Howdy! Well we’ve got quite an active month on tap for May, so here goes with just a few things:

It’s PICKET time again! The National Day of Prayer is again happening at our beloved Texas State Capitol Building, complete with government involvement, sweeping condemnation of liberalism, and really bad music. On Thursday, May 4 at Noon they’ll begin and like last year, we’d like to gather a half hour or so before they begin, for strategy, coordination, and maybe some tall lattes. More info on page 9.

May 7 is ACA election day and two new positions are being created, to replace two previous positions. Also a regular board seat is coming up, and I’m gonna go for it! More info on page 15.

We also feature a report on the American Atheists 32nd National Convention which your loyal editor and co-editor both attended. It was a blast, and there is much to discuss now that it’s over. I wrote an in-depth report on it, and that’s on pages 10-12. I’m proud to say that many issues of Atheist Community News were grabbed up by Atheists there.

We’ll have a booth at the Austin Gay & Lesbian Pride Festival (http://www.pridetexas.org/), Saturday, June 10th at Waterloo Park (East of Downtown on 15th St.). The festival runs from Noon to 8pm. We’ll be handing out fliers, meeting people, selling products, people watching, and having fun. We’ll need volunteers to help out. If you would like to help, contact Don Baker, who is coordinating this all, he’s at: dbaker@atheist-community.org.

And if you’re just picking up this newsletter for the first time, as we’re sure many people will at the Pride Festival, then welcome to an alternative way of thinking! Atheism is about freedom. We are free from god-ism and the fear-mongering that religion relies on. More inside!

Submissions? Send ‘em! joezamecki@hotmail.com Thanks and enjoy! :o)
The Atheist Community of Austin is a local non-profit educational 501(c)3 organization founded in 1996, and is affiliated with American Atheists Inc., the American Humanist Association, and the Council for Secular Humanism, and is a member group of the Atheist Alliance International. The ACA is a democratically run organization. Board meetings are held every second Sunday of the month, and all members are welcome to attend, but only board members may vote at board meetings. Board elections are held every year in May. All paid members may vote at that meeting. If you’d like to run for a position, now’s the time to tell the board. Two new positions will be created this May: president and vice-president. That’s May 7, 2006.

Regular membership in the ACA costs just $24. per year, and the membership year begins in March. You can join anytime though. We also offer student, family, senior and life memberships.

The ACA hosts a monthly lecture at the Austin History Center at the corner of 9th St. and Guadalupe St. This is a community service, and a means of disseminating information and ideas of interest to Atheists and the greater Austin community. Lecture topics usually focus on core areas of Atheist interest such as science, skepticism, the impact of religion, philosophy, church-state separation and community activism. Lectures are scheduled on the 3rd Sunday of every month starting at 12:30 pm in the “Reception Room.” Admission is always free. This month’s lecture will be given by ACA member Mark Loewe.

Atheist Community News is mailed free to paid members of the Atheist Community of Austin as an unofficial benefit of membership. But of course there is a cost to send it in the mail, so if you’d like to save us that postage, we’ll be glad to take you off of our mailing list, and then you can just pick up your copy at the regular meetings. We’ll try to make sure that there are plenty of copies available at each regular meeting. Just e-mail your editor at joezamecki@hotmail.com or call at (512)382-9283, and I’ll make it so.

ACA website  atheist-community.org  ACA Voicemail (512)371-2911
Editorial...

We’re still here! Plowing through the years...

Yes, we’re still here! Humanity that is, after last month’s apocalyptic numerologist’s dream. I’ll explain. On a Wednesday in April, at two minutes and three seconds after 1:00 a.m. in the morning, the time and date was:

01:02:03 04/05/06

Now I’m not much into the lottery, but I’m willing to bet that a lot more gambling took place that day, and at least one apocalyptic cult somewhere in the world took notice with devout interest.

On a lighter note, May is ACA election month. We have an interesting situation in that two old positions, the co-chairs, will be changed into president and vice-president. Also a board seat is coming up open, with the board lineup already there. We’re going to have an election meeting at the Brick Oven North, near the Arboretum. Only paid members may vote at that meeting. The Brick Oven is on 183 North, just Southwest of the intersection of 183 and Braker Ln.

There actually isn’t going to be much change in the board lineup though. We have a great bunch right now.

With that, I’d like to throw my hat into the race for that empty board seat. I served almost a year on the ACA board in 1998, until I moved with American Atheists to New Jersey in December of 1998. In all, I worked full time for American Atheists for almost exactly eight years. Yes, that has earned me a ton of experience working inside Atheist groups, not just AA.

I’d like to run on a platform of growth through a couple of specific pursuits. Obviously number one right now is the print newsletter. But now I’d like to revive the topic of the ACA getting professional office space of some kind. There’s a good example of a local Freethought group that has recently accomplished that, in a big way. Without funding from any national or international group, the Humanist Society of Greater Phoenix, Arizona is now the proud owner of a whole building. So yes, it can be done. More on that later.

Hey check out the results of a recent CNN.com survey: Have you been impressed by the new pope in the past year? Yes, 18% with 6,151 votes and No, 82% with 27,174 votes. As an ex-Catholic who hasn’t yet been excommunicated, I vote no as well. What a rat he is! :o)

On a more positive topic, in this issue we feature an extensive report on the American Atheists National Convention that was held from April 14-16 in San Antonio. We gave out a whole bunch of free literature about the ACA, and now it’s all inside the homes of Atheists and other freethinkers scattered all over our great nation. And in the desks of some media folks.

Now if you’ll remember from the last issue of Atheist Community News, the April 2006 issue, there was a topic discussed right around the middle of the issue, revolving around the print newsletter itself. It was whether to drop the print edition in favor of just the online version. Several reasons were given why it should be dropped, and in the Letters to the Editor section, several reasons to keep it going were also given.

Well as of press time, there remains another reason for keeping it going, which hasn’t been discussed much at meetings, and not at all in this newsletter. I am compelled to bring it up here and now.

On our website, www.atheist-community.org, our newsletter is featured in the newsletter section, www.atheist-community.org/library/newsletters. Back issues of each issue that was published can be found there.

It was suggested that this online version could replace the print version completely, and with the website being much less expensive than the cost of printing, it was considered a fiscally wise move to make. I argued that not everyone is online, or ever will be, and that even those who are online don’t always want to read a long newsletter there, opting instead for something in print. Otherwise the website is a great resource for back issues, and that will always be there. Still lots of ACA members have expressed their desire to read it online only, and save the ACA the money for their copy of that print newsletter. Great! The info gets to the right people, and we save some money. We still need the print version though, of course.

The problem with not getting the print version, and waiting to read it online is happening now. That is, the online version is late in being updated with the latest issue. Today is April 21, and the April issue is still not posted on the website. It’s 21 days late. Those who wanted the print version have it, and most of those people have had it since around April 1st. But those who only want to read it online are stuck out. The website even states that the latest issue is the March issue, but it’s not...

So it’s a darn good thing that we have a print version of our newsletter. The April issue has been out since a few days before April 1, and a whole lot of Atheists have them in their possession. MY job is done.

I don’t mean to come down on our webmaster, so don’t get me wrong there please. He does a great job otherwise. This problem is something that happens eventually with every webmaster. I cannot fault him for this at all. We’re all very busy, so I totally understand.

But the problem is still there, and it underscores the need for a print version.

Also in this issue, we feature a little taste of an article I’m working on for the June issue. We’ve all heard the call to boycott businesses of all kinds because of something they did or said. Usually it’s Christians boycotting a big multi-national company because they treat gays equally or they made fun of the Jesus myth or something like that. Most boycotts don’t seem to be effective, but some have been VERY effective. This article will be about Christian owned and operated businesses. Not to call for a boycott, but to call for more education about those businesses. We Atheists are surrounded, and we need to be aware. I’d also like to do an article in the future about Atheist owned businesses. They exist! :o)
Atheist Community of Austin Social Calendar for May

---Lecture Series---We hold our monthly lectures at the Austin History Center, at the corner of 9th St. and Guadalupe St. We hold them on the third Sunday of each month and they start at 12:30pm in the “Reception Room.” Admission is always free, and it’s open to the public. Updated information about this month’s lecture isn’t currently available.

---Board Meetings---We hold our board meetings on the second Sunday of the month, and lately we’ve held them at the very large Schlotzky’s at the corner of South Lamar and Toomey St., just South of Town Lake. That starts at 10:00am and usually lasts till 11:30am. All members are welcome, but only board members may vote at those board meetings.

---Happy Hour!--- We now meet for Happy Hour at Ninfa’s on 183/Anderson which is just west of I-35 by about a block. It’s on the Northbound side of 183. If you’re coming north on I-35, be sure to take the 183/St.Johns exit, go through St. Johns, and then left onto 183 Northbound, under the overpass. Ninfa’s is famous for their Tex Mex. In fact, many people feel that Ninfa’s actually defines “Tex Mex” setting a high standard for that type of cuisine, and their Margaritas are just as wonderful.

---Regular Weekly Meetings---Sundays at 11:30am at Romeo’s Italian Restaurant on Barton Springs Rd. just West of South Lamar. We meet in the front room, that’s separated a bit from the rest of the place.

---TV Show---The Atheist Experience is our tv show. It airs on Time-Warner Cable, public access channel 10, from 4:30pm - 6:00pm every Sunday. It’s a live call-in talk show, so feel free to call in with comments and questions for the show and their audience. Members of the ACA are also invited to visit the tv studio during the show, as live studio audience members. This show is also repeated, taped, on Tuesdays at 4:30pm on Channel 10. We also need volunteer help on the show from time to time, so if you’re interested in helping out, or if you think you’d like to be a guest on the show, please e-mail: tv@atheist-community.org

---Online Radio Show---”The Non-Prophets” is a regular live internet radio show on the Freethought Radio Network. It airs on alternate Saturdays from 2 PM to 3:30 PM (3-4:30 PM Eastern time) at www.freethoughtradio.com. Just click on “Listen”. The show is hosted by Jeff Dee, co-hosted by Denis Loubet and produced by Russell Glasser.

---Public Demonstrations---Once in a while, we grab picket signs and cameras and hit the pavement in public on issues of importance to us. Usually these can’t be scheduled far in advance, so announcements about demonstrations will likely only be heard at regular membership meetings. Our next demonstration will at the Texas State Capitol Building on 11th at Congress Ave. We’ll be picking up the National Day of Prayer ritual/rally/bad concert held on the steps of the Capitol Building every year. Last year, around 20 ACA members picketed. It was fun!

---Godless Gamers---is held at Russell Glasser’s house, email rglasser@apollowebworks.com for address and directions. We play all sorts of games. Strategy games, board games, card games, role playing games, party games. It just depends on what people bring. Some recent favorites: Siege of Avalon: a board game where all the players work together to fight back the forces of darkness, find the holy grail, and fill the round table with good knights. The interesting part is that there is sometimes a traitor who works against the others. Apples to Apples: A subjective word association game, where players vote on each other’s use of random objects to match a description. For instance, “scary” is matched with “Michael Jackson”; “enormous” with “black holes”, and so on. Sorry, but at this time, we have no schedule information about Godless Gamers. We’ll let you know when we get more info.

The Atheist Community of Austin PO Box 3798 Austin TX 78764 Voicemail: (512)371-2911 Website: www.atheist-community.org

>>>May 4 is the National Day of Prayer. We will BE there with picket signs. Please join us! <<<

>>>We’ll have a booth at the Austin Gay & Lesbian Pride Festival (www.pridetexas.org/), Saturday, June 10th at Waterloo Park. More info soon! <<<

>>>There will be NO regular membership meeting at Romeo’s on May 7, due to the election meeting. <<<
Some national Freethought groups’ upcoming events

The 2006 national convention for the Atheist Alliance was held in Kansas City, Missouri, and as of press time, we have not received any reports on how it went. We’ll be sure to feature any report on that event if and when we receive any, in the next issue possible.

The 2006 American Atheists national convention was held at the Marriott Rivercenter in San Antonio, Texas and it was a blast! Later in this issue you’ll find an in-depth report about it. Also in the next several days, look for photos of the convention at the American Atheists convention site: www.atheists.org/convention

We heard a rumor that next year’s AA convention will be held in Seattle, Washington. Just a rumor though folks, a claim currently unsupported by tangible objective evidence...or something like that.

The American Humanist Association’s next national event will be the 2006 AHA CONFERENCE: “The Wave of Reason.” It’ll be the 65th annual Conference of the AHA, and will be held May 11-14, 2006 at the lovely Tampa Airport Marriott in Tampa, Florida at the Tampa International Airport Phone: 1-813-879-5151, Toll-Free: 1-800-564-3440. Make sure to mention the American Humanist Association to take advantage of the $99 special guest room rate (single/double.) Reservations must be made before April 18 for this rate to apply. Speakers will include Lori Lipman Brown, Margaret Downey, and Michael Newdow. The American Humanist Association’s Washington DC office has more info: (800) 837-3792 or: Conference@AmericanHumanist.org

In Council for Secular Humanism news, the Center for Inquiry will be taking a cruise!

CFI Cruise -- May 28 - June 4, 2006, The Alaskan Explorer Experience Exclusive Skeptics and Secular Humanists Cruise

Join Paul Kurtz, Barbara Forrest, Mark Bowen, and Joe Nickell, for an adventure with Holland America’s Alaskan Explorer cruise into the Inside Passage and spectacular glacial wilderness where eagles, whales, and minds roam free. More info on this exists on page 14.
A Message From Richard Andrews, Atheist Activist in Utah

Reprinted with permission from Richard Andrews.

30 Days on the FX Network, Ch. 68, Time Warner Cable

Richard Andrews was the American Atheists Co-State Director of Utah with Chris Allen for many years, and is still very active there.

I’m reluctant to do TV programs and interviews anymore, but Caroline Macquinin from FX’s 30 Days program called me last week and ask me on be on a show hosted by Morgan Spurlock called 30 Days. After talking to Caroline for about 20 minutes, I decided I would do the show.

Morgan Spurlock is the young man who did a movie called 30 Days at McDonalds, Supersize Me or something like that. He is doing a show where he spends 30 days with an Atheist and Christian Family to see if they can find any common ground. As part of this new program that will start to air in July, they wanted to include a State-Church separation issue. They chose the American Atheists vs. Utah Highway Patrol crosses case. I am one of the litigants in that case.

Today, Saturday April 8, Morgan Spurlock and his production assistant Korelan Cone flew in from LA about 9 AM and rented a production crew to tape for the program. I asked to be scheduled last, so I could have the last word after they interviewed someone from the UHP and drove to Lehi, Utah to film two of the crosses.

Spurlock and the crew arrived at my house about an hour late at 4:30 PM. They set up camera and interviewed me at the house for about 45 minutes. I think I was able to cover and clear up any misconception about the lawsuit. Then Spulock and I walked thru my neighborhood for about 20 minutes talking about Atheists, Utah and the case. After that I drove them to the UHP Headquarters where two more crosses are, filming all the time. We stepped out of the car for a few shots by the crosses and they took off to the airport to catch a plan back to LA, while the camera crew drove me home.

I think it went well and look forward to it’s airing which starts in July.

They seemed sympathetic.

Richard Andrews

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We’ll have a booth at the Austin Gay & Lesbian Pride Festival (http://www.pridetexas.org/), Saturday, June 10th at Waterloo Park (East of Downtown on 15th St.). The festival runs from Noon to 8pm. We’ll be handing out fliers, meeting people, selling products, people watching, and having fun. We’ll need volunteers to help set up, tear down, and staff the booth.

We’re just going to be there, have a booth, and see if we can reel in some new members. We’ll need some volunteers to hand out ACA fliers and chat with people. Chuck will have a selection of products for us to sell. People can contact me (dbaker@atheist-community.org) for more info and to offer to volunteer.

As with all our public events, we need someone to take still photos and someone to get video. And if you’ve never worked a booth for an Atheist group at a public event like a street fair, and you’re concerned about the reaction from passers-by, don’t worry. Most of us who will be there have done this before. Your editor will be there, and he took part in several street fair “tablings,” in the busiest place to do that, Manhattan in New York City. The vast majority of people who disagree with us as they walk on by don’t bother to stop and even just look around at our booth. Those who do just seem to want to chat. An angry response is rare. Even here in the Bible belt, a finger and a dirty look are about the worst things displayed at us so far.

Most of all, it’s important for us to share in the level of educational exposure to diversity that operating with other minority groups can give us. Plus, bottom line, lots of gays and lesbians are also Atheists. Our various groups have a lot in common. :o)
India has a somewhat unique religious makeup when compared to most nations, including America. They have three major religions almost equally represented in their radically overpopulated country: Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Christianity was pushed into India starting a few hundred years ago, and while Hindus in India are known for happily incorporating characters and philosophical opinions from other religions, into theirs, Christianity has still not taken hold as a major religious force in politics and society there, when compared to the big three religions there. Of course all that religiosity and diversity in approach to religiosity hasn’t stopped unnecessary religious violence there, especially in more rural parts of India.

With all the hubbub over the cartoons of Muhammed in a Danish newspaper, and the awe that so many Americans displayed when seeing how fearsome large groups of angry Muslims can be over something so innocuous, I always like to think back and remember a much more lively version of Muhammed that we Atheists should all remember from several years ago. Remember the movie “Blasphemy” which was a small independently produced film starring Carlos Leon? It was about an Atheist who comes out to his family on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Well if you’ve seen that movie, and I hope you have, you’ll probably remember what happened in the movie that those Muslims obviously missed, the cameo appearance by Muhammed. In color, live action, and talking...loudly too. Here’s a small portion of the conversation:

Muhammed: “Sausage! Who ordered Sausage!? Buddha...was it you?”

Buddha: “It’s not gonna kill ya!”

Muhammed: “You KNOW I don’t eat pork! You must respect that! It gives me heartburn.”
Atheist Eve Goes to Iceland!

Reprinted with permission from Vantru.

Atheist Eve, the comic strip sported at the ACA website and in the newsletter is now being plugged by Vantru. Vantru, which means "disbelief" in Icelandic, is an Iceland-based group promoting the separation of church and state in their country.

In Iceland there is no notion of separation of church and state. And, according to Vantru member Hjalti Runar Omarsson, the Icelandic constitution states that the state must "support and defend" the Evangelical-Lutheran National Church--the state church. All registered religious organizations in Iceland receive between $150 to $200 per registered member annually. Newborns are automatically registered within the mother's faith, which brings the state church's membership to approximately 84% of the population.

According to recent polls, however, 25% of the population says they don't believe in god, 10-15% said they were unsure, 20% identified themselves as nonreligious, and 10% refused to comment.

Of those who identify themselves as Christian, most do not accept the notion of a virgin birth, the resurrection, and the trinity. The same poll indicated that only 1 percent believe in an afterlife with god. The church openly teaches that both Satan and Hell are only metaphors, and that god, rather than being "all powerful," is actually believed to possess only the "power of love and compassion."

Hjalti notes that the small group of fundamentalist Christians seem to be the most active members of the state church.

Iceland's history is one of fierce independence and paganism. It was settled by the Norse around 850 AD, who had fled the domination of Harold I (Harold Fairhair) of Norway. The country represented the only democratically run Western culture of the time. Christianity was introduced around 1,000 AD, but was not able to immediately displace paganism in the region.

To see the Atheist Eve posting and ACA web link at Vantru, go to <http://www.vantru.is/2006/03/11/07.30/> or <http://www.vantru.is/grin/>.

For further reading on Christianity in Iceland today, check out <http://www.sidmennt.is/english/>.

Iceland is hosting the International Atheist Conference this summer. For more information visit <http://www.samt.is/conference/>.

For further reading on the history of Iceland, visit <http://www.historyofnations.net/europe/iceland.html> or <http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/section/iceland_history.asp>.

For fun reading about Iceland's settlement history, check out <http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/tarristi/sagas.htm>, an English translation of The Icelandic Sagas. The Sagas are colorful, adventuresome, graphic family chronicles of the Vikings, written around the 13th century.

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"Minutemen" Rally Against State/Church Separation

Another radical state/church melding group gets media attention.

Minutemen United is a group of radical conservative Christians based in Ohio, who just recently had a conference in Danbury, Connecticut on why state/church separation was NOT the intention of the Founding Fathers, and that it’s unhealthy for our country. Speakers included Bill Federer of Amerisearch, Rev. Flip Benham of Operation Save America, Greg Thompson of America Asleep kNOW More, Rev. Bob Schenck of National Clergy Council, Rusty Thomas of Elijah Ministries, Coach Dave Daubenmire "Coach to the Church" and Mike Heath of Christian Civic League of Maine.

"Operation Save America"?? They like that word, “Operation,” don’t they? It’s got that subtle air of extremism to it. Makes you think about violence...

According to Coach Dave Daubenmire, founder of Minutemen United, "In 1801, responding to a private letter from the Danbury Baptists, the phrase 'wall of separation of Church and state' was penned by President Thomas Jefferson in response to the Baptists' fear that the U. S. Government was going to establish the Congregationalist Church as the official denomination of the new nation. Jefferson's reference to a wall of separation of church and state was a one way wall...a wall in which the government would have no say in the affairs of the church. His statement, mis-characterized today, was never intended to keep God out of Government."

These people are not clear on the concept of a wall. When’s the last time you went through a wall? I mean without the help of a window or a door. You can’t. Many walls are built for just that reason. A wall is “no-way” by definition. What these people want is for Jefferson to have erected a VALVE between church and state. That would allow things to pass through one direction, but not the other direction. That is simply not how a wall works, so they’ll just have to find a way to white-out the word “wall” in that letter, (or maybe yellow-out?) and all of the US Supreme Court case briefs which underscore that wall. To see the silliness and dishonesty, if you can stomach it, see: www.minutemenunited.com
Last year we picketed the NDOP event at the Capitol, and it worked out great. We got there right as they were starting, and we were on the sidewalk on Congress Ave. Being far from their event like that was a great relief to most of us, since they were singing some really obnoxious Jesus-tunes. Many of the passers-by expressed a dislike for the music too.

We only got one really angry Christian in our faces. She’s in the picture using her magic finger to communicate with us. The other photo shows that we can muster a good sized picket when we want to.

Well this year’s NDOP event is set for the State Capitol again, but this year, they’re going to have the event inside the Capitol building! In the rotunda! That burns me up but we can’t go picketing inside the building. They probably moved the location of their event inside so they wouldn’t have to see us and our picket signs, even from 80 yards or so away. Also legislators don’t work outside...:o)

We have some picket signs, but we need more, especially signs that are specific to this event. We might as well make them specific to this event since the Christians who put it on are typically stubborn and predatorial about these things, and surely will have this event at the State Capitol until they drop from exhaustion over it...not likely. Some churches pay homeless people to picket for them! Atheists have verified this.

We have handouts and ACA pamphlets to hand out free to passers-by. We’ll also have still and video cameras, and I’ll make a big report with photos about it for the June Atheist Community News.

We need to get to that general area by 11:30am as the NDOP event will begin at noon. There are two different coffee shops on Congress Ave. Just down a few blocks from the picket site. I recommend The Hideout, on the East side of Congress Ave.

So why do we picket the National Day of Prayer events?

Across America there are and have been at least a handful of pickets of National Day of Prayer events every year now for at least five years. I think there are several reasons why we do this.

1. The NDOP is a religious event, almost a ritual now, involving our government.

2. The NDOP sends and intends to send a giant message to the world that America is a “Christian nation.”

3. The NDOP events we witness almost always include out loud condemnation of certain non-NDOP groups like gays and lesbians, wiccans, pagans, feminists, Atheists, liberals, Democrats...etc. Some of the NDOP speakers have been heard issuing threats of violence, hellfire and damnation, against these other groups, even singling out individuals. Your elected leaders and mine, hand in hand, work hard to help with the condemnation.

4. Many NDOP events like this one traditionally include Boy Scouts leading the event in the Pledge of Allegiance and a prayer. As we should all know by now, the Boy Scouts of America is a government created and funded quasi public/private organization that not only discriminates against gays and Atheists, but also routinely insults both groups as well. It’s a government religious group getting involved to promote religion with government officials and other assorted evangelists.

5. We also want to take the opportunity to educate the general public aboutus Atheists. A free event like this suits that purpose well.

There are other, more personal reasons for picketing, and we’ll surely discuss them out loud, with pride, confidence, peace and respect. Free speech! Yeah! For more info on this event, call your editor, me anytime: (512)382-9283. Oh and it’s always FUN! ;o)

By Joe Zamecki and Marla Repka, members of the ACA and AA

Well we just got back from the American Atheists convention San Antonio, Texas! We had a blast. Just like always, there was a LOT of partying. Having the convention at a hotel on the Riverwalk was a great idea! We were at the very finest hotel on the Riverwalk, in a mall area of the Riverwalk, and right outside our door was the sights and sounds of an incredibly beautiful place.

The last time Joe visited San Antonio was in 1998 to see the Beastie Boys at the Alamodome. There was a lot of construction and trash everywhere on the surface, and the Riverwalk didn’t look much better, back then. Now, in 2006, the Riverwalk is better than ever! We were floored by the beauty that just seemed to go on and on without end. Tourism seemed to be in high gear there, and the hotel was in great form, for a hotel. We’ve stayed in Hyatts, Marriotts, Sheratons, Wyndhams etc. all over our great nation, and this was one for the books. An incredible hotel, and the second highest building in the city, as far as I could see, from the 26th floor. Looking up and seeing so much more building was wonderful. The wind was fierce that high up, and the air was nice and warm. Weather all around was very cooperative.

So we were very proud to talk up our great state, and we did a lot of that. We took a thick handful of Atheist Community News issues, business cards, tri-fold pamphlets, NDOP picket handouts, and writing pens with our name and contact info all over it, and placed it all on half a table in the AA book and product room. We’re very happy to report that all but around five of the newsletters were taken by Atheists and possibly media members over the weekend. Also we have been at conventions where a good portion of our pamphlets, magazines, newsletters and other inexpensive literature gets grabbed up by one or more employees of the hotel! Score!

It was great to meet new people, hang out with old friends, do some partying, explore the city and do some good old fashioned learning. Dr. Michael Shermer gave a very entertaining and educational talk on the origins of human morality, complete with a PowerPoint presentation. We got his autograph too. :o)

Dave Fitzgerald gave an insightful and humorous talk on the historicity of Jesus. Normally we get bored easily at that topic, but Mr. Fitzgerald had a remarkable way of keeping it amusing. A good critic uses humor, we believe.

There was a lively and heady god-debate between Edwin Kagin, the National Legal Director for American Atheists and Bob Siegel, Christian evangelist, apologist, writer, actor and radio talk show host. The debate was engaging and friendly, inspiring and affirming, and as was echoed on stage just after the debate ended, we hope this will become a tradition at American Atheists conventions.

Unfortunately at the end of each convention day, Marla and I were exhausted and had to rest, so we missed both dinners and the movie. We also skipped the trip to Sea World, to which we vow to try to see someday.

The hotel was just great, as I said, and since it was a Marriott, which is owned by Mormons, at least one Atheist mentioned this, and asked the question why American Atheists would have their convention at that particular hotel, given the option of so many others. I asked American Atheists President Ellen Johnson, my old friend and boss about the choice of hotels. She said all the hotels in the area wanted our business badly. Especially the Hilton and the Marriott. She said that she went with the Marriott because they had the best deal all around. The bottom line was to get the best hotel for the best price. Besides, we can usually eventually trace ownership and control of the other major hotels in America to some religious interests anyway. Just like many brands of fast food restaurants, and even a major brand of beer! Sometime soon I hope to write an article about religiously owned and operated worldwide businesses. For now, just know that there’s a specific reason why you can’t eat at Chick-Fil-A on Sundays.

On Saturday, we were treated to a fascinating panel discussion. The topic was to be “Big Tent Atheism and 30-Years of Sam Alito and John Roberts.” The folks on the panel were Shelley Hattan, former Texas State Director for American Atheists, Eddie Tabash, Attorney from California, Lorie Polansky, Pennsylvania State Director for American Atheists, Dave Kong, California State Director and two newcomers to the American Atheists conventions, Amy Madole a former member of UT San Antonio’s Atheist Agenda, and Meghan Regis of the Atheist Agenda.

What was fascinating was the conflict that reared its ugly head throughout most of the discussion. Ms. Madole brought up her disagreement with the aggressive way the Atheist Agenda recently advertised one of their meetings. They used fliers with a recreation of the cartoon of Mohammed with the bomb turban, and the fliers listed a certain room for the meeting. It invited Muslims to come talk about the cartoons with the Atheist Agenda. The only problem was that the location of the meeting was actually the location of a meeting of the Campus Crusade for Christ! Apparently the Christians weren’t laughing, and neither did Ms. Madole. She issued notice of her disagreement with that approach, and eventually left the Atheist Agenda, ending her membership.

Whether it was just just odd timing, blind luck or something planned, Ms. Madole and Ms. Regis sat on the same panel to talk about local group activism. What resulted seemed like a “cat fight,” in the words of at least two AA members in the audience when asked about it later. A couple of audience members who asked questions stated that the bickering was unproductive and should be stopped.

We didn’t get to ask questions because there were so many other members in line first. But we wondered why Ms. Madole was picked or chose to sit on the panel, being that she didn’t come representing any local Atheist group, and she eventually stated that she’s not even an Atheist! Maybe it was to bring up this issue. At least we’re more aware of an ongoing conflict, and the continued success of the Atheist Agenda.
“Unfortunetly Mr. Murray has an engagement with the President and Mrs. Bush during Easter and will be unable to attend the event this year,” said Peggy Birchfield, Executive Director of the Religious Freedom Coalition on what William J. Murray will be doing this year instead of continuing his tradition of taking out a half to full page ad in the major newspaper of the American Atheists convention city calling out to the Atheists attending the American Atheists convention, (with the title American Atheists always in large block letters! :o) and begging them to convert to Christianity. I didn’t invite him to the convention, so I don’t know why she responded this way. Maybe just to throw off attention to the lack of ad effort, which went on and on for at least a dozen conventions, but suddenly stopped when the Murray-O’Hair family was found and buried.

This year’s American Atheists National Convention, the 32nd one they’ve had, started off in a real bittersweet way. We got to hear from Ed Martin, a former IRS agent and a Catholic about how the Murray-O’Hairs were killed. He was one of the lead investigators who utterly busted David Waters for his part in the kidnapping, extortion and murder of Madalyn Murray-O’Hair, Jon Murray, and Robin Murray-O’Hair in September of 1995. They were murdered in San Antonio. I’m damn glad that Mr. Martin worked so hard to affect convictions all around in this case.

What was bittersweet was that a lot of us in the audience really cared for the Murray-O’Hairs, and while it was important and educational for us to see photos and video of the bones of our beloved friends, you can imagine that it was also painful for some of us as well. I never met the Murray-O’Hairs, but I have grown to identify with all three of them, and I highly respect their sacrifices and accomplishments. . Now I don’t expect law enforcement authorities to become personally involved in the lives of the people they find murdered. But Mr. Martin seemed very callous about his topic. It also hurt hearing about this all from a former IRS agent, knowing what the IRS did to the estates of the Murray-O’Hairs.

When Mr. Martin was done with his talk, the floor was opened for questions, and Joe made sure to be the first to ask him about something he said. Mr. Martin said he was at the funeral of the Murray-O’Hairs, as was William J. Murray. He said there was no praying over them at all during the funeral. Joe found this hard to believe for two reasons. First, William J. Murray was the diehard enemy of the Murray-O’Hairs who made his living bashing them for decades. He has been a hard core conservative Christian evangelist since the early 1980s. Secondly, Mr. Martin called himself a Catholic at the beginning of his talk. It all adds up to our suspicion that of course there were prayers said. Apparently not a single Atheist was at that funeral. Only Christians. Christians have a religious obligation to make sure that prayers are said during all funerals. At least they did when I was a Christian. Mr. Martin also showed photos and video and one of the photos was of the three graves of the Murray-O’Hairs. He gave two new pieces of information about the whereabouts of those graves by saying they’re in Austin(!) and by showing the photo of the graves, in the ground, outdoors, and not in a crematorium, as Joe had thought. Joe asked Mr. Martin why the exact location has remained a secret. He said it was agreed by William J. Murray, and the judge, and law enforcement officials involved that the grave site location should remain secret so that no one desecrates the graves.

Ok, that seems like a noble idea and a valid reason, until you stop and think about a few things. First, it’s been almost 11 years since the Murray-O’Hairs were murdered. The best revenge that any Christian could get against Madalyn is in what happened to them, and the fact she’s not going to be mouthing off to anyone ever again. We highly doubt that anyone is lying in wait to find out where her grave is so they can desecrate it. More than 10 years have gone by, and it’s a dead horse, so to speak. Her notoriety is just as dead, to Christians.

It was also suggested by Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists that someone would put the location of the grave site on the internet and it would spread around and more people would get involved in the desecration. She also stated, flatly, that it would also inspire Atheists to do all of that!

This kind of information doesn’t need to be on the internet. Marla and I don’t know anyone, Atheist or otherwise who would use that information for any purpose other than to pay their respects. I certainly wouldn’t. I’d like to get an “A” symbol on or near those gravestones, afterall, Madalyn had more to do with the creation of that symbol than anyone. Mr. Martin said the gravestones are blank! The photo he showed was far away and a bit out of focus. That’s the best look at the gravestones we’ve gotten yet. I consider that to be a terrible shame and an injustice.

Now I know what a lot of you might be saying, they’re gone, they’re dead. Their grave sites don’t matter-to them. It’s only for the benefit of the living that we have funerals and graves and issues about how people are buried. I agree with all of that. But consider this: How they were buried mattered to all of them BEFORE they were murdered, which of course was the only time they could’ve cared. But for we Atheists alive today, and the Atheists who will come after us, these graves DO matter. These are the graves of the three top Atheist activists we ever had.

Let us also remember and consider the fact that it wasn’t just Madalyn who was killed. Jon Murray was her son and the President of American Atheists at the time. Though he had conflicts with a number of Atheists over the years, (to a much smaller extent than his mother did of course) he was a good man, a strong activist, and a friendly family man. He too helped our movement come into being and take off with the first major Atheist activist group to go national.

But even more innocent was Robin Murray-O’Hair. We don’t knowof, and have never found any Atheist who had anything bad to say about Robin. She was the soldier for state/church separation and Atheist civil rights that we all should hope to be. That is, she was learned, articulate, inspiring, artful, and always respectful. Robin would speak softly and carry a big stick of research and information on any topic and drive home the fact that we Atheists are not only concerned about the welfare of our species, but we’re also amiable and warm-hearted. She was even sent to jail once in Austin for our cause, after she refused to swear to God in order to serve on a jury. None of the Murray-O’Hairs deserved to be killed, but especially Robin. I’m not aware that she even angered anyone at any time.

We’ll find out where their graves are, and maybe plant some pansies, place an “A” symbol, and mow the grass around them. It’s just the right thing to do. I can’t imagine that anyone working at a cemetery would do any upkeep there, knowing who is buried there. Continued on pg.12
Texas Local Atheist Groups Forgotten?

One big difference between this national convention and all other national conventions put on by American Atheists is that there seemed to be no plan for scheduled discussion of Texas or the Atheist activism that the Texas Atheist groups have engaged in. It has been a long-standing tradition that the state director for the state in which the convention is being held gives the welcoming remarks. This includes talking for a few minutes about the local Atheist groups in that state and their recent activism of note, and a few minutes talking about that state in general. Basically a welcome to the state, update on that state’s Atheist group activism, and then an introduction of Ellen Johnson, the American Atheists President.

This year that tradition was suspended. We here in Texas have an American Atheists State Director in Renee Hellman. She did not show up at any time during the convention weekend. Ellen knew she wouldn’t be able to make it on Friday, but was supposed to come in on Saturday. So Ellen planned for an alternate speaker to give the welcoming remarks. The problem was, that alternate speaker was not a Texan. It was Dave Silverman, the American Atheists National Spokesperson. Now Dave is an old buddy of ours, so he probably won’t mind us saying, it should’ve been a Texan giving those welcoming remarks. Dave did a good job, but he’s not from Texas, he’s from New Jersey, so logically he didn’t try to talk about Texas. So at the point in the convention where the MOST talk about the local Atheist group activism in the convention state should have been heard, there was nothing about Texas activism said or even planned.

In cases where the state director for the convention state was unavailable, or one did not exist, an alternate speaker from that state has always been used, usually the next most active American Atheists member in that state. We didn’t get that opportunity at all. Joe was ready to fill in, and volunteered, but no. Ellen said Dave was picked and had a speech all ready. She’s a good friend of Joe’s, and every bit as stubborn as he is, so that was it.

Again Dave did a good job and this is not his fault at all. On the first day, the only Texan to take the stage was Ed Martin, a Catholic! Then on Saturday, the only time Texas Atheist group activism was discussed, it was in the context of the bickering between Amy Madole and Meghan Regis of the Atheist Agenda. It wasn’t very productive, but it was embarrassing. Also during that panel discussion, Shelley Hattan managed to get in some talk about Metroplex Atheists (Dallas/Ft. Worth) and a few of their recent events. But it didn’t last long, and the discussion wandered back to the bickering, even after Conrad Goeringer, the moderator of the panel asked for an end to that topic. By the end of the weekend, the only mention of the Atheist Community of Austin on that stage came from Shelley during that panel discussion, and even that was very fast. It was also “the ACA” not the Atheist Community of Austin, so I’m sure some audience members didn’t get the message that we’re active and have a ton of Atheist activism to talk about with the whole convention. We especially wanted to talk up our planned picket of the National Day of Prayer, but it was not to be.

So we’d like to go on record and say that this is something that the national at American Atheists needs to work on. It’s important to share some of the spotlight with the local activists and their groups, and help them get noticed by all of the members in attendance. This should be considered an important benefit of affiliation with American Atheists. It’s one of the many reasons to attend an American Atheists convention anyway. To hear about activism in your state and beyond. Contrary to how the convention went, there ARE local Atheist groups in Texas, and they ARE active.

Texas Local Atheist Groups

Atheist Agenda

The only excuse for god is that he doesn't exist.

University of Texas at San Antonio

FACT

Freethinkers Association of Central Texas

San Antonio

Houston

Dallas

University of Texas at San Antonio

Austin

If you know of any Atheist groups we’ve missed, please let us know! :o)
New push to promote miracle cross debris. Remember that cross that God saw fit to save among all of the lives he allowed to be destroyed in the World Trade Center on 9/11/01? It was part of one of the buildings, and it's been revered ever since as a giant graven image, still sitting at the site of the WTC. Well recently there was a plan considered to remove the cross temporarily from that site, and store it in a hangar at JFK Airport, so that new construction can be done at the WTC site. A memorial is about to be built there. But before the cross was removed, the plan was aborted. A priest in New York City is leading the push to get assurances that the cross will be made a permanent part of the WTC memorial. So far, 50,000 signatures have been collected supporting that idea. We at Atheist Community News are not yet aware of any plans being considered to create a monument of some kind there identifying the many different cultures, ethnicities, religions and ideologies of the victims of the 9/11 attack on the WTC. Just this one blatant advertisement for Christianity and unjust torturous executions. No one was ever crucified at that site and they know it.

Tom Cruise refuses to give his baby a Catholic baptism. Tom Cruise and his wife Katie Holmes just had a baby, and Tom has announced that their baby will not be given a Catholic baptism, as their new family are all Scientologists. Now, Katie Holmes, his wife, was raised Catholic, and her parents are still very devout Catholics. So this is news worthy because there may be a religious family feud before it’s all over. It’s hard enough to stay together when you’re a pair of mega-celebrities, but when ultra-religiosity among multiple insane religions gets underway, the ingrams can hit the fan.

Another bizarre aspect of the Cruise/Holmes childbirth was that Tom says he’d do afterwards. He happily stated that he planned to eat the placenta and umbilical cord, just after the birth. He said it’s all nutritious, and indeed it is, and in some cultures, it’s very common. Also studies have shown that eating the placenta can help prevent post-natal depression. However I don’t know what those studies found regarding post-natal depression in fathers. I hope Tom shared his meal with Katie. In fact, she should’ve had first dibs on it.

Speeding and overcrowding cause 58 Christians to die after Easter. In Veracruz, Mexico, a bus full of Christians returning home from Easter celebrations in Guadalajara veered off of a highway, crashed into a barrier and then fell more than 650 feet into a ravine, killing 58 people including four children. So far, only four survivors have been found. The bus was overcrowded with more than 60 people though it was equipped to hold only 46, according to police, who also said that some of the passengers were standing during the trip. The owner of the bus was detained for questioning, but it was not known if the driver survived. Police also said that the bus was speeding, going 68-70 miles per hour on one of Mexico’s most dangerous highways.

So where was God? Where was God when the driver was getting ready to drive away with too many people? Where was God when that driver began speeding? These people had just gotten done praising God, and he didn’t care. Critical thinking could’ve prevented this disaster.

**Wacky Theist News**

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New study shows that Goths have a high rate of suicide. According to a British Medical Journal study on Goths that was completed recently, Goths have a high rate of suicide and self-mutilation. A research associate at the University of Glasgow who was involved with the study stated that more than half of 19-year-olds who identified themselves as Goth reported self-harming behavior, and nearly half reported a suicide attempt. But the study stopped short of saying that being a Goth leads to suicide or self-harm. Self-harming behavior was defined as “a maladaptive coping strategy intended to relieve negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, frustration, or guilt. It is usually unrelated to an immediate suicide attempt.” The study found that instead of Gothism leading to suicide and self-harm, “young people with a tendency to self-harm are attracted to the Goth subculture.”

Researchers also found that Goth subculture can serve as a way that young people can gain “valuable social and emotional support from their peers.” Most of us have personally known at least one “Goth” in our lives, since it seems like every public high school in America has at least one Goth in it. Visually, Goths have been most often characterized by the color black, trench coats, lots of black eye liner and sometimes powder base for both male and female Goths for that slightly zombie-ish look. Some Goths dabble in Satanism. Some Goths have been inspired by roll playing games like Dungeons and Dragons. I have often identified with Goths, in a positive way. I have found friends among them many times. One quality about them that stood out to me in high school was their tolerance for different people. Over the years, Gothism has become more sophisticated and organized and a bit popularized. I predict that they’ll become more popular and organized, until one day we add them to the list of quasi-religions; competition for Christianity. Excellent. I just hope they stick around long enough to do that. We need religions to be tolerant.

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Join Paul Kurtz, Barbara Forrest, Mark Bowen, and Joe Nickell, for an adventure with Holland America’s Alaskan Explorer cruise into the Inside Passage and spectacular glacial wilderness where eagles, whales, and minds roam free.

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But the excitement doesn't stop there!

A complete line-up of events and activities especially developed for skeptics and secular humanists is part of the package. Meet with leading minds for seven days of entertaining and educational lectures, discussions and recreational activities. Be a part of something grand and glorious!

Visit the best glaciers in Alaska, Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and protected by the U.S. National Park Service, this pristine bay is filled with not only 11 world-famous tidewater glaciers and mountains rising to 15,000 feet but also an abundance of wildlife.

Highlights include:

* The Grand Pacific and Margerie Glaciers nearly merge at the end of Tarr Inlet forming a wall of ice. On a clear day, you can see 15,230-foot Mt. Fairweather on the Alaska/Canada boarder.

* The Johns Hopkins Glacier is found among a cathedral of mountains. This actively calving tidewater glacier creates so many icebergs, the Inlet in which it lies has become an important seal pup ground and receives special protection from the National Park Service.

Unmatched Comforts with Amazing Scenery. The ms Westerdam, one of our new five-star, Vista-class ships, was built for viewing the wonders of Alaska better than any other ship. With fewer guests onboard, more space both indoors and outside, and expansive staterooms and verandahs, you will appreciate the difference you will find when you choose to sail with Holland America Line.

Reserve Now!

For more information and for reserving your spot on the CFI Cruise, please contact 1-800-398-7571 or cruise@cfiflorida.org

Galápagos Adventure -- May 9-19, 2007, Following in the Footsteps of Darwin, The Center for Inquiry is pleased to announce an exciting and memorable travel opportunity for 2007. Beginning May 9, we will be embarking on a most fascinating journey to the Galápagos Islands with host Paul Kurtz and his guest, Richard Dawkins. Aboard the M/V Santa Cruz, chartered exclusively for our unique adventure, participants will explore the lands that are home to flora and fauna not found anywhere else in the world, environments unparalleled in beauty. For a glorious ten days we will follow in the footsteps of one of the most important scientists of all time.

Visiting the Galápagos Islands is like visiting no other place on earth. This unmatched archipelago is a world away from the mainland, providing an isolated crucible for the mechanism of natural selection wherein organisms are adapted to the environmental pressures of each island. Just as the Galápagos captured the curiosity of Charles Darwin, providing the catalyst for developing the theory of evolution by natural selection, visitors are inspired and forever altered by all they encounter, learning firsthand how Darwin's ideas came together. Join Richard Dawkins, Paul Kurtz, and the CFI Travel Team for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Charles Darwin, a naturalist who shook the very foundation of knowledge and forever changed our way of thinking about life. We encourage you to register early as our ship is limited to 86 passengers. For more information and for reserving your spot for the Center for Inquiry's Galápagos Adventure, please contact 1-800-398-7571 or e-mail cruise@cfiflorida.org. Reprinted with permission from the CFI.
ACA Leaders & Elections

It’s election time! Here’s the deal:

On Sunday, May 7, 2006, from 12:00pm - 2:30pm, we will have an ACA Elections Meeting at the Brick Oven Restaurant, just north of the Aboretum. The address is 10710 Research Blvd. And the phone number there is (512)345-6181.

Any currently paid member may vote at that meeting, but you have to attend that meeting in order to vote. There will be no absentee voting, proxy voting, or early voting. So if you care about who runs the ACA, this is a very important meeting.

Right now, the ACA board of directors looks like this:

Co-Chair: Steve Elliott
Board members: Steve Elliott, Don Rhoades, Joe Rhodes, Don Baker, Keith Berka, Charles Clark, Matt Dillahunty, Russell Glasser, Mark Loewe, and Ashley Perrien

There is one open board seat not currently filled. Also the position of Co-Chair will be eliminated as of this election, and be replaced by the positions of President and Vice President.

I’d like to officially announce my candidacy for that open board seat. I have a platform on which to run, and it can be summed up in one word:

Growth

Remember folks, this election comes around only once a year, so let’s make it count. Plus have you ever had Brick Oven pizza? Oh yeah. :o)

Article Help Needed

Your Editor needs assistance with an interesting article.

Folks, I need some help. I’m writing an extensive article about Christian owned and/or operated businesses which are either international, national, or state-wide. Local businesses will be another article.

I need all the information I can get about Christian owned and/or operated businesses. I’d like to list as much info as I can pertaining to that. This is not necessarily for the purposes of a boycott. But that is an important aspect of the article. Many Atheists feel that it’s morally wrong to boycott a business just because it’s owned and/or operated by Christians. There’s also the argument that boycotts are ineffective, especially when the business is large, and the boycotting entity is small. And there are still other reasons to not look at this as a call for a boycott. I just think we need to know.

Being Atheists, we have a duty to look out for ourselves, since polls show that for some reason, most Americans hate and fear us.

I’d also like to publish the names and contact information for Atheist-owned and/or operated businesses, but alas, there aren’t many that have made themselves known as Atheist owned and/or operated. Plus they typically need all the business they can get. There are a dozen angles to this argument, and I’d like to explore them all. But for now, it’s just important to be a little more aware of the world around us. So here’s a taste:

Hobby Lobby

From this Hobby Lobby web page: http://www.hobbylobby.com/site3/company/statement.htm

Hobby Lobby Statement of Purpose

In order to effectively serve our owners, employees, and customers the Board of Directors is committed to:

Honoring the Lord in all we do by operating the company in a manner consistent with Biblical principles. Offering our customers an exceptional selection and unbeatable value. Serving our employees and their families by establishing a work environment and company policies that build character, strengthen individuals, and nurture families. Providing a return on the owners' investment, sharing the Lord's blessings with our employees, and investing in our community. We believe that it is by God's grace and provision that Hobby Lobby has endured. He has been faithful in the past, we trust Him for our future.

It’s this kind of blatant statement that I’m looking for. If you know of businesses that fall into this criteria, please e-mail joezamecki@hotmail.com
Atheist Community News

The Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin

PO Box 3798, Austin TX 78764

philosophical diversity exists in our beautiful city, Austin, Texas. Side by side are religious and non-religious viewpoints. You can find the very valuable cultural and intellectual diversity that exists in our community. So now you hold in your hand an example of the philosophy that exists in our community and deserves to be heard. 20% of you hold in your hand an example of the Austin Atheist philosophy. Non-religious Americans make up about 14% of the population, and that’s a large enough minority group in America, that it deserves to be heard. What’s left is a large enough minority group in America, that it deserves to be heard. Non-religious Americans make up about 14% of the population, and that’s a large enough minority group in America, that it deserves to be heard. Non-religious Americans make up about 14% of the population, and that’s a large enough minority group in America, that it deserves to be heard. Non-religious Americans make up about 14% of the population, and that’s a large enough minority group in America, that it deserves to be heard. Non-religious Americans make up about 14% of the population, and that’s a large enough minority group in America, that it deserves to be heard.