



The Ft Worth Humanists meet on the second Wednesday of each month at 7 PM. The gathering site is the Unitarian/Universalist Building 901 Page Ave. Prior to the meeting, several of us dine at Luby's Cafeteria, 2800 8th Ave. at 5:30 P M. All are welcome to join us!

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## ELECTION OF OFFICERS, SHORT HISTORY OF HUMANISTS, LONG OPEN DISCUSSION

June begins a new year for HOFW and at our May meeting, the 14th, we shall elect new officers: Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. Please make every effort to come, participate, and keep our chapter alive and vital in Fort Worth. Where else can you meet, converse, and enjoy the company of like minded free-thinkers?

As chairperson for the last 18 months or so I thank all our members who have attended and contributed their assistance in making our meetings as interesting as they have been. I thank our new members too who have joined and made us that much stronger.

In this last meeting as chairperson I want to talk a little about the history of great humanists and then open up a long discussion where everyone has the opportunity to describe her or his own choice of heroes and heroines and to ask and answer questions.

Give a little thought to your choice/s and come prepared to share ideas and enjoy the camaraderie of fellow heretics.

Dick Trice

**“A person who believes that Elvis is still alive is very unlikely to get promoted to a position of great power and responsibility in our society.** Neither will a person who believes that the holocaust was a hoax. But people who believe equally irrational things about God and the bible are now running our country. This is genuinely terrifying.”

“Despite a full century of scientific insights attesting to the antiquity of the earth, more than half of our neighbors believe that the entire cosmos was created six thousand years ago. This is, incidentally, about a thousand years after the Sumerians invented glue.” Sam Harris from *Letters to a Christian Nation*

**New research by the Indiana University School of Medicine shows that 59 percent of doctors support legislation to establish a national health insurance system,** up from 49 percent in 2002. Only 32 percent of doctors said they were opposed. A slightly lower percentage, 55 percent, agreed with a different question on what researchers considered “incremental” reform—that is, one that relies on tweaking the existing employer-based insurance system and filling in the gaps from there.

“National health insurance is national health insurance,” says Aaron Carroll, director of the Center for Health Policy and Professionalism Research at the medical school. “They [doctors] support a plan where there is government legislation to establish government financing for health care—a Medicare-for-all type of plan.”

In this campaign, which has offered a bumper crop of politicians and a thicket of platitudes about the American health insurance system, no one except Rep. Dennis Kucinich, the Ohio Democrat who long ago abandoned his presidential run, has proposed a national, single-payer system of insurance. The fear factor keeps politicians well behind doctors, even though many physicians might see their incomes shrink under a national health insurance plan. From: [www.Truthdig.com](http://www.Truthdig.com)

## This Week in God By Steve Benen

First up from the God machine this week is a church-state controversy I've been following for several years now, which I admit I find endlessly entertaining. Best of all, the controversy is going to be [heard by the Supreme Court](#), which guarantees an enormous amount of interest.

If a city allows a monument with the Ten Commandments to be erected in a public park, must it also allow other religions and groups to display monuments of their choosing? The Supreme Court agreed Monday to take up that question in an unusual dispute over the reach of the 1st Amendment and freedom of speech. In the past, the court has said the free-speech rule applies in parks and officials may not discriminate against speakers or groups because of their message. In this context, freedom of speech means a freedom from government restrictions.

But last year, the U.S. appeals court in Denver extended this free-speech rule to cover the monuments, statues and displays in a public park. It ruled in favor of a religious group called Summum, which says it wants to erect its "Seven Aphorisms of Summum" next to the Ten Commandments in Pioneer Park in Pleasant Grove, Utah.

Its ruling left the city with an all-or-nothing choice: Allow Summum and others to erect their own displays in the park, or remove the other monuments.

It's a classic case for conservatives who say we need more religion in the public square — and then balk if they don't like the religions asking for equal treatment.

Local officials in this case want to allow the Ten Commandments (which they like) to be promoted on public property, but want to reject the "Seven Aphorisms of Summum" (which they don't like). When officials say they support more public endorsement of religion, they mean *their* religion.

Here's the funny part: Pleasant Grove is getting legal assistance from TV preacher Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice.

And the rest of the religious right insist that we need more religion in the "public square."

Yes, the legal group that brags about its efforts to get state-sponsored religion on public property is helping a local government keep a religious group from erecting a religious monument.

The ACLJ and the rest of the religious right insist that we need more religion in the "public square."

The Summum agree. Christian activists respond, "Uh, we didn't mean you guys." The Supreme Court will hear the case in a few months. I look forward to hearing conservative religious activists nationwide argue vehemently against more religious displays.

**Also from the God Machine this week,** The Virginian Pilot's Bill Sizemore, who knows about as much of Pat Robertson as anyone, had a fascinating observation about Robertson's plans for the Second Coming. See [www.rightwingwatch.org](http://www.rightwingwatch.org)

In order to prepare for the imminent Second Coming — which Robertson believes will occur on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem according to biblical prophecy — he acquired METV (Middle East Television), a station then based in southern Lebanon that could broadcast into Israel. Straub was given marching orders to be ready to televise Christ's return.

CBN executives drew up a detailed plan to broadcast the event to every nation and in all languages. Straub wrote: "We even discussed how Jesus' radiance might be too bright for the cameras and how we would have to make adjustments for that problem.

Can you imagine telling Jesus, 'Hey, Lord, please tone down your luminosity; we're having a problem with contrast. You're causing the picture to flare.'"

I don't think I can respond to this any better than Yglesias did "Good thing that as long as the Republicans are in charge we don't need to worry about any nutty pastors getting political influence."

***"When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying the cross."***  
**Sinclair Lewis**

**Sen. Joe Lieberman (I - CT)** is actively campaigning for John Mc Cain, the Republican presidential candidate. Sen. Lieberman has been referred to as the senator from Israel by many of his detractors because he maintains a position that Israel must be protected by the US at all costs (to us).

Lieberman, is an orthodox Jew, which is not unlike a fundamentalist Christian when it comes to the interests of Israel.

On most every other issue the senator is a moderate, but when it comes to Israel's interests he might as well be member of the Knesset.

### **Excerpted from DaylightAtheism.org**

I don't make it my mission to slap down every loudmouth religious-right crackpot on the internet. Really, I don't. If I wanted to make it my mission, I could do nothing else, but it wouldn't accomplish anything and it wouldn't make for a very interesting site.

However, the other day, [\*this giant, flaming meteor of stupidity\*](#) landed in my inbox, and it was just too tempting not to have a go. The author of this benighted epistle is Michael Medved, nationally syndicated right-wing radio host. In it, he applies his talents to the issue of why atheists are unfit to serve as president of the United States of America.

First:

Just as the Queen plays a formal role as head of the Church of England, the President functions as head of the "Church of America" – that informal, tolerant but profoundly important civic religion that dominates all our national holidays and historic milestones.

The "Church of America"? Good grief. Does Medved really think a vital part of the President's job description is to issue mushy ecumenical proclamations reassuring voters that God approves of us?

I must have missed that line in Article II. Somehow, I think the nation could soldier on if the President didn't come out of the White House every so often to give us all a theistic pat on the head. The President is the *President*, not the Pope of America. His job is to faithfully execute the laws. That's all. I can assure Medved that those Americans who wish to go on believing have more than ample opportunity to find like-minded clergy members elsewhere.

For instance, try to imagine an atheist president issuing the annual Thanksgiving proclamation. To whom would he extend thanks in the name of his grateful nation—the Indians in Massachusetts? Oh, the horrors that would ensue if a president refused to issue a religious proclamation at Thanksgiving! Good thing we never had a president who dared such an impious act!

What? We did? Who was he, some kind of liberal?

I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises, its discipline, or its doctrines; nor of the religious societies that the general government should be invested with the power of effecting any uniformity of time or matter among them. Fasting and prayer are religious exercises.

The enjoining them, an act of discipline. Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the times for these exercises, and the objects proper for them, according to their own particular tenets; and this right can never be safer than in their own hands where the Constitution has deposited it... every one must act according to the dictates of his own reason, and mine tells me that civil powers alone have been given to the President of the United States, and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents. Oh, yeah: it was the guy who [wrote the Declaration of Independence](#)

Then there's the significant matter of the Pledge of Allegiance. Would President Atheist pronounce the controversial words "under God"? If he did, he'd stand accused (rightly) of rank hypocrisy. And if he didn't, he'd pointedly excuse himself from a daily ritual that overwhelming majorities of his fellow citizens consider meaningful.

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I have a third alternative: why not say the Pledge *as it was originally written*, by Baptist minister Francis Bellamy, before a meddling Congress inserted the words "under God" in the 1950s to give themselves a talking point about how we were superior to those evil, godless commies?

Medved unintentionally puts his finger on a reason why the Pledge *should* be restored. It's quite true that the President should be able to participate in the patriotic rituals that unite us as a people. That's why the current, religionized Pledge is so unfortunate - *because it divides us*, and makes a large number of Americans reluctant to participate in this civic institution without being made to violate their own consciences or feel like outsiders.

That's why it should be fixed, so that all Americans, religious or not, can participate. Medved's solution is to preserve that bigotry and keep the atheists out; I would rather get rid of the divisive language so that atheists can enter fully into the fold of American citizenship.

Next, Medved says, the "United States remains a profoundly, uniquely religious society" and should have a leader whose beliefs reflect that. Yet at the same time, he says, a candidate like Mitt Romney or Joe Lieberman would still be qualified:

There's a difference between an atheist, however, and a Mormon or a Jew – despite the fact that the same U.S. population (about five million) claims membership in each of the three groups.

Uh, no. The most recent major survey done on this issue, last month's [Pew poll](#), found that self-declared atheists and agnostics account for about 4% of the population. That's 12 million people. The "secular unaffiliated", very likely atheists in all but name, are another 6%. That's 30 million people, not five. Perhaps five million people seems like a small enough minority for Medved to safely ignore, but 10% of the population is pushing it.

For Mitt and Joe, their religious affiliation reflected their heritage and demonstrated their preference for a faith tradition differing from larger Christian denominations.

But embrace of Jewish or Mormon practices doesn't show contempt for the Protestant or Catholic faith of the majority, but affirmation of atheism does.

### **After Years of Advocating Electroshock Therapy for Gays, Mormons Finally Talk to Gay Rights Group** 16th April 2008

Continuing with the day's theme of religion and homosexuality, the Mormon Church has changed a long-standing policy and agreed to meet with a support group for gay Mormons.

The group, Affirmation, provides support for LGBT members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, otherwise known as the Mormons. The group has been invited to meet with the current and former commissioners of the Church's Family Services department.

Historically the Church has been vehemently anti-gay. Gay men and women have been thrown out of the church at times, and the Church has actually used electroshock therapy on members in an attempt to drive out homosexual desires. The idea of using "aversion therapy" was heartily endorsed by the Church.

Now, however, after 30 years of refusal to meet with the group, Church officials have set up a meeting with Affirmation.

Fred Riley, current commissioner of the Family Services department in the Church, said: "We believe that is always important to have the opportunity to be given better understanding of your points of view so that the church can appropriately understand your organisation and how best to be helpful."

Affirmation hopes to address the Church's historical treatment of gays at their meeting. This includes discussing the Church's approval of electroshock treatments as well as its policy of encouraging gay members to "cure" themselves by marrying members of the opposite sex.

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Affirmation's website discusses the issue, saying: "Scientific evidence does not show that conversion therapy works and that it can do more harm than good. Although some mental health providers do attempt sexual orientation conversion, others question the ethics of trying to alter through therapy a trait that is not a disorder and that is extremely important to an individual's identity."

The meeting is currently scheduled for August.

Posted on [www.pinke.biz](http://www.pinke.biz) (a gay friendly business directory for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT))

## Parenting Beyond Belief: The "Out" Parent

*(HNN's Parenting Beyond Belief column provides a forum for humanist parents and parenting experts to share their wisdom, advice and knowledge of parenting and family issues. Edited by Dale McGowan, the monthly column features guest writers who provide information and support about issues affecting freethought parents and children in the 21st century.)*

COLUMN By NOELL HYMAN  
For [HumanistNetworkNews.org](http://HumanistNetworkNews.org)

I walked into my child's preschool one day right before class was to let out. There was a lobby full of parents and one of them raised her voice above the crowd to say to me, "I noticed your license plate says AGMOM. What does that mean?"

Those of you who have read my articles or blog will recognize it as my blog name, Agnostic Mom. While most of my friends know about this, it wasn't something I wanted to shout across a crowded room of parents at my child's preschool. Yet there they all were, staring at me, curious.

I had figured out an evasive strategy for these types of situations. It goes like this.

1.) Give a vague, answer, like "Oh, it's just a blog name I used to use."

2.) Immediately change the subject. For example, "What are the kids doing? I was so worried I'd be late today because I was..."

My strategy, which I only used in the most threatening situations, seemed to work until the principal of my older children's elementary school took notice of the plates. Thanks to my state's open enrollment policy, my kids attend a progressive public school that is outside of our district.

But don't get the wrong idea. The school is progressive by Mormon-dominated Mesa, Arizona standards, and most of the students are Mormon or active in some other Christian religion.

As I was dropping my kids off at the front of the school one morning, the principal, always happy and enthusiastic, swung the car door open for the kids to get out and asked me, "What does AG-MOM mean?"

I gave my usual "blog name" response, but before I could move on to strategy step number two he asserted, "but what does the AG stand for?"

I had one of those moments where the world somehow pauses for you while a page worth of thoughts and images swim through your mind. This is the argument happening in my mind during that moment:

*He can easily kick my kids out of this school or not allow them back next year.*

*Yeah, but he's progressive and liberal in his philosophies.*

*Progressive or not, he's a Mormon and a believer.*

*But he has filled the school with non-Mormon teachers...he's got a reputation for openness.*

I blurted it out, "It means Agnostic Mom."

He got a look on his face that suggested a realization he had probed in the wrong place; as if to say, "Sorry for making you answer that. It's really not my business."

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He waved goodbye, and immediately the librarian stopped me to say hi. "What does your license plate mean?"

I couldn't believe it. Twice within a minute? But the worst was done. The man with the power to end the type of education that is perfect for my children already knows what it means. Nothing else matters now.

"It means Agnostic Mom," I said, and flashed the librarian a big smile.

Surprised, he let me go, and life has continued as usual. My children were accepted to return to the school next year and even my preschooler will get to start in August for kindergarten.

While Arizona is conservative, the state leans libertarian. Even most Mormons follow a "Live and Let Live" mentality.

Things might have gone differently if we were living in Kansas, a part of the less tolerant Bible-belt where I finished high school. But after five years of telling people I'm atheist or agnostic (whichever term I feel like using at the time) I have not lost a friend and neither have my children. They have chosen to be open about not believing in gods, as well.

Once in a while there is even a surprise response. Like the time my daughter replied to a cafeteria discussion of Jesus with, "I don't believe in Jesus." Her closest friend, whose mother I befriended more than two years prior, answered, "I don't either."

In all those play dates when we swapped ideas on vegetarianism, environmentalism, travel and arts, religion never came into our minds. I had no idea. So when my daughter told me her story, I called and the mother was just as surprised and delighted as I was.

Then last week, my washer repairman asked me what my license plate means and I told him, "Agnostic Mom."

"You don't believe in God?" I laughed, "No." And suddenly he wouldn't stop talking, like I was the first person in years he could share his stories with.

I can't think of a circumstance now where I wouldn't feel comfortable answering a question about my license plate. Venturing into that territory has been a positive thing for me.

Introducing believers to a happy godless person is a positive thing for everyone.

*Noell Hyman is a stay-at-home mom of three children, living in Mesa, Arizona. The once-blogger for AgnosticMom.com, was a regular columnist for Humanist Network News. She is the author of two articles in the book, Parenting Beyond Belief, by Dale McGowan. She now blogs and podcasts on her favorite subject, which is the visual art of story-telling through scrapbooking.*

**Your officers may be contacted as follows:**

**Chair: Dick Trice**

7563 Casburn Ct. Ft Worth, TX 76120

Phone 817-446-3840

email [paandmatrice@sbcglobal.net](mailto:paandmatrice@sbcglobal.net)

**Vice Chair and Newsletter Editor: Ray Weil**

2912 Woodlark Dr. Ft Worth, TX 76123

Phone: 817-346-2402

cell: 817-205-8603 email [alphamail@myway.com](mailto:alphamail@myway.com)

**Secretary: Reed Bilz**

6130 Haley Ln Ft Worth, TX 76132

Phone 817-292-7974 email

[rbilz@charter.net](mailto:rbilz@charter.net)

**Treasurer: Dolores Ruhs**

1036 Hill Top Pass Benbrook, TX 76126

Phone 817-249-1829

email [ruhsdol@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ruhsdol@sbcglobal.net)

**Recent Past Chair: Don Ruhs**

1036 Hill Top Pass Benbrook TX 76126

Phone 817 249-1829

email: [laidback935@sbcglobal.net](mailto:laidback935@sbcglobal.net)

**Past Chair: Mike Haney**

924 Roaring Springs Rd Ft Worth, TX 76114 Phone 817-737

-7047

email [mhaneyinfw@charter.net](mailto:mhaneyinfw@charter.net)

**Past Chair and Webmaster: Russell Elleven**

6120 Comfort Dr Ft Worth, TX 76132

Phone 817-370-2171

[doctorelleven@gmail.com](mailto:doctorelleven@gmail.com)