

# THE FORT WORTH HUMANIST QUARTERLY

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## Briefs

### Vanessa Adia to speak to HoFW in January

Vanessa Adia, who is running in the primaries against Congresswoman Kay Granger, District 12, will speak to HoFW at our regularly scheduled meeting on January 16.

While HoFW endorses no candidates, we do consider it important to help introduce people new to the political landscape.

Incumbent candidates have thousands in corporate lobbyist money available to them, but many new candidates have very little or even no corporate or party funding, so we feel it is important to educate everyone as much as possible regarding choices available to the electorate.

### February meeting schedule changed to accommodate Valentine's Day

Many of us have Valentine's Day commitments, so we felt it was important to reschedule our February meeting from February 14 to February 21. This is a one-time-only change.

### TCU human trafficking expert scheduled to speak at February 21 meeting

Vanessa Bouché, ph.d., Texas Christian University assistant professor of political science, will speak to us about human trafficking. Bouché teaches a TCU course on U.S. human trafficking and has done extensive work in this area. She also has a Master's of Public Affairs degree in International Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs, making her well-versed in the scope and intractability of the human trafficking problem.

### Members urged to vote in March primaries

Please be sure to cast a ballot. The last day to register to vote in the primary is Monday, February 5, 2018.

Early voting starts February 20, 2018 and continues through March 2. Election day is March 6.

## Republican, Democrat span partisan divide to stop vote harvesting

by Wanda Foster

Most Texas liberals push for expanded voting rights to ensure all citizens have access to a free and fair voting, regardless of race, gender, or national origin. Republicans openly express fears that noncitizens will vote illegally and try to manipulate voter availability in areas where ethnicities reside. Still, these sides share one concern in common—the belief that the voting system may be rigged. It turns out that on this one issue, they may be right, at least in parts of North Texas.

While they share little else politically, Republican Aaron Harris and Democrat Lon Burnam both have crossed the partisan divide to uncover and prevent voter fraud scams. They say such operations have led to at least two completely stolen elections in North Texas. After considerable hard work and shared investigations in 2015 and 2016 election cycles, they both agree voter fraud does occur, but not for the ideological or party reasons people think. Instead, they say voter fraud tends to be perpetrated in bipartisan fashion as part of quid pro quo schemes to win and fulfill lucrative tax collection contracts, not to push party platforms.

Both men spoke about voter fraud issues, particularly vote harvesting operations, at the November 8 meeting of HoFW. Some 30 members attended.

Burnam, who is no stranger to HoFW members, previously served 18 years as the Texas House of Representatives District 90 representative until he lost his 2014 re-election bid. District 90 includes downtown Fort Worth and surrounding areas. In 2016, he ran for Texas Railroad Commissioner in the March primaries, but he lost in a hotly contested race, results of which were questioned at the time.

Harris, an author from North Richland Hills, founded a political advocacy group, Direct Action Texas, in 2015. The stated mission of the group is to “help the grassroots take action in changing local government.”

Election integrity, including problems such as voter fraud, election accuracy, and vote harvesting are key elements



Aaron Harris, left, a Republican and executive director of the North Richland Hills-based government transparency group, Direct Action Texas, and Democrat Lon Burnam, former Texas House of Representatives member, and a 2016 candidate for Texas Railroad Commissioner, join forces to help overcome problems with vote harvesting, financial fraud, and errors in Texas election results.

of concern. The group particularly works on government transparency, government ethics, public debt issues, and civil liberties.

Burnam opened the meeting, introducing Harris as his friend. Throughout the conversation both of them offered their perspectives, including likenesses and differences.

“We agree on very few things politically,” Burnam said, “but we agree on the sanctity of the vote and the fact that we are losing ground. We are even going to disagree tonight on some of the issues relative to ballot protection, but we have been working together closely together now for 2 years over mail-in ballot fraud.”

Their interest began with issues they witnessed in elections during 2015. Before that, Harris was a campaign manager, but still he had no interest in election issues at the time.

Harris said “in 2015 if you had asked me about voter fraud, I would have told you that it doesn't exist, possibly in Chicago or whatever, but I didn't really believe in it. It wasn't an issue, and now I am kind of known for voter fraud. So it has been an interesting 2-year journey, and its given me some, you know how they say politics makes for strange bedfellows.”

“Since May of 2015, I have been on this—I guess journey you would say. Since then our work has resulted in four ongoing criminal investigations into voter fraud, one of which is in here in Tarrant County, one in Dallas County, one in Harrison County, and the other in Hill County,” he said.

They started the journey after Harris and Burnam witnessed election problems themselves.

“The first time we saw these errors with our own eyes, we had Lon, two other Democrats, myself, and my assistant, so there were two Republicans and three Democrats. We went down and looked at them [at election ballots and results]. I remember we walked outside and we stood around in a circle, and I was in shock for 3 days, having seen a stolen election,” he said.

Some of the findings went on to be investigated by the Texas Attorney General's (AG's) office. They both expect the AG to send out some notices and information about results of their investigation soon, and some elections underwent special monitoring, which may have prevented instances of voter fraud and harvesting.

The Hill County situation was the most obvious, he said. In Hill County in the Republican Party primary, he said 20 percent more ballots were cast than the number of physical voters. The election was still certified at every level, including by Hill County election officials, the Republican Party of Texas, and the Texas Secretary of State. Examination of signatures showed that only 7,295 voters actually voted, but 9,038 ballots were cast. At first he thought someone had simply failed to turn in the count for mail-in ballots. The count had been certified all of the way through the Texas Secretary of State, and no one caught or corrected mathematical errors.

(Continued on Page 4)

## HoFW to join Fort Worth Women's March commemoration on January 20, 2018

January 20, 2018, women in Fort Worth, across Texas, and around the U.S. have planned another Women's March. The date celebrates the first anniversary of the historic Women's March attended by some 1 million marchers worldwide nearly 1 year ago on January 21, 2017.

Some 60,000 marchers, including some HoFW members, attended the historic, Women's March on Austin, TX, in 2017. That protest became the largest-ever protest in Austin. Later, after many members already had left for Austin, a Fort Worth march was announced and held the same day.

Despite the late announcement, the 2017 Fort Worth Women's March also drew a few thousand attendees. This year, several HoFW members plan to join the local event.

Entitled “Women's March: Power to the Polls,” the event will celebrate successes of the 2017 march and will be used to rally women to vote at their ballot boxes to support women's causes. Most sites, including Fort Worth will host voter registration drives.

The Tarrant County Democratic Women's Club will host the Fort Worth March. Attendees will collect outside the Tarrant County Court-

house, 100 West Weatherford Street, at 10 a.m., Saturday, January 20.

The central organizational rally will be conducted in Las Vegas, NV. The organization said the site was chosen because “Nevada has recent experience with some of the most pressing issues facing women in our nation today, from gun violence to politicians accused of sexual assault. As a swing-state that will shape the Senate in 2018 and as home to a strong activist network, Nevada is the perfect place to commemorate the Women's March and continue building our electoral power.”

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Book Review

**I, Iago, a modern novel by Nicole Galland**

by Robert Stone  
Freethinkers Guest Reporter

**(Editor’s Note: For any readers who have not read Shakespeare in a while, Iago was the main villain in Othello. Scholars have studied him at length, and he has been called many things, among them an artist of evil who loves ruining other people’s lives.)**

As a bookstore employee and long-time fan of Shakespeare’s works, I read Christopher Moore’s *The Serpent of Venice* to see what a modern writer could do with one of the most classic tales in English literature. I enjoyed it, but the madcap blend of comedy and danger made the revision too far-fetched for my tastes.

Recently though, I stumbled across Nicole Galland’s *I, Iago*. The initial gravitas of Othello’s trusted lieutenant, Iago, stems from his reputation for telling the truth in a city where most people make a habit of lying.

The back story begins with his childhood friendship with Roderigo. Both of them are mischief makers and miscreants for sure, but they are not hardened criminals in the early phase of their lives.

As a young man, Iago is forced to enter the Venetian Arsenal, the ship-building powerhouse of the City. At that point, his hopes of joining the army are erased as his father chooses the navy for him.

But the silver lining is a meeting with Emilia in which a true love story unfolds. They are kindred spirits who want nothing to do with the panache and superficial camaraderie of patrician Venice. They are bonded by their passion for plain and simple lives.

Before long, the talk of the town is Othello, a Moor newly arrived with endless stories of world travel and death-defying martial conquest. His accounts captivate young Desdemona, the daughter of Senator Brabantio, and Emilia strives to make a match of the soldier and the politician’s daughter.

Once Othello is selected to lead the Venetian forces in combat, Iago takes it upon himself to teach his commanders how to navigate the upper echelons of society. After hearing of the secretive courtship, Iago nearly comes apart with worry over the consequences if the public finds out.

The troubles increase when Iago hears —on more than one occasion—how dashing Emilia and Othello are together as they attend social dinners, balls, and celebrations. There is, of course, no evidence to support the rumors but jealousy, “the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on,” rears its ugly head.

That’s not the sole reason to bring his amiable and successful superior down, though. That motivation is enhanced by Michele Cassio’s presence.

The Florentine, flamboyant and somewhat feminine, turns out to be quite a party animal. Although by all appearances, he is the perfect gentleman—intelligent, well-mannered, talented, and productive while at work, Cassio spends a good deal of time getting drunk with the ladies of the night. Iago witnesses this behavior, but never tells anyone.

So Othello’s decision to promote Cassio to lieutenant is the catalyst to tragedy. Iago, in his mind, has worked too hard and done too much for Othello to shrug off being passed over.

Objective 1, then, is to ruin Cassio and take his place. But how? His secondary goal becomes to damage Othello’s trust in his wife and achieve the first task in the process.

After all, Desdemona’s father was oblivious to her interest in Othello until a secret marriage was official.

Roderigo is the pawn in the first great move, which is to bait Cassio into a drinking game and stage a fight with a ruffian who compels Othello to strip his lieutenant of his rank.

Next, the main character worms his way into Othello’s mind with a slow-burning tale of infidelity. No one questions “honest Iago,” so he encourages Cassio to ask Desdemona for forgiveness and persuades Desdemona to take that same cause to her husband.

Much of the rest is related in the original play, but the point of no return arrives as Othello unravels and plots murder.

Iago, as deceived by his lies as anyone who hears them, continues to play along as he thinks, to paraphrase, “It won’t come to that. He won’t really kill Cassio or Desdemona. I can control the situation and get that promotion.”

Roderigo, the most pliable puppet of them all, is the first to die. Having already faced Cassio at Iago’s urging, he does so again and is wounded, then killed by his oldest friend.

As Iago tries to maintain order, he hears of chaos inside the palace and rushes upstairs to find Desdemona pale and lifeless in her bed.

With an audience looking on in shock, Othello lets all be known, just as Iago



said, “she was false,” but Emilia is present to expose the ruse and, once she places the blame on her husband, he snaps.

Unable to deal with her scorn, aware that their love has been obliterated in a single moment, Iago takes his wife from this world and Othello responds with a hidden dagger of his own, wounding the man who both guided him to unparalleled success and brought him to disaster before turning the weapon on himself.

Closing with a challenge, Iago argues “It is easy to call someone a villain; the title allows dismissal and more important, distance: as long as you know somebody else is the villain, then you are not one, and you may rest snugly in your own nest of good intentions... because you are not evil. This is the comfort of the smug. I am honest Iago, and I ask you: might not you be dishonest with yourself?”

This book gets a 3.5-star rating out of 5. While the original story is intriguing, I most enjoyed the dichotomy between the way it set terrible sequence of events in motion, while also making it seem that the whole domino effect would never actually occur.

All fans of Shakespeare and historical fiction, this one is for you.

	January 2018	February 2018	March 2018
<b>Key HoFW Events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular Meeting, Meet the Candidate, Vanessa Adia, who is running in the primaries for Congressional District 12; Wednesday, January 10, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX</li> <li>Dinner Social, Thursday, January 25, 6:30 p.m. Location to be announced at <a href="http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events">http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events</a></li> <li>Women’s March in Fort Worth, Saturday, January 20, 2018; 10 a.m., outside Tarrant County Courthouse, 100 West Weatherford Street, Fort Worth, TX</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Note: One Meeting Schedule Change to Wednesday, February 21 at 7 p.m.,</b> Speaker Vanessa Bouché, ph.d., TCU political science professor and expert in human trafficking, 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX; “<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events">http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events</a>”</li> <li>Dinner Social, Thursday, February 22, 6:30 p.m. Location to be announced at <a href="http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events">http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular Meeting, Congressional District 6 Primary Candidate Justin Snyder, Wednesday, March 14, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX</li> <li>Dinner Social, Thursday, March 22, 6:30 p.m. Location to be announced at <a href="http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events">http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events</a></li> <li>Check the Meetup Calendar for discussions about the annual street cleanup, which often occurs in March or April. You also can ask Adam, HoFW treasurer.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Metroplex Atheists, Social, 6:30 p.m., Wednesdays, January 3 - 31, J. Gilligan’s Bar, 400 E Abram St., Arlington, TX. Check the schedule at this link: <a href="https://www.meetup.com/Metroplex-Atheists/events/">https://www.meetup.com/Metroplex-Atheists/events/</a></li> <li>Freethinkers Dinner Across Fort Worth, Fridays; January 5 - 19, 7 p.m. Check the link for details: <a href="https://www.meetup.com/Freethinkers-of-Fort-Worth-Fort-Worth-TX/Meetup">Calendar - Freethinkers of Fort Worth (Fort Worth, TX)   Meetup</a></li> <li>Earlybird discounts have begun if you register now to attend the American Humanist Association Conference scheduled May 17 - 20 in Las Vegas, NV. Full Registration, \$349. Use this link for additional information: <a href="http://www.cvent.com/events/aha-annual-conference-2018-registration/event-summary-0b9578b79f7c40d8870e3a4429e7898c.aspx">http://www.cvent.com/events/aha-annual-conference-2018-registration/event-summary-0b9578b79f7c40d8870e3a4429e7898c.aspx</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Metroplex Atheists, Social, 6:30 p.m., Wednesdays, February 7 - 28; J. Gilligan’s Bar, 400 E Abram St., Arlington, TX. Check the schedule at the link: <a href="https://www.meetup.com/Metroplex-Atheists/events/">https://www.meetup.com/Metroplex-Atheists/events/</a></li> <li>Freethinkers Dinner Across Fort Worth, Fridays, February 2 - 16, 7 p.m. Check the link for details: <a href="https://www.meetup.com/Freethinkers-of-Fort-Worth-Fort-Worth-TX/Meetup">Calendar - Freethinkers of Fort Worth (Fort Worth, TX)   Meetup</a></li> <li>International Darwin Day, Monday February 12</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Metroplex Atheists, Wednesday Social, 6:30 p.m., Wednesdays, March 7 - 28, J. Gilligan’s Bar, 400 E Abram St., Arlington, TX. Check the schedule at the following link: <a href="https://www.meetup.com/Metroplex-Atheists/events/">https://www.meetup.com/Metroplex-Atheists/events/</a></li> <li>Dinner Across Fort Worth, Fridays, March 2 - 30, 7 p.m. Check the link at: <a href="https://www.meetup.com/Freethinkers-of-Fort-Worth-Fort-Worth-TX/Meetup">Calendar - Freethinkers of Fort Worth (Fort Worth, TX)   Meetup</a></li> <li>American Atheists 2018 National Convention, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March 29 – April 1, Sheraton Oklahoma City Downtown Hotel; <a href="https://www.atheists.org/convention2018/">https://www.atheists.org/convention2018/</a></li> </ul>

**Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly publication placed on hold for now**

by Wanda Foster, Editor

Since 2014, it has been my true pleasure to create and publish the *Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly* as a labor of love for the group. Life events and other priorities, however, make it necessary for me to cease publishing the newsletter for the foreseeable future.

As a result, members of the board are having discussions regarding finding someone else to resume publication at

some unknown point in the future. But for now, this will be the last issue.

I would like to sincerely thank all who participated by writing stories or allowing me to interview you and write your story. Your sharing enabled the group as a whole to have much more information about our members.

At every turn, all of those who told their life stories for the “Perspectives” column amazed me with their broad

world views and intellectual outlooks on life. Members demonstrate that they are well-read and well-educated, not only in terms of literacy, but in terms of life. Many are world travelers who face events with boldness and a working desire to make the earth a better place to live.

Having recognized that there is no god, we self-actualize to overcome the many challenges ahead. Thank you for being members.

**FORT WORTH HUMANIST QUARTERLY**

Chair: Sam  
Editor and Vice Chair: Wanda Foster  
Assistant Editor and Treasurer: Adam  
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<http://www.hofw.org/news.htm>

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Humanists of Fort Worth

## Opinion

### HoFW Humanist Perspectives

by Wanda Foster

Amanda Nelson has a youthful face with brown eyes, short-cropped brown hair, and a ready smile, all of which make her look 5 to 10 years younger than 38 years old. She is of average height, has a soft voice with literate diction, and is talkative, but if you just ask her to describe herself, she fidgets—grimaces even.

Descriptions define, and the last thing Nelson tolerates is being fitted for a box or being defined only by her work, a prevalent method of describing people in western nations. By that common measure, however, she is many things, an agnostic, an animal lover, a beekeeper, a former firefighter and paramedic, a hydroponic tomato gardener, a mentor for Big Brothers Big Sisters, a nurse anesthetist, an oil painter, a pilot of small aircraft, a reader, a thinker, and perhaps most of all a world traveler.

Just this year Nelson took her fourth trip to Rwanda, a place she loves enough to live there. She also loves Thailand, which she describes as cleaner than here. Most people wash themselves more than once a day, and although she ate street food there, she was never ill. She prefers traveling to places outside of Europe and has spent time in Africa, Japan, India, and Nepal, including its capital, Kathmandu.

“I’ve never been anywhere in Europe except on layovers,” she said.

For the past 3 or 4 years, Nelson has lived with her life partner Annie Quasnitschka, another HoFW member who also is a nurse anesthetist and likes traveling. They share a Southside apartment and work at John Peter-smith Hospital (JPS). Periodically they travel together, but sometimes they travel separately to accommodate their different tastes. Quasnitschka enjoys European travel, but has also visited Africa with her at least once.

Nelson prefers grand adventures and exotic places with stark differences in cultural norms and lifestyles. One of her most exciting excursions was her trip to India and to Nepal, nations she describes as eye opening and similar.

“I’m very happy I went, but if I ever say I want to go back I’m having a stroke,” she said. “It was crazy. Such poverty. It’s so dirty for no reason. Animals are treated horribly. That trip was mind blowing.”

While most people think of cows as sacred animals in India, she said they actually end up being treated badly.

“I think they are [treated badly], because they are just out roaming around. Everything is hungry. Everything is eating trash. The philosophy is that everybody takes care of these animals, so what happens is nobody takes care of the animals,” she said.

“Their dogs get run over. I don’t know how many dogs I heard get run over by rickshaws, dogs with jacked up, like angulated legs. Everything was so dirty, and nobody used trash cans. It was painful, but fascinating anyway, just amazing.”

Nelson saw similar things in Nepal. She only stayed in Kathmandu, the Nepalese capital, for four days, but she attended a big festival in Kathmandu Durbar Square, one of three

royal palace areas in a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization World Heritage site.

“It was so weird,” she said. “They were slaughtering chickens and goats and all kinds of stuff, and you’d see them sort of pitch it out of the corner of your eye, and at midnight in Durbar Square they kill all of these animals. They smear blood on buildings, cars, and one another. It’s like good luck for the year.”

Rwanda in contrast is a place she always wants to visit again. She works in a hospital there as a nurse anesthetist and likes the nonwestern lifestyle. While westerners often remember Rwanda as the home of a major genocide, Nelson remembers the people she has met. She describes them as very nice and Rwanda as a “beautiful, beautiful country.”

Nelson admits that white visitors in Africa enjoy privilege—not so much because of their skin color but because they arrive with money, a commodity most of the locals do not have.

“They don’t have any money. Their anesthetists make like \$300 a month, so it is like some of the most highly educated people are in the hospital making only \$300 a month,” she said.

Nelson likes that people in African nations like Rwanda place greater emphasis on quality of life than on a material lifestyle. They depend on nature, bartering, and cooperation more for survival than we seem to be able to do. People there do not necessarily need to work all of the time.

Every day Nelson thinks about retiring as soon as possible and moving abroad. Her desire is to work part of a year in another country and then pursue her own interests for the rest of the year. Nelson and Quasnitschka have a to-do list to develop 5-, 10-, and 15-year plans for reaching their goals and preventing their time from slipping away.

“I want to retire. I don’t want to work every single day,” she explains. “I don’t want to be defined by my work, which is what this machine wants. I’m not interested in it. I don’t know. I struggle with it. Sometimes I just want to go disappear into Africa and never see anyone I ever know again.”

On her day off, Nelson carried her copy of *Discourse on Colonialism*, a long essay she was reading for the second time. Written in the 1930s by Aimé Césaire, a poet and politician from Martinique, the book points out how Western nations have colonized and, in so doing, dehumanized many nations and races, making Europeans the antithesis of the humanist values many of them claim to hold dear, including the equal value of all people. The book points out comparisons between colonialism and Nazism.

#### Formative Years

At her core, Nelson admits she has spent an inordinate amount of time urgently mulling over the meaning of life, the universe, and everything, a fact she credits to growing up with freedom to think. Neither her parents nor her teachers tried to force her to conform to their own ideas of life.

When asked if she ever thought about religion and whether or not there is a

god, she said “Hell yes. From the time I was maybe 10 until maybe I was 30, always wondering, you know, not hoping, I was never Christian, always agnostic, probably just like wondering, curious, and I toiled with it for a long time, and then finally I just said forget it, and I just stopped and said it is better to just embrace this present moment I think.”

Born in Cleburne, Nelson grew up in Glen Rose. She attended kindergarten through sixth grade in a three-room school house somewhere between Stephenville and Glen Rose, which she describes as the middle of nowhere.

At peak enrollment, Nelson said the school had five students, but most days fewer than five. She remembers being sick frequently with normal childhood illnesses and having one teacher in particular who treated her specially in the classroom. She liked it there and considers herself fortunate to have learned in an environment that allowed free thinking.

“I was fortunate enough to be taught to read and have curiosity fostered and not just squelching it out. I think that primarily was it. There was no one specifically addressing those things, but no one was discouraging independent thought,” she said.

Nelson went to junior high in Hico, where she played guard for the football team one year. One girl previously had been a kicker on the team, paving the way for other girls to play. She later attended high school in Glen Rose. Her favorite courses were biology and art, and she still paints in oils today. She was not particularly a fan of history, but otherwise she liked the subject matter.

Mostly Nelson disliked attending Hico and Glen Rose schools, just as much or almost as much as she hated going to church. She thinks of herself as an introvert who did not like all of the demands made by the many extroverts in these environments. Sunday schools she described as “torture” and “extroverted havens.”

Nelson’s parents and her brother describe themselves as Christian, so they did attend protestant churches occasionally. When they did, they just went to any available, nearby church.

“We didn’t really talk about it outside of church. I would go to church, come home. That was it. Done,” she said.

No one at home prayed before meals or discussed religion, but when she visited her grandparents they did. Their influence helped foster her interest in travel. For many years she traveled with them all around the U.S. and in Canada.

After high school, Nelson explored several colleges and courses of study. First she attended Texas A&M for 2 years studying microbiology until her mother had a car wreck. After that, she went home for 6 months. She finished a biology undergraduate degree at Tarleton after that. For a while, she thought she would be interested in research or becoming a wildlife veterinarian, so for a few months she cared for black rhinoceroses at Fossil Rim. She liked it but changed her mind about the tedium of research, so she decided to become a nurse anesthetist

From the Editor:

Most HoFW members favor science and rationalism over religion, magic, and dogma. Within the realms of secularism and nontheism, we remain very diverse with different perspectives and ways of arriving at our beliefs in a world often unfriendly to secular thought.

This column presents our stories. Some of the names have been changed or limited to first names to protect the innocent.

and finished nursing school at Texas Wesleyan.

#### Adulthood, Career, Mentoring

Eventually as an adult, Nelson made up her mind about the god question.

“I made up my mind that I have no evidence of god. Just because I don’t have evidence does not mean there is not one. But if there is one, it is not having any influence in my life that I can detect, so who cares? I don’t need to think about it anymore.

“I know that in the name of god, there’s been nothing but, for the most part, destruction created upon this earth and as far as my purpose here I don’t really think there is one, so just enjoy—do my best to enjoy—it is still a struggle, you know for humans in general. Just be happy with what I have. I say that, still there is unrest,” she said.

After graduation she worked for 12 years as a firefighter/paramedic for Somerville County Fire Department in Glenrose and at Texas Emergency Medical Services in Granbury. Training included rappelling from the side of a water tower, among other things, but it is a job few people do forever.

“Scraping dead and dying people off the highway alters you,” she said.

For several years now she has worked at JPS, but she thinks a great deal about doing locums, work exchanges across the country that provide travel opportunities for medical people. She also plans to continue working in Rwanda when she can and may even work with Doctors without Borders.

For now, Nelson points out that some 700 children in Tarrant County are waiting for Big Brothers Big Sisters mentors. She and Quasnitschka are mentoring a 9-year-old stuck in multi-generational poverty. They take her to museums, help with her homework, and teach her life-planning and coping skills she cannot get at home. The child has a single mother who works nights at low-paying jobs and pays the babysitter half of her income. Meanwhile food stamps have been cut to the point that one person, let alone two, can barely live on the funding.

“Sometimes I feel like I should adopt 30 kids who have no hope—at all. Because I mean really if we don’t take care of the kids then, then there is for sure no hope,” Nelson said.

“I think all we can do is effect action in our daily lives and be good people, set a good example for one another, and that is it. Run for office if you are so inclined, but otherwise love one another—or not. Call people on their bullshit. That’s a big part of it.”

## Open letter to HoFW from Justin Snider, District 6 democratic congressional candidate

by Justin Snider

My name is Justin Snider, I am one of the Democratic candidates running for U.S. House of Representatives, TX-District 6. Politically speaking, I am a true progressive. In my personal politics and in my campaign, I stand for the following key progressive values:

- Separation of church and state
- Marriage equality
- A woman's right to choose
- Expanding women's benefits in health care
- Workers' rights
- Health care as a basic right for all
- Clean energy
- Tax reform that drastically helps struggling middle- and low-income communities
- Care and services for our veterans
- Peace and avoiding unnecessary conflict
- Immigration reform

I believe it is vital for our nation to put forward a universal health care system so that our nation's poor can begin to heal and so that average citizens no longer are forced to worry about bankruptcy if they come down with a major illness.

It is vital that we lock down financial institutions with regulations that will protect the nation's economy, and it is also vital that we reform our criminal justice system so that it actually protects society from criminals who present a true threat, rather than imprisoning people unnecessarily just to provide for-profit prisons with a ready source of income.

These are all issues I am passionate about, but my campaign is not just about pushing these issues onto voters. My main focus for this campaign, which I tell every voter I speak with, is that we need to clean up our political system and add term limits to all levels of office.

My campaign is about giving the average voter someone who can truly represent them, which is something that our current leaders are failing to do. I want to lead the nation in creating a new standard for those who speak for the people. I truly believe that if we come together in a forum such as a town hall we cannot only educate average citizens regarding issues and the facts that go with them, but we can also make a decision as a community with regard to how I should vote as their representative.

We have to face the facts. Congressional District 6 is a highly conservative area. The history alone shows that no Democrat should be able to win this district, nor do the Conservatives see District 6 as a loss they need to worry about in 2018. If elected to represent this district, I could vote for every single progressive issue that comes up. I could be one that votes against every conservative issue, but this would only result in a conservative retaking this district in the 2020 election. As a candidate in District 6, my sole push and plea to the average voter is this: let me represent the district as the people see fit.

As a progressive office holder, I will push for what I believe is right, give facts, and show evidence that moving in a progressive direction will be best for everyone. But at the end of the day, I have to vote the way the majori-



*Justin Snider, District 6 congressional candidate, is seeking an opportunity to compete for the congressional seat currently held by Congressman Joe Barton, who decided not to seek re-election after a recent Internet sexting scandal.*

ty of constituents want me to vote. If I continue to show that I am a true representative of all in District 6, and we continue to discuss and provide true evidence, I feel that we will transform this community to be something other than a typical conservative district.

As a candidate with years of community activism, I do not shy away from the hard work needed to help those in need or from providing a voice for those who are often not heard. I speak

with all voters, not just Democrats, and I am earning the trust of even conservative voters.

The Freethought Equality Fund has openly endorsed me, and I pledge to keep church out of state affairs, out of our education system, and out of our medical system. If you are in District 6, I urge you to reach out to the Snider for Congress campaign and help us secure our position as the Democratic nominee during the March primary.

## Voter harvesting operations can add up to 5,000 mail-in ballots to races favoring a candidate

(continued from Page 1)

That one he chalked up to ineptitude, which in itself is bad, but is not a crime in Texas.

Burnam said he was disturbed by some of the findings in his own 2016 election which Harris agrees he did not lose. The election code gave them only 30 days to correct any problems, and it said nothing about when the state had to provide required election data for review. Republican Party officials took 2 ½ months to get the election data from the Republican primary, and then he and others spent another couple of weeks trying to figure it out. By then it was too late to change results officially.

Harris said he and his attorneys have no problem calling specific elections stolen because he and his attorneys can produce copies of actual ballots and results to defend themselves in case of a civil suit against them.

Either way, results of Direct Action Texas' work is behind four ongoing AG investigations in process for several months in Dallas, Harrison, Hill, and Tarrant counties.

Also, Burnam and Harris have helped enact changes in law to increase the penalty from a misdemeanor to a felony for fraudulent voter practices, such as voter harvesting, a term unfamiliar to many attendees, but Harris and Burnam explained the methodology.

Harris said as many as 5,000 mail-in ballots in municipal and school district races may be fraudulently submitted as a result of vote harvesting, which can involve multiple techniques. He said the most common method involves local companies who hire elderly women, usually people with a sisterly or motherly rapport, and send them out to people who are vulnerable—between the ages of 75 and 95 who have lost cognitive ability, people whose first language is something other than English, and low-income, less-educated groups in black and Hispanic neighborhoods.

Voters have to request a mail-in ballot to receive one, so at a reasonable time before the election vote harvesters go into neighborhoods, get acquainted with people in these groups, and ask them if they have ordered a mail-in ballot. If not, they may help them pre-fill a form requesting the ballot, and they may even ask them to sign the request on a computer tablet.

Requests in Tarrant County tend to be faxed in on Wednesdays from specific businesses who submit most of the harvesting forms in batches. Many of the applications arrive with the header from the fax, including the name of the business, the telephone number, and other information. They read parts of a formal letter from one of the businesses revealing that the purpose of the harvesting was to help people get

into local offices who might then give them contracts in exchange for helping them win.

During their research, they asked why Wednesdays is the most typical day for these faxed-in applications to be received. The response was that applications tend to be processed on Thursdays and then the ballots arrive in the person's mailbox on Friday or Saturday, enabling them to know when they can go and harvest the ballot; i.e., collect it from the box or from the person they are helping complete it.

Burnam said he had "heard of harvesters taking their ballots out of the mailbox and taking the ballot. That is obviously a felony. People are less bold than that these days, but there are all numbers and varying degrees of this including—we haven't even mentioned computerized theft where they go out and tell people they have to sign on this computer so they have stored the signature forever in order to be able to vote, and they use it in a subsequent election without the person's knowledge or consent."

Harris told the story of one man, who never voted by mail in 20 years because he lived directly across the street from the polling place. A woman came to him and asked him to vote by mail, and he declined her request multiple times. So ultimately she appeared to give up, but she explained that she was a voter engagement spe-

cialist directly paid for engaging voters and asked him to sign paperwork allowing her to show she had talked with him. She handed him a clipboard, he signed it, and he also got his wife to sign it.

"A couple of weeks later they walked across the street to vote and guess what? They had already voted," he said.

Burnam and Harris agreed that this problem most often occurs in low-voter turnout areas where dual voting goes undetected for long periods if it is discovered at all. He said requiring all citizens to vote, as they do in Australia, could help stop voter fraud.

Starting in 2018, the new statutes implemented as a result of Burnam and Harris' efforts make it easier to catch vote harvesting employers rather than their lower-paid personnel. Plea deals can be offered in exchange for information about these employers.

Burnam urged HoFW members "who just want to save our republic from people working to undermine it to help in elections. Sign up to help conduct elections in your local polling area. Sign up to help during early voting. Here is really the bottom line," he said. "North Texas has the worst voter turnout participation of any urban region in the country. We are the most susceptible to a couple of hundred fraudulently filed ballots."