

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication • Volume 17 Number 1 • January 2011

The January AFS Meeting

The January 9 AFS meeting will include a talk by AFS Vice President Judy Thompson on "Tax Changes," with a Q & A session to follow. The meeting will be at 1:00 at Atlanta Freethought Hall, but please feel free to arrive early for refreshments and conversation with other freethinkers.

Judy is a managing partner of Strategic Tax Service with over 20 years of tax and financial experience. She is also a U.S. Tax Court Practitioner; she represents taxpayers at all levels of audit, appeal and Tax Court. And she instructs and gives talks on tax issues. She has been called the *best* tax speaker in Atlanta.

Atlanta Freethought Hall is located at 4775 N. Church Lane SE, in Smyrna, GA. 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. Atlanta Freethought Hall is on the left.

The January AFS Chili Social

The AFS Social for January will be a Chili Cookoff on Saturday, January 15, at 1:00 PM at AF Hall. Bring your favorite prepared Chili, or just arrive hungry! AFS will provide beverages and side dishes. The meal starts at 1:00; arrive earlier if you want to prepare food before the meal.

Election Results

Congratulations to the following AFS officers and board members elected to serve in 2011:

Steve Yothment, President	Dennis Martin, Secretary
Judy Thompson, VP, Int.	Mark Banks, Board
Michael Buckner, VP, Ext.	Steven Fant, Board
Diane Buckner, Treasurer	Laura Ross, Board

Lew Southern and Tony King will continue their 2-year board member terms into next year.

Other Meetings of Interest

The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 AM at AF Hall. They also have meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, and other events. See <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

The **Fayette Freethought Society** hosts a lunch at El Reposo Restaurant in Peachtree City, GA, on every first and third Saturday at noon. They also meet on other days for Book Club, philosophy and science discussions and civic activities. <http://www.meetup.com/Fayette-Freethought-Society/>.

The **Atlanta Skeptics** will meet at 7:00 PM on Saturday, Jan. 8, at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave, Atlanta. Jennifer Henning will speak on "Nuclear Power: Is It Really Safe?" See <http://www.atlantaskeptics.com>.

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet on Sunday, Jan 16 at 1:00 at AF Hall for Humanlight. See <http://humanlight.org/>.

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** meetup will be at 7:00 PM on Saturday, Jan. 22, at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE in Atlanta. Whit Gibbons will talk on the various reptiles in GA. <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>

There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, Jan. 9, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

Another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 23, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

Announcing: The Pay-Down-the-Debt Drive!

Atlanta Freethought Society has for the first time been offered a matching donation to encourage donations made specifically to pay down our debt on the hall. An anonymous donor has pledged a dollar-for-dollar match of up to \$45,000 for all contributions made in 2011 designated to pay toward the debt.

Each \$10,000 raised this way will reduce AFS costs by \$900 per year going forward and will free up future income for more progressive causes, such as activism or publishing.

To be eligible for the matching funds, donations must be clearly marked for the Pay Down the Debt Drive and must be received by the last day of 2011.

For many AFS members, membership expired at the end of the year. So, now is the time to update your membership! Please fill out the form on page 9 and send your dues and/or contribution to AFS! Thanks!



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 usually start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

Jan 9: AFS Vice President Judy Thompson will speak on "Tax Changes."

Feb 13: Dr. Mark Braverman, author of *Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews, and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land*, will speak on efforts to establish peace in the Middle East. (See <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/294468-1>)

Mar 13: Dr. Richard Jakiel and Pixie Bruner of the Atlanta Astronomy Club will speak on "Ancient Astronomical Knowledge."

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 freethinkers, 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.

Atlanta Freethought Society

President

Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

VP for Internal Communication

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

VP for External Communication

Michael Buckner – 404-633-2486

Secretary

Dennis Martin – 404-817-0413

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Diane Buckner – 770-432-3049

Board of Directors

Mark Banks – 770-354-1546

Steven Fant – 678-793-5662

Tony King – 706-886-9224

Laura Ross – 404-634-1005

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

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individuals, \$35 for households, and
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Sustaining Members (individual) \$100.

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AFS Webmasters: Freya Harris
and Michael Buckner

American Atheists Billboards

Billboards are used sparingly but effectively

An atheist billboard on the New Jersey side of the Lincoln Tunnel that declared Christmas a myth has been replaced by a pro-Christian billboard.

The old billboard, put up in late November by American Atheists said “You know it’s a myth. This season, celebrate reason.”

The sign stirred controversy among Christian organizations, prompting the Catholic League to erect its own pro-Christmas billboard on the New York side of the tunnel that read “You Know It’s Real: This Season Celebrate Jesus.”

The new sign, which was posted by the Manhattan-based Times Square Church, reads “God is,” and includes a word cloud of religious themes.

As for the old sign, an American Atheists spokesman said the organization’s lease ran out on the space, as they’d only had it reserved for a month.

Since putting down \$20,000 for the billboard, American Atheists has earned \$65,000 in donations, which they attributed to the national publicity it garnered – with a little help from the Catholic League.

“We received e-mails from hundreds of agnostics and atheists who heard about the billboard and had never heard about us who thanked us for being there and letting them know they’re not alone, and that was our target audience from the get-go,” said spokesman Blair Scott. “We sent the Catholic League a thank-you letter.”

Atheists, Humanists and other non-believers will gather in Huntsville, AL on January 29-30, 2010 for the Southeast Regional Atheist Meet (SERAM) –and they’re spreading the word the same way they did outside the Lincoln Tunnel –with a strong and challenging billboard.

The new billboard depicts several houses of worship with diverse religious symbols, and the message “You KNOW they’re all SCAMS.”

The sign went up on New Year’s

Scott says he finds it hard to believe that anyone still attends the Catholic church after the manifold evidence of ways the church hierarchy protected known child molesters, has uncovered



American Atheists advertises for the SERAM meet in Huntsville, AL

Day (Jan. 1, 2011) and is visible to northbound traffic on US-231 (Memorial Parkway) in Huntsville.

In a Dec. 23 press release, the President of American Atheists, David Silverman, said, “We’re reaching out to Americans who attend religious services even though they know it’s a scam. This is part of our ‘You KNOW it!’ campaign. As we did in New York, with this billboard we are challenging Alabama to face what they KNOW is the truth – that all religions are scams – they tell you how to live, and then they take your money, all in exchange for an afterlife that does not exist.”

“We are challenging people. If you know it’s a scam, why participate? Why are you letting this scam run any part of your life, or take any of your money? Why must you remain silent and compliant to protect the scam?”

Blair Scott, a local Huntsville resident and Communications Director for American Atheists, noted other frauds than the promise of an afterlife.

embezzling at high levels, and continues to ban condom use even though that could help save lives in AIDS-riddled Africa.

“All this, and people are still going to Mass,” Scott said. “It boggles my mind. It’s like after Tammy Faye and Jim Bakker got busted, people still sent them money!”

Scott said that the SERAM was one good way for people to find out the truth about organized religion.

“We are inviting all Atheists, Humanists, Freethinkers and anyone ‘in the closet’ to come and meet fellow nonbelievers, and get introduced to the thriving community we are building in Huntsville and throughout Alabama,” said Scott. “Polls show that upwards of 15% of people intellectually reject religious teachings. They know it’s a scam, and we think that’s just the tip of the secular iceberg.”

[From the Dec. 23 issue of *American Atheist News*, and a Dec 31 article by Kay Campbell in the *Huntsville Times*.]

Links related to this story: (Read more about SERAM on page 5!)

The new billboard: <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2010/12/23/god-is-billboard-replaces-controversial-lincoln-tunnel-atheist-billboard/>

See billboard pictures at: <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-532050>

Further Developments on the May 21 Prediction

A not-so-wise use of money, time and billboards

The billboard reads “He is Coming Again! May 21, 2011.” It’s a message that some Christians claim, saying that Jesus will return on that date.

The billboards, much smaller than the American Atheists billboards, are located in at least 8 major U.S. cities, including Atlanta and Nashville. (Nashville has 40 such billboards; Atlanta has 50 of them.)

Fans of Family Radio Inc., a nationwide Christian network, paid for the billboards. Family Radio’s founder, Harold Camping, predicted the May date for the Rapture.

Their message is simple—“He Is Coming Again”—and their aim is to get unbelievers to turn around quickly. But critics say the billboards are a waste of time, one more failed attempt to predict the end of the world.

The Rapture is going to be a great day for God’s people but awful for everyone else, said Allison Warden, 29, who orchestrated Nashville’s billboard campaign. She’s a volunteer with WeCanKnow.com, a website set up by followers of Family Radio. She and other fans designed the billboards, along with T-shirts, bumper stickers and postcards to get Camping’s predictions out.

Warden traveled from her home in Raleigh, N.C., to Nashville in early December to check out the billboards, purchased through the end of the year. She wouldn’t say how much they cost or name who paid for them.

She is absolutely sure that Camping’s prediction is right.

“It’s a certainty,” she said.

But many Christian groups do not agree. In fact, most of them are distancing themselves from the message, quoting a bible verse that “No one knows the day or the hour.”

David P. Gushee, a professor of Christian ethics and head of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University, also disagrees with

the message. “I’m glad they have it figured out,” he said. “No one knows the day or the hour. Only the Father knows and I think that teaching has provided good guidance to Christians throughout the centuries. You never attempt to fix a date for Christ’s return.”

If May 21 passes with no return, he said, it could prove to be embarrassing for the campaign organizers and a disappointment for those who take such things seriously. “It’s really a bad idea.”

Smyrna resident Ed Buckner, a member of the board and former president of American Atheists, said the group is considering a reply.

“In all honesty, I think Christians, and not just atheists, ought to ridicule these billboards and protest against them,” he said. “They’re really putting Christianity on the spot.”

Predicting the second coming for Jesus dates to very early Christianity, when believers said he would return in their lifetimes. Since then there have been a series of failed predictions. One of the most famous, known as the Great Disappointment, happened in 1843, after William Miller and his followers sold their homes and waited out in a field for Jesus to come back.

Former NASA engineer Edgar C. Whisenant sold millions of copies of his book *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be In 1988*.

BILLBOARDS IN OTHER CITIES

Tom Evans, a spokesman for Family Radio, insisted the predictions are true, and he and other Family Radio supporters want to save their friends and neighbors from God’s judgments. The billboards are also up in Louisville, St. Louis, Detroit, Little Rock, Omaha, Kansas City, Fort Wayne, Ind., and Bridgeport, Conn. In cities with Family Radio-affiliated stations, the message is on the air.

The latest prediction comes from a verse in Luke 17: “As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man.”

It’s a matter of simple math, said Evans.

CALCULATION OF THE DATE

According to Camping’s prediction, the Rapture will happen exactly 7,000 years from the date that God first warned people about the flood. He said the flood happened in 4990 B.C., on what would have been May 21 in the modern calendar. God gave Noah one week of warning.

Since one day equals 1,000 years for God, that means there was a 7,000-year interval between the flood and the Rapture.

“We hope that anyone would get a Bible out and try and prove that this is wrong,” he said.

Camping says further that, following the Rapture on May 21, God will destroy the world on Oct. 21, 2011.

To spread their message, Family Radio is also sending out caravans of RVs across the country, with the Rapture message. They’re also sending missionaries around the world to hand out tracts.

But he thinks only a small number of people—about 3 percent—will take the billboards seriously.

“Sadly, only eight people survived the flood in Noah’s time,” he said. “The number of people that are going to be saved is going to be very small.”

At least one Nashville resident remained unconvinced. Sophie Boes is a manager at Whiskey Kitchen, the downtown restaurant closest to a Gulch billboard. She said she’d never seen a message like it.

“Wow,” she said. “Welcome to the South.”

[From a Dec. 1 article by Bob Smietana in *The Tennessean*, and a Dec. 9 article by Shelia Poole at <http://www.ajc.com>.]

For more on this story, see <http://www.WeCanKnow.com>, <http://www.familyradio.com/>, and <http://www.bible.ca/pre-date-setters.htm>. Billboard campaign claims Jesus will return in May: <http://www.ajc.com/lifestyle/billboard-campaign-claims-jesus-771570.html> On May 21: <http://thepulpit.freedomblogging.com/tag/marie-exley/> and http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/40885541/ns/us_news-life

Southeast Regional Atheist Meet (SERAM) on Jan 29-30

It's in Huntsville, AL at the Holiday Inn Downtown

American Atheists, in association with the North Alabama Freethought Association, announced on Nov. 11 the Southeast Regional Atheist Meet (SERAM).

The SERAM will be held on January 29th and 30th in beautiful downtown Huntsville, Alabama at the Holiday Inn Downtown across from Big Spring Park and the Huntsville Museum of Art.

The SERAM is designed with an emphasis on local groups and local atheists. The speakers, workshops, panels, and more are designed with YOU in mind at the local level. If you live in Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Mississippi, Kentucky, Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas or South Carolina, the SERAM is for you! You'll hear from a great lineup discussing items of great interest to the local atheist and local atheist groups.

Speakers at SERAM will include:

- Dave Silverman: President of American Atheists
- Edwin Kagin: National Legal Director for American Atheists and author

of *Baubles of Blasphemy*

- Sean Faircloth: Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America
- Brother Richard: Director of Atheist Nexus and co-host of the Atheist News Podcast
- Blair Scott: Communications Director and National Affiliate Director for American Atheists
- Paul Provenza: Actor, comedian, and filmmaker
- Local Leaders: Local leaders from across the region will participate in panels discussing the issues important to YOU.

General Admission: Only 250 seats are available, so purchase your tickets now! Tickets are \$40 (\$30 for members of American Atheists)! Purchase tickets online.

Fund-Raising Dinner: On the night of Jan. 29 we will be hosting a Fund-Raising Dinner where ticket-holders will be able to dine with Paul Provenza, Dave Silverman, Edwin Kagin, Sean Faircloth, Brother Richard, and Blair Scott. Tickets are \$100 and include your meal. There are only 25 seats

available, so order your Fund-Raising Dinner tickets now! Purchase tickets online.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

January 28th, 7:00PM: Early Registration and hang out in the hotel bar for drinks and conversation.

January 29th, 9:00AM to 6:00PM: Speakers and panels.

January 30th, 9:00AM to 4:00PM: Workshops, panels, live podcasts, and more!

Hotel: The SERAM will be held at the Holiday Inn Downtown in Huntsville, Alabama. The hotel is across the street from Big Spring Park and within walking distance to the downtown square with bars and restaurants. There is plenty of parking at the Holiday Inn Downtown, so if you want to stay at another hotel somewhere else to save money and drive in both mornings you can certainly do so! Make your reservations online at:

<http://atheists.org/blog/2010/11/11/southeast-regional-atheist-meet-announced-for-huntsville-alabama>

At SERAM (see above), **Sean Faircloth**, Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America, will speak on Saturday at 1:50PM on "Sex! Law! Morality! Women!" and on Sunday at 1:30PM on "We WILL Secularize America: Here's How."

CFI Seeks Camp Director

The Center for Inquiry, a national nonprofit organization located in Amherst, NY, is looking for a camp director for its summer camp program, Camp Inquiry. Camp Inquiry serves children ages 7-16. Applicants must be familiar with the organization's mission and demonstrate a commitment to humanism and skepticism. Applicants should have at least one season of camp administrative experience, as a director or head

counselor, and must have substantial experience working with youth. The director for Camp Inquiry will be required, among other things, to prepare and conduct pre-camp and in-service staff trainings, plan the curriculum, develop routines, schedules, and procedures for camp operation, and supervise all operations and program staff.

Preparation for the camp begins on a part-time basis in February. The

camp itself will be held on July 31-August 6, 2011 in Holland, NY. The camp director must be on site while camp is in session; preparatory work may be done remotely. The camp director will be an independent contractor. Compensation will reflect experience, but is expected to be in the range of \$9,000-\$14,000.

Applicants should send a cover letter and resume by Jan. 10, 2011 to Ron Lindsay at rlindsay@centerforinquiry.net.

From Mother Jones News: (<http://motherjones.com/blue-marble/2010/12/beware-treehuggers>)

Just in time for the holidays, a coalition of Christian conservative groups has issued an "explosive new 12-part DVD series" (<http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/7431615583.html>) detailing the dangers of environmentalism.

"Resisting the Green Dragon" (<http://www.resistingthegreendragon.com/>) explains how caring about the future of the natural world is really an attempt to "push evangelicals to embrace anti-Christian environmental views."

There's a 12-minute preview here: (<http://www.vimeo.com/15849648>). The password is "RESIST"), but Right Wing Watch (<http://www.rightwingwatch.org/>) made a condensed version: <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/beware-green-dragon>.

Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Jack McKinney's letter was published on December 28 in the *Marietta Daily Journal*.

Ed Buckner's letters were published on December 30 and 24 in the *Marietta Daily Journal*.

Religion forced at courthouse ceremony

DEAR EDITOR:

The reporting of the dedication of Cobb's new Superior Courthouse may be your most ironic article of 2010.

The article says, "Dr. Sam Matthews of Marietta First United Methodist Church gave the invocation" — meaning religion was introduced into the ceremony. The irony was a quotation attributed to Chief Superior Court Judge Robert Flournoy III remarking that, "Without a functioning judicial system, might makes right and the person with the biggest gun or sharpest sword will prevail."

Requiring all citizens and taxpayers attending to be subjected to government sponsored and enforced religion is chilling proof of Judge Flournoy's remark.

Jack McKinney
Kennesaw

Reader reminds columnist to be careful what you wish for ...

DEAR EDITOR:

Columnist Star Parker — "Morally Unacceptable: 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' shows approval of gays, doesn't make it right," Tuesday's MDJ — should be careful what she wishes for. She confounds the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence and declares that God wants us to agree with her on continuing the oppression of gay men and lesbian women.

She wants us to be true to the ideals of the founding fathers, but seems quite naive about their original intent. Our governing charter — the Constitution, not the Declaration — was quite clearly not true to biblical morality in many ways, not least in establishing a democratic republic; this was anti-biblical for sure — see Romans 13:1-2.

But the original charter, the Constitution, did conform to biblical ideas in two important regards: it tolerated race-based

human slavery — see Leviticus 25:44-46, for the Bible basis of this — and it gave women no rights or voice — see 1st Timothy 2:11-12.

I'd ask Ms. Parker if she'd like to return to the morality that would insist that she "be in silence" — or worse.

Ed Buckner
Smyrna
Retired President
American Atheists

Plenty of Conservatives Never Served, Either

DEAR EDITOR:

The editorial in Wednesday's MDJ ("Don't Junk It") strongly implies that leaders who did not serve in the military are not qualified to comment on whether gay men and lesbian women should be allowed to serve openly. You wrote disparagingly of "many liberal congressman" who favor changing the policy but "who in most cases never served themselves."

The criterion you thus established means that we should discount or ignore the opinions of U.S. Senator Saxby Chambliss; conservative Georgia U.S. Reps. Tom Price, Phil Gingrey, Jack Kingston and Lynn Westmoreland; national conservative leaders Newt Gingrich, Dick Cheney, Mitch McConnell, Jim DeMint, John Boehner, Jon Kyl, Sam Brownback, Tom Coburn, John Cornyn, Richard

Shelby and Eric Cantor (R-VA; about to become House Majority Leader). None of these men ever served in the military themselves.

I trust the MDJ will publish information on which of its editorial staff and columnists served, so we'll know whose opinion to rely on. I look forward to seeing that.

Ed Buckner, Smyrna
(active duty, U.S. Army, 1969-70)

Recent Opinion Articles (and Videos) on the Internet:

"A New Year's Resolution" by Sam Harris: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sam-harris/a-new-years-resolution-fo_b_802480.html

Pat Condell says your faith is a joke: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4dSiHqpULk>

Todd Stiefel at an AHA Press Conference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ofZoff15HE>

The Pope compares Fundamentalism with Secularism: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/17/world/europe/17briefs-Vatican.html>

Greta Christina speaks at Purdue University on Atheism and Sexuality: <http://vimeo.com/9259141>

A Conversation with Christopher Hitchens: <http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/12/13/author-christopher-hitchens-in-conversation/>

Problems with the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program

by Kathleen Johnson, Military Director, American Atheists

On December 23, I learned something rather startling. Apparently, according to the assessment tool currently in use by the US Army to measure mental fitness, I am deficient in the area of “spiritual fitness” and I need to “work hard” to improve my scores in this area.

Here’s some background on the test. The Army has a new program called the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program that is supposed to “create an Army of balanced, healthy, self-confident Soldiers, Families, and Army civilians whose resilience and total fitness enables them to thrive in an era of high operational tempo and persistent conflict.” This quote is extracted directly from the Army’s official blog¹.

The mental health components of this initiative are Emotional Fitness, Social Fitness, Family Fitness, and Spiritual Fitness. All soldiers were required to complete the Global Assessment Tool (GAT) that was designed to measure these components of fitness and this requirement will soon apply to Army civilians as well.

As a civilian employee of the Army, I have access to the test, and after receiving several complaints, I decided to take the test and check this out for myself. According to the test web site, individual results are not reported to commanders by name, but commanders will receive an aggregated report of all the responses in their unit so that they can identify potential issues and conduct interventions and corrective training if issues are identified. However, since I did have to complete the test using my official Army login, it is a certainty that my individual results are a part of my electronic personnel record and I have no clear picture concerning what use these results could be put to in the future.

I have no real way to know if the assessment is exactly the same for soldiers and civilians, but according

to the complaints I received, at least some of the questions are the same. Here’s a sample of some of the questions I had to answer:

Answer in terms of whether the statement describes how you actually live your life.

I am a spiritual person. My life has a lasting meaning. I believe that in some way my life is closely connected to all humanity and all the world. The job I am doing in the military has lasting meaning. I believe there is a purpose for my life.

I basically answered the questions in the following way, which is the way a lot of atheists would answer them. I am not a spiritual person, I don’t believe my life has a lasting meaning, I do not feel connected to all of humanity and the world, and I don’t believe my life has a defined purpose. What I do believe, and what’s not possible to address using this assessment, is that although there are no such things as spirits or spiritual connections and human lives have no preordained meaning, we can make meaning for ourselves which doesn’t require calling on anything spiritual. I also believe there is no such thing as being spiritually connected to humanity but that it is possible to honor and respect humanity and all life, and that while there is no preordained purpose to my life other than what I create for myself, there is nothing wrong with that.

Here’s what the test had to say about my responses:

“Spiritual fitness is an area of possible difficulty for you. You may lack a sense of meaning and purpose in your life. At times, it is hard for you to make sense of what is happening to you and others around you. You may not feel connected to something larger than yourself. You may question your beliefs, principles, and values. Nevertheless, who you are and what you do matter. There are things to do to provide more meaning and purpose in your life.

“Improving your spiritual fitness should be an important goal. Change is possible, and the relevant self-development training modules will be



Kathleen Johnson, Military Director, American Atheists

helpful. If you need further help, please do not hesitate to seek out help from the people you care about and trust - strong people always do. Be patient in your development as it will take time to improve in this area. Still, persistence is key and you will improve here if you make this area a priority.”

To say the least, I found this evaluation to be utterly offensive. There is NOTHING wrong with me or my beliefs that needs to be fixed and I firmly believe that any strong atheist like myself cannot honestly answer the questions in a way that allows them to pass the test.

On December 23, American Atheists dispatched a letter to the Secretary of the Army that alleged that the assessment is flawed and discriminatory and will give commanders a misleading and false assessment concerning the state of their units’ fitness and readiness. We further stated that this assessment violates the provisions of Army Regulation 600-20 by discriminating against atheist Soldiers due to their lack of spiritual beliefs and we requested the Army immediately cease

¹ See <http://armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2009/12/csf-global-assessment-tool/>

using the assessment until these flaws are fixed and Soldiers are no longer subjected to a religious test to assess

their overall fitness for duty.
— Kathleen Johnson, Military Director, AMERICAN ATHEISTS

[From the Dec. 23 issue of *American Atheists News*. To subscribe, send a blank email to aanews-on@atheists.org.]

For more developments on the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program, visit Blair Scott's NoGod blog at <http://www.nogodblog.com/> or the Rock Beyond Belief website at <http://rockbeyondbelief.com>.

See also "U.S. Army: Atheists Unfit To Serve": <http://www.opednews.com/populum/linkframe.php?linkid=124061> and "Army Discrimination Toward Atheists":

<http://www.examiner.com/atheism-in-birmingham/us-army-discrimination-towards-atheists-story-update>

Appeals Court Nixes Rehearing in Utah Memorial Cross Case

The Court Affirmed That Christian Crosses Are Religious Symbols, Not Secular Memorials

A federal appeals court said it won't reconsider a case involving 14 memorial crosses on Utah highways that were ruled unconstitutional.

A three-judge panel decided in August that the 12-foot high crosses represent an endorsement of Christianity.

The Utah Highway Patrol Associa-

tion and two state agencies petitioned for a rehearing. They contend the memorials honor fallen officers and encourage safe driving.

The 14 white crosses were first erected in 1998 and were paid for with donations to the association. American Atheists filed a lawsuit in 2005

over the crosses' use of the Highway Patrol shield and argued that the crosses should be removed.

A majority of the judges on the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver rejected a rehearing in a split ruling issued on December 23.

[From the Dec. 23 *AANews*.]

New Videos and Articles on the Internet:

Fulton County Church Suspends organist after learning of child porn charge:

<http://www.ajc.com/news/north-fulton/church-suspends-organist-after-771080.html>

One Nation Under God: Powerful new rhetoric on the religious right pits Obama and big government against "God's America": <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/12/09/one-nation-under-god.html>

Members of Westboro Baptist Church picketed the funeral of Elizabeth Edwards, but were vastly outnumbered by a 'human buffer' of people: <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2010/12/11/Westboro-pickers-outnumbered-at-Elizabeth-Edwards-funeral>

Kentuckians will be able to buy "In God We Trust" license plates in January:

<http://www.kentucky.com/2010/12/17/1571038/in-god-we-trust-license-plates.html>

Statistics on Atheism v. Violence: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMpWRZ7_A34

Prepare to believe: The Unicorn Museum: <http://www.unicornmuseum.org/>

Why Religious People Are Scared of Atheists:

http://www.alternet.org/belief/149224/why_religious_people_are_scared_of_atheists

Why I'm An Atheist, by Ricky Gervais:

<http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2010/12/19/a-holiday-message-from-ricky-gervais-why-im-an-atheist/>

Four in 10 Americans Believe in Strict Creationism:

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/145286/Four-Americans-Believe-Strict-Creationism.aspx>

Forty Percent of Americans Believe in Creationism:

http://www.religiondispatches.org/dispatches/laurilebo/3952/40%25_of_americans_still_believe_in_creationism

Beliefs of the U.S. public about evolution and creation: http://www.religioustolerance.org/ev_publi.htm

2010: A Banner Year for Biblical Patriarchy:

http://www.religiondispatches.org/dispatches/julieingersoll/3971/2010%3A_a_banner_year_for_biblical_patriarchy/

Atheists accuse Cape Coral City Council of intimidation, trying to violate free speech:

<http://www.winknews.com/Local-Florida/2010-12-16/Atheists-accuse-Cape-council-of-intimidation>

WikiLeaks: Vatican dropped Holocaust deal:

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/40777748/ns/us_news-wikileaks_in_security/from/toolbar

WikiLeaks: Leaked Cables Show Vatican Tensions and Diplomacy With U.S.:

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/11/world/europe/11vatican.html?_r=1&ref=world

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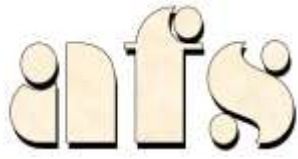
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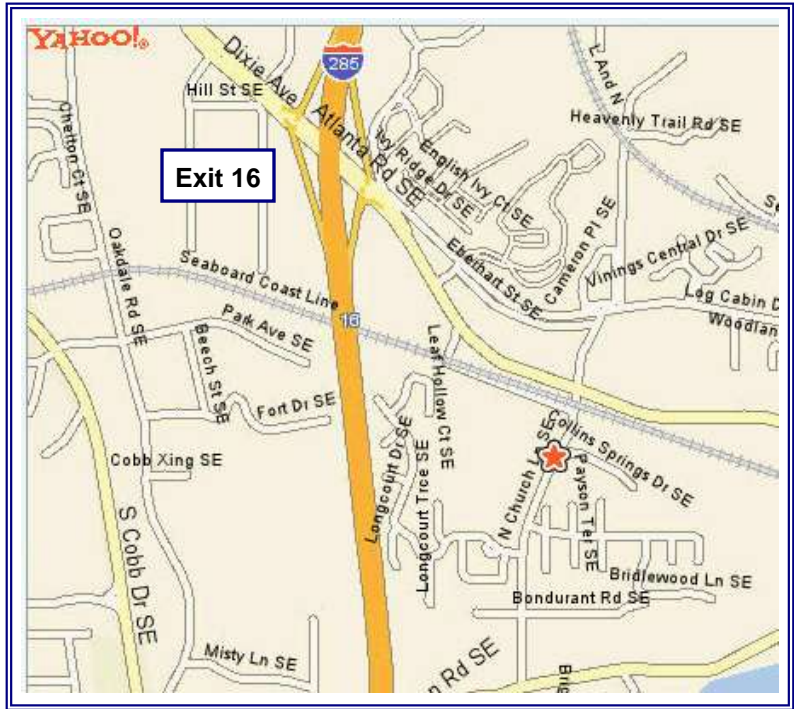


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**The January 9 Meeting:
1:00 at AF Hall**

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

**This Month's Speaker:
Judy Thompson**



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