



**March**

**2011**

**The Humanists of Ft Worth meet on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist building 901 Page Ave at 7 PM**

## **Demonstrations at Texas Capitol for Church Taxes to Support Education**

PICKET AT TEXAS CAPITOL DEMANDS CHURCH TAX TO SUPPORT PUBLIC EDUCATION

They're going to be out there every weekday in front of the Texas Capitol Building in Austin, Texas: and they're demanding that lawmakers begin levying a small tax on the wealthy churches of the Lone Star State in order to rescue public education.

The project is the brainchild of American Atheists State Director Joe Zamecki. Joe and a coterie of fellow activists hope to draw attention to the "war on public schools" that is taking place throughout the state. Indeed, every time the legislature huddles in Austin, there is a flurry of bills that would further erode the public education system, and undermine the quality of education in the classrooms.

Mr. Zamecki explains in the following announcement...

Public education in Texas is in a financial crisis. This year's state legislature is about to slash spending on education, to include the laying off of possibly hundreds of teachers, and the closing of public schools all over the state. Apparently the state budget is short this year, by billions of dollars.

Right now, parents, students, teachers and others are rallying around their schools, and speaking out about the very real need to keep the teachers and schools we have now, as one of our state's top priorities.

Meanwhile mega-churches and televangelists in Texas are doing very well. So the recurring theme of church taxation is in the air again, although it's still a somewhat shocking idea to most people. Not so shocking as in the past.

Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church alone is doing famously well, operating in the physically largest church building in the USA, tax free. Like so many Texas mega-churches, Joel and his church have the ease of marketing that some corporations have, so we feel that they and other successful mega-churches could help with public education too. We've proposed just a 1% tax on profits taken in by just the top 1% of the most profitable mega-churches and televangelists in Texas. They can easily afford it.

<http://atheists.org/blog/2011/02/10/demonstrations-at-texas-capitol>

## **From The Chair**



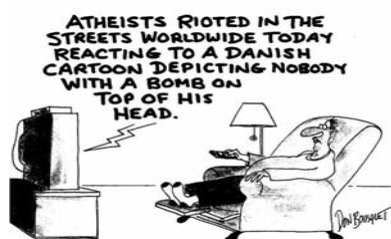
Dr. Russell Elleven, a former Chairperson of our HOFW and still member who helped found our chapter back in 1999, as well as Minister of Westside UU Church and counselor of our SMART program, will be our speaker at our next meeting this **March 9, 7:00 p.m.**, at the

church. The subject of his presentation is "The Story of Humanism Within Unitarianism-Universalism." It would probably behoove all of us to know more about this subject since 14 of the 34 distinguished signers of the first Humanist Manifesto were Unitarian ministers.

A few brief facts about this fantastic guy: Russell lost his left arm to cancer when he was 13 years old. He graduated from Joshua High School in 1983, with a BA degree from TCU in 1989, a Master of Theological Studies-World Religions from Vanderbilt in 1991, a Doctor of Education--Ed and Counseling from the University of North Texas in 1996, and a Post Doctoral Master of Science-Applied Technology, Training and Development also from UNT in 1998, and finally all the training and classwork necessary for ministry in the Unitarian-Universalist Association.

Dr. Elleven is a Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor, a Licensed Professional Counselor, a National Board-Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist, a Humanist Minister of the Humanist Society of Friends, a Licensed Family Life Educator, National Certified Counselor, Licensed Thanatologist (bereavement) and Certified Sexologist.

I hope many of us will want to know more about this connection of two such imposing philosophies and come to hear Russell. It's a great opportunity to experience his eloquence and ideas on a subject fairly removed from Sunday reflections. My personal advice: Don't Miss It.



## On Evolution, Biology Teachers Stray From Lesson Plan

Teaching creationism in public schools has consistently been ruled unconstitutional in federal courts, but according to [a national survey](#) of more than 900 public high school biology teachers, it continues to flourish in the nation's classrooms.

Researchers found that only 28 percent of biology teachers consistently follow the recommendations of the Nation Research Council describe straightforwardly the evidence for evolution and explain the ways in which it is a unifying theme in all of biology. At the other extreme, 13 percent explicitly advocate creationism, and spend at least an hour of class time presenting it in a positive light.

That leaves what the authors call “the cautious 60 percent,” who avoid controversy by endorsing neither evolution nor its unscientific alternatives. In various ways, they compromise.

The survey, published in the Jan. 28 issue of *Science*, found that some avoid intellectual commitment by explaining that they teach evolution only because state examinations require it, and that students do not need to “believe” in it. Others treat evolution as if it applied only on a molecular level, avoiding any discussion of the evolution of species. And a large number claim that students are free to choose evolution or creationism based on their own beliefs.

**Eric Plutzer, a co-author of the paper, said that the most enthusiastic proponents of creationism were geographically widely spread across the country.**

More high school students take biology than any other science course, the researchers write, and for about a quarter of them it will be the only science course they take. So the influence of these teachers looms large.

Randy Moore, a professor of biology at the [University of Minnesota](#), was unsurprised by the study's conclusions. “These kinds of data have been reported regionally, and in some cases nationally, for decades. Creationists are in the classroom, and it's not just the South,” he said. “At least 25 percent of high school teachers in Minnesota explicitly teach creationism.”

“Students are being cheated out of a rich science education,” said Dr. Plutzer, a professor of political science at [Penn State](#) University. “We think the ‘cautious 60 percent’ represent a group of educators who, if they were better trained in science in general and in evolution in particular, would be more confident in their ability to explain controversial topics to their students, to parents, and to school board members.”

But Dr. Moore is doubtful that more education is the answer. “These courses aren't reaching the creationists,” he said. “They already know what evolution is. They were biology majors, or former biology students. They just reject what we told them.

“With 15 to 20 percent of biology teachers teaching creationism,” he continued, “this is the biggest failure in science education. There's no other field where teachers reject the foundations of their science like they do in biology.”

## It Ain't Just Mubarak -- 7 of the Worst Dictators the U.S. Is Backing to the Hilt

by Joshua Holland

Embattled Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, whose regime has received billions in U.S. aid, has been in the global media spotlight of late. He's long been “our bastard,” but he's not alone.

Let's take a look at the other dictators from around the planet who are fortunate enough to be on Uncle Sam's good side.

### 1. Paul Biya, Cameroon

Biya has ruled Cameroon since winning an “election” in 1983. He was the only candidate, and did pretty well, getting 99 percent of the vote.

According to the country's [Wikipedia entry](#), “The United States and Cameroon work together in the United Nations and a number of other multilateral organizations. While in the UN Security Council in 2002, Cameroon worked closely with the United States on a number of initiatives. The U.S. government continues to provide substantial funding for international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, IMF, and African Development Bank, that provide financial and other assistance to Cameroon.”

Amnesty International [details](#) unlawful executions, journalists being thrown in jail and a host of other nasty business.

As part of a strategy to stifle opposition, the authorities perpetrated or condoned human rights violations including arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions and restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Human rights defenders and journalists were harassed and threatened. Men and women were detained because of their sexual orientation.

### 2. Gurbanguly Berdymuhammedov (or Berdymukhamedov), Turkmenistan

Berdymuhammedov came to power in 2006 when his predecessor died and the constitutionally mandated successor was thrown in jail.

According to [the State Department](#), “For several years in the 1990s, Turkmenistan was a key player in the U.S. Caspian Basin Energy Initiative, which sought to facilitate negotiations between commercial partners and the Governments of Turkmenistan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey to build a pipeline under the Caspian Sea and export Turkmen gas to the Turkish domestic energy market and beyond--the so-called Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline (TCGP).” *Parade Magazine's* list of the world's [worst dictators](#) notes that “the U.S. continues to import oil from Turkmenistan (\$100 million worth in 2008), while Boeing provides airplanes to the Turkmen government. Chevron ... opened an office in Turkmenistan's capital, Ashgabat.” (Continued on Page 3)

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### 3. Teodoro Obiang Nguema, Equatorial Guinea

Thirty-two years ago, Obiang Nguema deposed – and then executed -- his uncle, Francisco Macías, in a bloody coup. Peter Maas [called him](#) not only “Africa's worst dictator,” but a man whose life “seems a parody of the dictator genre.”

Obiang ... had promised to be kinder and gentler than his predecessor, but in the 1990s, even the U.S. ambassador to Equatorial Guinea received a death threat from a regime insider, the ambassador has said, and had to be evacuated. Not long after that, offshore oil was discovered, but the first wave of revenues—about \$700 million—was transferred into secret accounts under Obiang's personal control.

According to *Parade*, “The U.S. imported more than \$3 billion in petroleum products from Equatorial Guinea” in 2008.

### 4. Idriss Deby, Chad

We also imported \$3 billion worth of oil from Chad that year. According to [the State Department](#), “The United States enjoys cordial relations with the Deby government. Chad has proved a valuable partner in the global war on terror, and in providing shelter to approximately 200,000 refugees of Sudan's Darfur crisis along its eastern border.”

Amnesty International's [2010 report on Chad](#) paints quite a picture:

Civilians and humanitarian workers were killed and abducted; women and girls were victims of rape and other violence; and children were used as soldiers. The authorities failed to take adequate action to protect civilians from attacks by bandits and armed groups. Suspected political opponents were unlawfully arrested, arbitrarily detained and tortured or otherwise ill-treated. Harassment and intimidation of journalists and human rights defenders continued. Demolition of houses and other structures continued throughout 2009, leaving thousands of people homeless.

Despite the fact that Chad's military has been accused of using child soldiers, *Parade* notes that “the U.S. continues to train Chadian commandos.”

### 5. Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan

The thing that makes Karimov so special is his ([alleged](#)) penchant for boiling his political opponents to death.

Karimov has been president of Uzbekistan since 1990,

when he won the first of a number of rigged elections by a huge margin. Torture, arbitrary detentions and massive roundups of religious minorities are commonplace in Uzbekistan, [according to Human Rights Watch](#). But the country has been a key partner of the U.S. in its “war on terror,” the U.S. to abandon the base, but as *Parade* notes

hosting U.S. troops at the Karshi-Khanabad airbase until 2005. Relations cooled somewhat after Karimov encouraged “U.S. trade with Uzbekistan doubled in 2008, as Americans continue to import huge amounts of Uzbek uranium, which is used for nuclear power plants and weapons.” The following year “Uzbekistan Airways ordered Boeing jetliners worth about \$600 million.”

### 6. Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia

Zenawi has ruled Ethiopia for 20 years. Just last year, after what Human Rights Watch [called](#) “months of intimidation of opposition party supporters,” Zenawi's party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, won 99.6 percent of the vote. Legitimacy!

Ethiopia is a key strategic partner in the “war on terror,” and contributes significantly to African peace-keeping operations. According to the [U.S. Agency for International Development](#), the United States is the largest donor to Ethiopia. Congress passed a law, over the objections of the Bush administration, that restricts military aid to the country until it has a free press and the Zenawi regime improves its human rights record, but – and this is a big but – it exempts aid for “counter-terrorism.” So despite the fact that, [according to Amnesty International](#), Ethiopian opposition groups are illegal, NGOs have been banned and Ethiopians often disappear without trial, the U.S. continues to train Ethiopian troops.

### 7. King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz, Saudi Arabia

Apparently, when a theocratic Islamic state does horrible things to its citizens, it's only a big deal if that state is named Iran. Saudi Arabia, of course, is among the United States' most important allies – the U.S. government has provided security for the Saudi royal family for decades, in exchange for which ... oil.

Abdullah has instituted some reforms since taking power in 2005, but Human Rights Watch [says](#) the “initiatives have been largely symbolic, with only modest concrete gains or institutional protection for rights.” Amnesty International's 2010 report [charges](#) that the Saudi authorities continue to use “a wide range of repressive measures to suppress freedom of expression and other legitimate activities. **Hundreds of people were arrested as suspected terrorists.**”

**Thousands of others arrested in the name of security in previous years remained in jail; they included prisoners of conscience. Some 330 security suspects received unfair trials before a newly constituted but closed specialized court; one was sentenced to death and 323 were sentenced to terms of imprisonment. es.”**

There you have it -- a grand collection of bastards, yes. But remember: they're our bastards!

And there's not a mention of the South American dictators Ed comment



## Billy Ray Cyrus Scared of Atheist Sign

Somewhere on the list of topics I rarely discuss on this site much is Hannah Montana. But that's about to change now that singer **Billy Ray Cyrus** has told *GQ* about how his relationship to daughter **Miley Cyrus** has strained and how his life is fallig apart He should've seen it coming

"Somewhere along this journey," he says, "both mine and Miley's faith has been shaken. That saddens me the most." When they first came to Hollywood for *Hannah Montana*, the two of them would drive down the freeway together to the studio each morning, and every day Miley would point out the sign that said

### ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY ATHEISTS UNITED

Just before moving out to Los Angeles, the whole family had been baptized together by their pastor at the People's Church in Franklin, Tennessee. "It was Tish's idea," he remembers. "She said, 'We're going to be under attack, and we have to be strong in our faith and we're all going to be baptized...'" And there, driving to work each day in the City of Angels, was this sign. "A physical sign. It could have easily said 'You will now be attacked by Satan.' 'Entering this industry, you are now on the highway to darkness...'"

*Do you really see it in such clearly spiritual terms — that your family was under attack by Satan?*

"I think we are right now. No doubt. There's no doubt about it."

*And why is that happening?*

"It's the way it is. There has always been a battle between good and evil. Always will be. You think, 'This is a chance to make family entertainment, bring families together... ' and look what it's turned into.

**"So the sign that says atheists not only exist but are helping clean up litter on public roads was an indication to Billy Ray that he was about to be attacked by Satan?"**



Yep. That's pure evil right there...

This is how religion brainwashes you. Here is a perfect example of decent people helping their community, but all he sees are people out to destroy his life because they don't worship a particular deity.

It's silly, really. When money and worldwide celebrity mix together the way it has for his family, it's hard to believe Jesus would've made everything better. There's no need to blame the atheists for any of his problem

## The board of directors of The American Humanist Association

LOUIS ALTMAN received a law degree from Harvard and started a career as an intellectual property attorney in both private and corporate practice. He has been involved with numerous humanist and nontheistic organizations, including serving on the board of the Sarasota Congregation for Humanistic Judaism and the Executive Committee of the board of the Humanists of Florida, an affiliate of the American Humanist Association. Since 2000, he has served on the Executive Committee of the Society for Humanistic Judaism in various roles, and has been their President since 2006.

Worried about the growing influence of theism on our nation, Altman has worked to defend the integrity of scientific research, the quality of education, and our tradition of separation of church and state.

ROBERT BOSTON is assistant director of communications for Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) and the assistant editor of AU's monthly magazine *Church & State*. He is recognized as a leading writer and researcher on church-state topics and an articulate advocate for the separation of church and state. He frequently writes about the political goals of the Religious Right and other church-state issues, such as religion in public schools, tax aid to sectarian education and religious freedom. He covers the U.S. Supreme Court for *Church & State* and has attended oral arguments in every church-state case at the high court since 1988.

Boston is the author of three books: *Close Encounters with the Religious Right: Journeys into the Twilight Zone of Religion and Politics* (Prometheus Books, 2000); *The Most Dangerous Man in America? Pat Robertson and the Rise of the Christian Coalition* (Prometheus Books, 1996) and *Why the Religious Right Is Wrong About Separation of Church and State* (Prometheus Books, 1993; second edition, 2003).

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REBECCA HALE is a lifelong Humanist, beginning as a child in New York under the official religious category of Unitarian. She holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of Colorado, which she has used in careers as a city administrator, real estate/resort developer, and college administrator. She currently works tirelessly for freethought and Humanism by running EvolveFISH.com and serving on the board of the Freethinkers of Colorado Springs, both of which she and her husband Gary Betchan founded a little over eleven years ago. She was recently granted Celebrant status by the Humanist Society. Rebecca has been certified by the Educational Kinesiology Foundation and has continued in this work by developing programs and curriculum for teachers and seniors. She has two children, Josh, age 23, and Tani, age 5; they are both brilliant, free spirited Humanists in their own right.

JENNIFER KALMANSON is a space systems engineer. She has provided system engineering support to the Hubble Space Telescope servicing Mission 4, the Dawn mission to the asteroid belt, and supported a Phase A study to design a mission to fly humankind's first operational solar sail. She is a board member and chapter coordinator of the Washington Area Secular Humanists-DC Chapter and a Humanist Celebrant. She lives in Laurel, Maryland.

HOWARD KATZ is president of the Humanist Society, an adjunct of the American Humanist Association which certifies Humanist Celebrants. He has been a Celebrant for over seven years. Howard has been active with the Americans Civil Liberties Union and was awarded the ACLU of Illinois' Volunteer of the Year award. He's a former officer of Illinois National Organization for Women (NOW), board member of the local Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and board member of the Humanists of West Suburban Chicagoland. He's held multiple public offices and is currently parliamentarian of his County Democratic organization. He's been a member of the AHA for over 30 years after being introduced to humanism in his 20s.

AMANDA KNIEF is the Government Relations Manager at the Secular Coalition for America and co-founder of the Iowa Atheists and Freethinkers. She formerly served as legal counsel for the Legislative Services Agency, the nonpartisan division of the Iowa Legislature. She is a graduate of Drake University Law School and Iowa State University. She is an avid rock climber and bibliophile.

RAUL MARTINEZ was introduced to skeptical thought by his father at a young age, borrowing copies of the Skeptical Inquirer magazine. He read the Humanist Manifesto before he was ten, and identified as a humanist when he was twelve, what he refers to as "the age of reason". Born in Mexico City, he moved to the United States in 1996, becoming a citizen in May of 2001. He joined the Humanist Association of Las Vegas and Southern Nevada in 2002 and was elected Vice President of the organization in December of 2003. He became a board member of the Las Vegas Freethought Society in 2004.

MARILYN WESTFALL, who holds a Ph.D. in English, served as director of programs for the First Unitarian Universalist Church in Lubbock, Texas, and was a founding member of UU Infidels.

HERB SILVERMAN became involved in religious freedom issues when he won a unanimous decision in the South Carolina Supreme Court striking down a statute in the state constitution prohibiting nontheists from serving in public office. He then founded the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry in Charleston, SC, and also founded and serves as a faculty advisor to the College of Charleston student Atheist/Humanist Alliance. He is a national board member of the Atheist Alliance International, an advisory board member of the Secular Student Alliance, a state board member of the South Carolina ACLU, a member of the National Advisory Council of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a board member of the Humanist Institute, and the president of the Secular Coalition for America.

Silverman has appeared in a number of debates representing the humanist point of view, including one at the Oxford Union in England on the topic: Does American Religion Undermine American Values? He has spoken at a number of conferences and written articles for the *Humanist* and other freethought publications. He also has a mathematics book on Complex Variables and a chapter called "Innerancy Turned Political" in *The Fundamentals of Extremism*.

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**The Humanists of Ft Worth is a member of:**

