, Americans United, and other groups.

"The more we know about vouchers, the more they look like a bad choice for our children," said LeRoy.

In one of the first acts of the '99-2000 sitting, the Supreme Court turned away appeals challenging McCain's Arizona law that gives tax breaks to people who donate money for scholarships at religious schools. The action was saluted as a major victory by backers of tuition vouchers and other aid for families whose children attend private schools.

The court refused to hear the two appeals in which challengers called the Arizona program a flagrant violation of the constitutionally required separation of state and church.

The action comes at a time when the political debate over tuition vouchers is heating up, sparked by Florida's adoption of the nation's first statewide voucher program. The court is sure to play a key and still emerging role in that debate.

The action set no legal precedent, and the justices could decide sometime in the future to take up a similar case.

Clint Bolick of the pro-voucher Institute for Justice said the Arizona ruling "will now resonate widely. Clearly, the momentum remains on the side of school choice supporters," Bolick said.

Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State disagreed. "It's dangerous to read too much into this denial of [review], especially when the court has before it a case much more directly involving aid to parochial schools," he said. "We hope the court will stop this erosion of the church-state wall of separation."

The justices will hear arguments in December in a Louisiana dispute over the use of taxpayer money to supply computers and other instructional materials for parochial schools. Their decision, expected by late June, could offer important new insights.

The court has not yet said whether it will review appeals stemming from Maine's tuition-help program for families whose children attend private

schools. In that state, the help is not offered for children attending religiously affiliated schools—a law upheld by the Maine Supreme Judicial Court.

Sheriff posts lunacy on official Web site

FT. MYERS—Lee County Sheriff John McDougall is at it again.

You may recall he made it on the radar screen expousing his views on abortion. This time, he's using his office Web site to demonstrate that he has a peanut for a brain.

"Wake Up America! Before It's Too Late!" blares the headline. McDougall is author of a raving diatribe attacking gays, feminists, atheists, liberal judges and the ACLU. He opens with the preamble to the U.S. Constitution, a document that obviously holds him in a state of complete confusion.

he filed a bill that would have set up a government information bank profiling every woman in Florida who had an abortion

"The Constitution of the United States of America lulls Americans into a false sense of security, believing that nothing can change the ideals and intent of its God-fearing framers," he begins.

After reciting crime statistics following the removal of recitation of prayers in the public schools, he reasons that the crimes are flourishing because "we protect the rights of atheists, and abolish the recognition of Almighty God in our classrooms."

"So many contradictions confront the American people. We stood by silently and watched atheistic malcontents abolish school prayer and replace it with yellow crime scene tape, metal detectors, and drug sniffing dogs. How do we combat this insanity?"

"As concerned citizens and Christians, we need to display and read in our classrooms once again, and with pride, the Ten Commandments—the Judeo-Christian foundation of our entire Constitutional system of law. We need to display them in other public buildings with as much pride as they are in the Supreme

Court."

McDougall defends using the official Web site to promote his lunacy by calling it a crime prevention document.

One County Commissioner questioned the practice, stating that, "when it comes to taxpayers paying for the Web site, there has to be a question...of the appropriateness of that activity."

According to Howard Simon, executive director of the ACLU of Florida, McDougall should get a new job as an activist for an extremist Christian political organization. He should also brush up on his knowledge of the Constitution, which protects the group McDougall chastises. McDougall's Web site address is: sheriff@fl.org.

Christer to hold gavel

TALLAHASSEE—Right-wing Christian crackpot Tom Feeney, who said he waited patiently in the Legislature's "back bench" for years when Republicans were a minority in the statehouse, has been selected by his colleagues to be the speaker of the Florida House of Representatives in 2001.

Feeney was Jeb Bush's running mate in the 1994 governor's race. He was one of the first lawmakers to push the idea of "school vouchers."

As long as Republicans maintain a majority in the 120-seat House after the next election, Feeney will take over for the current speaker, John Thrasher, in 2001. Feeney, 41, enjoys enthusiastic support from the Christian Coalition for his conservative views. In 1991, he filed a bill that would have set up a government information bank profiling every woman in Florida who had an abortion.

As Republican colleagues bowed their heads in the Capitol, former speaker Dan Webster led a prayer for Feeney, ending it, "We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen."

Webster incensed Jewish lawmakers in 1997 when he allowed public prayers to Jesus in the Capitol. Legislative policy requires all prayers to be non-sectarian. State Rep. Sandy Murman, a Tampa Republican, also rose to praise Feeney for what she called his "very strong family values."

Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services

A Catholic hospital is first a church, then a hospital. These hospitals must maintain a code of behavior that underpins everything they do

The Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, drafted in 1994 by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, cover moral issues from conception to death

Though the directives, in their entirety, apply only to Catholic hospitals, partner hospitals often are persuaded to abide by some of them

Here are some highlights of the directives

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES: Advance directives contrary to Catholic teaching will not be honored. Decisions by a health care surrogate "should be faithful to Catholic moral principles and to the person's intentions and values"

EUTHANASIA: Not permitted, even in states where it is legal.

PERSISTENT VEGETATIVE STATES: The conference of bishops is still trying to determine whether it is moral to withdraw food and water

MORNING-AFTER PILLS: A rape victim should be able to prevent pregnancy if "there is no evidence that conception

has occurred already." She may be treated with medications that prevent "ovulation, sperm capacitation or fertilization." Doctors can't "initiate or recommend" treatments "that have as their purpose or direct effect the removal, destruction or interference with the implantation of a fertilized ovum."

FERTILITY TREATMENTS: Procedures that involve destruction of human embryos are prohibited. Sperm and egg donors are prohibited, as are surrogate mothers and fertilization in lab dishes. Adoption services and counseling should be provided.

ABORTION: Never permitted when directly intentional. Are permitted when the primary intent is to cure a serious pathological condition in the mother and the procedure or medication cannot be safely postponed.

STERILIZATION: Not permitted unless it is the unintentional side effect of curing a serious pathological condition and no simpler treatment is available.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER HOSPITALS: Are opportunities for Catholic hospitals "to witness to their religious and ethical commitments and so influence the healing profession"—for example, in making sure the poor are treated. On the other hand, partnerships may create "risk of scandal" by generating confusion about Catholic moral teaching.

merger two years ago.

Employees at Bayfront must sign an agreement to work under the Catholic Directives. By November, 1999, Cigna health plan (for school district employees and many others) will only cover hospital care at Bayfront/St. Anthony's, down from a previous choice of 12 hospitals and 12 pages of listed doctors, now only 4½ pages.

Keep in mind this is a nonprofit community hospital that leases property from the city of St. Petersburg for \$10 a year. The lease, according to the *The St. Petersburg Times*, requires Bayfront to provide services regardless of "sex, race, color or creed." City attorneys are trying to determine if the abortion restrictions violate the lease.

But that has been difficult. Bayfront executives failed to disclose the religious intrusion into Bayfront when they appeared before the council two years ago to seek an amendment to its lease agreement with the city to allow Bayfront to join the alliance. When the abortion controversy first erupted, they stonewalled and denied requests for public records, further eroding the community's trust.

Local groups such as NOW, the ACLU, Americans United, Planned Parenthood, and Atheists of Florida, angered by the intrusion of religion into public health care, are making their voices heard.

Led by Sandy Oestreich, president of the Pinellas chapter of NOW, members of A of F, NOW and other groups protested a black-tie fundraiser for the hospital at the Coliseum in St. Pete on Sept. 24.

Chanting "Not the church, not the state, *women* will decide their fate!" and "Keep the pope out of my hospital bed," protesters held signs, waved at passers-by and challenged those attending the fundraiser to think before they give money to an organization that violates the Constitution. One woman, dressed in a blue gown, tried to convince protesters that the hospital was serving the community. The protesters ignored her.

Oestreich also has formed the Coalition for Religious Freedom in Our

Secular Hospitals. More meetings and protests are planned.

Activist Lois Uttley helped create MergerWatch, a branch of Family Planning Advocates in Albany, NY. They have recently helped block proposed mergers in Miami, Baltimore, Wilmington and Enid, OK. "When communities are awakened to the potential to have religious gatekeepers dictate what services they may or may not obtain," she said, "they get outraged."

"People are already upset over HMO gatekeepers determining what services they may receive," she continued. "To add the local bishop is something that many people simply find unacceptable."

Feminists know that women will never be free unless they can control their own bodies, a belief that became law in 1973. But Congress doesn't have to ban abortions if the American Medical Association treats the procedure as beyond the bounds of medical training. The Catholic Church doesn't have to bother swaying the opinion of the majority of Americans who believe in a woman's right to choose if it owns the hospital they go to. Grassroots activism remains a powerful weapon. This is why A of F has joined the coalition. Help us how you can, by signing petitions, picketing, or finding out about mergers in your town.

As more hospitals merge and more health care networks join the Catholic Church, it's likely that religious intrusion into our hospital beds will spread like a cancer.

Let's hope we can remove it before it kills us.



Court rejects Graduation prayers

JACKSONVILLE—A federal appeals court has struck down the Duval County Public School's effort to ramrod prayer into graduation exercises.

The idea was to have students give two-minute "messages" at the ceremonies. But the U.S. 11th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled 2-1 in May that the school district must discontinue its policy of allowing students to vote on whether to include the prayers.

"We hold that the Duval County school system's policy coerces objecting students to participate in prayer," wrote the chief judge for the majority. The court asserted that the graduation ceremony is controlled by the school and that

graduating students who objected to prayer would have no choice but to attend.

In a concurring opinion, Judge Phyllis Kravitch pointed out that only coercive, mandatory prayers are unconstitutional in public schools. "Contrary to popular belief," she observed, "the courts never have interpreted the [First Amendment] to prohibit any individual students from praying, for example, before a meal or before a test."

"W" proposes opening tax coffers to churches

WASHINGTON—Republican presidential frontrunner George W. Bush put some flesh on his slogan of "compassionate conservatism" last July, saying he would fund religious groups to tackle social problems through billions of dollars in tax breaks.

In a speech in Indianapolis, Bush delivered his most detailed policy prescription since stepping on to the campaign trail.

"In every instance where my administration sees a responsibility to help people, we will look first to faith-based organizations, charities and community groups that have shown their ability to save and change lives," Bush declared.

"We will make a determined attack on need, by promoting the compassionate acts of others. We will rally the armies of compassion in our communities to fight a very different war against poverty and hopelessness," he said.

Bush has attracted growing complaints from his rivals and critics over his failure to give specifics of his vision for the nation.

Ironically, Bush's speech echoed a similar proposal from Al Gore in May, in which the vice president promised to place "faith-based organizations" at the heart of his national strategy to combat poverty.

"If you elect me your president, the voices of faith-based organizations will be integral to the policies set

forth in my administration," Gore pledged.

However, Bush was more specific, proposing to devote \$8 billion in his first year in office to provide new tax incentives for charitable giving and to support charities and private institutions.

"We will provide charity tax credits—credits which will allow individuals to give a part of what they owe in state taxes directly to private and religious institutions fighting poverty in their own communities," Bush said. "We will allow private and religious groups to compete to provide services in every federal, state and local social program," he added.

He said religious organizations should not be required to compromise their core values or spiritual mission in order to get government money.

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And don't forget about McCain...

You may recall that Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) proposed a \$5.4 billion nationwide federally funded private and religious school voucher program in July.

At the same time that McCain and other Republican leaders were pushing for money for private and religious schools, they have continued to oppose measures that would benefit far more children by investing federal dollars to hire more teachers for the public schools and to help pay for desperately needed school construction and repairs.

McCain's proposal, a tax bill amendment, appeared to be a blatant attempt to win support for his presidential aspirations from the Religious Right, which has made taxpayer funding for private and religious schools a top priority.

"Senator McCain's voucher proposal would help private and religious schools and raise his standing with his party's far right—all at the expense of the majority of America's children and their schools," said Catherine LeRoy, Public Policy Director of People For the American Way. "This smacks of self-interested, narrow politics at its worst."

McCain's push for federal money to expand vouchers also came at a time when existing voucher programs in Cleveland and Milwaukee had failed to produce the educational gains their proponents promised and were coming under a deepening cloud of scandals and court challenges.

In Cleveland, where the voucher program is being challenged in federal court by PFAW Foundation and other organizations, officials recently were forced to expel several voucher schools from the program after reporters uncovered egregious safety hazards and other abuses, including a teacher who was a convicted murderer.

Milwaukee's voucher program has also been plagued by abuses, including growing evidence that some schools are flouting the law by violating random selection requirements and giving admission preferences to certain students. Florida's voucher program,

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"we will look first to faith-based organizations, charities and community groups"