

Antonio Daza: “The Joys and Tribulations of Running for Congress Against a Gerrymander-Protected Incumbent”

AFS is proud to have again a major Atlanta political leader and a highly regarded and popular speaker, Antonio Daza to deliver a talk and lead us in discussion on Sunday, 11 February. We're glad to have this return engagement. Daza is among the most important American freethinking political leaders in the United States.”



Antonio Daza

He ran for Congress in 2022 and again this year and last. He has recently suspended his campaign (though many supporters hope he'll remain on the ballot in November). He will talk to us about “The Joys and Tribulations of Running for Congress Against a Gerrymander-Protected

Incumbent.”

Daza noted, by way of introduction, “As an immigrant, a refugee, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, a small business owner, and an atheist, I am qualified to see where we fall short of addressing true liberty for all people in the United States. As one who has escaped dictatorship, I had a front-row seat witnessing how democracy was overthrown in my home country of Venezuela. Democracy is not a permanent, indestructible system. Democracy is not just a subjective idea. Democracy is a real thing that, if it is taken away, impacts your life in unimaginable ways. I've seen it happen, and I am watching it happen again right now in this county.” The nominee of the Democratic Party for the 11th Congressional District against entrenched incumbent Barry Loudermilk, Daza won an impressive 113,571 votes in November 2022 and has run well and hard for 2024—though without enough money.

Antonio Daza was a political activist in his home country of Venezuela against the Chavez regime. In 2003, he joined his family in the United States and was granted political asylum until he became a U.S. citizen. In 2008, after years of building a career as a professional ballroom dancer and instructor, Daza opened his own small business. In 2021, he graduated cum laude with a major in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from

AFS Calendar

Feb 10	GAME NIGHT!!	6 pm
Feb 11	Board Meeting	11:30 am
Feb 11	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
Mar 9	GAME NIGHT!!	6 pm
Mar 10	Potluck lunch	11 am
Mar 10	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm

All events are combo Live/Zoom unless noted and are subject to change.

Oglethorpe University; and two years ago married his partner of 17 years.

Antonio is an award-winning business owner with 15+ years of experience executing business plans, exceeding revenue goals, nurturing client relations, and navigating positive change management while addressing business needs. In addition, he has been a dedicated business leader recognized nationally and internationally for steadily using project management tools and processes to deliver business objectives successfully.

Daza continued on pg 3

AFS February Meeting Feb 11, 2024 1:00-2:30 PM (eastern)

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:
us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911

Also at Atlanta Freethought Hall

Atlanta Freethought Society

GAME NIGHT

The long-missed Game Night returns and will be held beginning Saturday, February 10, starting at 6 pm! Please bring snacks, beverages (beer and wine okay), and any games you'd enjoy sharing.



For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our Meetup group!
meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society



Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 and also presented online (see link on page 1). Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:30 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy. Announced events are subject to change.



11 Feb Antonio Daza
10 Mar TBA
14 Apr TBA
12 May TBA
9 Jun TBA

AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com to subscribe. The AFS Forum email list is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation and religion. To subscribe to this list, send an email to AFSForum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. The AFS Facebook page is at facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought. For calendar information on AFS activities, please join the [Meetup group](#). The AFS website is www.atlantafreethought.org. To keep up to date on the Atlanta Freethought Society calendar of upcoming events, please join our Meetup group: meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

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

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

Views, opinions, positions or strategies expressed by authors are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, positions or strategies of the Atlanta Freethought Society or any member thereof. The editors of *Atlanta Freethought News* reserve the right to edit or alter in any manner it sees fit any articles deemed to be obscene, offensive, defamatory, threatening, in violation of trademark, copyright or other laws, or is otherwise unacceptable; and also to correct grammar and to conserve space.

Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

Editor: Laura Ross
Assistant Editor: Steve Yothment

How to Contact the Editor

Send correspondence to AFS at:
4775 N. Church Lane SE,
Atlanta, GA 30339,
phone Laura at 404-634-1005, or send
e-mail to Laura@LauraRossDesign.com
or luara.mom@gmail.com

2024 Board of Directors

Mark Banks
Michael Buckner
Beth Davis, Secretary,
George Craig
Laura Ross, President
Judy Thompson
Steve Yothment, Treasurer

Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 30, Number 2, February 2024 CE
Copyright © 2024 by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc. Signed articles are all copyright © 2024 by their respective authors.

Membership in AFS is \$50/year per person,
\$20 for low income.

Membership includes voting privileges and
AFNews by email/USPS (indicate preferences).

Sustaining Membership is \$100.

Life Membership is \$1000.

Subscriptions only are \$30 for 12 issues.

Please make checks or money orders payable to
Atlanta Freethought Society
(or Paypal to afs@atlantafreethought.org).

Visit our Meetup page at
meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

See AFS events and member views at:
facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought.

Send E-mail to
afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Wordpress specialist: Beth Davis
AFS Facebook page: Laura Ross, Ed Buckner,
Steve Yothment

Members of Congress participate in regressive circus at D.C. Bible Museum

ffrf.org

On January 31, House Speaker **Mike Johnson** and other members of Congress participated in an extremist and hate-fueled event at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C.

As we had **noted** prior to the event, the “National Gathering for Prayer & Repentance” was filled with Christian nationalists and conspiratorial extremists, many of whom participated in the event last year, including Johnson.

Lawmakers in attendance this year knew what to expect — and shamefully supported it with the prestige of their elected offices.

Evangelical preacher **Lou Engle**, who **reportedly** helped plant the seeds for Uganda’s law punishing homosexuality with death, **screamed for a “baptism of fire”** that would cause “a hundred thousand LGBT to be saved and transformed.”

Jon Hamill, another extremist preacher, **called for God to “cleanse” the U.S. government** so that

it has “no king but Jesus,” claiming a betrayal of the country due to “idolatry, witchcraft, false religions and secret orders, secret societies.”

Members of Congress in attendance joined in the Christian nationalist fever dream, such as Rep. **Maria Elvira Salazar** (Fla.), who **proclaimed** that the assembled group had “tied the hands of Satan and all his demons,”

and declared that “each person, regardless of their race, nationality, [or] language” will serve and praise God, which she claimed formed the United States. Rep. **Greg Steube** (Fla.) similarly promised that “people everywhere shall repent of immorality . . . and their rejection of God.”

Other lawmakers **turned to politics**, with Rep. **Chris Smith** (N.J.) calling abortion a “weapon of mass destruction” and complaining about the government funding Planned Parenthood, and Rep. **Randy Weber** (Texas) lamenting that we have legalized same-sex marriage and claiming that we had kicked God out of schools and replaced it with “drug-sniffing dogs, metal detectors, and armed police officers.”

Right Wing Watch **reports** that other members

of Congress in attendance included Reps. **Josh Brecheen** (Okla.), **Mark Alford** (Mo.), **Michael Cloud** (Texas), **Diana Harshbarger** (Tenn.), **Kevin Hern** (Okla.), **Gary Palmer** (Ala.), **Rick Allen** (Ga.), **Brandon Williams** (N.Y.), **Bob Good** (Va.), **Tracey Mann** (Kan.), **Glenn Grothman** (Wis.), **Warren Davidson** (Ohio), **Mary Miller** (Ill.), **Cathy McMorris Rodgers** (Wash.), and Sens. **Katie Britt** (Ala.) and **James Lankford** (Okla.).

FFRF reiterates that this event is a showcase of what happens when extremist lawmakers allow their personal religious beliefs to dictate their policy work, rather than upholding the crucial American value of ensuring a secular government.

Members of the Congressional Freethought Caucus recently **documented the shocking and underreported extent** of Speaker Johnson’s Christian nationalist history. Johnson’s involvement in this event should serve as a major wake-up call to Americans, who must demand their elected representatives defend true religious liberty by championing the fundamental American principle of secular governance.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is a national nonprofit organization with over 40,000 members and several chapters across the country. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.



Daza continued from pg 1

In addition, Antonio is a passionate, high-energy community outreach leader with philanthropy experience and a record of surpassing goals for capital campaigns and fundraising initiatives while driving continuous improvements across various nonprofit operations.

Antonio Daza is an action-oriented political organizer with a substantial track record of success directing and driving long-range outcomes, developing policies, and cultivating procedures; a lifelong advocate for freedom, justice, and equality.

Expect to learn much more about elections, voting, and the advantages and problems—and there are some—of running while an atheist or gay man. There will be time for some questions.

Because AFS is a 501-c-3 educational organization, we do not endorse candidates or parties in public elections. But we are certainly interested in such elections, many of our members are quite avid political activists, and AFS Hall is, as it happens, in the 11th Congressional District. We invited Congressman Loudermilk, but he turned us down, pleading a scheduling conflict (though we had expressly indicated interest in him speaking on any second Sunday).

We’re always pleased to provide great programs for our members and visitors, and we are glad we’ll be continuing 2024 with another good one.

On Running for Public Office

by Ed Buckner • Letters to a Free Country

Have you ever thought about running for public office? What matters most about deciding to do something like that—time, money, ego, agreeing with voters on the issues, strong commitment to a particular issue, or ... ?

Maybe you just want to be sure that someone like you—an old white irreligious Southern short-ish guy with a lame sense of humor, say—is represented in the state legislature.

Maybe you think a specific incumbent is a wrong-headed jerk and you want somebody to run against him—even if he's gerrymandered into place so firmly that there's little hope of anyone unseating him.

Or your ego is so fragile that the idea of adoring crowds following you around begging to shake your hand, however improbable, drives you to seek the limelight.

Should you run, especially for legislative office, more to promote ideas and your preferences, to shape what voters think, to promote the common good, or to represent the preferences of voters? Issues related to this are sometimes referred to as deciding whether elected legislators are delegates or trustees. As Edmund Burke famously said in 1790—

Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests, which interest each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but Parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole...

You choose a member, indeed; but when you have chosen him he is not a member of Bristol, but he is a member of Parliament.

(Would I like certain officeholders and office seekers in the US right now to grasp this? Hell, yes.)

Can lust for power and glory and fame drive you into office-seeking, maybe? Or you're sure getting elected will help you get rich, even if a bit of shady dealing might be necessary.

Wonder what brought George Santos to mind?

Or—and this may be wildly unrealistic—public service appeals to you. Mayhap you think the community deserves an honest, decent, steadfast woman or man with your skills, talents, and knowledge—and you're willing to step up.

Does it take a fortune of your own to make running happen? Should it?

Should you spend some time in the political trenches for other candidates before you become a candidate yourself?

Enough with the Questions, Ed—How About Some Answers?

Disclaimer: I've never run for or held public office. I've engaged in electoral politics in various roles and for decades and I'm a political junkie, even staying up way past my bedtime on election night to watch returns—so I have plenty of opinions, but maybe not much expertise.

I wish far more people would think about running for public office. I think all of us who care who is in office and what the politicians are up to should be willing to donate time, ideas, and money to encourage candidates—and to consider running ourselves.

Running takes commitment—you need time,

Public Office continued on pg 5

Become a Member!

(Or renew your membership with this form or online at www.AtlantaFreethought.org!)

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$50 per year.

Sustaining memberships: One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

Life memberships: Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A \$1000 life membership lasts a lifetime.

Paper newsletter: We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

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

Membership Dues # of mems Total

Individual	\$50	_____	\$_____
Low Income	\$20	_____	\$_____
Sustaining Member	\$100	_____	\$_____
Life Member	\$1000	_____	\$_____
Subscription only	\$30	_____	\$_____
Extra donation (Thank you!)			\$_____
		Total:	\$_____

Receive PDF of newsletter by email

Receive paper newsletter by post

Name _____
Address: _____
Phone: H _____ W _____
Email: _____

Save time, postage, and keep your hands clean
by making a payment via **Paypal** to:
afs@atlantafreethought.org

The National Prayer Breakfast is an anachronism that should go away

by Rob Boston • au.org

February 1st was the National Prayer Breakfast (NPB). Americans United is not fond of this event.

The NPB, Americans United has pointed out over the years, is a relic of the misbegotten “civil religion” era of the 1950s. For years the event was sponsored by the Fellowship Foundation (AKA “The Family”), a shadowy Christian Nationalist organization with the chief aim of promoting fundamentalist Christianity among people of wealth, power and status. (You know, just like Jesus did!)

The Family held the event in Washington, D.C., hotels for decades but relinquished control of it last year – kind of. This year, the prayer breakfast took place in the Statuary Hall of the U.S. Capitol, which actually makes things worse by drawing it closer to the seat of government.

(Plus, several people connected to The Family are still involved.)

‘It divides the country on religious lines’

As AU President and CEO Rachel Laser told reporters, “Our public officials should not be organizing and promoting religious worship services

in government buildings because it divides the country on religious lines, favoring a select few and making everyone else feel unwelcome.”

Indeed, today’s event was replete with prayers “in Jesus’ name” and references to the Christian faith, sending the message that other faiths and non-belief hold second-class status in America.

The president and other federal and state officials routinely attend the NPB. While the breakfast is often an occasion for platitudes about the

importance of religion (mostly Christianity) in America, during the presidency of **Donald Trump**, the event became alternately horrifying and embarrassing, as Trump used it to unveil disturbing policy proposals, put his biblical illiteracy on display and **belittle his political opponents**.

Biden and the NPB

President **Joe Biden’s** NPB remarks have been more inclusive and less embarrassing – and his comments this morning weren’t



controversial – but saying that an event isn’t as bad as it was during the Trump years is hardly a ringing endorsement.

In light of the **growing diversity** of religious thought in America and the fact that we have a First Amendment that separates church and state, it’s time to consign the National Prayer Breakfast to the dustbin of history.

P.S. **Jonathan Larsen**, a former reporter with the Young Turks, has been doing a deep dive on The Family and the prayer breakfast on his **Substack page**. (Just be warned that the title of his page is a tad spicy.)

Public Office continued from pg 4

support from family and friends, and money. You need to not be shy. You need to be focused and self-aware. You need to know why you’re running and to be able to tell others.

Identity? Only incidentally, in my opinion. What matters is not your ethnicity or age or height or sexual identity or religion, but what you think government’s roles should include and what those rules should not include; what rules or policies or legislation will have what effect and what unintended consequences might follow. Your character and respect for your fellow citizens and ability to negotiate good compromises are far more important, generally, than how you identify.

As to representing others or promoting ideas, I’d urge balancing both. And I’d insist that doing both requires honesty, accuracy in communication (sometimes bluntness), and transparency, in your campaign and in office if you win. Voters who want to know if you agree with them on an issue that matters to them should be able to tell.

Much of what is best about seeking office does not take much money—greeting and getting to know voters, talking informally and speaking to the local Rotary club or retirement community, ringing doorbells, and answering questions. But even a heavily ground-game-based campaign for school board—with little or no TV ads or billboards—takes some gas money, meals money, and printing money. However, the biggest cost, by far, for that sort

of campaign may be lost income. Even if you don’t have to quit your job to run (and you might), you cannot be as available for overtime or for preparing a good sales pitch for your company’s products. And especially if you do quit your job or close your business, you still gotta do things like eat, pay for childcare, pay rent or mortgage payments, and such. But remember, I’m trying to talk you into doing this, not out of it.

So what do you gain? Maybe some of that fame, glory, attention, ego-gratification I mentioned earlier.

But strong satisfaction at accomplishing something worthwhile, decent, and honorable, even if you lose, may be the greatest reward. You can make people think, convince them that they are not alone, offer a real alternative, and promote the common good.

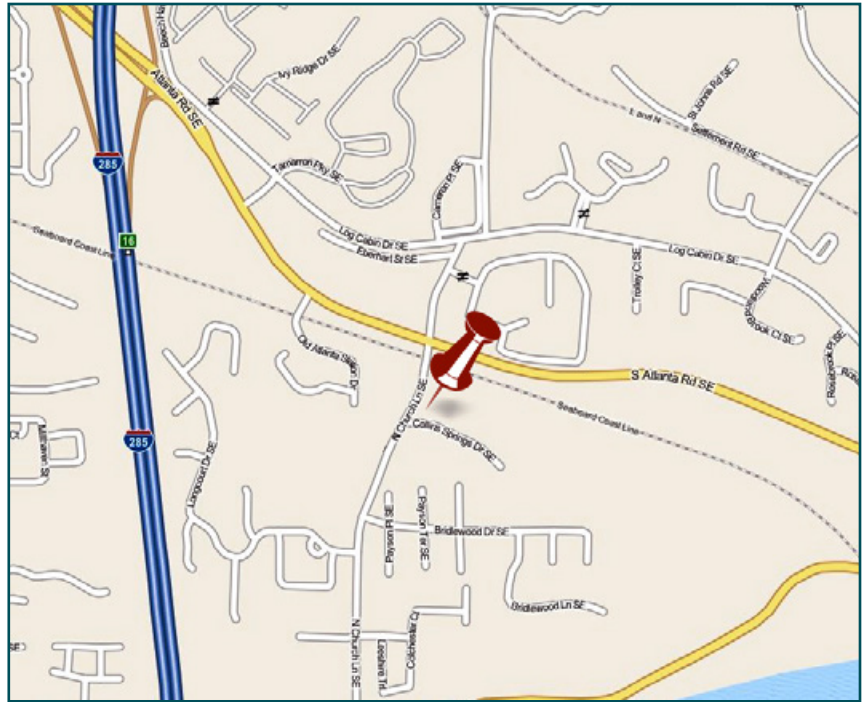
And if you run and win, imagine the good you can do.

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**AF Hall
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA 30339**

**Antonio Daza
2/11/24 1:00 pm EST
(At Hall and on Zoom)**



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.

Atlanta Freethought News
Atlanta Freethought Society
4775 N Church Lane SE
Atlanta GA 30339

