

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself*

An AFS Publication • Volume 15 Number 2 • February 2009

## The February AFS Meeting

The February 8 AFS meeting will feature a presentation by Dr. Lori Lipoma, titled "I'm OK; You're Going to Hell: An Examination of the Satirical Symbiosis Between Evangelical Christians and the People Who Mock Them." (See the box to the right for a synopsis of her talk.)

Dr. Lipoma is a professor in the Department of English and Philosophy at the University of West Georgia.

The meeting will be at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA, at 1:00 PM.

To get there, take I-285 (the perimeter road around Atlanta) to Exit 16 (Atlanta Road). Turn toward Atlanta. Go ½ mile and then turn right onto N. Church Lane. Go only 300 feet to Atlanta Freethought Hall, which is on the left.

## Darwin Day Celebration

The Atlanta Freethought Society plans to celebrate Darwin Day (February 12) at Georgia Tech with The Campus Freethinkers at 10:00AM to 2:00PM on the Skiles Walkway. We will have handouts and a table of information about Darwin, as well as cupcakes to celebrate his 200<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Join us there! The address is Ferst Drive at Cherry Street, Atlanta, GA. Contact Steve ([steveyoth@aol.com](mailto:steveyoth@aol.com)) for details.

## The AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at Las Margaritas Restaurant, 1842 Cheshire Bridge Road, Atlanta, on Friday, February 13, 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.

### Here is a synopsis of Dr. Lipoma's talk:

Is it possible to laugh fundamentalism or liberalism completely out of relevance? In creating and marketing "Hell Houses" and other Christian consumer products, American fundamentalism has produced yet another in a growing array of popular culture adaptations designed to expose, subvert, and finance their war against culture itself, to "take back the country for Christ."

In turn, secular culture satirizes conservative Christians' beliefs by creating parodies of their views, and presenting them to audiences, likewise attempting to expose, subvert, and finance their battle against their ideological opponents. The result is twofold: mainstream audiences' laughter affirms culture's distance from outmoded beliefs, comforting those of us who find fundamentalism terrifying. But also, this transaction confirms to fundamentalists, who find secular culture equally terrifying, that their work is proceeding according to God's plan, and that their forays into popular culture are more relevant than ever. Thus both viewpoints perpetuate each another—neither is likely to convert the other, but their laughter helps each side cope with living in a world in which the other exists.

## AFS Meetings and Activities

Feb 8: AFS Board Meeting at AF Hall, 11:00 AM.

Feb 8: AFS General Meeting at AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

Feb 12: Darwin Day Celebration, Ga. Tech, 10:00 to 2:00.

Feb 13: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

## Other Meetings of Interest

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AF Hall on Sunday, February 15, at 12:30 PM. Dr. Steve Burnett will speak on Charles Darwin and Evolution.

A **Freethought Discussion Group** meets in Peachtree City, GA on Wednesdays at 7:00 PM at Starbucks on Hwy 54. The group also meets for lunch on the first and third Saturday of the month at the Irish Bred Pub, 275 Hwy 74 N. They will have a **Darwin Day Presentation** that is open to the public on February 11 at 7:00 PM at Starbucks. For details, contact Shelby at [freediscussion@hotmail.com](mailto:freediscussion@hotmail.com).

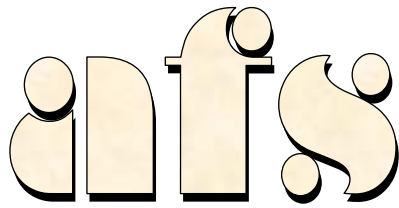
The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 1:00 PM at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

There will be a "**meetup**" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, February 8, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA.

Yet another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for Sunday, February 22, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta.

**GUST** (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Gwinnet (12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville) on Wednesday, February 11, at 7:00 PM. (See <http://gust.domek.org/>.)

**SOS**, the Secular Organizations for Sobriety, is not having regular meetings, but if you would like to learn more about it, email Donna Gore at [donnaigore@yahoo.com](mailto:donnaigore@yahoo.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.

Feb 8: Lori Lipoma, an English professor at the Univ. of West Georgia, will speak.

Mar 15: Jim Haught, editor of the Charleston, WV *Gazette*, will give a Power Point presentation on religious atrocities from his books *Holy Horrors* and *Holy Hatred*. This is a joint AFS/HGA meeting on the third Sunday of March.

Apr 12: TBD

## AFS Email Lists

The **AFS eNews** Announcement list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities and news. The **AFS Forum** is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation, and religion. Visit the AFS website at <http://www.atlantafreethought.org> for more info or to subscribe.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of free-thinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

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 lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an 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:  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA 30080-7224  
or phone Steve at 678-364-8703  
or send e-mail to [SteveYoth@aol.com](mailto:SteveYoth@aol.com).

**Atlanta Freethought Society**

**President**

Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

**VP for Internal Communication**

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

**VP for External Communication**

Freya Harris – 404-845-2276

**Secretary**

Dennis Martin – 404-817-0413

**Treasurer**

Diane Buckner – 770-432-3049

**Board of Directors**

Mark Banks – 770-354-1546

Steven Fant – 678-793-5662

Doug Hattersley – 770-971-1562

Tony King – 706-886-9224

Jack McKinney – 770-424-5004

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

**Atlanta Freethought News**

Vol. 15, Number 2, February 2009

Copyright © 2009 by the

Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc.

Signed articles are all copyright ©  
2009 by their respective authors.

Membership in AFS is \$25/year for  
individuals, \$35 for households, and  
\$10 for students/low income/under 21.

**Add \$15 to receive AFNews by mail.**

Sustaining members (individual) \$100  
and sustaining members (households)

\$125. Subscriptions alone are \$20 for  
12 issues, \$25 to Canada/Mexico,

\$30 for other addresses. Please make  
checks and money orders payable to

Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc.

**Visit our World Wide Web site at**

[www.atlantafreethought.org](http://www.atlantafreethought.org).

**Send E-mail to**

[afs@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:afs@atlantafreethought.org).

**AFS Webmaster:** Freya Harris

Call and leave messages on the

**AFS Info Line:** 404-A THEIST

---

# An Atheist's Perspective On the Inauguration: Enough With All the God Stuff

By Greta Christina, from her blog at <http://gretachristina.typepad.com/>, posted Jan 23, 2009

Yes. Okay. Pride; hope; history; immense joy; inexpressible relief.

Yes. Sure. Absolutely.

But also this.

I was watching the Inauguration, with pride and hope and history and joy and relief. And the message I kept hearing was, "We are one country. This country belongs to everybody in it. Everybody has a voice. Everybody has a part to play. Everybody's experience matters."

Everybody — except you.

Everybody except you and the roughly 15% of Americans who don't believe in God.

"Not you. You're not part of this. This isn't for you."

Yes, yes, I know what you're about to say. Obama said the word "non-believers" in his speech. He said:

*"For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus — and non-believers."*



And yes, that was pretty neat. As far as I know (does anyone know for sure?), this was the first time that a President's inaugural address said anything about non-believers in a positive, inclusive way. I'm not going to underestimate that. He said it, and

it was pretty darned cool. A milestone, even.

He said it once... in a speech, one of a series of speeches over the inaugural ceremony, that over and over again hammered home the message, "This is God's country."



Look at Rick Warren's icky opening invocation:

*"Almighty God, our father, everything we see and everything we can't see exists because of you alone. It all comes from you, it all belongs to you. It all exists for your glory. History is your story.*

*"The Scripture tells us Hear, oh Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord is one. And you are the compassionate and merciful one. And you are loving to everyone you have made."*

and:

*"...when we forget you [God], forgive us. When we presume that our greatness and our prosperity is ours alone, forgive us."*

and:

*"I humbly ask this in the name of the one who changed my life, Yeshua, Isa, Jesus, Jesus (hay-SOOS), who taught us to pray, Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."*

Do I need to point out what's wrong with this? Do I need to point out how grotesquely inappropriate it

is—in a massive and public government ceremony, addressed both to and on behalf of a secular nation populated by people of many faiths and many people of no faith—to assert that everything that happens comes from God and belongs to him? To assert that there's something wrong/need of forgiveness about "forgetting" God and claiming our achievements for ourselves? To not only invoke a prayer on behalf of the whole country, but to do so in a specific prayer that comes from his particular religious tradition, in the name of his particular god?

Ew.

Okay. Moving on, we have the closing benediction from Rev. Joseph Lowery. A much, much better speech



than Warren's, and one which, when you take the God stuff out of it, I have little to argue with and a tremendous amount to be inspired by. But we still have this:

*"Thou, who has by thy might  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever on the path, we pray.  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our  
God, where we met thee;  
Lest, our heart drunk with the wine of  
the world, we forget thee  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand  
True to thee, O God, and true to our*

---

---

## Enough With All the God Stuff (*continued*)

*native land.*"

and:

*"We pray now, oh Lord, for your blessing upon thy servant Barack Obama, the 44th president of these United States..."*

and:

*"We thank you for the empowering of thy servant, our 44th President..."*

and:

*"Let us take that power back to our homes, our workplaces, our churches, our temples, our mosques, or wherever we seek your will."*

So again, we have the message: It's God who directs us towards goodness. It's really bad to "forget" that. We—as a country—should stand true to God.

(Yes, I know that those words are from "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the song considered to be the Negro National Anthem, with an important and powerful history in the African American community and the civil rights movement. I get the value and meaning of using this song in the inaugural ceremony. But there are plenty of other lyrics from this song that don't frame the United States as a Christian nation, and that don't chastise non-believers for their non-belief.)

Plus we have the unsettling notion that Obama is God's servant. Sorry, but no. Obama is our servant. Yours, mine, ours. He is the public servant of the people of the United States of America. It is to us, and to the Constitution, that he owes his allegiance. Not to God.

In addition, we have the very unsettling message that "we" includes people who go to churches, temples, and mosques, people who seek God's will in an assortment of places... but "we" does not include people who don't seek God's will at all. "We the people" does not include people who don't believe in God.

And then, most importantly, from Obama's own Inaugural address:

*"...the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness."*

and:

*"This is the source of our confidence—the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny."*

and:

*"...and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations."*

No.

No, no, no.

The promise of equality and freedom and opportunity was not given to me by God. My confidence is not given to me by God. God's grace is not upon me.

No.

Finally, of course, the enormous elephant in the room:



We have the very fact that this inauguration was opened and closed with prayers. The fact that Sunday's inaugural concert was opened with a prayer. The fact that the oath of office was sworn on a Bible, and concluded—unrequired by the Constitution—with the words, "So help me God." The fact of the insistent repetition of the phrases "God bless you" and "God bless the United States." The fact that God was all over this inauguration like a cheap suit. The examples I've cited here, while the most egregious, were really just a drop in the bucket.

Completely regardless of the content of these prayers and invocations, we have the unquestioned assumption that religion and prayers and re-

peated references to God and faith should have a significant part—indeed, any part whatsoever—in the ceremonies of our government. We have the unquestioned assumption that the prayers of a church belong in the single most important ceremony of our state.

Look. You can't spend all day talking about how God's grace is upon the nation, and how everything that happens comes from God, and how equality and freedom and opportunity are promised to us by God, and how the elected leader of a democratic country is God's servant, and how forgetting God is a sin that requires forgiveness—and then mention once that some of the people making up the strong patchwork of this country are non-believers—and call that real inclusivity and recognition of non-believers.

Any more than you can spend all day talking about how same-sex couples shouldn't be allowed to marry, and non-discrimination laws shouldn't be expanded to cover sexual orientation, and LGBT people shouldn't be allowed to serve in the military—and then say, "Oh, no, I'm not homophobic."

Am I being churlish?

Should I just be happy about the mention of non-believers? Should I just be happy about this little baby step towards full recognition of atheists as actual citizens of this country, citizens with the same rights and responsibilities, the same expectation of respect and passion to contribute, that everyone else in this country has?

Maybe. For the record: I am thrilled that Obama is President. I've said it before and I will say it again: Thrilled. I'm thrilled because I care about torture, and global warming, and the economy, and the war, and education, and science, and our standing in the world at large. I'm thrilled because I care about our country's history and future, and I'm awestruck at what Obama's election means about who we've become and what we can be. And I am thrilled because I care about

---

---

## Enough With All the God Stuff (*continued*) (Reprinted by permission.)

secularism; because Obama is a Constitutional scholar, and I think he has potential to be one of the best advocates for secularism and separation of church and state that the White House has seen.

But I am done with this. I am done with repeated references to God and religion in official government events.

I'm not just done with it because this is supposed to be a secular, non-sectarian country, founded on (among other things) the idea of the separation of church and state. I'm not just done with it because I think the very presence of religion in politics makes for a toxic mess, with policy debates based not on observable evidence, but

on unsubstantiated dogma.

I'm done with it because, when Presidents and other official representatives of our country and our government insist that this is God's country, the implicit—if unintentional—message is that, if you don't believe in God, this is not your country.

Screw that. This is my country, too.

---

## Buckner, Silverman Comment on the Inauguration

American Atheists said in a Jan. 21 new release that it is pleased with President Barack Obama's reference to "non-believers" in his inauguration speech.

"For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus—and non-believers," Obama said in his speech.

Ed Buckner, president of American Atheists, said atheists and others who could be labeled as "non-believers" should routinely be acknowledged by elected leaders as "the good, patriotic, taxpaying and contributing citizens we have always been."

However, before Obama's speech, that acknowledgement has rarely been offered.

Buckner said Obama's forthright acknowledgement is appreciated.

"President Barack Obama finally did what many before him should have done, rightly citing the great diversity of Americans as part of the nation's great strength—and including 'non-believers' in that mix," Buckner said in his statement.

Buckner also alluded to Obama's mother, who was an atheist.

"His mother would have been proud, and so are we. Congratulations and best wishes on your presidency, Mr. Obama. And thanks for including us all, right from the start."

---

In a Jan. 21 "Guest Voices" article in the On Faith section of the online *Washington Post*, Herb Silverman, President of the Secular Coalition for America, also mentioned President

Obama's statement in his Inaugural speech.

"I'm delighted that the new president offered a token mention of atheists during his eloquent address, something our secular community isn't used to hearing from politicians, but he ended with the more traditional plea of politicians for God to bless the USA," he said. "Like most Americans, I felt a wonderful and profound chill watching Barack Obama become the first African-American president. I'm guessing that most nontheists voted for Obama and that we helped him win. With so many historical firsts this week, I wish I had seen a place on the inaugural program for one of the many patriotic Americans without religious belief. And since President Obama aligned himself so much with Abraham Lincoln, I would have been thrilled to hear anyone deliver this Lincoln quote: 'When I do good, I feel good; when I do bad, I feel bad. That's my religion.'"

Silverman continued, saying, "This week, we atheists have the audacity to remind President Obama of our founding as a secular nation, with a godless Constitution to protect the freedom of conscience and belief—or non-belief—for all people. We hope this religious inauguration does not portend an administration infused with religious advisers and events. We hope President Obama will include our perspectives as he recalls his non-religious parents and grandparents who raised him with good secular values. Though we do not believe in any gods, we do look for change

we can believe in."

Silverman also mentioned the Inaugural Oath, saying, "Like every incoming U.S. president before him, Barack Obama repeated the constitutionally prescribed one sentence oath to 'preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.' Chief Justice John Roberts, on behalf of the government, prompted President Obama to recite the words 'So help me, God.' Whether Obama wanted to say these words is beside the point. After taking the official oath, he was free to ask for help from Jesus, Allah, Zeus or any other gods that may or may not exist... I became one of the plaintiffs in Michael Newdow's recent lawsuit to prevent both the addition of 'So help me, God' to the presidential oath and the inclusion of religious invocations and benedictions. Although I didn't expect our side to win this year, and it didn't, I was stunned to learn that the ruling judge gratuitously opined that 'dislike for atheists is of their own making.'"

Silverman continued, "Perhaps atheists are a little too uppity for U.S. Dist. Judge Reggie B. Walton, reminiscent of when African-Americans, Jews, women, and gays began asserting their right to be treated fairly. Now many of the more than 30 million non-theistic Americans are visibly and vocally coming out of their closets, and working to end this type of discrimination. We are demanding a place at the table of public opinion, forming special interest groups, and lobbying for political and social change."

---

---

# AMERICAN ATHEISTS NATIONAL CONVENTION

APRIL 10, 11, 12, 2009 in... ATLANTA, GEORGIA !!

At the Emory Conference Center Hotel/Emory Inn, 1615 Clifton Road, Atlanta, GA 30329

## Confirmed Speakers at this time include:

### **Ed Buckner**

President, American Atheists, Inc.

### **Richard Dawkins**

Evolutionist/recognized author

### **Michelle Goldberg**

Noted Author, Journalist

### **Mike Malloy**

Nationally-syndicated talk radio personality

### **James Morrow**

Award-winning novelist

### **Dr. J. Anderson Thomson**

Psychiatrist, researcher, author

### **Nate Phelps**

Estranged son of Pastor Fred Phelps

### **John Lombard**

Beijing Secular Activist

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

### Friday, April 10,

- 10:00 AM WELCOME CEREMONY**  
Meet the VIPs and introduction of American Atheists, Inc. President ED BUCKNER
- 11:30 AM MICHELLE GOLDBERG**  
followed by \*Book signing\*
- 2:00 PM MIKE MALLOY**
- 3:30 PM JOHN LOMBARD**
- 5:00 PM TBD**
- 7:00 – 9:30 PM Silverbell Room, Open Banquet, Award Ceremony, Members Meeting**

### Saturday, April 11

- 10:00 AM DR. J. ANDERSON THOMSON, Jr.**
- 11:30 AM DR. RICHARD DAWKINS**  
followed by \*Book signing\*
- 2:00 PM NATE PHELPS**
- 3:30 PM JAMES MORROW**  
followed by \*Book signing\*
- 5:00 PM MASS DE-BAPTISM CEREMONY** featuring  
FRANK ZINDLER and EDWIN KAGIN
- 7:00 – 9:00 PM Silverbell Room, Open Banquet, Honor Lifetime/Gift and Legacy Members**

### Sunday, April 12

Dining Room; Breakfast. Arrive anytime between 8:00 and 11:00 AM and be greeted by AA board members and state directors who will be eager to chat with you, enjoy a cup of coffee, etc.

### Sunday afternoon group outing.

Major tour: Noon to 5:00 PM, Sunday, April 12, 2009

Destinations: Stone Mountain and its many attractions, then on to the historical Ku Klux site and on to Sweet Auburn -- the birthplace and resting place of Dr. Martin Luther King.

\$50 per person. Includes box lunch, transportation and all admissions.

Accessible for handicapped and limited mobility.

Of course, the convention will feature many vendors, endless conversations, greeting of old friends and making of new friends.

Register now at [http://www.atheists.org/store/index.php?main\\_page=index&cPath=23\\_22](http://www.atheists.org/store/index.php?main_page=index&cPath=23_22).

---

---

# Americans United Says Obama Should Act Swiftly To Fix Constitutional Flaws Of 'Faith-Based' Office

**President Should End Tax-Funded Religious Discrimination In Employment, Says Watchdog Group**

**T**he New York Times reported on January 29 that President Barack Obama will name Joshua DuBois, a Pentecostal minister who did religious outreach during the campaign, to head a revamped White House office of "faith-based" initiatives.

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, called on Obama to act quickly to overturn executive orders and other policies from the Bush administration that undercut civil rights and civil liberties.

"I urge President Obama and his staff to work expeditiously to fix several glaring problems with the 'faith-based' initiative," Lynn said. "Time is of the essence. Every day the initiative operates under Bush-era rules is another day rights are violated and tax money is squandered."

Lynn said the Obama administration should work to implement a series of recommendations the new president made in July. During a speech in Zanesville, Ohio, Obama vowed to end taxpayer-funded job bias in faith-based programs, forbid proselytizing in these programs and subject them to oversight to make

sure they are effective.

Affirming his support for separation of church and state, Obama said his approach to faith-based funding would follow "a few basic principles."

"First, if you get a federal grant," Obama said, "you can't use that grant money to proselytize to the people you help and you can't discriminate against them or against the people you hire on the basis of their religion. Second, federal dollars that go directly to churches, temples, and mosques can only be used on secular programs. And we'll also ensure that taxpayer dollars only go to those programs that actually work."

AU's Lynn said, "These reforms are vital if this program is to operate under the mandates of our Constitution. Bush-era executive orders gave religious groups a so-called 'right' to accept public funds and still discriminate on religious grounds when hiring staff.

"Americans should not be forced to subsidize publicly funded jobs that they can't even apply for because they're the 'wrong' religion. It's fundamentally unfair and an offense to our shared values."

Lynn added, "In addition, all forms of proselytism with public funds must end. In this time of economic uncertainty, more Americans than ever are in need. They should never be subjected to unwanted religious coercion as the price of receiving help from their government."

Lynn continued, "In an ideal world, there would be no 'faith-based' office. But if we must have this office, certain steps must be taken to bring it into line with the commands of the Constitution."

Concluded Lynn, "We look forward to working with President Obama and Joshua DuBois on this important issue."

Since 2001, Americans United has spearheaded a coalition of religious and public policy groups that opposed hiring discrimination in the faith-based initiative. Prior to the inauguration, members of AU's Legislative Affairs Department met with Obama staffers to discuss ways to fix the faith-based initiative.

[From a Jan. 29 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.]

---

## Lori Lipman Brown Steps Down as SCA Director

In an email to supporters, Lori Lipman Brown, Director and lobbyist for the Secular Coalition for America, indicated that she will step down from her position in "this wonderful national organization."

She noted that the SCA has grown to be a powerful and complex organization in fewer than four years, and that the SCA now needs an executive director, an individual with expertise in running a major national organization.

The SCA now has a staff of six people, and is involved in many larger coalition efforts. It is recognized by members of Congress and is consulted by the media and legislative personnel regularly.

Lori spoke to AFS at the July 2008 AFS meeting. We wish her well in whatever new work she pursues.

## Inauguration

We had seen sights, but this mocked our imaginations  
We had used words, but this defied our metaphors  
We had once been, our heritage proclaimed,  
"One Nation Indivisible," and "Out of Many, One"  
Until smallness of soul began to smother dreams.  
Then, suddenly, sorely profaned, and wounded, soon to die  
Our nation did an unimagined thing  
We rolled away the stone  
We shook the heels of history upon retreating wrongs  
We watched as hope, long dormant, bloomed  
And, through eyes blurred with tears,  
We went outside and raised the flag.

Edwin Kagin  
January 20, 2009

---

---

# Louisiana: New Pro-Intelligent Design Rules for Teachers

Last year, Louisiana passed the Louisiana Science Education Act, a law that many scientists and educators said was a thinly veiled attempt to allow creationism and its variants into the science classroom. On January 13, the state's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted a policy that sharpens those fears, giving teachers license to use materials outside of the regular curriculum to teach "controversial" scientific theories including evolution, origins of life, and global warming. Backers of the law, including the Louisiana Family Forum, say it is intended to foster critical thinking in students. Opponents insist its only purpose is to provide a loophole for creationists to attack the teaching of evolution.

"We fully expect to see the Discovery Institute's book, *Explore Evolu-*

*tion*, popping up in school districts across the state," says Barbara Forrest, a philosopher at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond. The Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based think tank, is a proponent of Intelligent Design. In a statement on the institute's Web site, its education analyst Casey Luskin hailed the new policy as a "victory for Louisiana students and teachers." The policy will now be printed in the Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators, which public school officials use as a guide.

State education officials tasked with translating last year's law into policy drafted a document that explicitly prohibits teachers from teaching intelligent design, but on 2 December, board members deferred a scheduled vote. Forrest says the advocates of the law used the delay to pressure educa-

tion officials to remove that language and a disclaimer saying that religion should not be taught under the guise of critical thinking. On January 13, the 11-member board unanimously approved a policy that contains no such caveats.

Education officials have defended the revision, arguing that it already includes language barring the use of materials that promote any religious doctrine. But Patsy Peebles, a retired science teacher who served on a committee that helped the education department draft the original policy language, thinks otherwise. "The creationists got what they wanted. We will have to redouble our efforts to educate our teachers and get them to teach good science," Peebles says.

[From a blog by Yudhijit Bhattacharjee at <http://blogs.sciencemag.org/>.]

---

## Americans United Urges Senate To Reject "Compassion Capital" Funding in Economic Recovery Package

**"Faith-Based" Funds Were Misused By Bush Administration, Church-State Watchdog Group Says**

The U.S. Senate should not go along with a House plan that provides \$100 million in "faith-based" funding as part of the federal economic recovery package, according to Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

HR 1, the measure approved by the House on January 28, includes a \$100 million appropriation for the "Compassion Capital" Fund (CCF), a key component of former President Bush's faith-based initiative.

Americans United officials say CCF money was allocated by the Bush White House without adequate oversight or civil rights and civil liberties safeguards. Administration officials also misused the fund to help political candidates and directed cash to their Religious Right allies. (TV preacher Pat Robertson's Operation Blessing, for example, was given a grant.)

Said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director,

"I am disappointed that the House included funding for the so-called 'compassion capital' program. I hope the Senate refuses to go along with this."

Americans United's legislative team successfully worked with House members to ensure that problematic faith-based provisions did not apply to the overall economic recovery bill, Lynn said. That's an important victory, he asserted, in preserving civil rights and civil liberties.

The House stimulus bill also provides broad funding for public school renovations, he continued, but specifically forbids the use of federal money at religious schools or houses of worship.

"I think House members were sensitive to the First Amendment's church-state separation mandate when they restricted public funds to use at public schools," Lynn said. "I just wish they had carried that constitutional com-

mitment forward and dropped funding for the much-abused Bush 'faith-based' scheme."

Lynn said Americans should remember that the Bush administration failed to get its faith-based initiative through Congress because it endangered basic civil rights and civil liberties. It would have subjected Americans in need to unwelcome proselytism in publicly funded programs and allowed faith-based agencies to discriminate on religious grounds in hiring for government-funded jobs.

When Congress said no, Lynn added, Bush forged ahead through executive orders.

"President-elect Obama has promised to roll back the Bush administration's civil rights and civil liberties infractions," said Lynn, "and we hope he will keep his commitment."

[From press releases by Americans United for Separation of Church and State on January 12 and 29.]



# Become a Member!



(Or renew your membership with this form or online at [www.AtlantaFreethought.org](http://www.AtlantaFreethought.org)!)

If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter, the *Atlanta Freethought News*, voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well as the social and activist events that we sponsor!

**Individual memberships:** One person can become a member for \$25 per year.

**Household memberships:** A household is defined as two members sharing one newsletter, and is available for \$35 per year. Since some of our households have additional members, there will be a \$5 per year charge for each additional voting household member.

**Paper Newsletters:** Due to printing and mailing expense, we add a surcharge of \$15 for members to receive a paper newsletter in the mail rather than our email version newsletter. We encourage all members to receive the newsletter by email to save on paper, postage and printing expenses.

**International members:** Because of international postage rates and special handling, we have been forced to add a surcharge of \$5 for members in Canada or Mexico, and \$10 for other foreign addresses for members who receive the paper newsletter.

Thank you for all your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

Annual dues are:

Membership	Dues	# of mems	Total	
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25	_____	\$_____	Name _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Household (2 members)	\$35	_____	\$_____	Address _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional household mems	\$5	_____	\$_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Low Income/ Student/under 21	\$10	_____	\$_____	Phone H: _____ W: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Paper version of newsletter	\$15	_____	\$_____	Email addr: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Subscription only	\$20	_____	\$_____	Please list names of additional household members: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$100	_____	\$_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Household	\$125	_____	\$_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for Canada/Mexico	\$5	_____	\$_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for other foreign addresses	\$10	_____	\$_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Extra donation (thank you!)		_____	\$_____	
<b>TOTAL:</b>			\$_____	

Please send this form with payment to:

Atlanta Freethought Society  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA 30080-7224

## Atlanta Freethought Society

4775 N. Church Lane SE Smyrna, GA 30080-7224

[www.atlantafreethought.org](http://www.atlantafreethought.org) [afs@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:afs@atlantafreethought.org)

“Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect.” —James Madison, 1774

**We still have these great books for sale:**

### *Why I Am Not A Christian* — \$8

Lucid, comprehensive, engaging answer to Christian apologists by **Keith Parsons**. Respectful but devastating to all Christian claims. A wonderful follow-up to Bertrand Russell's great essay with the same title.

### *An Uppity Old Atheist Woman's Dictionary* — \$8

By the late, great **Carol Faulkenberry** (illustrated by Amanda Faulkenberry); like Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary* —but better: more biting, funnier. Guaranteed to make you laugh out loud and to challenge at least one idea you hold.

### *Quotations That Support the Separation of State and Church (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)* — \$11

Compiled by **Edward M. Buckner** and **Michael E. Buckner**; ammunition against Christian-nation mythologists. Quotes from America's revolutionaries, constitution framers, Presidents, court decisions. Sources carefully documented; extensive index. Comb-bound—lies flat for easy copying.

*Please add:*

**\$4 TOTAL S&H Charge for up to 2 books.**

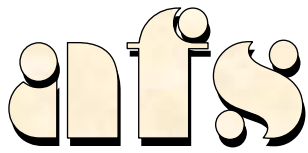
**\$1.50 EACH S&H Charge for 3 to 9 books.**

**No S&H Charge for 10 Books or more.**

*(All Merchandise will be shipped USPS Priority Mail)*

**Send check or money order to:**

**ATLANTA FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY**  
4775 N. Church Lane SE Smyrna, GA 30080-7224



Atlanta  
Freethought  
Society

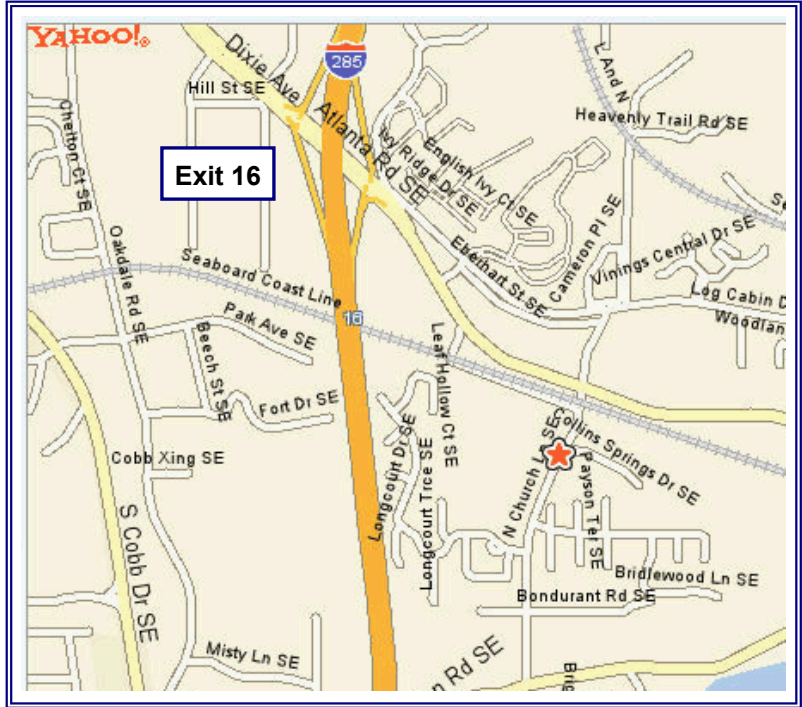
**The February 8 Meeting:**

**1:00 at AF Hall**

**4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:**

**Dr. Lori Lipoma**



*Atlanta Freethought News* is produced by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit, member-run, educational organization created to advance freethought and protect freethinkers. Any freethought, atheist, secular humanist, agnostic, or rationalist group is granted permission to reproduce anything from our newsletter not expressly labeled otherwise (acknowledgement of AFS and author appreciated).

Articles published represent the official opinion of AFS only when that is clearly stated; all other opinion is that of the individual author.



If your label indicates "02 2009" or earlier, please renew. Thanks.

Atlanta Freethought News  
Atlanta Freethought Society  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA 30080-7224