

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself.*

An AFS Publication • Volume 15 Number 6 • June 2009

## The June AFS Meeting

The June 14 AFS meeting will feature a talk by **Dr. A. Bowdoin Van Riper**, a Southern Polytechnic State University professor, on "Charles Darwin and Evolution."

Dr. Van Riper earned his PhD in History at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1990 and has written many books on the history of science. He is currently teaching courses on "Technology and Mass Media" and "Scientific Controversies" at SPSU in Marietta, GA.

The meeting will be at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA, at 1:00 PM. Please feel free to arrive early for snacks and conversation. We also typically go out to lunch together after the meeting.

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.

## The AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at **Panahar Restaurant**, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, June 19, at 7:00 PM.

## A Detour to AF Hall!

North Church Lane will be closed to thru traffic between Atlanta Road and Collins Springs Drive from June 1<sup>st</sup> to October 28<sup>th</sup> for bridge replacement over the CSX railroad.

To get to AF Hall from I-285, you can still take Atlanta Road towards Atlanta, but continue past N. Church Lane to Plant Atkinson Road. Turn right and go to N. Church Lane and turn right again. AF Hall will be on the right.

## The AFS Yard Sale

Thanks to all who participated or donated goods for the AFS Yard Sale on May 23. The AFS profit was about \$396. We met several neighbors, had some fun and had a nice meal, too. (Thanks to Lew for the great barbeque lunch!)

## AFS Meetings and Activities

June 14: AFS Board Meeting, AF Hall, 11:00 AM.

June 14: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

June 19: AFS Social at Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

## Other Meetings of Interest

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at AF Hall on Sunday, June 21, at 1:00 PM. The topic for this meeting: "Is America Becoming a More Humanist Nation? How Closely Do Humanist Values Coincide with American Constitutional Values?"

The **Fayette Freethinkers** meet in Peachtree City, GA on Wednesdays at 7:00 PM at the Orthodontist's Office on Peachtree Pkwy near Crosstown Road. The group also meets for lunch on the first and third Saturday of the month at the Irish Bred Pub, 275 Hwy 74 N. For details, contact Shelby at [freediscussion@hotmail.com](mailto:freediscussion@hotmail.com).

There will be a "meetup" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, June 14, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA.

There's another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists scheduled for Sunday, June 28, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta.

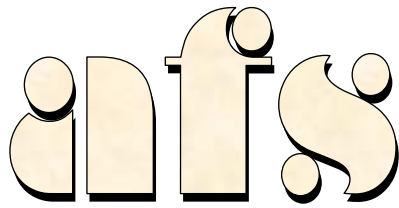
**GUST** (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Gwinnett (12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville) on Wednesday, June 10, at 7:00 PM. (See <http://gust.domek.org/>.)

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

The **First Annual Conference of Black Nontheists** will be in Atlanta on Friday, August 7, and Saturday, August 8, at the Atlanta Fulton Public Library, Central Downtown Branch Auditorium. Gary C. Booker will host the event. His website (<http://www.garybooker.org>) notes that "Even after many centuries of being disappointed and miserably failed by organized religion, Black Americans continue to be extremely devout and show blind faith in self-destructive ways. Religious fundamentalism and bigotry continue to promote sectarianism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and anti-intellectualism in Black American communities. Mental Liberation is the final frontier of the civil rights movement." See the website for details. Norm Allen of African Americans for Humanism will also be there.

"An avidity to punish is always dangerous to liberty. It leads men to stretch, to misinterpret, and to misapply even the best of laws. He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression; for if he violates this duty he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself." —Thomas Paine, from his Dissertation on First Principles of Government, 7 July 1795.



**Atlanta  
Freethought  
Society**

## Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at the AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

June 14: Dr. A. Bowdoin Van Riper, a Southern Polytechnic State University professor, will speak on Charles Darwin and Evolution.

July 12: TBD

Aug 9: (tentative) Norm Allen, president of African Americans for Humanism, will speak on Religion in African American Culture.

Sept. 13: 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

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Steve Yothment

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**Atlanta Freethought News**

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# Groups Speak Out on Dr. Tiller's Murder

## Many People are Appalled at the Murder of an Abortion Doctor

**G**eorge Tiller, a Kansas doctor whose clinic received national attention for performing late-term abortions, was shot to death as he entered his Wichita church on May 30.

Tiller has been among the few U.S. physicians performing late-term abortion, making him a favored target of anti-abortion protesters. He testified that he and his family have suffered years of harassment and threats. His clinic was the site of the 1991 "Summer of Mercy" protests marked by mass demonstrations and arrests. His clinic was bombed in 1985, and an abortion opponent shot him in both arms in 1993.

The anti-abortion group Operation Rescue runs a "Tiller Watch" feature on its website, though they now denounce the killing of Dr. Tiller. (See [www.operationrescue.org/category/tiller-watch/](http://www.operationrescue.org/category/tiller-watch/))

Americans United for Separation of Church and State issued a press release deploring the murder of the Kansas doctor.

"The murder of Dr. Tiller is an affront to every moral system imaginable," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director. "He had worked relentlessly to preserve the guarantee that women could make their own medical and ethical decisions. Our deepest sympathies go

to his family, friends and patients."

In a June 1 press release, Atheist Alliance International President Stuart Bechman said, "AAI is deeply saddened by the murder of Kansas physician George Tiller and wish to convey our utmost condolences to Dr. Tiller's family, patients, and friends during this time of unimaginable loss. Dr. Tiller's courage to serve vulnerable human beings against religious dogma and intolerance should not be forgotten. He was a hero to those seeking help in the most desperate of situations, and we honor the compassionate care he provided to so many."

Bechman continued, "To those whose hateful rhetoric on the airwaves, in pulpits, and on the internet condemns medical practitioners, your words and your beliefs are not innocent. Freedom of religion does not justify dehumanizing others, let alone taking criminal actions in the name of one's beliefs. Religious sects that provide justification to those who condone and promote such violence need to look critically inward and understand how your faith and teachings could be used to promote evil. We implore you to condemn those who use your faith to justify their hate and to cleanse your faith of all such teach-

ings."

Atheists for Human Rights also had a press release on June 1.

"These people who kill abortion doctors, bomb their clinics, kill and maim their staff, and terrorize women who seek their services are no different from the women-hating Taliban of Islamic countries," said Marie Alena Castle, communications director for AFHR. However, she said, the blame does not rest entirely on those who pull the trigger.

"Anti-abortion terrorists do not become murderous on their own. They are incited to violence by the churches that rant against abortion, the equivalent of Islam's madrassas," she said. "They are driven by dogma that cares nothing for the wellbeing of women and considers them reproductive vessels at best, and disposable ones at that. There are hundreds of thousands of maternal deaths every year worldwide because women have no access to birth control and abortion, thanks to the political power of anti-abortion, anti-contraceptive churches. Dr. Tiller's church, the site of his murder, is to be commended for not being a party to such misogyny."

[From press releases at <http://www.au.org>, <http://atheistsforhumanrights.org> and <http://atheistalliance.org>.]

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## The Lake Hypatia July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebration

### "No Preaching, No Praying, No Walking on Water"

**C**elebrate Freethought and Independence Day this July 4<sup>th</sup> with the **Alabama Freethought Association** and the **Freedom from Religion Foundation** at their 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Freethought and Independence Day Gala Weekend at **Lake Hypatia**, near Taladega, AL.

The July 3 – July 5 event will include these speakers:

- **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, on current FFRF litigation
- **Dan Barker** and **Steve Benson**, Tunes 'n Toons
- **Ed and Helen Kagin**, on Camp Quest
- **Bob Truitt**, and his famous Nature Talk
- **Karon Park**, on Art for Freethinkers
- **Ed Buckner**, Emcee and host, Freethought Trivial Pursuit
- **Jeremy Hall**, on Atheist in a Foxhole
- **Bob Collins**, hosting the Former Minister Forum

- **Alice & Pat Cleveland**, on 20 Years of Chapter Activism
- **Alice Shiver**, on Poetry

Presentations take place in the spacious, air-conditioned **Lake Hypatia Freethought Hall**. Inexpensive catered meals are held at a beautiful lakeside pavilion.

Swimming, paddling, boating, hiking, poetry-reading, relaxing and socializing are all on the agenda. Other fun events include:

- Atheists vs. Agnostics softball tournament
- Freethought Trivial Pursuit competition
- A hike, hosted by Michelle Michaels

Hotels are nearby for a comfortable overnight stay. A new Holiday Inn Express has special rates for this event.

See registration details at: <http://www.ffrf.org/lakehypatia/>.



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# “We Don’t Call It Hate”

**On May 26, the California Supreme Court voted to uphold Proposition 8 which bans gay marriage in that state. This inspired Doug Long of doug-long.com to write the following poem, reprinted here by permission.**

We don’t want gay folks to marry,  
So God and tradition say.  
It’s not that we hate gay folks,  
We just wish they’d go away.

Love the sinner, hate the sin  
That we’ve judged them to have done.  
Even though the so-called sin  
Isn’t hurting anyone.

So we deny gay people rights  
That for us are essential.  
Don’t say that we discriminate,  
Just say we’re preferential.

I wonder how it feels to them  
When equal treatment is denied.  
Should I look to the Golden Rule,  
Or has my compassion died?

I’m so glad scripture doesn’t say  
That it’s a sin for being straight.  
For would I turn away my love  
And take a same-sex mate?

Many gay folks have been crushed  
Under discrimination’s weight.  
So let us add a few more pounds.  
But we don’t call it HATE.

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## Americans United Applauds Court Decision Striking Down Oklahoma County’s Commandments Display

**A**merican United for Separation of Church and State praised a federal appeals court in a June 8 press release for striking down a government display of the Ten Commandments in Haskell County, Okla.

Reversing a lower court, the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously declared unconstitutional the eight-foot-tall religious display, which was erected at the local courthouse in 2004 after a campaign by a local minister and his supporters.

“This decision should send a clear message to politicians and religious leaders: Thou shalt not mix church and state,” observed the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. “Our courthouses should focus on the Constitution and civil law, not religious law.”

Americans United, which filed a friend-of-the-court brief in the Green

v. Haskell County Board of Commissioners case, noted that the monument displays the Protestant version of the Commandments and that it contains the text of the Mayflower Compact on the other side.

The appeals court traced the history of the monument, noting that commissioners frequently invoked religious language in defending it. One commissioner said, “I’m a Christian, and I believe in this. I think it’s a benefit to the community.”

The appellate panel, composed of three George W. Bush appointees, ruled that most people would perceive the display of the monument and the battle to keep it up as religious efforts.

“We conclude, in the unique factual setting of a small community like Haskell County, that the reasonable observer would find that these facts

tended to strongly reflect a government endorsement of religion,” wrote the court. “In particular, we find support for this conclusion in the public statements of the Haskell County commissioners.”

Lynn said the court made the right call. “The display of religious documents like the Ten Commandments properly belongs to religious leaders, not government officials,” he said. “I hope county officials have learned an important lesson about launching ill-considered religious crusades.”

Lynn noted that Oklahoma legislators recently passed a law calling for a display of the Ten Commandments on the grounds of the state capitol. In light of this ruling, he said, lawmakers might want to reconsider the wisdom of that action.

[From a June 8 press release by Americans United for Sep. of Church & State.]

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“Many secular liberals have convinced themselves that freedom of belief entails respect for all religions, and that respect means refraining from criticism. But that is not respect; it’s just blanket acceptance, even disregard. Understood correctly, respect is not just compatible with criticism – respect entails criticism. To respect someone we must take him seriously, and taking someone seriously sometimes means finding fault with him.”

– Austin Dacey, from the introduction to his book *The Secular Conscience*, page 18.

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# Kentucky Homeland Security Still Calls on “God”

**Kentucky Lawyers Moved to Dismiss the Atheist Lawsuit Over God-Promotion at Homeland Security. Here’s an update on litigation by American Atheists.**

**D**oes the Bluegrass State of Kentucky enjoy God’s special protection against terrorism?

Some people, including the legislature and the State Office of Homeland Security think that it does; and they proclaimed their belief in a post-911 statute to that effect. Indeed, the 2002 law has the deity fighting alongside policy, fire departments, the National Guard of Kentucky and other first responders. It declares, in part:

1) The Kentucky Office of Homeland Security shall be attached to the Office of the Governor and shall be headed by an executive director appointed by the Governor.

2) The executive director shall:

a) Publicize the findings of the General Assembly stressing the dependence on Almighty God as being vital to the security of the Commonwealth by including the provisions of KRS 39A.285(3) in its agency training and educational materials. The executive director shall also be responsible for prominently displaying a permanent plaque at the entrance to the state’s Emergency Operations Center stating the text of KRS 39A.285(3)

That text pompously declares that the General Assembly “finds that: The safety and security of the Commonwealth cannot be achieved apart from the reliance upon Almighty God as set forth in the public speeches and proclamations of American Presidents, including Abraham Lincoln’s historic March 30, 1863 Presidential Proclamation urging Americans to pray and fast during one of the most dangerous hours in American history, and the text of President John F. Kennedy’s November 22, 1963, national security speech which concluded: ‘For as was written long ago, ‘Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.’”

Edwin Kagin, National Legal Direc-

tor for American Atheists, took action along with several plaintiffs, and in December of 2008 filed suit to have the Kentucky statute declared unconstitutional.

“It is one of the most egregiously and breathtakingly unconstitutional actions by a state legislature that I’ve ever seen,” Kagin told reporters. Democratic State Rep. Tom Riner, however, who happened to also be an ordained Baptist minister from Louisville and the architect of the controversial law, disagreed.

Echoing the rationale in the Kentucky statute, he declared, “No government by itself can guarantee perfect security. There will always be this opposition to the acknowledgement of divine providence, but this is a foundational understanding of what American is.” Riner also described the Atheist lawsuit as “frivolous” and “an attempt to censor and suppress the publication of a key law that acknowledges divine providence.”

Fox also quoted Ed Buckner, President of American Atheists, who said that despite the heightened religious climate in post-911 America, Kentucky was the only state trying to enlist the deity in the formidable task of homeland security. “I’m not aware of any other state or Commonwealth that is trying to dump their clear responsibility for protecting their citizens onto God or any other mythological creature,” Buckner said.

Kentucky has a long record of problems involving unconstitutional effort to promote sectarian religion. Many involve the display of the Ten Commandments on public property, and in one decision the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the state in two cases involving nativity creches on courthouse property. Rev. Riner’s wife Claudia, served in the state legislature and in 1979 sponsored a bill

mandating display of the Commandments in all public school classroom. That led to another lawsuit, and in *STONE v. GRAHAM*, the Supreme Court found the practice blatantly unconstitutional. Ironically, that case is now part of the legal record and is cited in the American Atheist lawsuit.

Mr. Kagin says that the Kentucky statute “is facially volatile” of the Constitution, adding that “The challenged laws unlawfully attempt ... to establish religion, endorse belief over non-belief, set up a religious test, indoctrinate Kentucky citizens and state employees in this theistic religious belief, and diminish the civil rights, privileges, or capacities of Atheists and others who do not believe in a god, or who believe in a different god or gods than the presumed supernatural entity unconstitutionally endorsed by the legislature ... The challenged laws are grossly, and outrageously at variance with the Constitutions of the United States and of Kentucky, and are retrograde to the very purposes of protecting American freedoms for which the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security was established.”

On June 1, the State of Kentucky was in court presenting a Motion to have the American Atheists complaint dismissed. The hearing began at 10:00 AM, at the Franklin County Courthouse in Frankfort, KY. Outside, supporters of American Atheists, state-church separation and civil liberties held a rally supporting the lawsuit.

The full text of the American Atheists complaint can be found at: <http://www.atheists.org/upload/aavky.pdf>.

See an excellent summary of the June 1 hearing, with comments by Kagin, at: <http://kysecurity.wordpress.com/2009/06/01/ky-requests-case-dismissal>.

[From May 30 and June 6 press releases by American Atheists.]

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“The hope of the world is still in dedicated minorities. The trail blazers in human, academic, scientific, and religious freedom have always been in the minority.” —Martin Luther King, Jr., *Harper Religious & Inspirational Quotation Book*, 1989, p. 190.

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# The Elephant in the Notre Dame Auditorium

Here is the response of Herb Silverman, President of the Secular Coalition For America, to the question “What did you think of President Obama’s commencement speech at Notre Dame?”

It was published in the On Faith section of The Washington Post on May 18.

I’ve never really met anyone “Pro-Abortion,” despite such epithets from graduation protesters. We all agree that an abortion signifies a mistake, though we may disagree on what the mistake was. So I applaud President Obama’s advice to seek common ground in a culture with diversity of belief, and to try and understand the other side, instead of resorting to ad-homonym attacks when common ground can’t be found.

Obama found common ground with, “So let us work together to reduce the number of women seeking abortions. Let’s reduce unintended pregnancies.” As means to these ends, he urged improving adoption and pre-natal support policies. Fine, so far, but it’s not enough by any rational measure.

Bowing to the Catholic Church prohibition against birth control, President Obama failed to point out the most realistic ways to reduce abortions and unintended pregnancies. Based on mounds of evidence and

countless studies, we must promote comprehensive sex education for young people, and readily available contraceptives for everyone. So if finding common ground requires us to emulate President Obama and politely ignore evidential behavior studies, I don’t think we’re likely to get very far in reducing abortions.

If I were setting government policy to reduce abortions, I’d promote contraception on billboards and buses. I’d advertise its benefits on TV. I’d set up teen sexual health clinics in every county, and staff them with medical practitioners and wise, persuasive youth counselors. As an atheist and secular humanist, I don’t set Catholic policy. But if I were seeking common ground with those who believe abortion to be a “mortal sin,” I would at least suggest that they lighten up on the “venial sin” of condom use. Even many Catholics disagree with the message of the Monty Python song, “Every Sperm is Sacred.”

I applaud a central observation of

President Obama, which did not deal directly with abortion. He maintained that even the faithful should try to make their case based on “universal rather than parochial principles.” In other words, if there are no good secular arguments to justify a proposed sectarian public policy, that policy should not become law.

During last year’s political campaign, I argued that, for secular Americans, lip service beats no service at all.

With that in mind, I thank the President for these common-ground words: “For if there is one law that we can be most certain of, it is the law that binds people of all faiths and no faith together. It’s no coincidence that it exists in Christianity and Judaism; in Islam and Hinduism; in Buddhism and humanism. It is, of course, the Golden Rule—the call to treat one another as we wish to be treated. The call to love. To serve. To do what we can to make a difference in the lives of those with whom we share the same brief moment on this Earth.”

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## A Message from Herb Silverman

The Secular Coalition for American sent the following email to supporters on June 1.

Last Thursday, the nontheist movement achieved a new milestone when the Secular Coalition for America had its first individual meeting with White House officials. The Secular Coalition has met with White House officials before, but Thursday’s meeting was unique. It was not a coalition meeting with other organizations, but a special meeting between White House staff and representatives of the Secular Coalition. **We had the opportunity to tell the White House who you are, what your policy interests are, and what concerns you.**

We have made clear to White House officials that our coalition of nine national nontheistic organizations represents a full spectrum of nontheists. As the broadest, most diverse advocacy group for nontheists in Washington, D.C., we have the credibility to explain our political and cultural interests to our nation’s leaders and provide them with a window into what nontheists across America are thinking and doing in their communities. **More importantly we are becoming an influential and increasingly organized constituency, and**

**elected officials want to take our concerns into account.**

The goal of the Secular Coalition has always been to increase the visibility of and respect for nontheists in America. Thursday’s meeting was one small step for the Secular Coalition, but an even more significant leap for nontheists everywhere.

My deepest thanks for all you do to support the work of the Secular Coalition for America.

– Herb Silverman

President & Founder,

Secular Coalition for America

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“Blasphemy is an epithet bestowed by superstition upon common sense.”

– Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899), from the New York Times, May 20, 1887

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# Will 2010 be the “Year of the Bible”?

## The Congressional Backer has a Sordid Record on Separation, Bankruptcy and Alimony, Also Linked to Bizarre “Anointing” in DC Capitol Building

Representative Paul Broun (R-Ga.) wants to have the federal government pass a decree proclaiming 2010 as the “Year of the Bible.”

Pundits say that the proposed measure, H.Con Res. 121, is unlikely to pass and amounts to little more than a publicity stunt reflecting tone-deaf Republican obsessions with divisive “culture war” issues. Extreme religious right groups, however, are likely to exploit the bill, and see in Broun a dependable ally who has skillfully used his high-profile faith to gain public office.

The Resolution reads, in part:

“ENCOURAGING the President to designate 2010 as ‘The National Year of the Bible.’

Whereas the Bible has had a profound impact in shaping America into a great Nation;

Whereas deep religious beliefs stemming from the Old and New Testament of the Bible have inspired Americans from all walks of life, especially the early settlers, whose faith, spiritual courage and moral strengths enabled them to endure intense hardships in this new land;

Whereas many of our Presidents have recognized the importance of God and the Bible, including George Washington, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, who declared 1983 as ‘The National Year of the Bible’; and especially Abraham Lincoln whose 200th Birthday Celebration in 2009 highlighted freedom for the slaves;

Whereas shared Biblical beliefs unified the colonists and gave our early leaders the wisdom to write the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, both of which recognize the inherent worth, dignity, and inalienable rights of each individual, thus unifying a diverse people with the right to vote, and the freedom of speech and vast religious freedoms, which inspired

courageous men like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to lead the Civil Rights Movement...”

The Resolution has the endorsement of 13 co-sponsors in the House; so far, there is no comparable measure being introduced in the U.S. Senate.

Broun’s call for a “Year of the Bible” drew quick responses, particularly from state-church separationists and congressional figures in Washington. Reporter Victoria McGrane of the Politico.com web site said that the measure, while unlikely to become law, was one of the most blogged topics in cyberspace.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) described the proposed Resolution as an unconstitutional “endorsement of religion by the federal government.”

“Does that (the Broun proposal) mean that 2009 is not the year of the Bible?” asked Rep. Barney Frank (D.-Mass). “What is 2012 the year of? The Quran?”

The Progressive Puppy blogspot quipped: “Republican lawmakers with apparently too much time on their hands and no solutions to offer the country are pushing a resolution that will not address the nation’s problems or advance prosperity or even untangle their previous government mistakes.”

Broun’s legislation is not the first time politicians have “pushed” for government recognition of the Bible. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed a “Proclamation” declaring a “Year of the Bible.” That move came in response to an October, 1982 Joint Congressional Resolution describing the Bible as “The Word of God” and citing “our national need to study and apply the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.”

The current resolution has propelled Rep. Broun into the national spotlight. In Georgia, he has been a lightning rod for controversy and critical comment even within the ranks of

fellow Republicans due to his checkered background and strident religious and political views. Last November, for instance, Broun was locked in a fierce GOP Primary contest against state Rep. Barry Fleming. In an interview, he questioned his opponent’s religious convictions insisting that Fleming “doesn’t understand redemption and salvation and a changed life in accepting Jesus as lord and savior.” Both candidates were busy promoting their respective faiths as a credential for public office.

Despite Fleming’s insistence that he was a good Christian, Broun remained on the offensive and accused his opponent of “bearing false witness” by lying about his voting record. Fleming went on to point out that lying violated one of the Ten Commandments.

Broun however, has had his own problems, including revelations of a bankruptcy and squabbles over alimony payments to one of his three ex-wives. In July, 2008, Mr. Broun’s Washington, DC office reportedly was experiencing “financial troubles.”

Roll Call, a capitol hill-based publication and web site noted that Broun’s operation “has nearly expended his national budget, and may be forced to seek assistance to manage the office’s day-to-day functions.” Nearly half of the \$1.38 million budget had reportedly been used for mailings to Georgia voters and other constituents.

More recently, Rep. Broun made overnight headlines when he described President-elect Obama as a “Marxist” during an address to a Rotary club.

Rep. Broun has also been linked to a bizarre incident in the U.S. Capitol involving the Rev. Rob Schenck, head of a group called “Faith & Action.” Schenck is a leader on the religious right, and no stranger to publicity stunts. His group, for instance, has called for the display of the Ten



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## Will 2010 be the “Year of the Bible”? (continued)

Commandments on Capitol Hill, and erected “temporary” Decalogue monuments. Schenck and his brother Paul worked closely with anti-abortion zealot Randall Terry and founded Operation Rescue. The pair were featured in Life Magazine; Robert was shown holding an aborted 20-week-old fetus in his hands. Later, Robert Schenck—despite his extremist politics and reputation for “in your face” stunts—was later appointed to the U.S. Senate Chaplain’s Emergency Pastoral Response Team charged with handing “emergencies” in the Capitol. More recently, he has become a regular at the National Prayer Breakfast, and is involved with the National Bible Reading Marathon where dozens of volunteers read the complete Old and New Testaments aloud.

See the Capitol “anointing” here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SE73OoC-njM>.

Schenck and Rep. Broun crossed paths on Jan. 7 while Faith & Action was busy conducting a bizarre ritual inside the Capitol. Schenck and the Rev. Pat Mahoney of the Christian Defense Coalition were trying to “bless” and “anoint” a doorway that President-elect Obama was to walk through on his way to inauguration.

According to a Washington Post story, “Schenck said the Capitol Police refused to give him access to the doorway, but that changed when Schenck and Mahoney ran into Rep. Paul Broun, a Georgia Republican.”

“It just so happened—as it so often does for people of faith—when we entered the Capitol complex, we met Congressman Paul Broun of Georgia in the hallway... Congressman Broun is a dynamic and unapologetic Chris-

tian. I told him what God had prompted me to do. He immediately agreed and joined me along with Rev. Mahoney... as together we held a prayer service inside the U.S. Capitol that included anointing the doorway President-Elect Barack Obama will pass through...”

Despite prayers and “anointed” doorways, it is unlikely that Rep. Broun’s resolution will see much traction in the House. Introducing these sorts of measures, though—including calls for display of the Commandments on public property, or permitting organized prayer in public school—keeps divisive “culture war” issues alive, and in many parts of the nation generate votes for religious right candidates at election time.

[From the May 25 American Atheists News at <http://www.atheists.org>.]

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## AU Says IRS Should Review Liberty U’s Tax-Exempt Status Watchdog Group Tells IRS Falwell-Founded School Is Showing Preference For Republicans

**I**n a letter to the Internal Revenue Service on May 27, Americans United for Separation of Church and State asked the IRS to review the tax-exempt status of Liberty University in the wake of the school’s decision to yank official recognition of a student-run Democratic club.

In the previous week, Liberty officials informed the president of the Democratic club that it is no longer eligible for university recognition, including funding through student activity fees. The goals of the Democratic Party, school officials insisted, are contrary to Liberty’s evangelical Christian outlook.

The Lynchburg, Va. school was founded by controversial TV preacher Jerry Falwell, and his son Jerry Jr. currently serves as its chancellor.

“Liberty University is a tax-exempt institution and isn’t allowed to support one party over another,” said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. “If the school

insists on pushing policies that favor Republicans over Democrats, it should have to surrender its tax exemption.”

In a letter to the IRS, Lynn officially requested a review of Liberty’s tax exemption. The letter notes the recent flap and argues that by giving official recognition and student funding to a Republican club but not a Democratic one, Liberty has run afoul of the tax code.

Liberty’s Republican club endorses candidates for public office and works on their behalf. It can do these things with university recognition and student funding, which are denied to the Democratic club.

“Liberty University has no right to do partisan proselytizing and still retain a tax exemption,” Lynn said. “I urge the IRS to act swiftly to correct this injustice.”

A week later, in response, Falwell directed his legal arm, Liberty Counsel, to file a complaint letter to the IRS of partisan activities by Americans

United. But AU’s Lynn, in another press release, said, “Falwell knows full well that Americans United is rigorously non-partisan. He’s feeling the heat for a bad decision and trying to shift the focus to Americans United.”

Continued Lynn, “This is a desperate diversionary tactic, and it will fail. Instead of launching baseless attacks against Americans United, Falwell needs to get his own house in order.”

Lynn pointed out that the Liberty Counsel letter is replete with distortions, inaccuracies and outright falsehoods. For example, the letter claims that Lynn attended a service at the Rev. Jeremiah Wright’s church and a national meeting of the United Church of Christ, both of which featured speeches by Barack Obama. In fact, Lynn did not attend either of those events.

[From May 27 and June 1 press releases by Americans United for Separation of Church & State. See <http://www.au.org>.]



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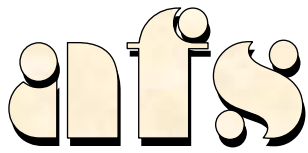
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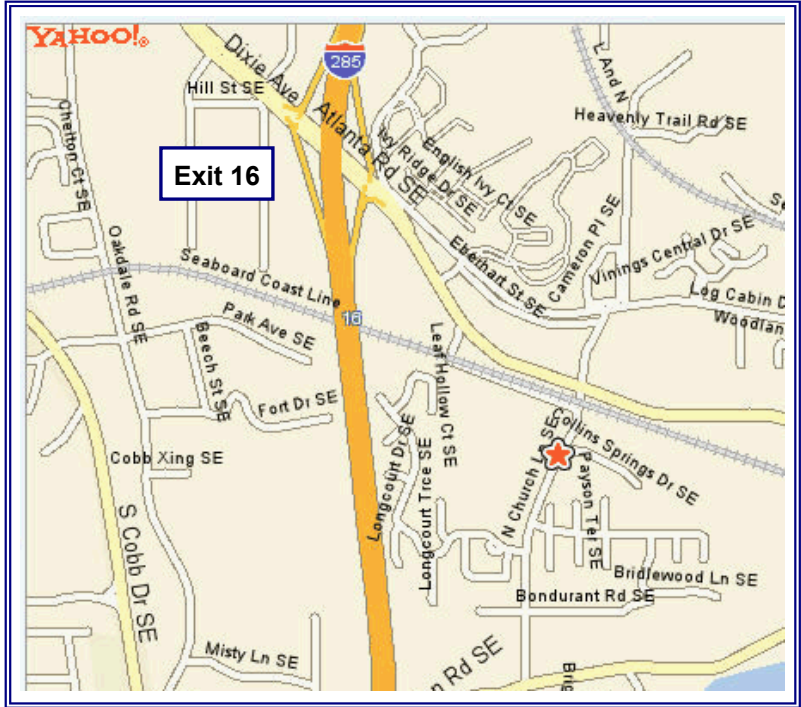
**The June 14 Meeting:**

**1:00 at AF Hall**

**4775 N. Church Lane SE  
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**This Month's Speaker:**

**Dr. A. Bowdoin Van Riper**



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