

# Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 9 Number 10 • October 2003

## Our October Meeting

Our October 12 meeting will feature a speech by Ted Goodwin, head of the Georgia chapter of **End-of-Life Choices**, formerly known as The Hemlock Society.

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.

End-of-Life Choices is a nonprofit membership association of people who support choice and dignity at the end of life. It was founded in 1980 by Derek Humphry, who launched the dying-with-dignity movement in the U.S. by writing about his decision to help his terminally ill wife Jean achieve her wish of a peaceful, dignified death.

Today, End-of-Life Choices has more than 30,000 members in about 70 chapters and community groups around the country. Members have access to programs that help them and their loved ones examine the full range of their end-of-life options, including the option of hastening the dying process. Where the law is inadequate to provide for end-of-life choice, the group works through the democratic process to change the law.

End-of-Life Choices is the only nationwide membership organization that promotes access to the full range of dying-with-dignity choices, and offers guidance on advanced healthcare directives, living wills, durable powers of attorney and other resources that help people ensure their end-of-life wishes are followed and implemented and that their pain is adequately treated.

## 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).

## AFS Meetings and Activities

Oct 11: AFS Hike at Chattahoochee River, 11:00 AM.  
Oct 12: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.  
Oct 17: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.  
Oct 19: AFS Discussion Group, AF Center, 4:00 PM.  
Oct 26: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 3:00 PM.

## AFS Activities

The **AFS Hike** will be at 11:00 on Saturday, October 11, 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 at Las Margaritas Restaurant at 1842 Cheshire Bridge Road (Atlanta) on Friday, October 17, at 7:00 PM. To get there, take I-85 to the Cheshire Bridge Road exit (Exit 88) on the north side of Atlanta. Turn east at the light and go about 1.5 miles. The restaurant will be on the right.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on Sunday, October 19, at 4:00 to 6:00 PM at the AF Center.

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

## Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center at 12:30 on Sunday, October 26. HGA President Stephen Burnett, an assistant professor of biology at Clayton College and State University, will speak on his favorite subject: bats!

## Internet Resources

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

Recent debate: Herb Silverman debates a Christian:  
[http://charleston.net/stories/092803/mun\\_28munday.shtml](http://charleston.net/stories/092803/mun_28munday.shtml)

The Atheist Alliance website:  
<http://atheistalliance.org/>

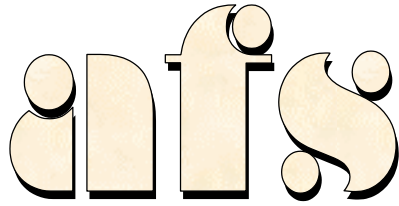
Massimo's Skeptic Web: Bush, the Pope & Gay Rights:  
<http://botany1.bio.utk.edu/skeptic/RS.html>

End-Of-Life Choices website:  
<http://www.endoflifechoices.org/>

ACLU of Georgia website:  
<http://www.acluga.org/>

Humanists of Georgia website:  
<http://www.geocities.com/gahumanists/>

From the other side: Ten Commandments Revolution:  
<http://www.therevolutionwillbelieve.com>



**Atlanta  
Freethought  
Society**

## 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.

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 will speak on the Council for Secular Humanism and his new role as CSH's Southern Director.

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

Jan 11: TBA

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

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to [xxxx-unsubscribe@yahoo.com](mailto: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

**Editor**

Steve Yothment

**How to Contact the Editor**

Send correspondence to AFS at:  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500  
Roswell, GA 30075-3905  
or phone Steve at 678-364-8703  
or send e-mail to [SteveYoth@aol.com](mailto:SteveYoth@aol.com).

**Atlanta Freethought Society**

**President**

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

**VP for Internal Communication**

Tony King – 706-886-9224

**VP for External Communication**

Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

**Treasurer**

Bill Burton – 770-469-1228

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Harriet Harris – 404-252-1962

Joel Kollin – 770-392-7958

Kate Miller – 770-xxx-xxxx

John Schwartz – 770-757-2883

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

**The Atlanta Freethought News**

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For membership and subscription  
information, contact AFS at:  
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**AFS Webmaster:** Ken Cummings  
Call the AFS Infoline: 770-641-2903

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# The “Save Our Commandments Caravan”

A model of Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore’s Ten Commandments monument went on tour from Montgomery to Washington, DC on September 28<sup>th</sup> to October 5<sup>th</sup>. The lightweight model was the centerpiece of a “Save the Commandments Caravan,” sponsored by Faith and Action, a Washington religious advocacy group, as well as the National Clergy Council and the Christian Defense Coalition. Rallies occurred along the way, primarily in Montgomery, Atlanta, and Washington, DC.

Back on September 18, Moore offered the monument to Congress for display in the U.S. Capitol. In a statement announcing the offer, Moore said, “By its very action as the elected representatives of the American people, Congress would restore the balance of power between the branches of government and would send a message to federal courts that we, the people, have the final word on our inalienable right to acknowledge God.”

Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) welcomed Moore’s “generous offer,” but no official decision has been made.

Even though supporters of Moore acknowledge that displaying the Ten Commandments in the Capitol would likely prompt an intense fight, it hasn’t stopped them from pursuing the idea.

The Rev. Rob Schenck, president of the National Clergy Council, said displaying the monument in the Capitol would be the quickest way for lawmakers to send federal judges a message. “The fact that so many individuals and groups are demanding the public acknowledgment of God indicates the seriousness of the issue and the necessity of public officials to act to secure our rights,” said Schenck.

Schenck and Mahoney aren’t alone in their efforts. Mark Iain Sutherland, president of the Positive Action Coalition, has also drummed up support for Moore. He said the coalition’s action alerts have prompted thousands of people to contact their elected representatives.

“Congress is designed in such a way that it’s answerable to the people,” Sutherland said. “Congress needs to step up and display the Ten Commandments.”

Sutherland also hopes Congress goes a step further and enacts a law designed to protect Ten Commandments displays like the one Moore housed in the Alabama courthouse.

Rep. Robert B. Aderholt (R-Ala.) has introduced the Ten Commandments Defense Act, and Sen. Wayne Allard (R-Colo.) followed with the Religious Liberties Restoration Act. The bills would limit the authority of federal judges to make decisions about the Ten Commandments, the Pledge of Allegiance and the motto “In God We Trust.”

In addition to the federal legislation, Schenck said he would also like to see a constitutional amendment adopted protecting religious displays. But, he acknowledged, it was more likely for Congress to act in the short term on Moore’s offer to house the monument in the U.S. Capitol.

Critics of Moore said such a move would lead the country down the wrong path.

Larry Darby, director of the American Atheists of Alabama, said he hopes reason will prevail should Congress ever seriously consider putting the monument in the Capitol.

“It is without question that [Moore and his supporters] are trying to install Christianity as our national religion,” Darby said.

Any action Congress takes would result in a constitutional debate, Darby predicted. He added that it wouldn’t benefit anyone except the Christian groups that are lobbying heavily for action. He said the more attention the issue receives, the more money these organizations are able to raise.

Darby said it is unfortunate Moore has attracted so many followers. He said supporters keep reciting the Declaration of Independence and Magna Carta – citing them for their re-

ligious impact – when the Constitution sets up the framework for government.

“Our government was founded in spite of the Ten Commandments,” Darby said. Asked why some people believe otherwise, he said: “It’s easier to believe what someone else says than to think and decide things for yourself.”

## THE ATLANTA RALLY

The caravan’s Atlanta rally was on Monday, September 29. Several hundred Christians, including prominent Georgia politicians, gathered outside the capitol to support displaying the Ten Commandments in the nation’s courthouses, schools and other public buildings.

Holding signs that read, “Hand written by the one living God” and “Thou shalt not put God’s law in a closet,” the protesters called on Americans to stand up for what they described as a constitutional right to acknowledge God.

More than a dozen speakers attacked the ACLU and federal judges for supposedly misrepresenting the intents of the founding fathers of the nation and perverting the U.S. Constitution’s principle of separation of church and state.

Ralph Reed, the former national director of the Christian Coalition of America and ex-state chairman of the Republican Party of Georgia, told the crowd that the Ten Commandments, along with the Magna Carta and Mayflower Compact, were pillars of the U.S. legal system and society.

“That is an historical fact,” the boyish-looking Reed said. “If you post the Ten Commandments along with the other inspirations and foundations, that’s not an establishment of religion, that’s a recognition of our heritage as Americans.”

“The vast majority of Americans believe that these Commandments have a place in the halls of justice, that they unify us morally under a just system of laws,” Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue, a Republican, said at



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## Ten Commandments Caravan *(continued)*

the rally. "Ours is a nation founded on freedom of religion, not freedom from religion. It is our duty as citizens to make our voices be heard and to ensure our right to display the Ten Commandments in our public buildings."

Congressman Johnny Isakson, a Georgia Republican who is running for the U.S. Senate, echoed Perdue's sentiments. Georgia's two U.S. Senators, Zell Miller, a Democrat, and Saxby Chambliss, a Republican, also sent letters of support that were read out by organizers of the rally.

Larry Darby, the Alabama director for the American Atheists, attended the rally and said he was shocked at the involvement on the part of some politicians.

"Governor [Sonny] Perdue of Georgia was a speaker and there were several people who appeared to be state leaders or senators here, or at least candidates for office who were speaking, and I was shocked at some of the comments that the governor made that support this whole notion that America is a Christian nation and our government was founded on religious principles. It is a lie, an outright lie," Darby said.

Darby said he believes Perdue, as a government official, violated the U.S. Constitution by promoting the rally.

"We haven't seen this in Alabama where the governor would advocate or participate in such an overtly religious ceremony." The Constitution, not the Ten Commandments, he said, serve as the basis of American government.

"The Ten Commandments are an overtly religious artifact. There is no doubt what Roy Moore and people who support him want. They want to establish Christianity as our state and national religion," Darby said. "The religious fundamentalists want to force religion on others. Our constitution is a Godless document."

### THE COUNTER-DEMONSTRATION

A short time after the morning rally, a counter-demonstration began. Organized primarily by Ed Buckner, Southern Director of the Council for Secular Humanism, participants were from many groups, including the Council for Secular Humanism, the Atlanta Freethought Society, Citizens for First Freedoms, The Georgia Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Alabama Freethought Association, American Atheists and the Greater Atlanta Interfaith Alliance.

In a press release, Buckner announced that "lovers of religious liberty will gather on Monday afternoon to demonstrate in favor of religious

liberty. This will *not* be a protest against religion; it will be a polite, civil protest by all who cherish religious freedom, whether as religious or as non-religious people. We are embarrassed and angered by the arrogance and ignorance of Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore and his followers, who are willing to sacrifice the great American ideals of religious liberty to gain government endorsement of their own narrow-minded religious ideas."

Sue Garland, a member of the Atlanta Freethought Society, was quoted in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, saying, "I do not want any religion imposed [in] a building which my tax dollars have paid for."

Ed Buckner said his group spoke for those "who understand that this is a free country, not a Christian nation."

Ed reported on the AFS forum email list later that day that participants included AFS members Ray Knisely, Bill Burton and Sue Garland, John Elliott of the Greater Atlanta Interfaith Alliance, Pat Cleveland, Hank Shiver, and Alice Shiver of the Alabama Freethought Association, Jeff Selman of Cobb County (defender of science and evolution), and Larry Darby of American Atheists.

[From the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Montgomery Advertiser* & *CNSNews.com*.]

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"The foundation of all morality is to have done, once and for all, with lying; to give up pretending to believe that for which there is no evidence, and repeating unintelligible propositions about things beyond the possibilities of knowledge."

— Thomas Henry Huxley

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# Sing Along

By **Bobbie Kirkhart, President  
of Atheist Alliance, Inc.**

I have referred to religious ecstasy as “tutored bliss.” Music, especially the fun of singing along, as well as handholding or chants – any proficient psychologist knows that these are mood-altering exercises. When not misused, they are really very good for us. What is harmful is assigning some supernatural power to their performance, and, worse yet, acquiring indebtedness to that power.

The exhilaration that Christians get in these exercises relieves their pain of having been “born sinners;” they are told that their elation is the Holy Spirit, sending the message that the very same god that condemned them now forgives them. They leave the exercise refreshed, but with the eternal debt of gratitude to a god who, having created them as unworthy beings, now makes them worthy. Other religions have similar, though not identical, rationales for the rapture brought about by these techniques, and many add a less benign ritual: drugs that are stronger than communion wine. In all cases, these practices work to convince the participants that their gods are good to them, and, in

many societies, they also convince the non-believing observer that religion is a helpful coping device.

This goes on in spite of a side effect that often comes with the bliss: an ineffectively denied hostility to everyone who doesn’t share the same vision. Examples of this abound, but there is perhaps none more explicit than a song I remember from the church camps of my adolescence. The first verse is, “I’ve got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.” Joy times four. Say it enough times, and it becomes true. A later verse exclaims, “I’ve got that heavenly hope that heckles heathens.” I can hardly imagine anything more pathetically isolating than the fantasy that one’s own happiness is disturbing someone else. Teaching this to children is beyond irresponsible.

I am sad to know that recovery was not in the cards for most of my childhood friends who sang that song with me. They are still singing the songs, grateful to their god for giving them respite from his judgment. I feel very lucky to have escaped the stifling immersion of religion that organized my

childhood.

Many of us activists in the atheist community have odious memories of this perversion of psychological methods, and those experiences sometimes make us shun the practices. That’s a shame, because there is everything right about celebrating our lives, enhancing our enjoyment, and reveling in our right to be happy with no debt owed.

Who, after all, has more reason to rejoice than those of us who are free from the muddle of superstition?

We have chosen a life in uncensored search for truth. No path could be more difficult or more rewarding. The fact that we can live without an occasional euphoric respite does not mean we should deny ourselves. Reason is not a god, and we are allowed to abandon it occasionally in favor of a momentary pleasure. We should spend more time holding each other’s hands, singing silly songs together, dancing badly and laughing heartily.

Fellowship and joy are absolutely secular terms.

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## Blacks, KKK Rally Together

A crowd of 200 rallied on Friday, September 26, in support of a Ten Commandments display at the Barrow County courthouse, with ralliers ranging from a Ku Klux Klan leader to members of a fundamentalist black church.

American White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan imperial wizard J. J. Harper was joined by about five members of the Atlanta-based House of Prayer, a church that received national attention last year when the minister and four church members were convicted of aggravated assault and cruelty to children for whipping two boys.

The rally was held to support the Barrow County commissioners, who voted in June to fight a legal challenge

by the American Civil Liberties Union over the display.

Harper, from Cordele, lashed out at the American Civil Liberties Union for asking for the framed poster to come down, saying the First Amendment does not bar religious displays from courthouses.

“It don’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that this courthouse is not Congress and this courthouse has made no law,” Harper told the crowd.

Some protesters were wary of the Klan’s involvement. “We started not to come,” said Angela Woodall, who says she opposes the Klan but felt compelled to attend the Barrow rally for religious reasons.

Commission chairman Eddie Elder,

who strongly opposes taking down the Ten Commandments poster, apparently didn’t mind that a Klan member was leading the rally.

Elder spokeswoman Lane Downs said, “He appreciates all the help he can get.” Downs also said Elder doesn’t mind the Klan rally as long as it stays peaceful.

Charlie Ruth, a leader with the House of Prayer, a predominantly African-American congregation, confirmed the day before that church members would attend the rally. “I’m going to be up there making speeches starting at 11:30 a.m. until I get hoarse,” Harper said.

[From a Sept 26 article in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.]

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## “Foundations of Our Law” Exhibit in Alabama Supreme Court Library

[From an article in the September 10 *Montgomery Advertiser*]

**G**ov. Bob Riley held true to his promise to display a granite plaque of the Ten Commandments in the Alabama Capitol on September 9.

A small group of Montgomery-area ministers and other Ten Commandments supporters filed into the old Supreme Court Library early that day to see it for themselves. The granite plaque was on display as part of a “Foundations of Our Law” exhibit.

“Just as the Ten Commandments are exhibited in similar displays in the U.S. Supreme Court and in our nation’s Capitol building, I feel it is important to display them in our Capitol as well,” Riley said in a written statement.

In the previous week, Toby Roth, the governor’s chief of staff, accepted the plaque presented by supporters of Judge Moore’s Ten Commandments monument removed by court order from the Judicial Building rotunda, where it had been on display for two years.

But the supporters’ gift to the governor wasn’t the only thing on display. Accompanying the 10 Mosaic laws were several other adjoining display panels – one for the Magna

Carta, the Code of Justinian, the May-Flower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, the Bill of Rights and the Constitutional Amendments to Guarantee Full Citizenship.

“Visitors to Montgomery can now read again and learn about those historical documents upon which our system of laws rests,” said Riley, whose office worked with Attorney General Bill Pryor and his staff in creating the diverse display.

“In recent weeks, there has been much discussion of both the Ten Commandments and the rule of law, and it is my hope that the display will illustrate the historical relationship of these matters,” Pryor said in a written statement. “... I hope many Alabamians will visit our state Capitol to learn more about the development of the rule of law.”

Members of the group of monument supporters expressed approval of the display.

Larry Darby, state director of American Atheists Inc., also visited the Capitol to see the display.

“It needs to be taken out because it has no place, even in this context,” he

said. “It has nothing to do with the moral foundation of law. The Constitution is the foundation of law. It is the founding document.”

In an email on the AFS forum email list, Darby commented on the Ten Commandments plaque. “The tablets really stand out because they are in the shape of stone tablets, thick and part of two items on one panel,” he said. “Standing back from the entire display, one has the impression that the decalogue is three-dimensional and everything else is two-dimensional. The Ten Commandments really have a place of prominence in the display. Further, the plaque is listed first, as if it is THE foundation of our law.”

“Former judge Moore opposed this display. And in media interviews yesterday I stated that I agreed with Moore in that it does lessen the religious value of the Ten Commandments to have it placed with other documents... To me, it seems to be a sugar coating for secular Christian organizations, such as Americans United, to prevent them from suing to stop this blatant attempt by the State to recognize the Christian religion as our State religion.”

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## September Board Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Judy Thompson, Kate Miller, Lew Southern, Steve Yothment, Harriet Harris, Bill Burton

Minutes taken by: Harriet Harris

Time/Date of meeting: 2:00 PM, September 28, 2003

- ▶ Prior to the meeting, Ed Buckner made an appearance for the purpose of gathering some material for the following day’s Ten Commandments rally in downtown Atlanta. He explained the plans for the counter-rally.
- ▶ The Minutes of the July meeting were approved as distributed. (No business was transacted at the August board meeting due to lack of a quorum.)
- ▶ Treasurer Bill Burton distributed a detailed financial report. Our checking account balance is \$1,212.72.
- ▶ Property taxes were discussed. Kate will check into our eligibility as an IRS registered educational institution, for exemption from property taxes on both of our buildings.
- ▶ It was noted that we have been making irregular mortgage payments, resulting in an increase in principal. The Board agreed to be punctual in making the payments.
- ▶ The book “Bible Bloopers” by Michael Ledo has sold out,

and the author has revised the book into a new volume, titled “A Skeptic’s View of the Christian Bible.” The board agreed to publish this new book, but we must first raise the necessary funds to underwrite the printing. Bill will solicit bids for the printing. He has already had offers of loans from AFS members to cover the cost of the initial printing.

- ▶ The election for Board members will be held in December. It’s time to start thinking about candidates. Nominations will be accepted at our General meeting on October 12. Kate accepted appointment as chair of the Election Committee.
- ▶ Lew reported on his investigation into providing an emergency exit for our meeting room. A current window will be replaced by a double sliding glass door and a small concrete pad will be poured outside the new door.
- ▶ The board discussed and established a system for distributing incoming mail.
- ▶ The board agreed for the next board meeting to be on October 26 at 3:00 PM.

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# Founders had it right: We're secular

By JOHN KANELIS, editorial page editor for the Amarillo Globe-News. Reprinted by permission.  
From [http://www.amarillonet.com/stories/092803/opi\\_founderright.shtml](http://www.amarillonet.com/stories/092803/opi_founderright.shtml). © 1996-2003 Amarillo Globe-News.

The United States of America is among the most religious countries on the planet, even without a state-sanctioned religion.

And no amount of posturing from those who profess to call this a "Christian nation" is going to change the historical record that America's founders were quite specific in their intent to create a secular state.

Why, after all, did their forebears come to these shores in the first place? To get away from tyrants who tried to force them to believe in a certain deity, to pray certain prayers and to adhere to a certain faith.

All this came from a panel of scholars assembled at the National Conference of Editorial Writers annual gathering in a place founded by one Roger Williams, who splashed ashore in 1631 at the Massachusetts Bay Colony specifically because he disagreed with the Church of England's official religious policies.

It seems that Williams faced persecution in his native England because of his disagreements with the church. So, he fled to the New World to practice his own brand of religious non-conformity.

Those of us out here in the heartland have to deal frequently with the belief among our readers that since many of our founders indeed were Christian, that they intended this to be a Christian nation.

One of my colleagues posed this admittedly paraphrased question to the scholarly panelists: How can I persuade the readers who call me and insist that we are a Christian nation that we are no such thing?

And I thought I was the only one who had to grapple with that one.

The panel gathered to discuss what the "Founding Fathers really meant."

Gordon Wood, a professor of history at Brown University, just a few blocks from our meeting place, answered first.

The nation, he said, was a "Christian nation at the time of the revolution, but the founders weren't necessarily religious."

Pauline Maier, a constitutional scholar and professor of American history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said, "One of the greatest gifts of the Revolution was it at least began to get the state out of the religion business. If you believe in religion, don't fool with the system. Religion in America has thrived without the sponsorship of the state."

Previous to Maier's assertion, Catharine Kelleher, a professor of strategic research at the Naval War College in nearby Newport, told a gathering of editorialists that the "United States is a secular state that takes religion very seriously. Europeans have state religions and couldn't care less."

This is the utter beauty of our founders' logic. They knew when they wrote the words of the First Amendment – that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." – that Americans would place priceless value on their religious freedom.

An overwhelming majority of us in the Texas Panhandle demonstrate our faith daily. We pray. We attend worship services of all types – Christian and non-Christian alike. We do so freely and without reservation.

How can that be? Because the government isn't forcing us to do it.

This discussion topic rings with particular resonance in this day and time. A state judge in Alabama recently got himself into a jam over whether a monument displaying the Ten Commandments in a public square is constitutional.

Personally, I have no problem with the monument. I do have a problem, however, with a judge who is sworn to uphold the law who then violates the law by defying a legal court order to remove the Ten Commandments monument.

The government can make no law that requires us to practice a certain religion, or any religion. That's as it should be. As to whether we're a Christian nation, perhaps we are, but only if you consider that most Americans say they believe in God and attend a Christian church regularly.

Is it written in law that this is a Christian nation? No. Quite the contrary. It is written into the Constitution that we are a secular nation that gives its citizens the absolute right to believe in whatever deity they choose. Or, they can choose to believe in nothing at all.

To which I say, simply, "Amen."

[Mr. Kanelis can be contacted at the Globe News, P.O. Box 2091, Amarillo, TX 79166, or via e-mail at [jkanelis@amarillonet.com](mailto:jkanelis@amarillonet.com).]

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"Atheism, properly understood, is no mere disbelief; is in no wise a cold, barren negative; it is, on the contrary, a hearty, fruitful affirmation of all truth, and involves the positive assertion of action of highest humanity."

– Charles Bradlaugh, (1833-1891), from "A Plea For Atheism"

# Clipped

## Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Michael Buckner's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on September 20. Hank Shiver's letter was in the *Decatur Daily* on October 1 and in the *Post Herald* on October 3.

### An Issue of Endorsement

As has become increasingly common these days, Tom Terry [Faith & Values, Sept. 6] bewails the removal of Christianity from the "public square." Of course, no such thing has happened or is likely to happen in this country.

The trick to selling this absurd claim is to never really define what the "public square" is. The Official Code of Georgia defines a "public place" as "any place where the conduct involved may reasonably be expected to be viewed by people other than members of the actor's family or household."

Obviously Christians haven't really been barred from the "public square" by any reasonable definition of "public." Christians are free to practice their religion, not in secret but openly and in public; not only that, they are free to share it with others and to seek to peacefully persuade others to adopt their religious views.

What Mr. Terry is really demanding is that the government endorse his religious views. And, because everyone pays taxes to support the government and everyone is subject to the laws enforced by the government, what Mr. Terry is really demanding is that *everyone* endorse his religious views. Such a demand is not consistent with a free country; it is consistent with a theocracy.

*Michael E. Buckner  
Decatur*

### Public Hatred in Alabama

An Alabama news story reported, "Eighty-two percent of those (Alabama residents) responding to the poll said they do not support same-sex marriages." This is a no-brainer. This tells me that 82 percent of Alabamians don't hold these truths to be self-evident, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

One only has to look at the time line of public hatred in Alabama to see what the self-righteous Christians have hated.

1819 Constitution: The General Assembly shall have no power to pass laws for the emancipation of slaves.

1861 Constitution: No slave in this State shall be emancipated by any act done to take effect in this State, or any other country.

1901 Constitution: Article 177 denies women the vote. Article 256 mandates racial segregation.

The United States gave women the right to vote in 1920. Alabama approved the 19th Amendment on Sept. 8, 1953 (after having rejected it Sept. 22, 1919).

The segregation laws are still in the constitution, but the federal courts have ruled them unconstitutional. Alabama has a long history of racial and religious bigotry. As soon as one group gets its civil rights, Alabama finds another group to hate. Now it is the gay community. Who is next?

*The Rev. Hank Shiver  
Talladega*

Robert Scott's letter was in the *Pensacola News-Journal* on September 24. Blair Scott's letter was in the *Post Herald* on September 12.

### Added Later

While Jim Holleman's mocking ("It doesn't work," Letters, Sept. 14) of the original national motto (E Pluribus, Unum) was funny, it still does nothing to invalidate the original point.

The national motto was "E Pluribus Unum" until the 1950s, when anti-communist fear, generated by McCarthyism, caused a lot of unconstitutional changes in America.

During that same time "under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance: prior to the '50s the "under God" part was not in the Pledge of Allegiance.

"In God We Trust" was added to paper money and larger coinage: prior to the '50s it was only on smaller coinage.

"In God We Trust" became the national motto of the nation.

These are unconstitutional because the context of the time was clearly Christian — the government was directly endorsing and promoting a specific religion by law (the changes were actual laws signed by the president of the United States).

Let's restore the original motto of the United States, which clearly defines who we are — a pluralist nation of many ideas, races, ethnicities, religions, etc: E Pluribus, Unum, "Out of Many, One."

*Robert B. Scott Sr.  
Mobile, Ala.*

### Clearing Up

Let's clear up some of the misconceptions being argued by Roy Moore and his supporters.

1. The Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution requires states to follow the U.S. Constitution. Judge Moore seems to have forgotten about that.

2. The reference to "Almighty God" in the Alabama Constitution is in the preamble, which has no legal bearing whatsoever on the law of Alabama.

3. The Alabama Constitution is very clear in its religious freedom section (1-3-1), which 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."

4. Nowhere in the U.S. or Alabama constitutions is the Ten Commandments. There is no mention of any Biblical characters, either. There is no reference to Jesus or Yahweh or even the Virgin Mary.

5. The phrase "separation of church and state" is not in the U.S. Constitution; that's true. It's a phrase to summarize the intent of the First Amendment. The phrases "Immaculate Conception" and "Trinity" are not in the Bible. We use phrases to summarize positions all the time.

*Blair Scott  
Mobile*



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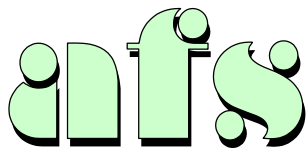
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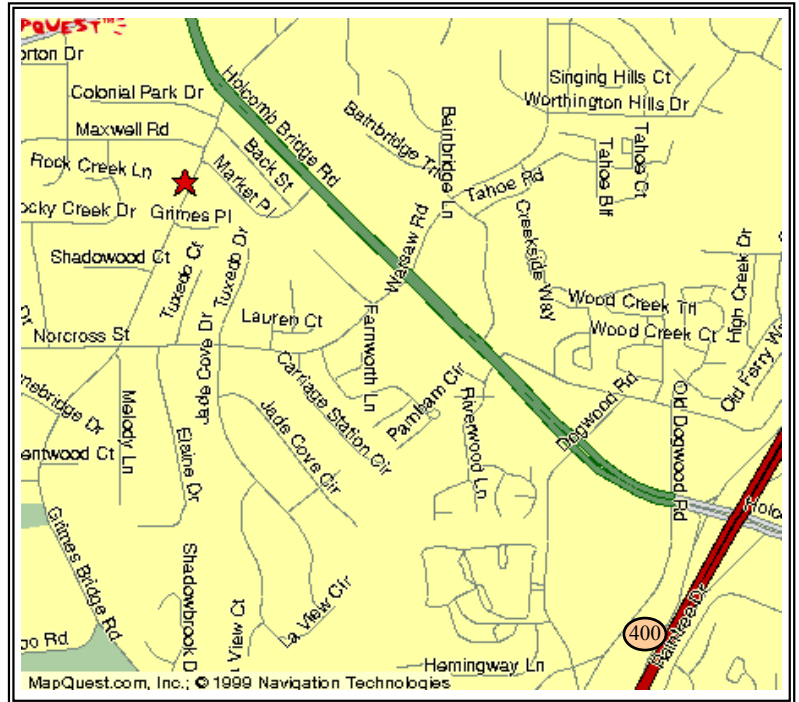
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End-of-Life Choices**



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