

THE ATHEIST

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin, a Nonprofit Organization

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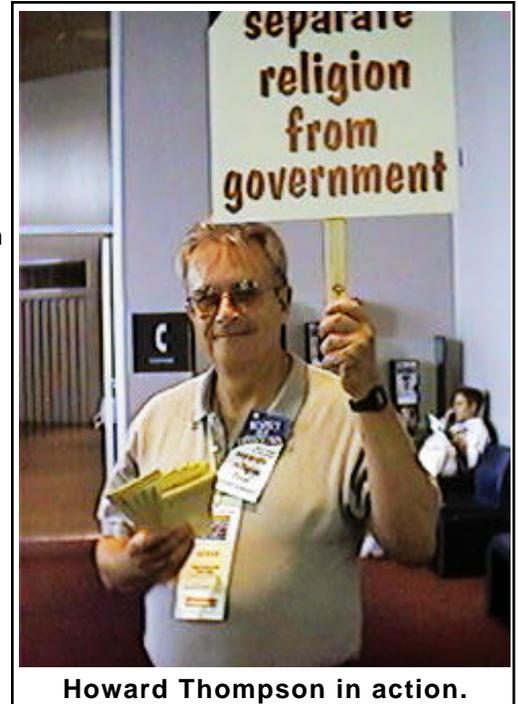
Volume # 4 No. #8

The Respect Our Constitution Story

ROC began in January as an experiment in non-theistic political action. The effort encouraged non-theists to take three ROC resolutions to political party precinct conventions the evening of primary elections. The Three Resolutions were:

- 1) To Teach Texas Government officials about U.S. Constitutional separation of religion from government so that they may understand the duties of their oath to uphold the Constitution.
- 2) To establish equal civil rights for non-theistic Texans by voiding Texas Constitution provisions that bar non-theists from holding public office.
- 3) To guarantee all Texas students an excellent Science education by taking authority for science textbooks away from the State Board of Education and giving it to state college science professors.

Over 30 non-theists attended precinct conventions as a result of the ROC effort. Many became delegates to the County/Senatorial District conventions. About 20 got selected as delegates to state party conventions. Almost all our delegates were in the Democratic party with a few Republican delegates.



Howard Thompson in action.

Few political efforts ever got as much bang for the buck out of a thousand dollars.



Fearless Atheist activists work the ROC booth. (l to r) Jeff Dee, Don Rhoades, Rodney Florence, and Howard Thompson

At least one ROC resolutions passed in eight different Democratic county conventions. All three ROC resolutions passed in the Travis County convention. Republican delegates reported zero success and many Christian fundamentalists at Republican meetings.

We were surprised by our Democratic party success. There was some opposition to ROC resolutions. They did, however, get a lot of general support. We demonstrated the existence of opposition to the religious right within the Democratic party. We discovered that there were lots of people in the Democratic party who would support non-theistic resolutions.

ROC built on this success with a larger effort at the state Democratic party convention. We raised \$1,000 for a ROC booth, signs and flyers to promote our resolutions and make our non-theistic effort visible to thousands of Democrats. Few political efforts ever got as much bang for the buck out of a thousand dollars.

~Howard Thompson



During the caucus, at least 100 political activists heard the good news of State/Church separation.

Democratic State Convention a Success

Thanks go to John Koonz, Michelle Gadush, Julie Fisher, Jeff Dee, Manda Dee, Don Rhodes, Catherine Fahringer, Fred Fahringer, Rudy Holz, Dan Lewandowski and Rodney Florence for passing out ROC flyers and talking to people at our booth. This tiny band made us the most visible and noticed effort for any issue or candidate at the Democratic state convention.

- We were successful in contacting non-theistic and non-religious democrats. About 115 new people joined our contact list. Many others expressed verbal support.
- We successfully publicized the Respect Our Constitution messages of government-religion separation and non-theistic civil rights.
- We handed two ROC flyers to over 1,700 democrats. Especially effective was the slogan, "Just Say No to Pat Robertson" which got heads turning and hands reaching for our flyers.
- We attracted over 100 people to our Freethinker-Atheist-Humanist caucus meeting. They heard the basic ROC message of a godless, unreligious constitution and the case for non-theistic civil rights. Just imagine! Over 100 came to a meeting with atheists at a political convention! Dozens signed up for our mailing list at the meeting!
- We also conducted visible floor demonstrations.
- We held up our "Respect Our Constitution: Separate Religion from Government" signs in front of the podium during the invocation. Dozens joined with us for the old "one nation, indivisible" version of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Lots of people talked with us as we handed out flyers in the

hallways and at our booth. In their various ways, many expressed support for our effort. It made them glad to see someone speaking out openly for the Constitution and non-theistic rights against the religious right.

Most surprising were Rudy Holz and Dan Lewandowski. They became Senatorial District representatives on the 31 member Resolutions Committee. Rudy and Dan were instrumental in getting our Non-Theistic Civil Rights resolution passed out to the floor of the convention. They also helped pass two other church-state separation resolutions. Our Excellence in Science Education resolution failed because of opposition from Christian fundamentalists who wanted elected politicians decided what is or is not accurate science for students to learn.

Lest this success is taken for granted, let me summarize for emphasis. Perhaps three dozen non-theists organized to participate in political party activities with only \$1,000. They got resolutions passed at the Democratic state level and got non-theists into key party roles. They discovered a lot of opposition to the religious right that non-theists can mobilize for church-state separation and non-theistic rights.

One Democratic U.S. Congressional candidate even told us that "under God" was in the Constitution.

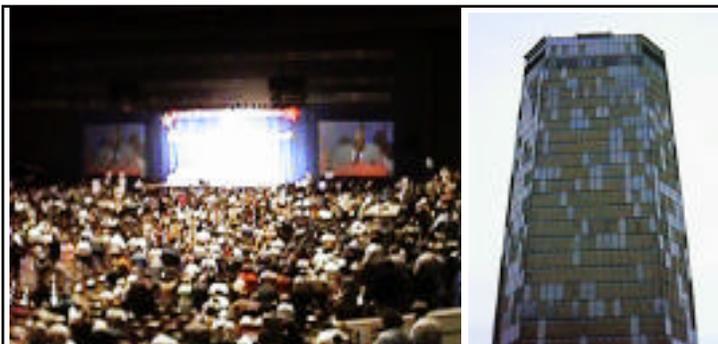
By speaking out, taking action, and showing up, non-theists had some impact in state party politics. We also learned some crucial lessons.

- ❑ What counts is not religious hostility towards non-theists. What counts are those people who agree with us and support our issues. Speaking out for our issues despite the hostility is the only way to find those who agree with us.
- ❑ There are lots of non-theists active in political parties who are not organized as non-theists for non-theistic issues. All it took was a few atheists, freethinkers and humanists speaking out to discover this support for our issues.
- ❑ There are clearly enough non-theistic and non-religious people involved in political parties to have an impact for non-theistic issues within state and national party politics. This means there is a latent power base for non-theistic issues just waiting to be mobilized and organized.
- ❑ Non-theists are as capable for our issues as others who participate in political activities. In many ways, our years of atheistic debates with theists and among ourselves makes us better prepared for

political activities than most of those we talked with. We have nothing to fear in speaking out for many of us are already better prepared than most of those who participate in political party activities.

Party at Don's

On July 29th, Don had an ACA party at his house. And a good time was had by all. Thanks Don!



The Democrats began their convention with a prayer, but Rodney Florence bravely defied them by holding a ROC sign in front of the minister. (Rodney may only appear as a pixel in this image, but he made us all very proud.)

That's funny! Where was their god during the killer tornado that hit Forth Worth earlier this year? Hmmmm.

- There is widespread ignorance about the degree to which the U.S. Constitution strongly separates religion from government. Those who disagreed kept repeating tired old myths about god and the bible in the Constitution and the U.S. founded as a Christian nation. One Democratic U.S. Congressional candidate even told us that "under God" was in the Constitution. This is, if nothing else, an excellent demonstration of the need for our resolution to teach public officials about the Constitution.

~Howard Thompson

Ed note: Although Respect Our Constitution is not an official ACA effort, our charter allows us to work with other groups to achieve common goals. ROC is non-partisan. If you would like more information about this exciting new opportunity for atheist activism, contact Howard at gofreemind@aol.com

A Quote to put on your refrigerator

"If we do not destroy this dangerous invention, it will one day destroy us."

Bishop of London (1474) in reference to the printing press



Your ACA board of directors:

Co-chairs:

Susan Brown
John Koonz

Treasurer:

Don Rhoades

Secretary:

Earle Beach

Board members:

Keith Berka
Paul Wilson
Michelle Gadush
Russell Glasser
Arval Bohn
Vic Farrow
Jeff Dee
Howard King
Manda Dee

And The Survey Says:

Q. What would you like to tell middle school kids about atheism?

A. "An atheist isn't somebody who hates God. An atheist is someone who looks at things and thinks about things, and decides that there is not a god, and there never ever was."

"Deciding to be an atheist is like finding a perfect drug that makes you feel like you're in total control of yourself, and you like you! It's like when you come out from under the blanket in the morning and breathe fresh air. It's like knowing that no one will ever tell you you're stupid for asking questions, ever again."

Recreational Religion

Brother Arlo demonstrates that for a price, even an atheist can become a deacon.



Proving that truth is stranger than fiction, Arlo Pignotti provided a highly entertaining lecture on August 6th. Rather than give a lecture on a specific topic, Arlo showed some very bizarre religious items that he has collected.

All of the items he showed were the real thing. They were not originally intended to parody religious faith. The absurdity of it kept us laughing for hours.

It just goes to show how religious belief fuels an entire industry.



Come To Me Triple Fast Action

Spiritual Bath and Floor Wash

The instructions say to: Pour 1/2 into warm water while reading the 23rd psalm . . .Scrub the floor as needed while concentrating on your desires. . .

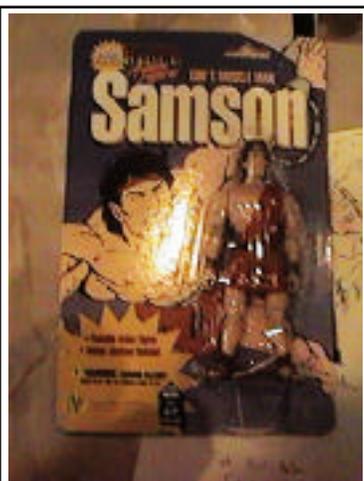
Ed note: What can I say?



Head spinning around lately? Try a home exorcism kit.

Announcements

- **Weekly Meetings** Sunday Mornings at Hot Jumbo Bagelry, 307 West 5th Street at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings when lectures are not scheduled at Furr's Cafeteria.
- **ACA Board meetings** are on the second Sunday of the month at 12:00. Board meetings are open to all members.
- Annual Freethought and Thought-Free Awards Ray is heading up this effort. These awards will be given on January 4th, 2001, the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Tripoli. Send nominations to John Koonz (jknz@hotmail.com).



The Christians even have buybull action figures! What we need is an Ingersoll action hero to jaw this pompous ass!

- The **TV committee** is always looking for volunteers on Sunday mornings. They also need donations to pay for tapes and training. ACA TV Tapes are now available for \$20.00 each and will be offered over the web soon.
- **Products** New t-shirts have arrived. We still have our original ACA t-shirts which list a number of famous atheists. We also have 'top ten reasons beer is better than Jesus' beer mugs. See Michelle Gadush (gadush@mail.utexas.edu) for more information on these and other exciting atheist products.
- **Library** Our library is now stored at the Hot Jumbo Bagelry! If you would like to donate a book, please be sure to put your name in it so we know who to thank. See Rodney if you would like to check out the newsletters from other atheist groups.
- The next **blood drive** will be September 23rd. Meet at the blood bank at 10:00AM at the Regional Blood and Tissue Center on N. Lamar.. Vic Farrow has taken over the role of blood drive coordinator. After you donate, be sure to give him your coupon so that our account can be credited.

□ Guest Speakers

- Our September 3, 2000 speaker is Dr. William R. Coker of the Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Austin. He will speak about: FAKE SCIENCE, ANTISCIENCE AND IGNORED SCIENCE."
- Our October speaker will be Dr. Ray Mooney of the Department of Computer Science, The University of Texas at Austin. His topic is tentatively titled: "Artificial Intelligence: Minds without Mysticism."
- Lectures are held at Furr's Cafeteria in Northcross Mall, 11:00 am on the first Sunday of the month. Susan Brown liatris@mail.utexas.edu) is in charge of scheduling our lectures.



- **Randalls Donations** Randalls will donate a percentage of the money you spend there to the Atheist Community of Austin. To take advantage of this offer, contact the customer service department of your nearest Randalls. The ACA number is 5158.

For more information about any of these coming events, call (512) 371-2911 or e-mail liatris@mail.utexas.edu

The Atheist is printed on somewhat recycled paper!

Book Reviews

Since we recently had the very interesting panel discussion on the political activism of the Respect our Constitution (ROC) members, I thought this would be an opportune time to recommend one of the books in our library: *The Armchair Activist - Simple Yet Powerful Ways to Fight the Radical Right*, by Felice N. Schwartz and Suzanne K. Levine. Those of you who do not feel up to joining ROC may be interested in reading this book, to learn how you can participate in the political process without investing very much time or effort.

The first part of this book is a concise introduction to the "Radical Right", a term the authors use interchangeably with "Religious Right". Even if you've heard them before, the quotes by Pat Robertson and Pat Buchanan are guaranteed to make you shiver -- hard to believe these idiots are so well known. Like many of you, I once dismissed them as crackpots, but the fact is -- they are dangerous crackpots. They have a lot of power because their followers are politically involved and very organized (and donate lots of bucks). The only way to beat them is to become even more politically involved and well organized

ourselves.

The next several chapters deal in detail with various political issues such as abortion, civil rights, gay rights, prison reform and so on. Particularly chilling is the fact that this book was published just four years ago, and many of these religious right dreams are already well on the way to coming true. At the end of each chapter, the authors give an example of action you could take if you wish to become involved, and some resources. Unfortunately they don't give much information on internet resources and contacts, but if you do a search, you will find almost all of these organizations, newsletters, etc. on the net. Also be sure to check out the appendices for more really excellent resources.

The authors then describe action you can take both in and out of your armchair, so that you too can make a difference. There are even sample letters to legislators, which you can use as a guide in writing your own. If even that seems like too much trouble, an increasing number of web sites have letters available, already written. All you have to do is give your name and address, and push a few buttons, and they will spoon-feed you through the process of determining who represents you in the House and Senate, and virtually e-mail the letter for you. This is an incredibly easy way to influence your legislators -- "We're atheists and we vote" -- they will listen if enough of us speak up.

I bought a bunch of these from Hamilton Books and have passed them out to family members, etc. This book is not written specifically for atheists, by the way -- it's important to remember that theists have just as much to lose to the Religious Right agenda as atheists do, so be sure to get them involved also.

Another ACA library book you may want to check out is *Leaving the Fold - A Guide for Former Fundamentalists and Others Leaving Their Religion*, by Marlene Winell. That title pretty much says it all - this book is about recovery. Again, this is not a book solely for atheists, but would probably appeal to anyone who isn't a fundamentalist. If you aren't familiar with the incredibly repressive child-rearing practices involved in Christian Fundamentalism, then you may want to read the first part of this book with the lights on. Creeeeeepy! If you had the misfortune to actually be raised this way, then you probably are carrying around a lot of emotional baggage, like guilt, fear and sexual hang-ups. This book can help you rid yourself of them. (Just like in AA, the first step is admitting that you have a problem.) If you were fortunate enough not to have had this particular brand of child abuse inflicted upon you, then this book can still help you to understand others who are trying to recover from this dysfunctional upbringing.

Happy Reading!

~Susan Loehner

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FOR THE ATHEIST COMMUNITY OF AUSTIN, INC.

Last name: _____ First name: _____

Companion's name (if family or couple membership)

Last name: _____ First name: _____

Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Telephone : (_____) _____ e-mail address: _____

This is to certify that I am a non-theist, that I have read the "Purpose" of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. as stated in the Constitution (below), and that I am in agreement with the principles stated herein. I understand that membership is open only to non-theists.

Purpose

The Atheist Community of Austin is organized as a nonprofit educational corporation to develop and support atheist community; to provide opportunities for socializing and friendship, to promote atheist viewpoints, to encourage positive atheist culture, to defend the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, to oppose discrimination against atheists, and to work with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

This organization shall operate in an open, democratic manner, without discrimination as to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, nationality, or disability.

The Bylaws to this Constitution are intended to further define and explain the operating procedure of this organization. Changes may be made to the Bylaws when necessary to improve the operation of this organization. Changes to the Bylaws shall not alter the purpose of this organization as set forth in its Constitution.

Check all that apply

I wish to become a member of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. Membership fees are \$24.00 per year, but our membership year does not begin until the 1st of March. My prorated membership fee, at \$2.00 per month u n t i l next March, is enclosed.

I wish to make a tax exempt donation to ACA .Please direct my donation to the following fund:

General Fund Building Fund Permanent Fund

I only wish to participate in the e-mail group. My e-mail address is above. No fee is required.

I wish to help ACA save money by receiving The Atheist by e-mail. No fee is required.

I wish to receive a hard copy of The Atheist in the mail. \$10 is enclosed.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please return this form to: Atheist Community of Austin, Inc., P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764

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