

Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 9 Number 9 • September 2003

Our September Meeting

Our September 14 meeting will include a presentation by **Kay Scott**, CEO of **Planned Parenthood of Georgia**.

Planned Parenthood is the nation's oldest and largest provider of family planning services. In Atlanta since 1964, they provide health and educational services to over 26,000 women and men each year. They advocate public policies that guarantee reproductive rights and access to healthcare.

The AFS meeting will be at 1:00 at the **Atlanta Freethought Center**, Suite 500, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA. Please feel free to arrive early for snacks and conversation before the meeting.

To get there from Atlanta, take I-400 north past I-285 by 8 miles to Exit 7B, which is GA-140. Take GA-140 (Holcomb Bridge Road) west about 1 mile and turn left at Grimes Bridge Road. Go 0.2 miles to 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, which is on the right.

AFS Activities

The **AFS Hike** will be at 11:00 on Saturday, September 13, at the Island Ford Branch of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. To get there from Atlanta, take I-400 north to the Northridge Road exit. Stay in the right lane and cross over I-400, then take an immediate right onto Dunwoody Place. Go right at the second light on Roberts Drive. The park entrance is on the right less than a mile ahead. Meet at the end of the road. For info, call Lew Southern at 770-509-8272.

The next **AFS Social** will be on Friday, September 19, at Taqueria Del Sol, 359 W. Ponce De Leon, in Decatur, GA. Let's meet there at 7:00 PM. Come and enjoy the Mexican food and great conversation with other freethinkers.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on Sunday, September 21, at 4:00 to 6:00 PM at the AF Center.

The **Tuesday Lunch Bunch** meets every Tuesday for lunch at Panahar Restaurant. Please note the **new meeting time: 12:30 PM**. The address is 3375 Buford Hwy, Suite 1060, in Atlanta. Come on down and enjoy the Bangladeshi food buffet and the great company.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Sept 13: AFS Hike at Chattahoochee River, 11:00 AM.
Sept 14: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
Sept 19: AFS Social, Taqueria Del Sol, Decatur, 7:00 PM.
Sept 21: AFS Discussion Group, AF Center, 4:00 PM.
Sept 28: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 2:00 PM.

SOS Meets at AF Center

The **Secular Organizations for Sobriety** meets at the Atlanta Freethought Center every Tuesday evening at 7:30 PM. SOS is the secular replacement for AA (Alcoholics Anonymous).

AU Head to be IHS Conf. Speaker

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU), will serve as the keynote speaker for the Institute for Humanist Studies 2004 Conference, entitled, "Progressive Action in Regressive Times."

This second national conference, organized with the Humanists of Florida Association, will run Jan. 23-25, 2004 in Tampa, Fla. The intent of the event is to get various progressive groups together in order to work out how best to influence the public and the policymakers, said Matt Cherry, IHS executive director.

For registration information, call Jennifer Hancock, 941-745-7181 or e-mail her at jen@floridahumanist.org. The registration fee will run around \$60. Watch for updates at: <http://www.floridahumanist.org/services/convention.htm#jan2004>

As part of the conference preparations, nominations are open for the Malarkey Awards. Malarkeys are given to individuals and groups that are "Mindlessly Lacking in Reason and Compassion." If you have witnessed an example of a politician, group, or business acting in a way that just is mindlessly lacking in reason and compassion, e-mail jen@floridahumanist.org or call 941-745-7181 with the info.

Internet Resources

Here are some interesting Internet sites for more reading material on freethought issues:

Blair Scott's "The Council of Nicea: Christian Catalyst":

<http://blasphemy.home.att.net/articles/200309.htm>

Blair Scott's "Bible Blasphemy" article archive:

<http://blasphemy.home.att.net/articles.htm>

Is it true that Madison said...?:

<http://candst.tripod.com/misq1.htm>

Massimo Pigliucci's Sceptical Webpage:

<http://fp.bio.utk.edu/skeptic/>

Free Enquiry Group of N. Kentucky online newsletters:

<http://www.gofigger.org/leaves/>

ACLU of Georgia website:

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

Humanists of Georgia website:

<http://www.geocities.com/gahumanists/>

Atlanta Freethought Society website:

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



Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at the AFS Center, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

Sept 14: Kay Scott, CEO of Planned Parenthood of Georgia, will speak on women's rights and the challenges of her organization.

Oct 12: Ted Goodwin, Georgia Representative for the Hemlock Society, will speak on end-of-life choices and the dying-with-dignity movement.

Nov 9: Ed and Diane Buckner will be back in Atlanta. Ed may speak (tentative) on the Council for Secular Humanism.

Dec 14: Laughlin McDonald, Director of the Southern Regional Office of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) will speak on the ACLU.

To join the AFS Forum e-mail list, send a blank message to AFSforum-subscribe@yahoo.com. To join the AFS Announcements list, send a blank email to afs-announce-subscribe@yahoo.com. To join the Georgia Freethinkers Letter Writing Cooperative, send a blank email to flwc-ga-subscribe@yahoo.com.

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to xxxx-unsubscribe@yahoo.com.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists. We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about the advantages of living life free of religious dogma through speeches, debates, discussions, protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available.

We define freethought as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or, especially, lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion, primarily through having a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs and by maintaining and using our own extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Atlanta Freethought News an AFS publication

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Roy's Rock Removed!

Well, it finally happened. Unless you've been away from the media a lot lately, you should know that *former* Judge Roy Moore's Ten Commandments Monument was removed from the Judicial Building in Montgomery, AL, on Wednesday, August 27. In addition, Moore was suspended as Alabama's chief justice on August 25 for his refusal to obey a federal court order to remove the monument.

Back on August 5, U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson issued his Final Judgment and Injunction for the removal of the monument from the Alabama Judicial Building no later than August 20th. A Writ of Injunction was ordered to be served on Alabama's governor, attorney general, treasurer, comptroller, as well as defendants Roy Moore and Rich Hobson.

In an apparent attempt to inflame public opinion against the federal courts, Moore used an August 14 press conference to repeat his argument that the federal courts have no power to enforce church-state separation in Alabama.

"Alabama will never give up its right to acknowledge God," Moore said at the afternoon press gathering in front of the 5,280-pound Ten Commandments monument and before a delighted throng of his supporters. "They have no power, no authority, no jurisdiction to tell the state of Alabama that we cannot acknowledge God as the source of our law."

In the same press conference, Moore promised to ignore the court ruling, and fired ad hominem attacks at Thompson, accusing him of "abuse of power."

On August 15, The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director, urged appropriate government officials to make sure he complies.

"Moore clearly wants to create a media circus, with his Ten Commandments monument starring in the center ring," said Lynn in a press re-

lease. "It's time to shut down the performance... If Judge Moore can't in good conscience comply with a lawful federal court order, he ought to resign. We will take whatever steps are necessary to see that the federal court order is enforced.

"Moore seems better suited to be an evangelist than a judge," continued Lynn. "He is not only defying the rule of law himself, he's urging others to join his misguided religious crusade. In some countries, judges enforce religious law, but in the U.S., judges follow the Constitution. This is America, not Iran. In his official role, Judge Moore must apply the U.S. Constitution, not his personal interpretation of the Bible."

Lynn called on Alabama Attorney General William Pryor, Gov. Bob Riley and other state officials to see to it that the court order is obeyed. If they are unwilling to do so, he said, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft should intervene.

Moore's defiance, Lynn said, strongly parallels actions by segregationist Southern governors who in the 1960s tried to block racial integration of public universities and schools. Like Moore, those governors tried to ignore federal court rulings requiring racial equality, but the U.S. Justice Department saw to it that the rulings were obeyed.

"It's unfortunate that some people are treating Moore like a folk hero," said Lynn. "In fact, Moore is a George Wallace-style demagogue in a judicial robe. His behavior is cause for shame, not celebration."

In a press release, Larry Darby, State Director for American Atheists, said, "Moore continues to embarrass law abiding citizens of Alabama by such belligerent opposition to the rule of law under the Constitutions of the United States and Alabama. It's time for Moore to apologize to Alabama citizens for his monumental waste of taxpayer money, which could exceed \$1,000,000 in plaintiffs' attorney fees.

Further, this courthouse comedy has opportunity costs in lost time of service to the taxpayers of Alabama by Moore and his staff and many others, such as Attorney General Bill Pryor, which possibly exceeds a million dollars... Moore's militant defiance of the Supreme Law of the Land indicates he longs for a theocracy; his actions subvert the U. S. Constitution, particularly Article III, Section 3. Moore has created a situation of government-coerced religious worship by placing his graven image of the Ten Commandments on taxpayer property. Moore's actions have incited Christian groups, all hostile to individual liberty, to threaten to obstruct justice."

A circus-like atmosphere, meanwhile, built in Montgomery thanks in large part to the efforts of the Rev. Patrick Mahoney, the leader of a fringe group called the Christian Defense Coalition. Mahoney called on fundamentalist Christians to descend on Montgomery to make removal of the monument as difficult as possible.

Twenty-two people were arrested and charged with trespassing on August 20 after they refused to leave the area near the monument after being ordered to do so by police.

Throughout the debacle, Larry Darby presented the Atheist viewpoint on many news programs, including national reports by NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX and MSNBC, and talk shows including *Good Morning America* and *Hannity and Colmes*.

EIGHT JUSTICES TO THE RESCUE

On Thursday, August 21, eight members of the Alabama Supreme Court voted unanimously to overrule Chief Justice Roy Moore and ordered his Ten Commandments monument removed from the Judicial Building.

Moore appeared before a large crowd of supporters and media outside the Judicial Building that afternoon, expressing his disappointment with his colleagues and vowing to persevere.

"The fight to defend our constitutional right to acknowledge God must

Roy's Rock Removed *(continued)*

and will continue," Moore said to loud cheers. "I will not violate my oath, I cannot forsake my conscience, I will not neglect my duty and I will never, never deny the God upon whom our laws and country depend."

Attorney General Bill Pryor said he backed the decision by the justices to remove the display and filed notice of their order the same day with Thompson's court. Pryor said he hoped the justices' actions would convince Thompson not to impose contempt fines against the state, which Thompson indicated would start at \$5,000 a day and escalate each week.

"Taxpayers should not be punished for the refusal of the chief justice to obey a court order," Pryor said.

Gov. Bob Riley said though he believes Thompson and the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals were wrong in ruling Moore's monument unconstitutional, the state Supreme Court "was correct in unanimously voting to uphold the rule of law."

"By not complying, the state stood to incur some of the most expensive fines ever imposed in Alabama," Riley said. "The suggested fines could have exceeded \$1 billion within just four months."

On the same day, Attorney Richard Cohen of the Southern Poverty Law Center, one of the organizations that sued Moore to force removal of the monument, said, "We hope they can remove it really fast so that no sanctions are imposed. We respect the attorney general, justice Gorman Houston and the other justices, and admire them for their actions. It was gut-check time for them. Popular opinion may be with the chief justice, but they did the right thing. They are doing all that to purge the chief justice of his contempt and rescue him from his own folly."

In a last ditch effort to "save the rock" Christian radio talk show host Kelly McGinley and Tallassee pastor Richard C. Dorley filed a suit against the eight associate justices who decided to override Moore and order the monument removed. The suit claimed

that removal of the monument would violate the constitution's protection of freedom of religion. However, U.S. District Judge William H. Steele, a recent Bush appointee in the Southern District of Alabama, said in a 17-page order that he does not have jurisdiction over the claims filed by the Moore supporters. He granted a state attorney's request to dismiss the suit.

ROY MOORE SUSPENDED

On Friday, August 22, Chief Justice Roy Moore was suspended by a judicial ethics panel for his refusal to obey the federal court order to remove the monument from the rotunda of the Alabama Judicial Building.

Moore was automatically suspended with pay when the nine-member Judicial Inquiry Commission referred the ethics complaint against Moore to the Court of the Judiciary, which holds trial-like proceedings and can discipline and remove judges.

Moore has 30 days to respond.

Attorney General Bill Pryor said the public corruption and white collar crime unit in his office will handle the prosecution of Moore, who cannot perform any judicial duties while disqualified. Pryor said senior Associate Justice Gorman Houston will perform the chief justice's duties.

"I'm not happy we have to deal with these matters, but it is part of our duties and we will continue to do so," Pryor said.

He said the length of time to resolve the complaint will depend on how many pretrial motions Moore files.

Stephen Glassroth, a Montgomery lawyer, filed the ethics complaint after Moore defied Thompson's order.

Attorney Richard Cohen of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which sued Moore over the monument, said the commission acted appropriately in suspending the chief justice.

"Justice Moore forced their hand. The canons of ethics say you have to respect and comply with the law," Cohen said. "Justice Moore said he would defy the law. It's an open-and-shut case."

"Roy Moore has brought this on himself. He has nobody to blame but himself for this. He knew all along that state court judges cannot defy the federal courts and yet he went ahead with this anyway," said Joe Conn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which sued to remove the monument.

In an August 25 E-newsletter, Dr. Ed Buckner, Southern Director of the the Council for Secular Humanism, said that Moore, with his continued grandstanding and refusal to follow a court order for the monument's removal, has violated his oath of judgeship and thus the very moral codes he claims to hold dear. "Chief Justice Roy Moore is a jurist, not a preacher or a theologian. He misrepresents the First Amendment and his actions are a disgrace to all Southerners, not just to all Alabamans."

The around-the-clock vigil by Moore supporters continued in downtown Montgomery that weekend, with about 100 protesters moving from the steps of the judicial building to a sidewalk in front of the federal courthouse, where Thompson works. Some ripped to pieces and burned a copy of Thompson's ruling. Demonstrators also held a mock trial, in which Thompson was charged with breaking the law of God.

"We hold you, Judge Thompson, and the United States Supreme Court in contempt of God's law," said Flip Benham, director of the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue.

The Rev. Patrick Mahoney, director of the Christian Defense Coalition, was furious that Attorney General Bill Pryor would prosecute Moore. "Mr. Pryor, resign from office now!" Mahoney shouted from a bullhorn outside the building on Union Street. "Resign now! Resign now! Resign now!" he and the crowd chanted in unison.

"Bill Pryor should be protecting the citizens of Alabama instead of campaigning to get confirmation to the 11th Circuit," Mahoney said.

In the past, Pryor supported Chief

Roy's Rock Removed (continued)

Justice Roy Moore's display of the monument in the rotunda, but more recently said he would not assist Moore in defying a federal court order to remove it.

At the state judicial building, protesters prayed, sung hymns, preached and kept an eye on the monument through the building's glass doors. Inside the building, court officials were trying to determine where the monument would go and when it would be moved. Thompson's order gave the option of moving the monument to Moore's office.

In an August 22 press conference, Patrick Mahoney of the Christian Defense Coalition said that five protesters would kneel in front of each of the two exits from the building to keep the monument from coming out. "Our message is clear. We are going

to peacefully block the way if they try to move it," Mahoney said.

THE REMOVAL

On August 27, the monument was finally moved to a "private area" in the Justice Building.

"This is a tremendous victory for the rule of law and respect for religious diversity," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "Perhaps Roy Moore will soon leave the bench and move into the pulpit, which he seems better suited for."

"Roy Moore has shamelessly exploited the Ten Commandments as a platform for political grandstanding," Lynn continued. "That is a disgraceful misuse of a religious code that many people regard as sacred."

"Moore claims to venerate the Ten

Commandments, but that didn't stop him from using them as a prop in a series of increasingly cheap stunts," said AU's Lynn. "Moore turned this situation into a circus, and it was unnecessary. He should have obeyed the court ruling from the start."

Concluded Lynn, "As this affair draws to a close, I reiterate my call for Moore to spare the people of Alabama any further embarrassment and resign as chief justice."

"This controversy has never been about the Ten Commandments," observed Americans United Legal Director Ayesha Khan. "It's about maintaining a court system that treats all Americans fairly, regardless of their religious beliefs. Judges have no right to impose their personal religious beliefs on others through official action."

A God-Intoxicated Country The Ten Commandments have no place in America's courthouses

By Larry Durstin, from a September 3 article in the *Cincinnati Free Times*. Printed by permission.

I confess that watching the enraged histrionics and blubbering politics of victimization that took place in Montgomery, Alabama over the removal of the Ten Commandments monument from the state Supreme Court building was a hellish experience for yours truly.

I don't know which was more preposterous – Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore's assertion that the 10 Commandments are the "very foundation of our laws and legal system,"

or the charge made by a parade of Religious Right leaders and self-pitying fundamentalist nut cases that they are the powerless victims of an insidious, society-wide conspiracy of "Christian-bashing" being fueled by a demon culture dominated by atheists, secular humanists and the liberal media.

First of all, let's look at the spurious claim that the Commandments are the "very foundation" of our courts and justice system. The First Commandment (which is apparently the most

important one) states, "I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have false gods before me." This commandment alone is reason enough to give the Decalogue the heave-ho from courthouses, since America was founded on and still operates by the principle of religious freedom. The Pilgrims came here to escape a single, state-enforced orthodoxy that forbade diversity of belief. The First Commandment mocks our country's very reason for existence.



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God-Intoxicated (*continued*)

I don't know what the Second Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," has to do with our legal system, since I can't remember anyone being hauled before a judge for grunting out "Good Gawd" in chorus with James Brown. The Third Commandment's exhortation to "Keep holy the Sabbath" may have spawned a few Sunday blue laws here or there (although I could never figure out how not selling beer produced holiness) but certainly did not inspire legal canons requiring church attendance.

The Fourth Commandment, "Honor thy Father and Mother" is certainly a wonderful code to live by but, legally speaking, it's a long way out of a court's jurisdiction to punish little Johnny for sticking his tongue out at dad and bellowing "I hate you" upon being denied a request for Madden 2003.

The Fifth and Seventh Commandments forbidding killing or stealing (and to a minor extent the Sixth's admonition against adultery) are certainly dealt with in our courts, but as far as being unique, divinely inspired revelations you didn't have to create the universe in six days to figure out these three things are no-nos. Not only that, but the cavemen didn't have to wait until Moses went up that mountain to get hip to the fact that murder, theft and "Me and Mrs. Jones" liaisons might result in a big boulder to the noggin.

The Eighth Commandment's "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" is only a court matter in about one out of every 50 gazillion times people lie. And in order to enforce the Ninth and Tenth's ban on "coveting" thy neighbors goods and wife, an army of swarming thought police would, first, have to infiltrate the daydreams of all those green-with-envy guys who secretly drool over that shiny Mercury Cougar in their neighbors' yards — and then they'd have to cart these legions off to the hoosgow in the company of all

those lusty lads who linger too long in their delight over the well-turned ankle of somebody else's better half.

So not only is it ludicrous to assert that the Ten Commandments are the foundation of our legal system, it's quite accurate to say that — aside from the dictums against stealing and killing — they have almost zero application at all to our laws and, if strictly adhered to, would turn our country into a chaotic theocracy.

Let's be honest. Behind the brouhaha over the Decalogue's proper placement is the Religious Right's Big Lie that America is a Godless land where Christians are persecuted and forced to keep their beliefs a shameful secret, lest the dominant culture slowly but surely eliminate them. This Orwellian mendacity enables these pious prevaricators to portray themselves as last-shall-be-first victims of a secular society — scourged, scorned and darn near crowned with thorns, yet somehow courageously carrying on against overwhelming odds to restore God to a land overrun by infidels.

However, recent statistics and common sense dispute this hysterical picture of widespread intolerance of God and all things Christian. Quite the contrary, actually. A late '90s survey by U.S. News & World Report discovered that America is a God-intoxicated land with religiosity at an all-time high. Among its findings were that 90 percent believe in God and that nearly 70 percent regularly attend church services — both figures unchanged since the '50s. Also, around four out of five people in the U.S. think God performs miracles "on a daily basis". America has more churches per capita than any country in the world and continues to grow more "churchly" all the time. In the late 18th century, for example, only 17 percent of Americans belonged to churches. If anything, we're currently in the midst of a God glut.

But by characterizing their move-

ment and therefore needing to take drastic action to win the never-ending Crusade against the hedonistic cultural elite, Religious Right leaders (such as James Dobson, Jerry Falwell and Operation Rescue's Randall Terry — who were all out front during the Ten Commandments debate) are utilizing the rhetoric of victimhood to further their narrow political agenda and enhance their considerable personal wealth.

Although it's more than a tad humorously ironic to hear those who bleat about our culture's alleged contempt for religious beliefs hypocritically resort to the same politics of victimization that they normally attribute to feminists and homosexuals, the real sin of Falwell et al., is their callous use of the cross as a blunt instrument to exact revenge on those who oppose them on any number of social policy issues.

Rather than focusing their mumbajumbo propaganda machine on a totally manufactured plight, perhaps the Religious Right leadership should practice being merciful and doing for the least of their brethren what they would do for their Master. Rather than swooning deliriously about "spiritual impoverishment," maybe they should do something about good old-fashioned economic impoverishment.

Rather than delivering sermons about family values, endless diatribes about condom distribution and ruminations about which rung in hell is reserved for their enemies, perhaps these unctuous gents should try to inspire their memberships to become immersed in the eradication of inequity, injustice and human suffering.

And rather than weeping and gnashing their teeth about the long overdue removal of the Ten Commandments from the Montgomery courthouse, perhaps they should try to do something truly inspired — revolutionary even — and work at living up to the legacy of love and compassion supposedly left by Christ.

Clipped

Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Ed Buckner's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on September 7.

Ried Crowe's letter was in the *Pensacola News Journal* on August 19.

Blair Scott's letter was in the *Pensacola News Journal* on August 21.

Hank Shiver's letter was in the *Decatur Daily* on August 24.

CHURCH AND STATE

*Response to "Mixed message, but set in stone,"
Letters, Aug. 31*

Supreme Court got it right

Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore and other extremists spread misinformation and misconceptions everywhere. Moore disagrees with history, sound logic, the U.S. Constitution, the First and 14th amendments, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and the great majority of Americans, including most American Christians. All of those sources prefer religious liberty to having any government official making religious decisions for Americans.

Atlanta Journal-Constitution readers are invited to visit, as I have, the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington. There are in that building many sculptural references to various sources of law, including to Moses and Judaic sources such as the Ten Commandments, along with depictions of many other law-giving sources, such as Hammurabi, Solon, Confucius, Napoleon and Mohammed. Unlike Moore's Alabama rock, there is nothing that appears to endorse religion.

ED BUCKNER

*Buckner, of Smyrna, is southern director
for the Council for Secular Humanism.*

Fortunately, he's wrong

Thomas Suhr ("Majority rules," Letters, Aug. 3) stated, "we are a democracy, which basically means majority rules."

Fortunately for American citizens, Suhr is wrong; we're not a democracy. The United States is a republic. This means that the majority can only rule as long as the rights of the minority are not trampled upon.

If 99 percent of Americans are Christians, the government still cannot endorse or promote Christianity because the rights of the 1 percent minority would be violated.

Immigrants come to America because we have freedom of religion guaranteed by the founding document of this great country, the Constitution. Everyone is free to practice any religion they want to, even religions that you disagree with.

We need to go back to the original national motto to replace the recently chosen unconstitutional motto of "In God We Trust." Yes, that's right - the current national motto has only been around for 50 years. The original national motto was "E pluribus unum," which means "Out of Many, One."

The original national motto better describes the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and truly demonstrates in summary the Bill of Rights.

Blair Scott, Mobile

Constitution, not majority

In Thomas Suhr's Aug. 3 letter ("Majority rules"), he trots out a staple of fundamentalist hogwash when he defends such things as public prayer and Ten Commandments displays with the "majority rules" argument.

This doctrine states that since a majority of Americans are Christians, then all Americans should be forced to accept governmental acknowledgment of the Christian God via such things as the "In God we trust" motto on coins.

The flaw in this reasoning is that America simply is not subject to the "majority rules" ideal; it is subject to the Constitution. The Constitution serves to protect every American from the potential aggressions of all other Americans, regardless of whether or not he or she is part of a majority or a minority of any kind.

Thus, due to the 1st and 14th amendments, nobody can be forced to observe the religious doctrines of anybody else. For example, an atheist cannot be subject to reading "Thou shalt have no gods before me" in a courthouse, just as a Christian is not allowed to be coerced into saying "one nation, under Allah" while reciting the Pledge.

Why is this concept so seemingly difficult to understand?

Ried Crowe

Powder Springs, GA

Lawmakers need to be accountable

During the last session of the Alabama Legislature, I had a discussion with my state senator, Jim Preuitt, about state financial accountability. I asked him to introduce legislation that would make elected or appointed state employees financially responsible for all costs incurred by an unconstitutional act. Sen. Preuitt is opposed to the idea that individuals should take responsibility for their own actions. Let the taxpayers be responsible.

I called the Governor's Task Force on Taxes and Accountability and spoke to a man named Chris. I asked him if anything in the governor's package did anything to prevent the taxpayers from paying for the unconstitutional acts of state officials. He said he would get back to me with an answer. He didn't.

As long as there are no financial consequences for the unconstitutional acts of government officials, they will continue. Forcing religion on the public or supporting segregation is very popular among politicians. Forcing officials to put their own money on the line will cause those officials to gain a new respect for the "evil" Bill of Rights. We lost the Civil War. The U.S. Constitution is the basis of all American law. Let's start acting like Americans.

Rev. Hank Shiver

Munford

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Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Ried Crowe's letter was in the *Sun Herald* on August 31.

Blair Scott's letter was in the *Mobile Register* on August 23.

People can be moral without being religious

In Chet Franklin's letter of Aug. 27 ("I swear to tell the truth... if it sounds good"), he insinuates that trials in America cannot be expected to be fair without witnesses swearing to a god and that the Ten Commandments are necessary in our society in order to ensure morality. I can only hope that Mr. Franklin is joking.

The simple fact is that we continually see people swear "to tell the whole truth, so help me God" and then promptly perjure themselves (such as Oliver North, Bill Clinton, and the tobacco executives who swore under oath that nicotine was not addictive). We also see countless numbers of people who claim to cherish the Decalogue and yet kill and steal (think abortionist executioner James Kopp, or the millions of other Christians currently in jail). Did these people worry about an eternity of damnation before lying or violating Moses' laws?

In my life, I have no problem telling the truth, not killing, and, in general, being good. I do this simply because it is the right thing to do. I don't need the childish threat of hell to make me ethical. Furthermore, I suspect that this is the case for the vast majority of my fellow citizens.

RIED CROWE
Powder Springs, Ga.

"To rest one's case on faith means to concede that reason is on the side of one's enemies — that one has no rational arguments to offer." — Ayn Rand

Chief Justice violating Alabama Constitution

An argument has been made by Chief Justice Roy Moore's supporters that the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution does not apply to the state or specifically to judges in courthouses because the First Amendment addresses "Congress."

While Justice Moore may not be a congressman, he is a representative of the state, which falls under the guidelines of the Fourteenth Amendment, which states (in part):

"No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

The 14th Amendment requires the states to adhere to the federal Constitution. States are free to write their own constitutions, but they must not contradict or violate any part of the federal Constitution.

Ironically, the Alabama constitution is much clearer on this issue. Since Justice Moore is Alabama's chief justice, he definitely falls under Alabama's constitution. Section 3 of that document states:

"That no religion shall be established by law; that no preference shall be given by law to any religious sect, society, denomination, or mode of worship; that no one shall be compelled by law to attend any place of worship; nor to pay any tithes, taxes, or other rate for building or repairing any place of worship, or for maintaining any minister or ministry; that no religious test shall be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under this state; and that the civil rights, privileges, and capacities of any citizen shall not be in any manner affected by his religious principles."

So even if the Moore supporters' argument held any validity, it wouldn't matter because Judge Moore is blatantly violating Alabama's constitution — the very constitution he swore an oath to uphold.

BLAIR SCOTT
Mobile

Abortion Doctor's Killer Expects 'Reward'

STARKE, Fla. - Paul Hill, a former minister who gunned down an abortion doctor, said he feels no remorse and suggested the state will be making him a martyr when he becomes the first person executed in the United States for anti-abortion violence.

The 49-year-old former Presbyterian minister was put to death by lethal injection on August 27 for the 1994 murders of Dr. John Britton and his escort, retired Air Force Lt. Col. James Herman Barrett. Barrett's wife was wounded in the shootings outside the Ladies Center in Pensacola.

"The sooner I am executed ... the sooner I am going to heaven," Hill said in a jailhouse interview. "I expect a great reward in heaven. I am looking forward to glory. I don't feel remorse."

"More people should act as I have acted," Hill added.

Abortion-rights groups worry that Hills execution will trigger reprisals by those who share his steadfast belief that violence to stop abortion is justified. Several Florida officials connected to the case received threatening letters last week, accompanied by

rifle bullets.

Hill, a father of three, has supporters who have maintained a Web site in his honor, with snapshots and ballads, but most major anti-abortion groups have repudiated him.

Some of his backers liken him to John Brown, the abolitionist hanged for his crimes. One militant anti-abortion group, Missionaries to the Unborn, likens Hill to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor from Germany who was executed after joining the plot to assassinate Hitler.

[From an AP article by Ron Word]

"We are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it."
-Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to William Roscoe, 1820

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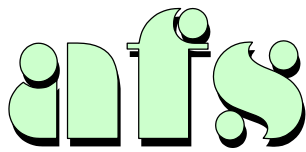
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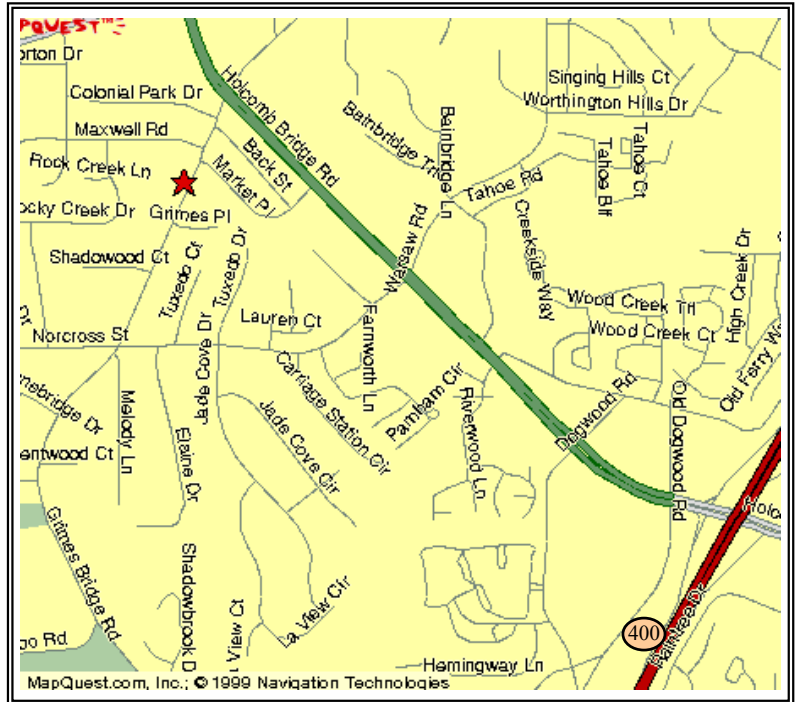
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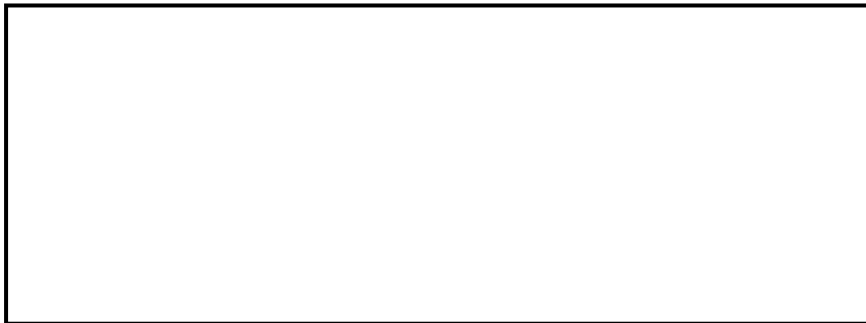
**Atlanta
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**The September Meeting:
Sunday, September 14
1:00 PM at the AFS Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road,
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Kay Scott
Planned Parenthood of Georgia**



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