

# Atheists of Florida

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Our organization has become something of a fixture down there. We know where to stand so as not to block the sidewalk, on the public right of way, and security guards down there keep an eye out and make sure nothing gets out of hand, something that's always a concern when you're dealing with drunken Christians—or sober ones, for that matter. There are regular fans who drop by to say 'hi,' and Carlos even occasionally gets a big hug from one or more of the ladies who are down there—bonus!



B Yaciw / Wide World of Atheism

If you haven't been to Centro Ybor on a Friday night lately, or ever, you're missing out on some big time fun! Where else can you people watch and see pretty much all types, from scantily clad young ladies to old guys shuffling around trying to look hip, and everything in between.

Of course, there are those who see Ybor solely as a den of iniquity, bible-thumping self-appointed guardians of public morality, who come down with the sole goal of dissuading people from having a good time and, not coincidentally, selling them religion. They stand on the corners and read verses to them, often through the "Bullhorn of Bullshit" because louder makes it right, doesn't it?

This has been going on for years, and shortly after the lunatic fringe started harassing clubhoppers, the Atheists of Florida, specifically Jim Young and Carlos Oquendo, started going down there to provide an alternative viewpoint. Carlos is there pretty much every Friday from 8:00 p.m. until 1:00 a.m., Jim Young still stops by regularly (and is responsible for designing and producing those lovely signs Carlos is holding), and various other Atheists members drop in on a semi-regular basis, including yours truly now that he's back in Florida for at least the winter.



B Yaciw / Wide World of Atheism

Carlos Oquendo makes his weekly Friday night stand on the sidewalks of Ybor City, loaded with handouts that challenge the absurdity of religious beliefs.

Centro Ybor, besides having drinking and dancing establishments, has assorted shops and restaurants and a movie theatre. Parking is available in the parking garage, which is expensive if you stay past 10 p.m., in various lots for \$5 for the whole night, or if you get there early enough or get lucky you can find free street parking. Come on down and converse with the other side, or just hang out and keep your fellow Atheists company!

Additionally, since 1937, chaplains have been brought in to the inaugural ceremony to give prayers to Jesus and to God. Because such prayers are prohibited under the Establishment Clause, this, too, is being challenged.

A preliminary injunction—certain to be denied—is being sought. After that, there will be a battle over mootness. Eventually, the case will get to the Court of Appeals, where a successful outcome is assured (provided the judges adhere to the constitutional ideal of religious equality for all).

The principal plaintiff, Michael Newdow, a California E.R. physician and lawyer, gained national prominence about six years ago when he brought suit in California on behalf of his minor daughter challenging inclusion of the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance which she was forced to recite in her public school classroom.



B Yaciw / Wide World of Atheism

Oquendo makes a salient point to an interested passerby. The back sign reads "RELIGION ENSLAVES."

To see more of Yaciw's photos of the atheists on the sidewalks of Ybor City, go to <http://photobrent.shotblogs.com>

## Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS

### CLASSIFIEDS

Classified ads are published free for all active members of Atheists of Florida. Send your ad information to:

[AthAIFLE@aol.com](mailto:AthAIFLE@aol.com)

Subject line "CLASSIFIEDS."

**Fine American-made, Hand-crafted jewelry** (great gifts for any occasion—Secular, Pagan or otherwise): If you're looking for that special one-of-a-kind piece for yourself or that special someone, take a look at the Swarovski crystal, pearl, amethyst, turquoise, jade and other gorgeous gemstone bracelets, necklaces, and earrings available from TRACYS TRES CHIC. Tracy Thomas, Jewelry Artist. 727-235-3220, [mschacha@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:mschacha@tampabay.rr.com).

**Godless in America:** conversations with an atheist by George A. Ricker is now available at most book retailers and online



Photography by Brent Michael

gary@aimzoom.com  
gary@aimzoom.com  
www.aimzoom.com  
brent@aimzoom.com

**TAMPA BAY: Pinellas Park Public Library—Second Sunday of each odd-numbered month (Jan., Mar., etc.), 1:30—4:30, 78th Ave North & 52nd Street. Tampa—Second Sunday of each even-numbered month, 1:30-4:30, Atheists of Florida office, 3614 S. Manhattan Ave., Tampa Social dinners follow all meetings at nearby cafeterias. FMI: Ed Golly, 813/835-1500, AthAIFLE@aol.com.**

**St. Pete-Atheists // Free-Thought Group**

IN REASON WE TRUST

GARY THOMPSON, Organizer  
Monthly Meetup Day: Third Tuesday @ 7:00 PM  
Contact: garys@stpeteayr.com  
<http://atheistsinestop.com/y209>

**Get together with other freethinkers** at the St. Pete Atheist / Freethought every third Tuesday of each month for good food, good drink, good conversation, and lotto tickets!

**AAI Convention DVDs, professionally mastered.** The 5 DVD set of the 2008 Atheist Alliance Convention is now available each with about 40 hours of the speakers, workshop presenters, etc. Set of all 5 DVDs only \$50. Order from: <http://www.atheistalliance.org/conventions/index.php>

## A of F joins Newdow suit

**Invocation inappropriate**

WASHINGTON, D.C. ON DECEMBER 29, 2008, a lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, challenging two monotheistic religious practices planned for Obama's inauguration.

The first concerns the presidential oath of office, which is prescribed in the Constitution's Article II. With no authorization whatsoever, Chief Justices have taken to adding the purely religious phrase, "so help me God" when administering that oath.

Additionally, since 1937, chaplains have been brought in to the inaugural ceremony to give prayers to Jesus and to God. Because such prayers are prohibited under the Establishment Clause, this, too, is being challenged.

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The principal plaintiff, Michael Newdow, a California E.R. physician and lawyer, gained national prominence about six years ago when he brought suit in California on behalf of his minor daughter challenging inclusion of the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance which she was forced to recite in her public school classroom.

Alleging that he had a right to rear his child free of religious indoctrination imposed by the state, his case prevailed in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The inauguration ceremonies violate the Con-

A challenge to "In God We Trust" was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California on November 18, 2005. The Federal Defendants—along with a "non-profit organization dedicated to defending religious and civil liberties"—filed Motions to Dismiss, which were granted by Judge Frank Damrell on June 12, 2006. An appeal was taken to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. Briefing was completed in December, 2006, and oral argument occurred on December 4, 2007. Now there is nothing to do but wait for the three-judge panel to issue its

school board appealed and the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the case. But they wimped out and ruled that Newdow lacked standing since he was not the custodial parent. Rather than allow the Ninth Circuit's decision to stand, it meant the entire case was thrown out.

A second Pledge lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California on January 3, 2005, resulted in District Court Judge Lawrence Karlton ruling in favor of the Plaintiffs. The Defendants appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit. Briefing was completed in September, 2006, and oral argument occurred on December 4, 2007. Now there is nothing to do but wait for the three-judge panel to issue its opinion(s). That will occur whenever the judges feel they are ready.

With the Inauguration suit, Newdow sought as many co-plaintiffs as possible and Atheists of Florida joined without hesitation. Similar unsuccessful suits were also filed by Newdow in 2001 and 2005.

Joining Newdow in the suit are groups advocating religious freedom or atheism, including the American Humanist Association, the Freedom from Religion Foundation and atheist groups from Minnesota, Seattle, and Florida.

To read the complete suit and see all the Plaintiffs, go to:

<http://www.restorethepledge.com>

The new lawsuit says in part, "There can be no purpose for placing 'so help me God' in an oath or sponsoring prayers to God, other than promoting the particular point of view that God exists."

Newdow says references to God during inauguration ceremonies violate the Constitution. It's unconstitutional to imply that atheists and others are not as good.



Michael Newdow

Newdow did not name Obama in the suit because in addition to participating as a government official at the ceremony, he possesses rights as an individual that allow him to express religious beliefs.

"If he chooses to ask for God's help, I'm not going to challenge him," Newdow said. "I think it's unwise."

Newdow said religious references in the inauguration ceremony send a message to non-believers that "we who believe in God are the righteous, the real Americans." It's unconstitutional to imply that atheists and others are not as good.

"Those who deny the existence of a supreme being have been turned into second-class citizens by a government that continuously sends messages that 'real Americans' believe in God."

—Michael Newdow

**I**N 1976 *THE SELFISH GENE* WAS PUBLISHED. RICHARD Dawkins had written a book that was an easy to understand explanation of evolution. His idea that genes survive by adapting to their environment made sense to most evolutionists, but there were some very well known scientists who disagreed with Dawkins' examples and conclusions. This led Dawkins to write another book on the subject. *The Extended Phenotype*

## THE SOLUTION IS EVOLUTION

No. 10—Genes don't die

~Jim Strayer

His idea was not meant for the general public. It was written as an answer to his critics. His idea were becoming well known. So much so that there were universities that offered classes using his books as a text. Some universities used *The Blind Watchmaker* (1976) as a text.

When I was teaching evolution at the high school and community college level I found that the concept of Adam and Eve was well in-



that have ever lived on earth. Each cell has within it tiny structures, organelles, that are necessary for life. These organelles are produced by genes. Each cell must be able to produce energy; the mitochondria does this. Each cell must be able to produce secretions made from the proteins that the genes produce (Hair, teeth, bone, hormones, wood, etc.). Each cell must be able to produce a membrane to protect itself and its nucleus.

If we examine the cells of an earthworm and a fern we find that not only are the organelles the same, carrying on the same life functions, but the DNA has the same chemical makeup. We know basically how the DNA sequence is translated into proteins, how



Jim Strayer is a retired biology teacher living with his wife, Bobbe, in Ormond-By-The-Sea, Florida. He can be reached at BLOJIMS@aol.com.

granted in the students' minds, even those who were not religious had a difficult time understanding that genes make adults. Most of them viewed the adult as the beginning because they make genes.

Every survey done to see what Americans believe gets the same results. Over half of American adults believe that the stories they read in the Bible can be taken as literal truth, not merely as stories told to communicate life principles.

My approach to this problem was to show that adults die, but genes do not.

It may seem simple, but the concept is that there have been genes since life began. The other concept is that there have been adults since life began. Most of these adults, about 99%, are extinct. Over half of the American population believes the extinction was the result of a great flood. The rest accept the evidence that these species could not adjust to slow or rapid environmental changes.

Even so, the genes that produced those extinct species are still in the natural world. That is because the cells that form species on earth today have the same fundamental DNA (genes) as all the plants and animals these proteins carry on life functions and regulate gene expression, and how multi cellular organisms develop from a single cell.

All unicellular and multi cellular organisms descend from one "universal ancestor" that lived about 3.5 billion years ago. That ancestor evolved from a simpler organism in which RNA carried out the present roles of both DNA and protein. Therefore all biochemical processes, physical properties of living things and behavioral diversity of life around us evolved from a few original genes. It is the genes that mutate and the environment that the adult lives in that determines if they survive.

It appears that adults of all species will continue to become extinct over time. It also seems that genes will evolve to produce life forms that can survive in a ever changing environment.

It also appears that the more complicated the adult form is, that is many types of cell making different tissues, the greater the chance for extinction. The final life forms on this planet will most likely be some forms of bacteria.

## Members Feedback

Let us hear from you...

As a new year dawns, we have a few challenges on the plate. A "war" we can't seem to resolve, a failed energy policy, and a crashing job market all plague as we approach the doorstep of depression. Yet the single problem that seems to perpetuate all others remains overpopulation.

From Somalia to Haiti to India, overpopulation increases poverty, threatens

## LETTERS



We welcome correspondence from readers. Address mail to:

Atheists of Florida  
P.O. Box 130753  
Tampa, FL 33681  
Or email us at:

the environment, generates conflict, and challenges our very survival as a species. While population control seems more critical than ever, the Vatican just doesn't get it.

Then what is our biggest problem—the religion that causes the problems, the ignorance that perpetuates the religions, or something more sinister than either? We want to hear from you. E-mail your opinion to us in 100 words or less to [ATHALFLE@aol.com](mailto:ATHALFLE@aol.com), subject "Letters."

## Polls may be skewed

E-mail received from: ygehricht@yahoo.com

I have always said that if a true poll could be taken as to the percentage of Atheists it would be at least 33% and probably a great deal more. The polls that show 2 or 3% and even the ones at 10% are absurd. Most Atheists will not answer truthfully due to social, family and job pressures. Others won't admit in case they are wrong and god will hear and punish them. Here is an interesting poll from the Larry King Web site.

### Religion Poll

Which religion do you associate with?

Religion	Percent	Total votes
<i>Christianity</i>	17	4,866
Judaism	3	914
Islam	1	393
Buddhism	1	171
Hinduism	0	113
Jehovah's Witnesses	1	216
<i>Atheism</i>	67	19,007
Agnostic	4	1,056
I am spiritual,		
but of no religion	4	1,082
Mine's not listed	1	415
Total Votes:		28,223

manists or FLASH! It is an affiliate of American Atheists and covers Broward County. Both of these sites are great resources for people in those areas.

What about everyone else? Obviously, Florida consists of more areas than these. So what are other atheists across the state who would like to meet like-minded individuals to do? Well, there is a Web site out there called Meetup that offers hope for atheists who feel alone in their lack of belief and the struggles that can be associated with it.

Meetup facilitates the meeting up of people associated with many types of groups, including "atheists" and "secular humanists." If what you want is to find an existing group in your area, the service is free. If you want to start a group in your area, there is a small fee. There are many existing groups in Florida as well as many Floridians who are waiting to be organized.

The site is searchable by Zip Code and distance to help you locate people close to you. Provided below, you will find a few of the Meetup groups for Florida atheists. There are several more groups throughout Florida and across the United States at the Meetup Web site. If you don't find your area listed here, be sure to visit [Meetup at meetup.com](http://meetup.com).

### Meetup Atheist Groups

Area	Members	Group
Deerfield Beach	61	FLASH!
Fort Lauderdale	251	FLASH!
Fort Lauderdale	77	The Center for Inquiry
Melbourne	45	Brevard Atheists
North Miami Beach	39	FLASH!
Stuart	22	Stuart Atheists
West Palm Beach	17	FLASH!



[www.atheistalliance.org/florida](http://www.atheistalliance.org/florida)  
[www.atheistsofflorida.org](http://www.atheistsofflorida.org)  
[www.tampabayatheists.org](http://www.tampabayatheists.org)

### Chapters:

Tampa Bay  
PO Box 130753  
TAMPA, FL 33681  
(813) 835-1500 / (813) 839-7567  
[ATHALFLE@aol.com](mailto:ATHALFLE@aol.com)

### Membership dues

Life Member	\$ 500.00
Sustaining	60.00 Yr
Couple	50.00 Yr
Individual	40.00 Yr
Student (under 25 yrs)	10.00 Yr
Limited Income (over 65)	10.00 Yr
Newsletter (out of state)	10.00 Yr

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### State Board of Directors

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Men's Room Attendant  
J. Abraham Moore

## Where are all the Florida atheists?



religious. It is safe to assume that some of those people, though they claim no religion, are in fact atheists. So, if we consider the national average of atheists, which is estimated to be somewhere around 10%, that would lead us to believe that there are approximately 1.9 million atheists in the sunshine state. So where are they all?

If you search the internet using any of the popular search engines, you will find a handful of Web sites dedicated to atheism in Florida. However, some of the links that exist don't actually work. They take you to a blank page. Of those that do work, a few seemingly have had no administrative activity in years. They aren't very helpful at all.

Trina Hoaks is the author of the book *1 Atheist, 1 Voice*, a collection of her articles about atheism. She is also the National Atheism Examiner (columnist) for *Examiner.com*. You can read more of her articles at: <http://trindyatheist.com>

Tampa and is a member organization of the *Atheist Alliance International*. The other site belongs to *Florida Atheists and Secular Hu-*

HAVING DECLARED GALILEO GALILEI A HERETIC for committing the crime of science, the Vatican is now recasting the most famous victim of its Inquisition as a man of faith.

It only took 400 years to admit that his discovery that the earth is a sphere revolving around the sun and not the center of the universe conflicts with the church's opposite primitive concept.

Born in Pisa in 1564, Galileo entered the University of Pisa in 1581. While in the Pisa cathedral he supposedly observed a lamp swinging

and found that it always required the same amount of time to complete an oscillation, no matter how large the range of the swing. Later in life he verified this observation experimentally and suggested that the principle of the pendulum might be applied to the regulation of clocks.

Researching the theory of motion, Galileo first disproved the Aristotelian contention that bodies of different weights fall at different speeds. He proved theoretically that falling bodies obey what came to be known as the law of uniformly accelerated motion (in such motion a body speeds up or slows down uniformly with time). He also gave the law of parabolic fall (e.g., a ball thrown into the air follows a parabolic path). The legend that he dropped weights from the leaning tower of Pisa apparently has no basis in fact.

much as modern day creationists disavow the evidence of the theory of evolution. The Dominican preachers secretly denounced Galileo to the Inquisition for blasphemous utterances, which, they claimed, he had freely invented. Galileo reminded the church of its standing practice of interpreting Scripture allegorically whenever it came into conflict with scientific truth and warning that it would be "a terrible detriment for the souls if people found themselves convinced by proof of something that it was made then a sin to believe."

Unfortunately, the chief theologian of the church was unable to appreciate the importance of the new theories and clung to the time-honored belief that mathematical hypotheses have nothing to do with physical reality. Accordingly, he had Copernicanism declared "false and erroneous" and decreed the book suspended in 1616.

Eight years later Galileo again went to Rome hoping to obtain a revocation of the decree. Although denied, he did obtain permission from the pope to write about "the systems of the world," as long as he discussed them noncommittally and came to the conclusion dictated to him in advance by the pontiff—that is, that man cannot presume to know how the world is really made because God could have brought about the same effects in ways unimagined by him, and he must not restrict God's omnipotence.

Galileo returned to Florence and spent the next several years working on his great book *Dialogue Con-*

Galileo became convinced early in life of the truth of the Copernican theory which states that the planets revolve around the sun. But from fear of ridicule he withheld his opinion.

While in Venice in 1609, Galileo learned of the recent invention of the telescope. He then built a telescope of threefold magnifying power and quickly improved it to a power of 32. His telescopes became the first that could be used for astronomical observation and soon were in demand in all parts of Europe.

As the first person to apply the telescope to a study of the skies, Galileo announced a series of astronomical discoveries. He found that the surface of the Moon was irregular and not smooth, as had been supposed; he observed that the Milky Way was composed of a collection of stars; he discovered the moons of Jupiter and observed spots on the sun, the phases of Venus, and the rings of Saturn.

In 1611 Galileo visited Rome and demonstrated his telescope to the most eminent personages at the pontifical court. Big mistake. Although he was accorded a flattering reception, he ventured to take up a more definite position on the Copernican theory. Movement of the spots across the face of the Sun, Galileo maintained, proved Copernicus right and Ptolemy wrong.

His great expository gifts created a powerful movement of opinion, but the Aristotelian professors, seeing their vested interests threatened, united against him. They strove to cast suspicion upon him in the eyes of ecclesiastical authorities because of contradiction between the Copernican theory and the Scriptures,

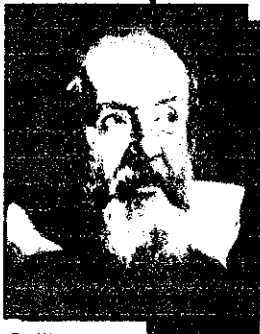
*cerning the Two Chief World Systems—Ptolemaic and Copernican.* As soon as it came out, with the full and complete imprimatur of the censors, it was greeted with a tumult of applause and cries of praise from every part of the European continent as a literary and philosophical masterpiece.

But the pope interpreted the work as a compelling plea for the Copernican system and, in anger, ordered a prosecution. The church officials alleged Galileo had engaged in heresy and he was compelled to journey to Rome to stand trial. The commissary general of the Inquisition sympathized with him and sought a reprimand. But the congregation decreed that he must be sentenced and he was held guilty of having "held and taught" the Copernican doctrine and was ordered to recant. Galileo recited a formula in which he "abjured, cursed and detested" his past errors. The Pope commuted his sentence of imprisonment into house arrest ad seclusion on his estate at Arcetri near Florence. The sentence of house arrest remained in effect throughout the last eight years of his life.

And now, just last month, Pope Benedict XVI paid tribute to the Italian astronomer and physicist, saying he and other scientists had helped the faithful better understand and "contemplate with gratitude the Lord's works." In May, Vatican officials will participate in an international conference to re-examine the Galileo affair. To the community of reason, it's clearly too little too late.

A

## Vatican continues to re-write history~Ed Golly



Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)

*"it would be a terrible detriment for the souls if people found themselves convinced by proof of something that it was made then a sin to believe."*

## CO voters reject 'Personhood Issue'

COLORADO—It will not become the first state to amend its constitution to give fertilized eggs the same rights as human beings, as voters soundly rejected Amendment 48.

The so-called Personhood Amendment was failing by a 3-to-1 ratio, and co-author Kristi Burton laid a lot of the blame for its demise at the feet of high-profile officials with strong anti-abortion credentials that refused to endorse it.

Burton pointed out that Republican U.S. Senate candidate Bob Schaffer and Colorado Republican Party Chairman Dick Wadhams hurt the amendment's chances when they "campaigned against this issue" publicly.

"That proved to be insurmountable," she said.

But Wadhams and Schaffer didn't actually campaign against it --they simply refused to endorse it, with Wadhams calling the measure the wrong avenue for the abortion fight.

The measure would have granted constitutional rights to a fertilized egg—including due process and inalienable rights. Much of the anti-abortion establishment was fractured—with Burton unable to round up such notable abortion opponents as Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput and National Right to Life.

But the political arm of Focus on the Family did support it, and Burton was aided by several other anti-abortion groups and some Colorado candidates willing

The doctor must have the patient sign each page of a form indicating that she has been warned of the "statistically significant" risks of the procedure, including "increased risk of suicide ideation and suicide."

These "risks" are almost completely unsupported by the scientific literature. There is no significant differences in long-term mental health between women in the U. S. who choose to terminate a pregnancy and those who do not.

Fascinating. Physicians can be forced to deliver a state message with which they completely disagree. This is what conservatives call "less government, more freedom of choice."

## Youth abstinence pledges a total hoax

*Ignorance is bliss...*

True Love Waits. Silver Ring Thing. Catchy names for virginity pledges that simply don't work.

A new report issued the first week of 2009 supports other evidence that abstinence-only education is totally ineffective.

Virginity pledge programs began in the '90s when the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board launched True Love Waits. As word of the program spread, the concept caught on in several Christian denominations, in-

cluding the Catholic Church, and even in public schools. Some abstinence programs receive government funding, which is one reason their effectiveness is being closely scrutinized by policymakers who would rather put money toward other kinds of sex education efforts.

In the most recent study that examined abstinence programs, a Johns Hopkins University researcher found that virginity pledgers had sex at the same rate as students who did not take the pledge. The study focused on students who said they made the pledge in 1996. Five years later, 82 % of those students denied having ever taken a chastity oath. Virginity pledgers were also less likely to use birth control.

According to a *St. Petersburg Times* survey early last year, an overwhelming majority of Floridians think public schools should teach sex education. They think the curriculum should go beyond an abstinence-only approach, covering such topics as disease prevention and contraception. Current Florida statutes stress abstinence, but give districts the discretion to offer more.

## Denial of service limits repro freedom

*Two conflicts over reproductive rights turn on whether health workers can be forced to provide medical services or information to which they ethically object*

A new rule purports to protect the "right of conscience" of American health-care workers under a midnight regulation shoved through by the Bush Department of Health and Human Services. Any health-care worker may refuse to perform procedures, offer advice or dispense prescriptions, if doing so would offend their "religious beliefs or moral convictions."

Congress has protected the right of physicians to opt out of providing abortions for decades. This new rule, which Obama can overturn (although it may take months), is significantly broader. It allows one's access to birth control, emergency contraception and even artificial insemination to turn on the moral preferences of a pharmacist, nurse or ambulance driver.

The second dispute concerns a South Dakota law put into effect last summer which requires physicians providing abortions to read from a state-mandated script advising the patient that she is about to "terminate the life of a whole, separate, unique, living human being" with whom she has an "existing relationship."

Some statistics:

- Florida has the sixth highest teen pregnancy rate with 48,440 teenage pregnancies annually.
- Florida has the second highest AIDS rate in the country.
- 86% of registered voters (in the *Times* poll) think sex education should be taught in public schools.



*The measure would have granted constitutional rights to a fertilized egg—including due process and inalienable rights.*

*Below: A pledge card issued by a Pasco County public school*

