

A U S T I N Atheist

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Texas Atheist Group Releases Voters Guide for 2010

Editor's Note: The following is an official ACA press release that was sent to media contacts across Texas.

Austin, Texas, October 18, 2010 — The Atheist Community of Austin, a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization has released the results of its 2010 candidate questionnaire survey at their website: <http://www.atheist-community.org/political/votersguide/2010>.

The 2010 Voters' Guide is a survey of candidates running for offices voted on by Texans in the 2010 general election. The questionnaire consists of 24 position statements and candidates were asked to rank the strength of their agreement/disagreement with each.

The ACA is conducting and publishing this survey as part of a non-partisan educational effort in line with our missions of education, defending the Constitutional separation of church and state, and promoting positive atheism.

The particular positions statements represent some of the issues and concerns that, while certainly of interest to members of the secular community, are valuable to all voters in determining the candidate that can best represent their positions.

ACA President, Matt Dillahunt, noted that more than 400 surveys were submitted to candidates yet, "...many candidates didn't feel the need to send a response while others returned the questionnaire without responding to any of the positions listed. The atheist and secular community continues to be freely disregarded by the overwhelming majority of candidates and elected officials who are duty-bound to represent the interests of all constituents. While the responses that we received should prove useful to voters, I hope that voters also consider those candidates who did not reply and ask themselves and those candidates why they were disinclined to respond to simple position statements."

The questionnaire covered First Amendment, education and civil rights issues and is available at the ACA website in multiple formats, including summaries. ■

Some of the 2010 Voters Guide Questions:

The Voters' Guide is based on the candidates' level of agreement or disagreement with 24 questions, some samples of which follow:

1. If I am (re-)elected, then I will listen to and fairly represent the interests of atheist constituents.
2. I will not consider religion in any decision to hire, promote, demote, or fire a member of my staff.
3. I would sooner resign from office than allow a religious consideration to cause me to break my oath of office to support our nation's Constitution.
4. Our Constitution's provision that "The Congress shall have Power... To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts," which was adopted unanimously at the Federal Convention of 1787, stands as convincing evidence that the Framers, including Benjamin Franklin and James Madison, considered science and technology to be of fundamental importance.
5. Public schools should provide age-appropriate, scientific information on methods of birth control and ways to reduce health risks of sexual activities.
6. In public school science classes, it is appropriate to teach alternatives to established scientific theories without regard to the extents to which the alternatives are supported by scientific evidence.
7. The age of the Earth is closer to 6 thousand years than to 4 billion years.
8. Speciation and the diversity of life are best explained by evolution through natural selection.
9. Our Constitution's provision that "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States," which applies to all divisions of government (legislative, executive, judicial, military, federal, state, and local), should never be violated.
10. Public school teachers should never be required to respond to religious tests, including to utter "under God" during the Pledge of Allegiance.
11. Whenever children in public schools are free to proclaim "under God" during the Pledge of Allegiance they are free to remain silent or to proclaim alternatives.
12. "E Pluribus Unum" or "In Science We Trust" would be a more divisive national motto than "In God We Trust," "In Allah We Trust," "In Shiva and Vishnu We Trust," or "Gott Mit Uns."
13. Our Constitution's provision that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" requires strict government neutrality in matters of religion and forbids government promotion of ceremonial Deism and monotheism.

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“God and Country Sunday” at the Cornerstone Church

—by David C. Tyler



SBOE candidates Mark Loewe and Ken Mercer.

A CA member and Libertarian candidate for the Dist. 5 SBOE seat, Mark Loewe, along with other area candidates, was invited by Pastor John Hagee to attend the October 17th service. Mark invited me to attend as his guest. I made a few notes and will be relating some observations of the event.

The event was organized in a highly professional manner. The support staff was prepared for the candidates who were all greeted cordially. Tables were laid out in a courtyard where spots were labeled for the individual candidates to stand place any materials. There was a reception room with coffee and snacks where the candidates could be assembled before being guided to their reserved seating. Each candidate was provided

with a sheet of paper with their information on it which they were to present to Pastor Hagee to facilitate proper introductions. There were about 50 candidates and the introductions at the end of the service went off flawlessly.

The service itself was a well-orchestrated high tech event. There was lots of well-amplified music. A small orchestra accompanied a large choir and some talented soloists. Hymns were guided by a soloist and by directions on huge screens on either side of the stage. In between the musical numbers, Pastor Hagee gave a sermon on the blessings of being in the USA, and the duty of Christians to get out and vote for candidates who share their beliefs.

Finally, we got to the main event, which was an address by David Barton, the main force behind the Wallbuilders.com Web site and infamous Christian propagandist. Until now, the service had been mainly music and basic Christian platitudes. This talk was much more focused on patriotic and Christian responsibility to vote and to vote for priority Christian values. He started building the case for American Exceptionalism, which he supported with some highly questionable statistics. These were mainly about the economic and political instability of the rest of the world, particularly Europe. He went on to assert that we owe our exceptional position to God's reward for following core Christian values.

Mr. Barton used his interpretation of the Ten Commandments to inform the congregation of just what those core values should be. This interpretation resulted in a list of four values that are primary.

1. Open display of worship (prayer in schools and government functions).
2. No killing of innocents (abortion, Pro-life).
3. Honor your father and mother (traditional marriage, family only - no gays).
4. Protection of private property (no government eminent domain seizures).

Mr. Barton made it clear that Christians were to get out and vote and evaluate a candidate on the core values only. He went through an explanation of how it is not important to evaluate a candidate's position on social issues. The Bible does not support secular solutions to social problems

and Barton then gave a number of statistics about how faith-based solutions are better. He used these to statistics support the success of faith-based prisons, rehabilitation programs, and of charity programs as opposed to allegedly unsuccessful secular programs. A candidate supporting secular social solutions instead of core values should not be supported. He presented more statistics to support a claim that one only has to know a candidate's stand on one of the core issues to be able to predict with 90% accuracy on other issues. This simplicity allows for easy evaluations. If that is too difficult, one is advised to check on Christianvotersguide.com.

The whole talk was very slick and while not saying anything specific about any one candidate, it offered clear guidance on how to vote based on a very limited number of issues. No need to confuse yourself about economic issues. If you vote the right way on the core four, God will take care of those other unimportant issues. After all Mr. Barton, and his “unimpeachable” statistics, said so.

After the service, the candidates were allowed to return to their tables. Most of the congregation were polite and forgot to ask the litmus test questions. ■

2010 Bat Cruise a Success

—by Don Baker

The fifth annual ACA Bat Cruise sailed on Saturday, September 25, 2010. Around 100 participants came to Austin for a day of events geared at luring atheists in to Austin from around the state and around the country. Events included a pre-cruise lecture by Matt Dillahunty on “The Superiority of Secular Morality,” the cruise itself went from 6pm until after Sunset. After dinner, a sizable fraction of the group went to Esther’s Follies comedy club for an evening of fun. We had guests from as far away as Seattle and Trinidad and Tobago as well as many guests from Houston and Dallas.

The cruise itself was a nice mix of conversation, snacking, and bat watching. Austin is the home to the largest urban bat population in the world and they emerge from under the Congress Avenue Bridge at sunset for forage for food. Being on the river is the best place to watch the bats as they can be seen clearly in silhouette.

Everyone enjoyed the day and we look forward to a similar day of activities next year. Special thanks goes to ACA Treasurer John Iacoletti, who organized the event. ■



Above: Viewing the Congress Avenue Bridge from the top deck of the boat at sunset.



Left: Snacking and conversation on the bottom deck.

ACA CALENDAR

TUESDAY, NOV 2

- Election Day—Your vote matters!

THURSDAY, NOV 4

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

SUNDAY, NOV 7

- 10 a.m.-?: Pre-lecture brunch meet-up (Hickory Street)

SUNDAY, NOV 7

- 12:15-1:45 p.m.: ACA Lecture Series (Austin History Center; Eileen Flynn Delao on “Observations: Why the Media Still Fears Atheists, and other observations from a religion writer”; Free)
- 4:30-5:30 p.m.: The Atheist Experience (Channel 10-16)

- 6 p.m.-?: Meet-up after The Atheist Experience (Threadgill’s)

THURSDAY, NOV 11

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

SUNDAY, NOV 14

- 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.: Regular Sunday Meeting (Romeo’s)
- 12:30-1:30 p.m.: Board Meeting (Romeo’s, outside)

WEDNESDAY, NOV 17

- CFI Food for Thought Lecture (American Legion Post 76, 2201 Veteran’s Drive Austin, Michael Mauk from the Center for Learning and Memory at UT on “How to Build a Cerebellum”; Free)

THURSDAY, NOV 18

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

SUNDAY, NOV 21

- 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.: Regular Sunday Meeting (Romeo’s)
- 4:30-5:30 p.m.: The Atheist Experience (Channel 10-16)
- 6 p.m.-?: Meet-up after The Atheist Experience (Threadgill’s)

THURSDAY, NOV 25

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

SATURDAY, NOV 27

- 10 a.m.-?: Blood Drive (Blood & Tissue Center)

SUNDAY, NOV 28

- 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.: Regular

Sunday Meeting (Romeo’s)

- 4:30-5:30 p.m.: The Atheist Experience (Channel 10-16)
- 6 p.m.-?: Meet-up after The Atheist Experience (Threadgill’s)

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.
- **Hickory Street**, 8th and Congress
- **Romeo’s**, 1500 Barton Springs Rd. South of Town Lake.
- **Threadgill’s**, 301 West Riverside Drive (at Barton Springs Rd.)

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> for last minute changes.



Atheist Community of Austin

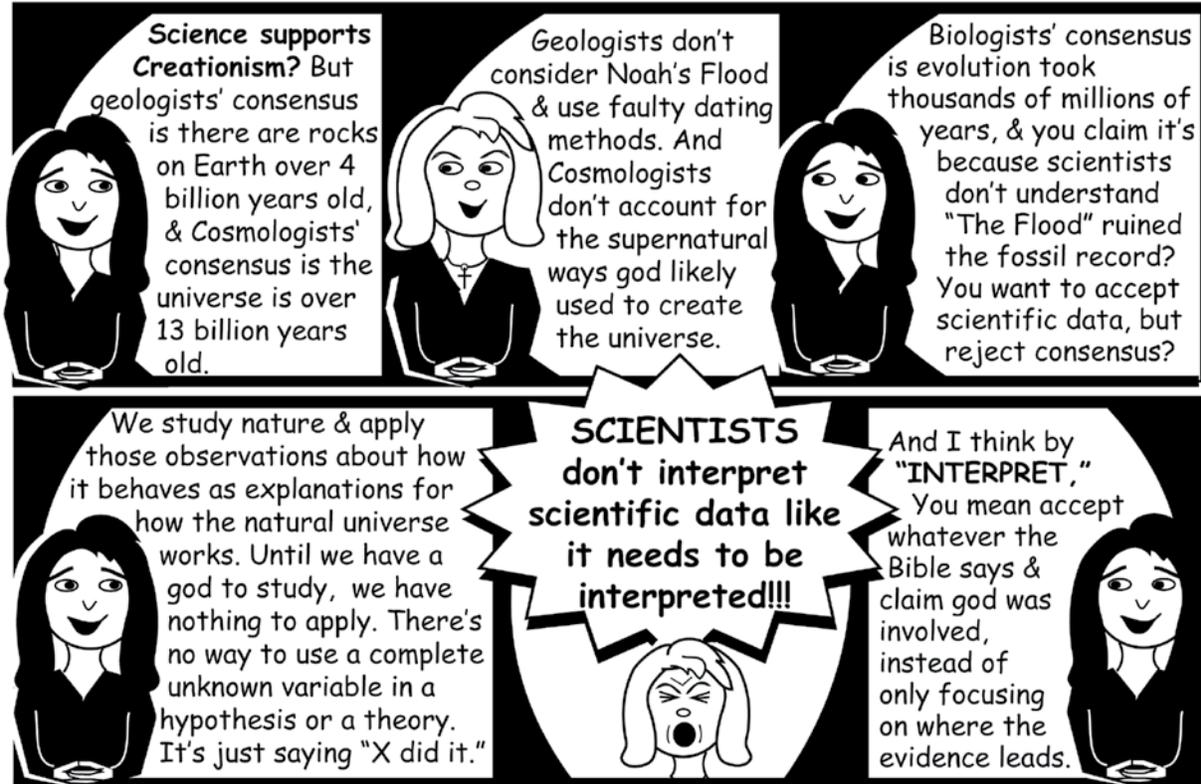
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ATHEIST EVE

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