

HUMANISTS OF FORT WORTH

The Cowtown Humanist

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HUMANISTS GATHER AT TRINITY PARK IN JULY

MARK GREEN TO SPEAK ON POLITICS AT AUGUST SESSION

Also in this issue:

Court Asked to End
Execution of Minors

More Jobs, Worse Work?

HoFW Announcements –
Monthly Meeting Change?

Officers & Contacts

PICKNICKING IN THE PARK AT OUR JULY 18 MEETING

Seventeen Humanists, both young and, well, those sort of elderly, gathered in the heat of a Texas July afternoon at the pavilion in Trinity Park to partake of a picnic lunch and to share desserts on the eighteenth. The thermometer registered a high somewhat less than a triple digit figure and there was a bit of humidity. It would have been a lot worse except for a mild breeze. In fact, in the shade of giant oak trees most of us found the afternoon weather tolerable if somewhat less than delicious.



We regret that so many of our fellow Humanists were precluded from attending and sharing in a lot of enjoyable conversation. We had the chance also to do a bit of proselytizing on a visitor sent to us by Joel Bailey. The occasion may prove fruitful in more ways than one.

LEGAL FRONT

COURT ASKED TO END EXECUTION OF MINORS

Texas religious organization joined Nobel Prize winners and international political leaders July 19 in asking the U.S. Supreme Court to end the execution of inmates who killed before age 18. Former President Carter, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and the American Medical Association were among those who said the juvenile death penalty violates evolving standards of decency and is almost universally rejected by the international community. The U.S. is among a handful of countries that allow such executions, putting to death more juvenile offenders than all other countries combined between 1990 and 2003, according to court filings. Texas, one of five states with a minimum age of 17 for execution, leads the nation with 28 such inmates on Death Row, including two from Tarrant County. Since 1973, the state has executed 13 juveniles, according to the Texas Defender Service, a nonprofit legal-defense group. (FWST)

TERROR SUSPECT GET HEARING AT GUANTANAMO

For the first time in the nearly three years since the 9/11 attacks, a prisoner picked up as a terrorist suspect and held nearly incommunicado at a U.S. prison in Cuba got a chance July 30 to convince his jailers that he should go free. The Supreme Court in June granted new legal rights to about 600 foreign-born men held at Guantanamo Bay. The

detainees, however, will be without the assistance of legal counsel. Department of Defense lawyers claimed that as noncitizens the prisoners were not entitled to the same constitutional protections as American citizens. Some legal observers asserted that the government is simply stonewalling and that the courts will explicitly extend right to counsel to the detainees. (NYT, NPR)

MISSOURI SAYS 'NO' TO GAY MARRIAGE

Seventy percent of Missouri voters on August 3 voted to amend the state constitution to prohibit gay marriages and to deny recognition to such marriages made in other states. Having a mixture of both rural and urban, Missouri is widely regarded as a barometer of voter sentiment for the nation. Republicans had wanted to hold the vote at the same time as the presidential election to mobilize evangelicals to turn out for Bush; Democrats were successful in holding out for an August referendum. Louisiana plans a vote on the marriage amendment on September 18. In November, voters in Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, Oklahoma, Oregon and Utah are expected to consider similar measures. Ballot initiatives are awaiting approval in Michigan, North Dakota and Ohio. Four states—Alabama, Hawaii, Nebraska and Nevada—had already passed constitutional amendments before the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling in favor of same-sex marriages. (NYT)

PRISON POPULATION STILL RISING

The Department of Justice reports that America's prison and judicially restricted population in 2003 stood at almost 6.9 million, or one adult in every 32. Of these, 2.1 million were in prison or jail and more than 4 million were on probation. A further 775,000 were on parole. (Economist magazine)

NEW YORK CITY AND EIGHTS STATES TO SUE POWER PLANTS

Eight states and New York City plan to sue utilities they say are the biggest emitters of carbon dioxide, the heat-trapping gas that scientists have linked to global warming. The states are California, Colorado, Iowa, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin. The utility companies operate a total of 174 power plants that burn fossil fuels and that the states and New York City say emit 646 million tons of carbon dioxide a year, or ten percent of the national total. (NYT)

DEMOCRATS BLOCK CANDIDATE FOR FEDERAL JUDGESHIP

Senate Democrats on July 20 used a filibuster threat to block yet another of President Bush's judiciary candidates, asserting that William G. Myers III, a longtime lobbyist for large ranchers and mining interests, was unsuited to be a federal judge. Myers, who was nominated for a seat on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit, which covers nine Western states, became the seventh of Mr. Bush's judicial

nominees to be blocked by a Democratic filibuster. The Republicans, who needed 60 votes to defeat a filibuster, were able to muster only 53 Senators. Senator Leahy of Vermont complained that Myers "would be an anti-environmental activist on the bench. He has a consistent record of using whatever position and authority he has to fight for corporate interests at the expense of the environment and the interests of the American people in environmental protections." Senator Craig Thomas, Republican of Wyoming, said that Myers would provide needed balance to the 9th Circuit, which has a reputation among conservatives as too prone to the side of environmental groups. (NYT)

A RADICAL ASSAULT ON THE COURTS

A majority that are frustrated when courts stand up for minority rights have occasionally tried to strip them of the power to do so. This week [7/18-7/24], the House voted to deny the federal courts the ability to decide a key constitutional issue involving gay marriage. Such a law would upset the system of checks and balances and threaten all minority groups. It is critical that the Senate reject it. The Marriage Protection Act, which was passed by the House, 233-194, would bar federal courts from hearing challenges to parts of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act. That law says states do not need to recognize same-sex marriages conducted in other states. Gay marriage opponents fear that the courts will hold that this violates the constitutional requirement that states recognize the legal actions of other states. ...even at the height of the backlash against the civil rights movement, Congress

never passed a law that completely insulated a federal law from Supreme Court review. This radical approach would allow Congress to revoke the courts' ability to guard constitutional freedoms of all kinds. And although gays are the subject of this bill, other minority groups could easily find themselves the target of future ones. ...even one house of Congress backing this sort of assault on the federal judiciary is an outrage. (NYT editorial)

CHURCH & STATE

Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind.

James Madison

CHRISTIAN NATION ADVOCATE GOES FOR BLACK VOTE

"Christian nation" advocate David Barton recently spoke at a "unity rally" sponsored by a black Republican minister in Lufkin, Texas. During the event, Barton offered his usual cut-and-paste revisionist history that attacks church-state separation. Barton, an official with the state GOP, also blamed the rise of the Ku Klux Klan on the Democratic Party. [Someone should have reminded him that the KKK achieved its greatest political power in 1920s solidly Republican Indiana.] An attendee reported that gathering appeared to be part of a GOP effort to recruit African American voters. (C&S)

WHITE EVANGELICALS LESS TOLERANT OF DIVERSITY

A new survey indicates that when it comes to race and religion, white conservative Protestants are more likely than other Americans to be less tolerant of diversity. The American Mosaic Project, run by three professors at the University of Minnesota, found that 48.3 percent of white conservative Christians would disapprove if their child wanted to marry a black person. Only 21.8 percent of other Americans said they would oppose such a marriage. The survey also found

that white conservative Christians would oppose a son or daughter marrying a Hispanic, an Asian or a Jew, a higher level than other Americans. Asked to give reasons why there is inequality among races, 31.9 percent of white conservative Christians cited "laws and institutions work against Blacks," while 47.9 percent of other Americans picked that reason. The survey also found that many Americans harbor animus against nonbelievers. Asked to say if members of certain groups agreed with their vision of society, most respondents felt that atheists were the group they had the least in common with. Fifty-four percent of Americans said atheists share their vision of society. The number for Muslims was 64 percent.

LAURA BUSH'S BEDTIME READING? DOSTOYEVSKY

We were all aware that Laura Bush, a former librarian, likes reading as much as her husband dislikes it (except for the sports pages of the newspapers). Hence, it comes as no surprise that she might take on some pretty heavy stuff. Recently, she told an interviewer that her favorite piece of fiction was the Grand Inquisitor scene in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, one considered ambiguous by most critics. Mrs. Bush thinks otherwise. She finds it to be about Christ and to be reassuring. (A politically correct response?) (NYT)

NEWS BRIEFS

TOP OF THE NEWS

MORE JOBS, WORSE WORK?

More than a million jobs have been added to total nonfarm payrolls over the past four months—the sharpest increase

weakest hiring cycle in modern history. From the trough of the last recession in November 2001 through last month, private-sector payrolls have risen a paltry 0.2 percent. This stands in contrast to the nearly 7.5 percent increase recorded, on average, over the comparable 31-month interval of the six preceding recoveries. Nor is there much reason to celebrate the type of jobs that have been created during the past four months. In general, they have been at the lower end of the economic spectrum. By industry, the leading sources of hiring turn out to be restaurants, temporary hiring agencies and building services. These three categories, which make up only 9.7 percent of total nonfarm payrolls, accounted for 25 percent of the cumulative growth in overall hiring from March to June. ...According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the total count of people at work part time—both for economic and noneconomic reasons—increased by 495,000 from March to June. That amounts to an astonishing 97 percent of the cumulative increase of the total growth in employment measured by the household survey over this period. By this measure, as the hiring dynamic has shifted gears in recent months, the bulk of the benefits have all but escaped America's full-time work force.

Joe Six-Pack is under a lot of pressure. He got a lousy raise; he's paying more for gasoline and milk. He's not doing that great. But proprietors' income is up. Profits are up. Home values are up. Middle income and upper income people are looking pretty good.

Ethan S. Harris, Chief Economist of Lehman Brothers

since early 2000. These gains certainly compare favorably with the net loss of 594,0900 jobs in the first 27 months of this recovery. But there's little cause for celebration: The increases barely make a dent in the

...It turns out that fully 81 percent of total job growth during the past year was concentrated in low-end occupations in transportation and material moving, sales, and repair and maintenance services. At the upper end of the occupational

hierarchy, increases in construction and professional jobs were partly offset by sharp declines in the numbers of production workers, who mainly toil in manufacturing plants. – Stephen Roach, chief economist for Morgan Stanley

JOB CREATION LEGISLATION TO ENRICH TEAM OWNERS

According to tax analysts, an undebated provision of the 2004 American Job Creation Act (passed by both houses and now in joint conference) could increase the value of sports teams of the National Football League and Major League Baseball by five percent or more. More liberal rules for writing-off intangible assets for tax purposes would reduce the long term tax liabilities of many sports teams. (It's a complicated business and would not impinge on all professional sports teams uniformly.) Proponents claim that tax revenues would in fact rise (the proverbial free lunch). One analyst estimated that the New York Jets, which sold for \$624 million in 2000, would be worth \$55 million more following passage of the Act. (2004 should be a great year for Jerry Jones.) Pete Stark, Democrat of California, characterized the 964 page legislation as "a Christmas tree of special interest giveaways" and Representative Tommy Baldwin, Democrat of Wisconsin, complained, "Instead of creating jobs, it creates tax cuts for cruise ship operators, foreign dog-race gamblers, NASCAR track owners, Chinese ceiling-fan manufacturers, Oldsmobile dealers, and beer and liquor wholesalers. (NYT)

WHO'S GETTING THE NEW JOBS?

A startling new study shows that all of the growth of the employed population in the United States over the past few years can be attributed to recently arrived immigrants. The study found that from the beginning of 2001 through the first four months of 2004, the number of new immigrants who found work in the United States was 2.06 million, while the number of native-born and longer-term immigrant workers declined by more than 1.3 million. The study, from the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston, is further confirmation that, despite the recovery from the recession of 2001, American families are still struggling with serious issues of joblessness and underemployment. ...If we are going to encourage immigration, it's essential that we move once again toward full employment. ...In the absence of full employment, a face-off between American workers and newly arriving immigrants will be inevitable. —Bob Herbert, columnist, NYT

BEATING THE HEAT

Sex arose as a means to mix DNA and thereby boost genetic diversity, according to standard evolutionary theory. But it may also exist to help repair DNA damaged by environmental stress, such as heat, for fitter offspring. Experimenting on green alga, which can reproduce both sexually and asexually, researchers at the University of Arizona found that when such colonies are heated for 10 minutes to 42.5 degrees Celsius, they had twice the number of DNA-damaging oxidants as unheated ones. They found that

these high oxidant levels triggered the microbe's genetic pathway for sexual reproduction, leading the algae to release mating pheromones. (Scientific American)

PASSING OF A GREAT SCIENTIST AND HUMANIST

Francis Crichton, humanist and co-discoverer of DNA, died recently at the age of 88. Sir Francis, discoverer of the double-helix structure of DNA with James Watson, was an outspoken atheist and humanist, whose antipathy toward religion was a prime motivator for his DNA breakthrough. He resigned as a fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge, after it proposed to build a chapel. When Sir Winston Churchill pointed out that nobody need enter the chapel if he didn't wish, Crick shot back that given this reasoning the college should build a brothel. (www.humanistinstitute.org)

ERNST MAYR CELEBRATES 100 WITH A NEW BOOK

Ernst Mayr, successively ornithologist, zoologist, evolutionary biologist, and now science philosopher, celebrated the century mark on May 10 with a symposium/birthday bash in his honor at the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology. August is to mark the publication of his 25th and newest book, *What Makes Biology Unique?* For more on a phenomenon many regard as the 20th century Darwin, see Steve Mirsky's column in the August issue of *Scientific American*.

BACTERIAL INTEGRATED CIRCUITS (WHAT NEXT?)

By interfacing bacteria to silicon chips, NASA-supported researchers have created a device that can sense almost anything. University of Tennessee microbiologist Gary Sayler and his colleagues have developed a device that uses chips to collect signals from specially altered bacteria. The researchers have already used these devices, known as BBICs, or Bioluminescent Bioreporter Integrated Circuits, to track pollution on earth. Now with the support of NASA's office of Biological and Physical Research, they are designing a version for spaceships.

DESPERADOES

Something went awry at the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas last Saturday night [July 17]. Linda Ronstadt did what she had done at several concerts across the country this summer. She dedicated the song "Desperadoes"—an encore—to Michael Moore and urged members of the audience to go see his new movie, *Fahrenheit 9/11*. ...a few audience members tore down posters, threw drinks and demanded their money back. According to one person who was present—William Timmons, the Alladin's president—it was "a very ugly scene." Mr. Timmons promptly made it even uglier. He had Ms. Ronstadt ejected from the premises. ...if their [the protestors'] intemperate behavior began to worry the man, then they were the ones who should have been thrown out and told never to return, not Ms. Ronstadt, who threatened, after all, only to sing. (NYT editorial)

ENVIRONMENT IN THE CAMPAIGN

SURRENDER IN THE FORESTS

The Bush administration has taken apart so many environmental regulations that one more rollback should not surprise us. Even so, it boggles the mind that the White House should choose an election year to dismantle one of the most important and popular land preservation initiatives of the last 30 years—a Clinton administration rule that placed 58.5 million acres of the national forests off limits to new road building and development. There are no compelling reasons to repudiate that rule and no proponents besides a few disgruntled Western governors and the timber, oil and gas interests that have long regarded the national forests as profit centers. ...Nearly three years in the making, that [the roadless] rule essentially gave blanket protection to some of the last truly wild places in America, critical watersheds for fish and wildlife and important sources of drinking water for metropolitan areas in the West. The Bush administration offers instead a less protective and more uncertain system under which state and local officials would become the moving force in whether to log or conserve forest lands. This represents a big swing in the ideological pendulum, essentially returning control of an important part of national forest policy to the very people from whom Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, both Republicans, wrested it when they established the Forest

Service a century ago. (NYT editorial)

[The Times, however, has given editorial kudos to the administration's decision to restrict off-road vehicles to existing trails in national parks.]

A PLAN FOR WATER

A recent federal report brings together years of research and comes to the long-standing yet little heeded conclusion that the oceans are in trouble. Almost everyone applauds the report for taking major steps toward improving management of the oceans. But there is still concern, especially among some U.S. states, that the recommendations will not be fully funded and that they may encourage offshore oil and gas drilling, an activity some states have fought to restrict. Among proposals is a doubling of federal money allocated to ocean research, from \$650 million to \$1.3 billion. The commission also proposes establishing the Ocean Policy Trust Fund using money already paid to the government by offshore drilling companies that use federal waters. The trust fund, which would be worth about \$5 billion annually, would go to several programs already in existence, as well as to states and to federal agencies. A point of contention is that the funding structure will pressure states to beef up their oil and gas-drilling programs. The commission recommended that more money go to the states that engage in offshore energy and gas production, "because that's the source of the money." Gov. Schwarzenegger has averred that he "would insist that no incentives for additional offshore oil and gas development be created through the use of funds from these revenue sources." Opposition to

offshore drilling is also very strong in Florida. (Scientific American)

HOW ABOUT A COAST- TO- COAST TRAIL?

A focus of the American conservationist movement has been conservation, and that's why there is such rage at the Bush administration's efforts to log, mine, or drill patches of wilderness from the Arctic to Florida. President Bush has done more than other recent president to shift our environmental balance away from conservation and toward development. Mr. Bush's Healthy Forests initiative, in its harsh early version, allowed logging companies to pillage federal land. The latest assault is President Bush's decision to overturn the Clinton administration's "roadless rule", protecting nearly 60 million acres of national forest from road building and development. ...Yet the environmental movement is wrong to emphasize preservation for the sake of the wolves and the moose alone. We should preserve wilderness for our sake—to remind us of our scale on this planet, to humble us, to soothe us. Nothing so civilizes humans as the wild. ...At a time when America is struggling with obesity and few Americans have daily conduct with the outdoors, we should not be sealing off the wilderness but rather increasing access to it for those on foot or horseback. ...I wish that Mr. Bush's environmental policy wasn't rooted in rapine. But I also wish that the green movement fought as hard for interactions between humans and our environment as it did against blind development. If environmentalists applied a small fraction of the energy they

devoted to fighting snowmobiles in Yellowstone to push for a coast-to-coast trail, we would now have one. -- Nicholas Kristoff, columnist, NYT

U.S. TO WITHHOLD U.N. POPULATION FUND CONTRIBUTION

The Bush administration said July 16 that it will withhold \$34 million in dues from the U.N. Population Fund, acting against the program for the third consecutive year because the administration believes that the fund indirectly supports Chinese government programs that force abortions. Fund officials countered that a U.S. fact-finding team sent to China two years ago found no evidence that the fund had supported or taken part in management of Chinese programs of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization. Investigations by the U.N., the British Parliament and a group of religious leaders had reached the same conclusion, they said. (LAT)

HoFW NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

AUGUST MEETING

We will meet at West Side Unitarian Universal Church at 7:00 p.m. Tuesday August 17. Mark Green will be our speaker. Let's welcome him with a big turnout!

Mark Greene was born in Amarillo and raised in Fort Worth. After 10 years of parochial schooling he transferred to and graduated from a public high school. A 1989 UTA

graduate in journalism & public relations, he has served in the military and worked in public relations, political campaigns, marketing and financial services. He has spent the bulk of his working career in construction and is currently owner of a small construction firm specializing in elite residential remodeling and renovation services.

A 2000 Democratic congressional nominee who lost a hard-fought race against Kay Granger, Mark later served one term on the Benbrook City Council before stepping down to free himself up for this year's campaign against George Bush and the Republicans. He is an ardent political activist, a philosopher sans portfolio, and is currently working on a collection of essays for publication. Mark lives in Benbrook with his wife Kelly and two very Democratic children.

MEETING DAY CHANGE?

Suggestions have been made to change the regular meeting days, currently the third Tuesday of the month. This item will be discussed at the regular August meeting or e-mail [Don Ruhs](mailto:Don.Ruhs) with suggestions.

DINNER AT JASON'S DELI

Our August meeting will be preceded by dinner at Jason's Deli at [5100 Overton Ridge Blvd](http://www.jasonsdeli.com), Fort Worth (near Cosco's) 5:30 p.m. Come join us.

BOARD MEETING

There will be a board meeting following our regular session on August 17.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION CONVENTION IN OCTOBER

The 27th annual national convention of the Freedom From Religion Foundation will meet in Madison on the weekend of Oct. 29-31. A featured speaker will be Susan Jacoby, author of the recently published *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*. She will speak on "How Secularism Became a Dirty Word." Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker will be this year's recipient of the "Emperor Has No Clothes Award." Author of *The Blank Slate*, Pinker was recently named one of the "100 most influential people" in TIME Magazine's "Scientists and Thinkers" category. Receiving a tailor-made "Freethought Hero" award will be Michael Newdow, who brought the lawsuit against "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. Registration forms and additional information can be obtained from: FFRF, Attn: Convention, PO Box 750, Madison, WI 53701.

NEW HUMANIST LEADERSHIP CLASS STARTS IN DECEMBER

On December 3, 2004, the 13th Humanist Institute Leadership Class will begin. The three-year course (2004-2007) graduate level program consists of intensive reading and reflection, and three annual seminars leading to a Graduate Certificate in Humanist Leadership. Visit the Class XIII web page at www.humanistinstitute.org for more information.

FREE INQUIRY MAGAZINE

Readers who are not receiving Free Inquiry might consider doing so. Published by the Council of

Secular Humanism, Free Inquiry is now issued bimonthly. The Aug./Sep. edition is of more than usual interest. Among other articles you will want to read is Richard Dawkins' "What Use is Religion" and Christopher Hitchens' "True Church-State Separation." A special feature is "What is the Optimum Population of the U.S.? The World?" Is there a problem of overpopulation or not? Both sides of the argument are presented in ten articles. You will especially want to read Rob Boston's lengthy and timely review of Susan Jacoby's *Freethinkers*. He hails it as a "classic."

MEMBERSHIP DUES

A reminder that membership dues were to be paid in March. If you are still delinquent and wish to retain your membership, please see Dolores.

BOOK CORNER

Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment—A Citizen's Agenda for Action. By James Gustave Speth.

We travel together, passengers in a little spaceship, ...preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and, I will say, the love we give our fragile craft.

Adlai Stevenson, in his last speech, 1965

James Speth brings impressive credentials to this study. He was head of President Carter's Council on Environmental Quality, founder of two high churches of the American environmental movement: the Natural Resources Defense Council and the World Resources Institute, a think-tank, and head of the United Nations Development Program. He is now dean of Yale

University's environment school. This book constitutes a summing up of what has been accomplished in saving and restoring the environment, what has gone amiss, and what should be done to avoid global catastrophe.

How much has been accomplished since the late 1970s when the environment became a major global issue? Speth grades governmental response to ten global-scale concerns generally agreed as worthy of particular attention: 1) Ozone layer depletion; 2) Climate change; 3) Desertification; 4) Deforestation; 5) Biodiversity loss; 6) Population growth; 7) Freshwater resources; 8) Marine environment deterioration; 9) Toxification; and 10) Acid rain. Only action on ozone layer depletion (the Montreal Protocol) gets high marks and only two others get passing grades, population control and acid rain. Failing grades are given to the other seven. Although some 250 treaties and conventions have been negotiated over the past quarter century, problems in those areas, he says, have only

gotten deeper and more urgent. Stifling progress have been the low priority most governments give to global environmental problems and the tendency of some governments not to cooperate at all, most recently the U.S. government, without whose participation only very limited progress can be made on any of the most pressing concerns.

What is to be done? Speth notes that governments have been



capable of cooperating effectively in dealing with the most urgent and least expensive issues such as ozone depletion. With longer term, less immediately pressing issues such as global climate change, cooperation has been very slim. In this connection, he notes the irresponsible position the Bush administration has adopted toward the Kyoto Protocol. Among other measures to focus world attention more sharply on environmental problems he suggests the establishment of a World Environmental Organization, counterpart of the World Trade Organization. (Surely the environment is as worthy of international cooperation as is trade.)

The Economist magazine, not exactly known for tree-hugging, has reviewed Speth's book quite favorably. This is no environmentalist's screed against consumption and rising living levels. It represents a lifetime of reflection by a top flight scientist. It warrants reading by all who are seriously concerned by the continuing degradation of our planet.

YOUR OFFICERS, AND HOW TO REACH THEM

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Call to Humanists

Is there something we forgot to mention in the newsletter? Do you have a comment or suggestion? E-mail [Michael Rivera](mailto:Michael.Rivera) with:

- Newsletter story ideas.
- Photos for the newsletter.
- Events to include on the newsletter or Internet Group.
- Subscribe/Unsubscribe requests.

Humanists of Fort Worth Internet Group

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