

HUMANISTS OF FORT WORTH

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**ANIMAL RIGHTS FEATURED AT FEB
MEETING**

**HOMELAND SECURITY OFFICER SPEAKS
IN MARCH**

Also in this issue:

**Bush Appoints Abortion Foe
to Appellate Court**

**Ten Commandments Illegal,
Again**

Same-Sex Marriage

**Scientists: Administration
“manipulating & censoring”**

MAN’S BRUTALITY TO OTHER SPECIES FEBRUARY SESSION TOPIC

In their behavior towards creatures, all men are Nazis.

Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Enemies, A Love Story* (1972)

Callousness has long been a defining characteristic of *Homo sapiens'* relation to other species, especially in those societies drawing on monotheistic traditions. The Old Testament shows only slight regard for the well being of other creatures and the New Testament none at all. Indeed, Jesus is reported to have cast devils into 2,000 swine and then sent them over a cliff into the sea, all of this gratuitously, since there is no apparent reason why he couldn't have disposed of them in anyway whatsoever. And Paul insisted that God cared nothing for the rest of the animal kingdom except insofar as they were useful to man. Saint Augustine wrote: "Christ himself shows that to refrain from the

killing of animals (the swine incident) and the destroying of plants (Christ cursing the tree) is the height of superstition." Aquinas excluded animals from his sphere of moral obligations.

Other animal species have fared only somewhat better by the philosophers. While the Pythagoreans eschewed consumption of meat and Plutarch attacked the use of animals for food as "unnatural, unnecessary, bloody murder," Aristotle's Great Chain of Being hypothesized an unbridgeable gulf between man and other species, a thesis that was to resonate strongly among later generations of philosophers.

Montaigne was among the few writers in the post-Roman Empire era to show leniency toward other species: "Tis by the same vanity of imagination that man equals himself to God, attributes to himself divine qualities, and withdraws and separates himself from the crowd of other creatures." By contrast, Rene Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, writing only somewhat later, held that all material objects are governed by mechanistic principles, like a clock; hence, animals could not be sentient. Man is exempted by the fact that he alone has a soul. (Descartes' logic may be rather cloudy, however, it provided a neat rationalization for dissecting live animals in order to advance his knowledge of anatomy.) David Hume urged "gentle usage" of other creatures; Kant saw kindness justified only because of

We have seen that the senses and intuitions, the various emotions and faculties, such as love, memory, attention and curiosity, imitation, reason, etc., of which man boasts, may be found in an incipient, or even sometimes in a well-developed condition, in the lower animals.

Charles Darwin, The Descent of Man (1871)

the moderating effects it has on man's disposition. Schopenhauer contrasted the "revoltingly crude" attitudes of Westerners toward animals with the gentler attitudes that prevailed in Buddhist and Hindu cultures; nonetheless, he deemed meat consumption necessary for northern latitude dwellers.

Our guest speakers explained the philosophy of animal rights as a prohibition on the consumption, usage of products, experimentation on, and entertainment usage of animals; the interests of animals are to be given equal weight to the interests of humans, as we are all sentient beings. Jeremy Bentham, the English utilitarian philosopher, asserts that it matters not whether animals can talk, or reason; "the question is, can they suffer." The Princeton philosopher Peter Singer argues that the fact that other animals are sentient (ability to feel pain, joy, anguish dread, love) is sufficient to require recognition of and respect for the interests of other animals. He uses the term "speciesism" to designate homo sapiens' inclination to regard the needs of individuals of other species beneath moral concern, analogous to the biases of racism, sexism, classism, etc.

The American philosopher, Tom Regan goes further, arguing that empirical evidence demonstrates that other animals are capable of a sense of self and of an awareness of selfhood in time and space in relation to others. Regan concludes that other

animals have intrinsic worth apart from the usefulness they may have to humans. It is arrogant of man to deny kinship to other creatures and to assume an attitude of dominance, as codified in law and reinforced by religious doctrine, convenient dogma without naturalistic foundation.

The Animal Rights movement took off in the latter part of the 70's as philosophers began to examine the ethical foundations of man's relations to other members of the Animal Kingdom and as greater resistance developed against such activities as fox hunting, particularly in England, and the use of animals in laboratory experiments. The first large demonstrations in the U.S. took place in 1983 against experiments on primates by the National Institutes of Health. [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals \(PETA\)](#) was formed after exposing cruel experiments on monkeys by a research lab. A campaign waged against Revlon resulted in a decision to stop using animals. The film Project X drew attention to the use of chimpanzees in space and in military-related experiments. The Head Injury Lab at the University of Pennsylvania was closed after the release of film footage showing a cruel mistreatment of baboons. More recently, laws have been passed in several states raising cruelty to companion animals to felony status; greater public awareness is evident in the rise in the number of vegetarians and the decline in the fur fashion industry.

This is only the tip of the iceberg of what needs to be done, they argue. Industrialized meat, poultry and fish production constitute the most egregious abuses of animals. 100 million cattle, sheep, goats and pigs and three billion fowl are slaughtered annually in the U.S. The greater part is raised under conditions of overcrowding (particularly chickens and turkeys) and often involves a cruel dietary regimen. Some 20 million animals are used in medical and military research in the U.S. Many of these experiments are for petty purposes, oftentimes repetitive and sometimes conducted without regard to the suffering of the animals. Circuses, zoos, rodeos, dog/horse racing, and seaquariums are other venues for remedial action.

What is to be done? The Animal Rights Movement urges legal demonstrations (marches, vigils, picketing), letter writing and phone calls, lobbying for legislation and for legal action against abusers, and lifestyle changes, especially vegetarianism. Each person refraining from the consumption of meat saves an estimated 83 animals per year. You can go all the way, becoming a [vegan](#); *i.e.*, eschewing any animal products, including eggs and dairy, and by refusing to wear animal skins. Animal rights, they argue, is ultimately a social justice issue, a matter of recognizing our kindred nature with other beings, of empathy with their suffering and of demanding the respect due any thinking, feeling individual regardless of species.

The heat of the debate, which accompanied their presentation, was more or less in inverse proportion to the number present. Some members of the audience

disagreed with the objective of giving up pets. Dogs have been man's "best friend" for at least 10,000 years and cats at least since the beginning of historical times. These species can't be returned to the wild. The severing of a symbiotic relationship that arguably is beneficial to man and those other species as well in order to honor ideology seems rather pointless. Others questioned whether the Animal Rights Movement has cast its net too widely by attributing rights to all sentient creatures. The Declaration of the Rights of Man dates only to 1945 and is still a long ways from being fully implemented. Advocating a position on animal rights that will be regarded as dotty by the vast majority of people undermines the achievement of modest but real improvement of animal well being. Wouldn't a more limited program, say, prohibitions on the killing and mistreatment of the higher primates and more humane treatment for the animals in man's food chain represent a good start? Man has been altering the environment in a substantial way at least since the dawn of agriculture. Six billion of us are now in competition with other species for this planet's limited resources. Inevitably we make decisions that impact negatively on many of these other species. Is it unreasonable that he should give priority to his own interests?

RECOMMENDED

READING: [Animal Liberation](#), by Peter Singer. A philosophical radical, Australian born and educated, Singer is widely acknowledged as one of the leading philosophers of this era. He is also a fluent writer.

[The Case for Animal Rights](#), by Tom Regan.

NO VEGGIES FOR SLAUGHTERVILLE

Slaughterville, Oklahoma, has turned down an offer of \$20,000 worth of veggie burgers for schools in return for changing its name to Veggieville. PETA's vegan campaign coordinator, Ravi Chand, argued the case for Veggieville at a packed town meeting where officials unanimously rejected the name. Earlier, an Oklahoma City country-music radio station celebrated Slaughterville pride by hosting a "100 percent beef" cookout at the town hall, where residents dined on hamburgers and hot dogs. In previous attempts with name changes at Rodeo, CA, and Hamburg and Fishkill, NY, PETA's efforts were similarly rejected. (FWST)

MARCH SPEAKER: DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY OFFICER

The regular March meeting is not to be missed, Patricia Mancha of the [Department of Homeland Security](#), will be the featured speaker. Ms. Mancha will discuss DHS and the PATRIOT Act.

LEGAL ISSUES

BUSH PLACES ABORTION FOE ON APPEALS COURT

President Bush bypassed the Senate on a high-profile judicial nomination February 20 for the second time in five weeks and seated William Pryor Jr., the Alabama attorney general and an outspoken opponent of abortion, as an appeals court judge through 2005. Pryor is among six of Bush's appeals court nominees

who have been blocked from receiving confirmation votes because of delaying tactics by Senate Democrats, who contend that the nominees are extreme conservatives. Pryor has described *Roe v. Wade* as "the worst abomination in the history of constitutional law. In 1997, Pryor invoked God's will while speaking at a Christian Coalition rally in defense of a state judge's prerogative to post the Ten Commandments in his courtroom. Republican officials described Bush's action as a signal that he intends to make judicial choices a major issue in his re-election race, as well as another example of his determination to expand executive power at the expense of the legislative branch. (WP)

TEXAS DEATH ROW INMATE'S SENTENCE REVERSED

A Texas inmate who was granted a reprieve just 10 minutes before being taken to the execution chamber last year won a reversal of his death sentence from the U.S. Supreme Court on February 24, when the justices found evidence of misconduct by police and prosecutors. Justice Ginsburg pointed out that prosecutors remained silent as key witnesses lied on the stand, and that prosecutors kept quiet about those witnesses' ties to police throughout the appeals process. "When police or prosecutors conceal significant exculpatory or impeaching material, it is ordinarily incumbent on the state to set the record straight." The high court's 7-2 ruling means that Delma Banks, who has been on Death Row for nearly 24 years for killing a Texarkana teenager can ask lower courts to commute his sentence or give him a new trial. (FWST)

HOUSE VOTES BILL PROTECTING FETUSES

The House voted 254-163 February 26 to treat attacks on a pregnant woman as separate crimes against both her and the fetus she is carrying. Critics say it would undermine abortion rights by giving fetuses new federal legal status. Passage of the [Unborn Victims of Violence Act](#) was actively backed by the White House and President Bush's conservative supporters. The measure would apply only in federal cases such as terrorism, drug trafficking or offenses on federal land or on military bases. (AP)

GROSS MISMANAGEMENT IN WAR ON TERRORISM?

The federal prosecutor who won the first—and so far only—jury-trial conviction in the war on terrorism sued the Department of Justice on Tuesday, contending that he was not given adequate backup support in the case and that senior government officials seemed more interested in publicity than in seeing justice served. Richard Convertino, a 14-year veteran of the Detroit office, accused Ashcroft and other department administrators of retaliating against him for his criticisms of the Department. The lawsuit, filed February 17, is the first public statement from someone inside the government's war on terrorism that there are problems in the Justice Department's Terrorism and Violent Crimes Section. (LAT)

CHURCH & STATE

EAGLES' TEN COMMANDMENTS DISPLAY RULED ILLEGAL

A federal judge in February ordered officials in La Crosse, WI, to remove a large Ten Commandments monument from the center of a city park. The Fraternal Order of Eagles (FOE) donated it to the city in the 1960s. "I cannot find any meaningful difference between a city's own display of a religious monument and a city's grant of permission to one (and only one) private group to permanently display the monument in the same location when the monument is still surrounded by city property," wrote Judge Crabb. Pat Robertson's legal group, the American Center for Law and Justice, has said it will file an appeal on behalf of the Eagles. (C&S)

STATES NEED NOT FINANCE DIVINITY STUDIES

The Supreme Court ruled Feb. 25 that states that subsidize secular studies at college level may withhold the scholarships from students preparing for the ministry. The 7-2 decision, upholding the eligibility requirements of the Promise Scholarship program in Washington State, was a setback for advocates of using publicly financial vouchers to pay for religious school tuition. Joined by the Bush administration, advocates of "school choice" programs sought to use this case to establish a broad principle that an institution's religious affiliation

should not make it ineligible to participate in general programs of government. Chief Justice Rehnquist's opinion was a decisive rejection of the proposition that a government that subsidizes a secular activity must necessarily, as a matter of the constitutional free exercise of religion, subsidize the comparable religious activity as well. (NYT)

NO COMFORT FOR RELATIVES OF THE HELL-BOUND

A New Mexico state judge ruled in late January that a Roman Catholic priest who announced during a parishioner's funeral that the man had gone to hell cannot be sued for inflicting emotional distress on the dead man's family. "For thousands of years, churches have been making judgments against people," the judge wrote. "Dante's 'Inferno' has been talking about sending people to hell for many a year. People aren't shocked by it." (Who would have guessed that "The Inferno" is a bestseller in New Mexico?) (C&S)

LEGISLATIVE PRAYER SPARKS FUROR IN ARIZONA HOUSE

On Jan. 26, Rep. Doug Quelland (R-Phoenix) recited a prayer made popular by a guest chaplain in the Kansas House eight years ago that attacks gay people, legal abortion, tolerance of non-Christian religions and other features of life condemned by the far right. "It was a pandering, mudslinging, name-calling political statement," the House Democrats responded. "It was hateful and mean-spirited. It was undignified. The citizens of Arizona deserve better." (C&S)

FRENCH ASSEMBLY BANS STUDENT RELIGIOUS GARB

By a 494-36 vote, the French National Assembly in February approved a measure that would bar Islamic headscarves, large Christian crosses and Jewish skullcaps from public schools. Sikh turbans would likely also be included in the ban. Officials in the Bush administration have called on French lawmakers to reconsider the legislation and even suggested that the measure could subvert international religious freedom agreements. (C&S)

IT'S YOUR TAX DOLLARS BUSH IS DOLING OUT

Through the so-called "Compassion Capital Fund," a type of White House slush fund for subsidizing religious groups, the Bush administration is quietly diverting millions of dollars to sectarian organizations every year. According to research by AU's Legislative Department, the most recent round of awards shows 60 grants totaling \$8.2 million—all distributed to Christian organizations. (C&S)

PLEDGING 'UNDER GOD'

...many devout Christians and other religious persons believe deeply in God but do not want to see the deity turned into some sort of national mascot. That borders on idolatry. ... Many recent U.S. political leaders have assumed that generic references to God and Religion are acceptable to everyone. They are not. Lots of patriotic Americans are offended by them; these people are angry at having their loyalty to the country questioned because of their

religious beliefs or lack thereof. ...In the Pledge of Allegiance case the Supreme Court has been given a rare opportunity to state that one does not have to share a majority religious view—or any religious view, for that matter—to be a good American. Let's hope the justices take it. (C&S editorial)

CULTURE WARS

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION ON MARRIAGE

The results of more than a century of anthropological research on household, kinship relationship, and families, across cultures and through time provide no support whatsoever for the view that either civilization or visible social orders depend upon marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution. Rather, anthropological research supports the conclusion that a vast array of family types, including families built upon same-sex partnerships, can contribute to stable and human societies.

THE CASE FOR GAY MARRIAGE

So at last it is official: George Bush is in favor of unequal rights, big-government intrusiveness and federal power rather than devolution to the states. That is the implication of his announcement this week that he will support efforts to pass a constitutional amendment in America banning gay marriage. Some have sought to explain this action away simply as cynical politics, an effort to motivate his core conservative supporters to

turn out to vote for him in November or to put his likely "Massachusetts liberal" opponent, John Kerry, in an awkward spot. Yet to call for a constitutional amendment is such a difficult, drastic and draconian move that cynicism is too weak an explanation. No, it must be worse than that; Mr. Bush must actually believe in what he is doing. ...The importance of marriage for society's general health and stability ... explains why the commonly mooted alternative to gay marriage—a so-called civil union—is not enough. ...Some gays think it would be better to limit their ambitions to that, rather than seeking full social equality, for fear of provoking a backlash—of the sort perhaps epitomized by Mr. Bush this week. Yet that would be both wrong in principle and damaging for society. Marriage, as it is commonly viewed in society, is more than just a legal contract. Moreover, to establish something short of real marriage for some adults would tend to undermine the notion for all. Why shouldn't everyone, in time, downgrade to civil unions? Now that really would threaten a fundamental institution of civilization. (The Economist)

A DARKER VIEW OF BUSH'S MOTIVES

Stirring a crowd is one thing. Mob politics is another. With his announcement Tuesday that he backs a constitutional amendment against gay and lesbian marriage, President Bush reminded us what a mob-monger he is. "I'm a uniter, not a divider," promised candidate George W. during the election of 2000. But his most effective political initiatives reveal that his most sinister political talent is to rally "us" against "them"—whoever "they" are. ...Faith-based agitation in

Massachusetts ...has helped to shift public opinion 10 points in the direction of intolerance. ...And this is Roman Catholic, Northern fundamentalism, not Protestant Southern. So you ain't seen nothin' yet. ...Bush is a political animal with his back against the wall. And he has made us, in his image, into a nation of claws and teeth. —Greg Moses, editor, Texas Civil Rights Review

If the president is truly concerned about preserving the sanctity of marriage, why not make divorce illegal and stone adulterers. ...When it comes to the Bushes' willingness to stir up base instincts of the base, it is as it was. (Maureen Dowd, NYT)

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE MARQUIS DE SADE

And his latter day incarnation is Mel Gibson, or so secularists and liberal religionists seem to regard the producer of the now famous, or infamous, *The Passion of the Christ*. Who would have imagined that there was such a huge appetite for sadomasochism in this country? (We will soon find out how large it is in the rest of the world, or perhaps the enormous publicity surrounding the release of *The Passion* will assure a draw of large numbers of the curious elsewhere) The religious right retort, echoing the reported judgment of Pope John Paul II, that this is the way it was. Most unlikely. It took a lot of filling the interstices in the gospel accounts—pretty sparing on details of the last 90 minutes—to come up with a rendition that would “entertain” the ‘born-again’ what with its Aramaic and Latin. (Greek was the lingua franca of the eastern part of the Roman Empire, not Latin. So much for the authenticity of the dialogue.) I

have read that Gibson's bleak theology reflects his judgment on his misspent youth: presumably Christ's suffering had to be proportional to the depths of Gibson's sins if salvation was to be had, or so he seems to have reasoned. Whether his motives in making the film are sincere or not, he surely has shown an almost unparalleled ability to generate publicity and to stir emotions on the right through the medium of celluloid. Whether this will create a wave of ill will against Jews, secularists and liberal religionists or not remains to be seen.

Since our readership has probably read the FWST film critic's harsh judgment on Gibson and film, and the venomous responses in the letters section a couple of days later, it will suffice to report a few of the more incisive reactions to the film appearing elsewhere in the media: Mel Gibson's movie torture and agony of the final hours of Jesus is the bloodiest most brutal example of sustained sadism every presented on the screen. (William Saffire, NYT) Pompous, medieval, a new kind of fiction. (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung) Mel Gibson and George W. Bush are courting bigotry in the name of sanctity. ...Perhaps fittingly for a production that licensed \$12.99 nail necklaces (what's next? Crown-of-thorns prom tiaras?), “The passion” has the cartoonish violence of a Sergio Leone Western. You might even call it a spaghetti crucifixion, “A Fistful of Nails”. (Maureen Dowd, NYT) ...a repulsive, masochistic fantasy, a sacred snuff film that uses classically anti-Semitic images. (Leon Wieseltier, New Republic) ...too much “Bravehearts” theology. (Robert Johnston, Fuller Theological Seminary, on PBS, in an otherwise favorable review) The movie Gibson has

made from his personal obsessions is a sickening death trip, a grim process of treachery, beatings, blood and agony. ...he falls in danger of turning Jesus message of love into one of hate. ...how, I wonder will people become better Christians if they are filled with the guilt, anguish or loathing that this movie may create in their souls? ...another dose of religious fanaticism is the last thing we need. (David Denby, The New Yorker)

NEWS BRIEFS

TOP OF THE NEWS

SCIENTISTS LAY IN ON BUSH POLICIES

A group of more than 60 top U.S. scientists, including 20 Nobel laureates and several science advisers to past Republican presidents, on February 18, accused the Bush administration of manipulating and censoring science for political purposes. The scientists accused the administration of “suppressing, distorting or manipulating the work done by scientists at federal agencies” in several cases. The Union of Concerned Scientists organized the effort, but many of the critics aren't associated with the group. The report cited the administration for 1) ordering massive changes in an EPA report on global warming; 2) replacing a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fact sheet on proper condom use with a warning emphasizing condom failure rates; 3) ignoring advice from experts concerning the infamous aluminum tubes imported by Iraq for supposed nuclear weapons; 4) establishing political litmus tests for scientific advisory boards; 5) suppressing an Agriculture Department

microbiologist's finding that potentially harmful bacteria float in the air at large hog farms; 6) stacking regulatory advisory panels with scientists from regulated industries. (Knight-Ridder)

BAPTISTS TO REGISTER VOTERS

Southern Baptists will seek to register an additional 2 million voters for the presidential election, Richard Land, president of the Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission told an Executive Board session in Nashville. Land said a new Web site, iVoteValues.com will be set up to compare presidential candidates' stands on same-sex marriage, abortion, stem-cell research, the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance and the display of the Ten Commandments in civic settings. (FWST)

WACO GROUP URGES GIRLSGOUT COOKIE BOYCOTT

John Pisciotta, director of Pro-Life Waco and an associate professor of economics at Baylor, has been urging listeners in public-service announcements running around the clock on KBDE/89.9 to boycott Girl Scout Cookies. Pisciotta claims the local Council of Girl Scouts supports Planned Parenthood's annual sex education seminars. So far, the fallout has been limited. Only two of the 400 Girl Scout troops in the Council's Central Texas district have reportedly disbanded after learning of the Planned Parenthood connection. (FWST)

HoFW NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

KUDOS TO JEFF RODRIGUEZ

Jeff has our association's most onerous burden: finding speakers for our monthly meetings. He has done a remarkable job finding people with something interesting to say. The best way to render appreciation is to attend our meetings whenever possible.

BOOK CORNER

The Hispanic Challenge, by Samuel P. Huntington.

Samuel Huntington is one of our foremost political scientists. He came to the attention of a wider public than policy wonks and academia (he teaches at Harvard) when he published an article in 1993 entitled *Clash of Civilizations in Foreign Policy*. The ensuing controversy induced him to follow with a book in 1996 with the same title. His basic thesis was that the end of the cold war did not imply the triumph of Western values, rather that an age-old conflict of civilizations, briefly muffled by ideological warfare, was coming to the fore again. In particular, he warned of the dangers of a resurgent Islam and a newly assertive China as challenges for Western Civilization. He called for trans-Atlantic cooperation to assure military and technological superiority against civilizations demographically advantaged and, in the case of China, advancing economically at a torrid pace.

[The Hispanic Challenge](#) appears in the latest issue of [Foreign Policy](#) and can be accessed at

that website. It constitutes an excerpt from a forthcoming book entitled *Who Are We?* Huntington argues for restrictions on Hispanic immigration, particularly Mexican, in order to protect the core values of America that stem fundamentally from our Anglo-Protestant heritage. Previous immigrants and particularly second-generation Americans have sought to assimilate themselves into American society, largely forgetting their old country languages and relegating old country allegiances to secondary status if retained at all. What is different about the current influx from south of the border is its size, its concentration in the southwest and south Florida, and the unwillingness of most of these immigrants and much of their offspring to become Americans in the same way. Indeed, most of them seem to identify themselves principally with their countries of origin. Because the Mexican immigration is very heavily concentrated in that part of the U.S. seized in 1849 and Hispanics have much higher fertility rates, the specter of a slow disconnection of the southwest from the rest of the U.S. has to be considered as likely. Drastically reducing the inflow of new immigrants from Latin America would, in his view, accelerate the assimilation of those already here and assure the preservation of traditional American values, he argues.

Obviously Huntington has a penchant for putting forth provocative points of view opportunely, whatever one may think about their validity. Congressional Republicans have apparently turned thumbs down on the Bush administration's proposal to give worker status to 8 million illegal immigrants. Hence, immigration is bound to have an important role in this

year's presidential election. Huntington, by the way, is no arch-reactionary. He wrote speeches for Adlai Stevenson and Jimmy Carter and was a consultant to the Johnson administration. He is, however, conservative on defense and on the preservation of American traditions. "The American political genius is manifest not in our ideas but in our institutions. The greatest need is not so much the

creation of more liberal institutions as the successful defense of those which already exist." (A Hamiltonian Democrat?)

Mancha of the Department of Homeland Security will speak. Meeting Time is 7pm at Westside UUChurch.

HoFW Events

March Regular Meeting

The Regular meeting will be Tuesday, March 16. Patricia

April HoFW Meeting

The regular HoFW meeting will be Tuesday, April 20 at West Side Unitarian Church. Speaker TBA.

YOUR OFFICERS, AND HOW TO REACH THEM

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