

# Atheist

## Responding to Greg Abbott on the Texas Pledge

—by Joe Zamecki, Texas State Director, American Atheists <[www.atheists.org/tx](http://www.atheists.org/tx)>

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott recently wrote an op-ed piece about the new Texas state law passed this year, which added the words “one state, under God” to the Texas Pledge Allegiance to the Texas state flag.

Just the title of the piece “Protecting the Texas Pledge of Allegiance,” reveals a dishonest approach on his part. It implies that our Texas Pledge of Allegiance is under attack somehow. The new law added something to the pledge, it didn’t subtract anything, and no one has suggested removing anything from that pledge that wasn’t there as recently as last year.

Obviously the problem with that pledge is the new “law respecting an establishment of religion,” passed by our Texas State Legislature this year. Does that phrase sound familiar? It should.

Our federal congress is specifically forbidden from doing what it did several times already. It is forbidden from making a “law respecting an establishment of religion,” by the First Amendment to our federal

Constitution. Yet they did exactly that in the 1950s, during a very dark time in our nation’s history that we call the McCarthy Era, or the “Red Scare.”

In order that our country look even MORE religious than it seemed to be in the 1950s, our federal Congress passed a religious law adding

more glaring. Congress made laws “respecting an establishment of religion,” and we Americans are still having to cope with them.

So now we have the Texas State Legislature attempting to imitate the violation of the US Congress, by passing a “law respecting an establishment of religion,” on the

forming. I’m sure that most of them would oppose any government demanding that its citizens recite a religious pledge, or a pledge to a god. They certainly wouldn’t want there to be a law mandating that we all say that we live UNDER a god. So they made the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause, to protect us

### **The Web site <[www.texaspolicecentral.com/plrdge.html](http://www.texaspolicecentral.com/plrdge.html)> has this to say:**

“Honor the Texas flag; I pledge allegiance to thee, Texas, one state under God, one and indivisible.”

In 1933 the legislature passed a law establishing rules for the proper display of the flag and providing for a pledge to the flag: “Honor the Texas Flag of 1836; I pledge allegiance to thee, Texas, one and indivisible.” The pledge erroneously referred to the 1836 national flag, known as David G. Burnet’s flag, instead of the Lone Star Flag. Senator Searcy Bracewell introduced a bill to correct this error in 1951, but the legislature did not delete the words “of 1836” until 1965.”

The pledge was again amended by House Bill 1034 during the 80th Legislature with the addition of “one state under God.” The revised wording became effective on June 15, 2007.

“under God” to the federal Pledge of Allegiance, and it passed another religious law adding “In God We Trust” to our paper money, and it passed another religious law changing the traditional motto “E Pluribus Unum,” (“Out of many, one”) to “In God We Trust.” Those violations of the US Constitution couldn’t be

state level. Even if our Texas State Constitution also had the ban on religious laws, it seems that our state legislature would ignore that ban just like our federal Congress did.

Atty. Gen. Abbott listed a number of bogus reasons for this new state law. First he used the tradition argument. Because “under God” has been in our federal Pledge of Allegiance for over 50 years, it must be legitimate. In other words, anything that’s been in place for a long time must be right. I hardly need to point out the fallacy of that.

Then he used the old idea that, “the Founding Fathers were religious, so religious laws must be okay.” The Founding Fathers were religious, sure, but they probably had no idea how far a religion could be pushed by the government they were

all against religious laws like this.

No one is challenging the right of politicians to be religious, or to express their personal religious beliefs. The problem with religion in the Pledge of Allegiance is that government has no right to enforce religious pledges on anyone. Freedom FROM religion is a prerequisite to freedom OF religion.

Then Atty. Gen. Abbott uses the argument from the Declaration of Independence. This is not very helpful, if you’ve ever read that document. It refers to Indians as “savages” and is basically a letter regarding the king of England at the time. It’s really not a founding document because there was no official government to send it. Only a group of upstart wealthy white

—Continued on page 2

### In This Issue

**Responding to Gregg Abbott on the Texas Pledge** \_\_\_\_\_ **Cover**

**Inside the ACA: Press Releases: Committee Head Changes** \_\_\_\_\_ **2**

**Looking into the Ouster of Chris Comer** \_\_\_\_\_ **3**

**ACA Calendar** \_\_\_\_\_ **3**

**Atheist Eve (Cartoon)** \_\_\_\_\_ **4**

## About ACA

ACA provides opportunities for socializing and friendship, promotes atheistic viewpoints, encourages positive atheist culture, defends the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, opposes discrimination against atheists, provides outreach to atheists in the greater Austin area, and works with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

ACA produces a live cable access TV show and Internet radio show, presents a monthly lecture series, maintains a library of Freethought books, protests in support of civil liberties, and participates in various community service activities.

ACA operates in an open and democratic manner to provide a community of like-minded people for social interaction and support.

ACA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational corporation made up of volunteers. The membership is restricted to atheists, but does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, or disability.

## ACA Board of Directors

### President

Matt Dillahunt

### Vice President

Don Baker

### Treasurer

Michael Swift

### Secretary

Mark Loewe

### Directors

Shilling Cadena

Steven Elliott

Ashley Perrien

Don Rhoades

Joe Rhodes

## Contact

### Atheist Community of Austin

P. O. Box 3798

Austin, TX 78764

512.371.2911 (voice mail)

[www.atheist-community.org](http://www.atheist-community.org)

[info@atheist-community.org](mailto:info@atheist-community.org)

## Austin Atheist Newsletter

Editors: Matt Dillahunt, Don Baker

Design/Production: Tracie Harris

[editor@atheist-community.org](mailto:editor@atheist-community.org)

## Submission Deadlines

Issue	Deadline
Jan. _____	Dec. 1
Feb. _____	Jan. 1
March _____	Feb. 1
April _____	March 1
May _____	April 1
June _____	May 1
July _____	June 1
Aug. _____	July 1
Sept. _____	Aug. 1
Oct. _____	Sept. 1
Nov. _____	Oct. 1
Dec. _____	Nov. 1

# Pledge

—Continued from page 1

men who were tired of paying their taxes and housing British troops in their homes.

The REAL founding document of our nation is the US Constitution, and though it's not at all perfect, and hardly complete, it's a secular document that actually addresses timeless issues that affect us Americans here and now. It is pertinent, whereas the Declaration of Independence stopped being pertinent at the end of the Revolutionary War.

Then Atty. Gen. Abbott uses the "two wrongs make a right" argument, by bringing up the US Congressional Chaplains offices, but fails to mention their rather steep cost. We have two now, one for the House and one for the Senate, and they sometimes take trips abroad on the taxpayers' tab. They each make over \$150,000 per year, and act as religious therapists to Congresspersons, or so they say—a

rather expensive pair of violations.

It is wrong for a single tax dollar to go towards promoting religion. Just because there are other religious violations here and there does not mean that all religious violations are now legally justified. It takes a childish mindset to insist that they are.

He then implies that since some politicians have been religious, we are all therefore religious, with this astounding statement: "With such a clear record of reliance on Providence, it should come as no great surprise or offense to acknowledge God in our state Pledge." This is a preposterous and frightening position to take.

What Atty. Gen. Abbott needs to learn is that not all Americans are evangelical Christians. Our nation, and, yes, our state are both full of a diverse range of people coming from different religious, cultural, ethnic, political, and social backgrounds. We are not all the same. Just because a lot of Texans are Christians, that is no reason for our state government to mandate religion, especially in public schools,

where our children are, away from parental supervision. Texas parents shouldn't have to worry about how much evangelism their kids are going to have to put up with during the school day.

Then Atty. Gen. Abbott sums it all up by stating that the words "one state, under God" is not a religious statement. This is simple denial of the obvious. Here's a good question for Atty. Gen. Abbott: If adding "one state under God" to the Texas Pledge of Allegiance isn't the state government mandating and issuing us all an official state government religion, then what would it take for that to occur? How much of an endorsement, promotion and enforcement of religion would have to happen before our Texas Attorney General sees the violation and the insult? I believe that requiring public school students and others to state that they live UNDER a god is as much of a government endorsement, promotion, and enforcement of religion as could ever possibly happen.

There are lots of other ways that we're all required to help support religion whether we want to or not, so this is one in a long line of violations and insults. As long as America is diverse, and as long as nonreligious Americans make up around 14% of our population, our government needs to stay out of the evangelism business.

Keeping our government secular is not about hostility toward religion; rather it's about fairness and equality in the eyes of the law. It's about treating ALL Americans with respect, in word, not just in deed. It's about making sure that the real needs of humanity take priority over the fantasies and irrational notions of organized religion. And even if you're religious, state/church separation protects YOUR rights as well. ■

*This article was originally published under the title "Protecting the Separation of Church and State," as an op-ed piece in the Pflugerville Pflag in response to Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott's op-ed statement supporting the addition of a religious statement in the Texas Pledge of Allegiance.*

## INSIDE THE ACA

# Committee Head Changes

—by Don Baker

During the last few months, we've had a number of changes to our committee leaders. Changes like this are good for the ACA as new people can bring fresh ideas and enthusiasm to important roles within the organization.

- **Shilling Cadena** is now heading the Activism Committee, which is charged with promoting positive atheism and church-state separation in our larger community.
- **Mark Loewe** is heading a new subcommittee of the Activism Committee for the publication of a nonpartisan voter's guide that will educate our members and other interested parties as to the stands of the various candidates in the 2008 election.
- **Don Rhoades** has assumed the head of the Lectures and Presentations Committee. He will be finding speakers of interest to atheists and the larger community for the ACA Lecture Series.
- **Matt Dillahunt** is now head of the Products Committee. He will be managing the products and promotional items that are available on our products page, <[www.atheist-community.org/products](http://www.atheist-community.org/products)>.

Encourage these new committee heads with your ideas, suggestions, and help. There is much more that the ACA could do with more active involvement in all of our committees. If you have a good idea or want to help, please contact the appropriate person via the committees Web page, <[www.atheist-community.org/activism/committees](http://www.atheist-community.org/activism/committees)>. ■

# Looking into the Ouster of Chris Comer

—by Don Baker

In late November 2007, Director of Science Curriculum for the Texas Educational Agency Chris Comer, was forced to resign for allegedly violating a dubious policy of “endorsing” a speaker and therefore appearing to take a side in an upcoming curriculum review. She had forwarded an e-mail about a then upcoming lecture with the only comment of “FYI.” While other circumstances surrounding her ouster may have been in play, the fact that the lecture was unfavorable to the Intelligent Design/Creationist pseudoscience movement was clearly the precipitating event in Comer’s forced resignation. This sad episode gives us a window into the politics inside the NEA and the ID movement as a whole.

The announcement that Comer forwarded was for a lecture given by Dr. Barbara Forrest, co-author of *Creationism’s Trojan Horse* and expert witness in the Dover Pennsylvania school district Intelligent Design trial. Dr. Forrest has exposed the ID movement for what it is: religion pretending to be science. She exposed it as fraudulent on many levels and her testimony proved pivotal in the Dover ruling that was a deep blow to the movement.

No doubt, the very mention of her name struck nerves within TEA ID promoters. With Comer making her colleagues and the greater community aware of the threat to science education, their hidden agenda was probably set back a few steps.

Because Comer’s actions were allegedly “taking a side” in the upcoming curriculum review, it is likely there is a plan for the ID/creationists to sabotage the TAKS curriculum standards so as to enable the ID movement to make inroads. TEA has apparently been stacked by conservative political appointees. Additionally, State Board of Education Chair Don McLeroy has himself promoted ID in church lectures, and other SBOE members are avid supporters of the movement. With the ouster of Chris Comer, there is one less voice in Texas educational government for science and reason standing in the way of the ID machine.

The Intelligent Design movement has its origins in the “watchmaker” teleological argument for the existence of God advanced by William Paley in 1802. While the design argument is 50 years older than Darwin’s theory of evolution, it has not borne any fruit in our understanding of nature, it has not made any scientific predictions, it has not generated any scientific papers, nor has it been the genesis of any technology giving benefit to mankind. Because so many people have come to recognize the modern incarnation of the design argument, ID, as the latest evolution in Creationism, ID supporters have not gained much traction in scientific circles. More and more, the supporters have resorted to gimmicks and trickery to advance their cause in the public sphere. “Teach the controversy” is one of their gimmicks. Unwritten policies that attempt to sabotage the promotion of science so as to “not show favoritism” against pseudoscience, shredded TEA documents that would expose the perpetrators, and fraudulent ousters are par for the course. The actions of the promot-

ers serve as an admission that they know ID is damaged goods.

The lengths that ID supporters seem to be willing to go raises the question of why they are willing to use deception, hidden agendas, and defraud the voters that elected some of them to public office. The answer, of course, is their deeply held religious beliefs. The Intelligent Design/Creationism movement is almost exclusively Protestant and is largely promoted by Evangelicals. Darwin’s theory of evolution explains the complexity and diversity of life without a designer. It also renders Adam and Eve along with their original sin an obvious fable and effectively obviates the need for Jesus to suffer on the cross and die for everyone’s inherited “sin.” While evolution is not essentially atheistic, it is an elegant and powerful description of biological life that inadvertently does collateral damage to several core tenets of Christianity. TEA Commissioner Robert Scott seemed to admit this conflict when he said, “We teach evolution in public schools. It’s part of our curriculum. But you can be in favor of

a science without bashing people’s faith, too.” Faith that conflicts with reality is just delusion.

Finally, we can learn a few things about Christianity from this sad episode. We see that Christianity has within it powerful movements of individuals who are happy to lie, promote hidden agendas, violate the US Constitution, and sabotage the education of our children to advance their cause. Their tactics clearly demonstrate that Christians have no claim to moral superiority. Religious belief is more likely an impediment to morality as believers value their god over their fellow human beings or the laws of their country. The behavior of ID supporters reminds me of a self-deprecating codependent wife who so adores her abusive husband that she lies and steals to support his drunken carousing. Only in the case of the ID-ers, they are lying and cheating in suppression of our scientific understanding to appease the God that failed to leave any evidence whatsoever of his existence. They have spun around in circles to somehow make the universe of their unjustified faith safe for their God, and He hasn’t even acknowledged their efforts by even showing up. ■

## ACA CALENDAR

### THURSDAY, JANUARY 3

• 7 p.m.-?: *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 5

• 2-3:30 p.m.: *Non-Prophets Internet Radio Show* (See Web site for details)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 6

• 12:15-1:45 p.m.: *ACA Lecture Series* (Austin History Center) Don Rhoades on “Freethinkers in Texas”; *Free and open to the public.*

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 6

• 3-4:30 p.m.: *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 6

• 5 p.m.-?: *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (El Arroyo)

### THURSDAY, JANUARY 10

• 7 p.m.-?: *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 13

• 10-11 a.m.: *Board Meeting* (Romeo’s *outside!*)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 13

• 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: *Regular Sunday Meeting* (Romeo’s)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 13

• 3-4:30 p.m.: *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 13

• 5 p.m.-?: *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (El Arroyo)

### THURSDAY, JANUARY 17

• 7 p.m.-?: *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 19

• 11 a.m.-12 p.m.: *Adopt-a-street Clean Up* (Jack-in-the-Box, Burnet Rd. & Anderson Ln.)

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 19

• 2-3:30 p.m.: *Non-Prophets Internet Radio Show* (See Web site for details)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 20

• 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: *Regular Sunday Meeting* (Romeo’s)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 20

• 3-4:30 p.m.: *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 20

• 5 p.m.-?: *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (El Arroyo)

### THURSDAY, JANUARY 24

• 7 p.m.-?: *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 27

• 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: *Regular Sunday Meeting* (Romeo’s)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 27

• 3-4:30 p.m.: *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 27

• 5 p.m.-?: *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (El Arroyo)

### THURSDAY, JANUARY 31

• 7 p.m.-?: *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

### REGULAR LOCATIONS:

- **Austin History Center**, 9th and Guadalupe. Building opens at noon. Lectures are free and open to the public.
- **Dog & Duck Pub**, North of the Capitol, 406 W. 17th at Guadalupe, 512.479.0598. Informal gathering; food available.
- **IHOP**, 707 E. Cesar Chavez St. (at I-35) downtown.
- **Mike Swift’s house**, log in to the ACA Web site for details.
- **Romeo’s**, 1500 Barton Springs Rd. South of Town Lake.

Unless otherwise indicated, events are open to all atheist and atheist friendly people, regardless of ACA membership status. Check the calendar on the Web site <[www.atheist-community.org/calendar](http://www.atheist-community.org/calendar)> for last minute changes.



Atheist Community of Austin

P. O. Box 3798

Austin, TX 78764

www.atheist-community.org

ATHEIST EVE

TH DESIGN ©2007

