

**FACT**  
P.O. Box  
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San Antonio,  
TX 78280

# A Matter of *FACT* & The Voice

May 2008

## FACT

is an association of atheists, freethinkers, agnostics, secular humanists, rationalists, skeptics, and other non-theists serving the purpose of preserving the separation of church and state and promoting Freethought through education.

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## Courage to Speak Out

The guest speaker at the May General Meeting will be John Courage, who will present the case for publicly-financed elections. John is a well-known progressive activist in the San Antonio area and a former candidate for Congress. His current project is "Clean Elections-Texas" a grass roots effort to change the equation of politics so that votes count more than dollars.

We all share a general feeling that public policy is being driven by campaign contributions, whereby private interests spend millions of dollars to gain access to elected officials, and are rewarded with billions of taxpayer dollars or favorable legislation. Campaign contributions also dictate which potential candidates will be able to get on the ballot and be able to present their views to the voters. The current game is to tailor a political message that appeals to big contributors rather than the general public. Alternately, a large personal bank account will also buy your way onto the ballot. Even after the election, lawmakers spend too much of their time raising money for their re-election, which means continuing to toady to special interests.

Public financing is a better, more democratic way to level the field and remove the inefficiencies of the system. There are grassroots organizations, both nation-wide and local, promoting public financing, and in fact, four states have already adopted public financing for some state-wide offices. The goal of "Clean Elections-Texas" is to introduce and pass legislation in the 81<sup>st</sup> Session of the Texas Legislature that will provide public funding for judicial races and legislative races, thus freeing candidates from the need to court special-interest money from wealthy ideologues and corporations.

John Courage will provide more details and show you what you can do to help rescue democracy from "big money".

General Meeting, Saturday, May 17<sup>th</sup> @ 1pm  
Community Unitarian Universalist Church  
4818 E. Beverly Mae

## Dating Method Refined

A team led by Paul Renne, director of the Berkeley Geochronology Center and an adjunct professor of earth and planetary science at the University of California, Berkeley, said they were able to refine the so-called argon-argon dating method to reduce uncertainty. The method compares the ratio of two types of the element argon found in rocks. The greater precision matters little for recent events in the last few million years, according to Renne, but it can be a major problem for events in the early solar system. For example, a one percent difference at 4.5 billion years is almost 50 million years. The new system reduces that potential uncertainty to one-fourth of one percent, the researchers said.

Source: Associated Press

## Texas History at April Meeting

### Elected Positions:

President, Nick Lee  
 Vice President, Jane Tuck  
 Secretary, Jim Evans  
 Treasurer, Cathy Howard  
 Publicity, OPEN

### Appointed Positions:

#### Newsletter

Publisher/Editor, Marc Janssens  
 Webmaster, Jim Evans  
 Discussion Group Host, OPEN  
 Librarian, Jimmie Barnes

### Texas Hill Country Freethinkers

(No Officers)

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### FACT MEMBERS:

FACT wants your participation in communicating through our newsletter. Please contribute letters, articles, book reviews, highlights and comments on church/state separation, quotes, drawings, cartoons, etc. Please send contributions to [FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org](mailto:FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org).

All submissions are subject to editorial revisions at the discretion of the publisher.

Don Rhoades of the Atheist Community of Austin was the guest speaker at our April General Meeting. Don's talk was on "The History of Freethinkers in Texas."

Between 1842-1878, the Adelsverein, an organization composed of German nobility, sponsored 60,000 immigrants to settle in Texas. Their hope was to buy cheap land where they could escape religious oppression in Europe and practice their beliefs in liberalism, socialism and Freethought. They opened a new Gulf port at Indianola and headed inland from there.

In 1845, Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels founded the town of New Braunfels. Among the many other towns in the Texas Hill country established by the Freethinkers were Comfort, Luckenbach, Bettina, Sisterdale, Boerne, and Fredericksburg. The characteristic of these communities was the dedication to rational discussion and secular discussion. In reaction to the divisive religious wars these settlers had experienced in Europe, they banned organized religion, and the town of Comfort did not have a church building until the year 1892.

In keeping with their progressive philosophy, the Texas Freethinkers were against the institution of slavery, and as the Civil War approached, their opposition to this practice created friction with the majority of Texans, who were sympathetic to the Southern States. When Texas seceded from the United States and joined the Confederacy, attempts were made to raise citizen armies to fight for the Grays. But the Freethinkers refused to enlist, and suffered vigilante violence.

In 1862, a group of 65 Freethinkers, headed south to Mexico to join Union forces in New Orleans. But Texas Confederates, learning of this plan, gave chase. They caught up with the Freethinkers on the banks of the Nueces River, in Kinney County, and killed a great many. As the survivors continued their scramble for the Border, the Confederates hunted them down and killed several more.

To honor this history, in 1998, a group of people including Howard Thompson, Ed Scharf, Catherine Fahringer, Julie Fisher, Terri Maverick, Ruth Lett, and Sally Chizek, began a project to erect a stone monument, or cenotaph, in the town of Comfort. Substantial monies were raised, and all legal hurdles were overcome and the stone was dedicated in a corner of the town park. Shortly thereafter, it dawned on Comfort residents that this was a memorial to "Atheists", and under the leadership of the Catholic Church petitioned to have it removed. In December, 2000, "persons unknown" uprooted the rock and carted it to private property, where it was unceremoniously dumped in a field.

Subsequently, long-time Comfort resident, Greg Krauter agreed to allow a smaller stone set up in front of the historic Inglehuet General Store, and it was dedicated in August 2002, where it remains today. Don Rhoades and others from the Atheist Community of Austin were present at this rededication.

As Julie Fisher pointed out, the anti-rock citizens of Comfort ironically created a victory for the Freethinkers by focusing attention on its history.

Submitted by Jane Tuck

**Every Monday at 12:30 and 8:30 PM**

Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20

**FREETHOUGHT FORUM**

Hosted by Hugh Henry

## Council for Secular Humanism Calls for Resignation

Rep. Monique Davis, a Chicago Democrat and member of the Illinois legislature, stepped egregiously over the line when she verbally attacked atheist activist Rob Sherman for his religious unbelief during his testimony April 2<sup>nd</sup> to the House State Government Administration Committee, says the Council for Secular Humanism.

Sherman had been testifying before the committee that Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich's plan to donate one million tax dollars to Pilgrim Baptist Church in Chicago was unconstitutional when Davis launched into a diatribe against atheists, asserting that atheists did not have a right to present testimony to the legislature.

Challenging Sherman, Davis wondered aloud, "I don't know what you have against God. Some of us don't have much against him. We look forward to him and his blessings." Affirming that the people of Illinois believe that there is a God, Davis went on to suggest that the philosophy Sherman was spreading was "extremely dangerous. "It's dangerous to the progression of this state. And it's dangerous for our children to even know that your philosophy exists," shouted Davis.

After Sherman thanked Davis for sharing her perspective with him, Davis shot back, "Get out of that seat. You have no right to be here! We believe in something. You believe in destroying! You believe in destroying what this state was built upon."

The Council for Secular Humanism is appalled by Davis's apparent belief that atheists and other nonreligious individuals are not entitled to the same rights and liberties as other citizens.

Ronald A. Lindsay, director of the Council for Secular Humanism's First Amendment Task Force, is calling for Davis to resign. "In informing Sherman that he had 'no right' to be there merely because he was an atheist, Davis confirmed that she is not willing to be a representative of all her constituents, regardless of their religious beliefs," said Lindsay.

"She is unfit to serve in her office, just as a representative who told a Jew or a Hindu to 'get out of that seat' would be unfit to serve. If she does not resign, the Illinois House has an obligation to expel her," continued Lindsay.

Sherman, after being told repeatedly by Davis to get out of his seat because he was an atheist commented that he felt like Rosa Parks, "who also was told, get out of that seat and arrested when she didn't give up her seat on the bus to a white person."

Source: <http://www.secularhumanism.org/>

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## Christianizing US History

by Chris Hedges

Here is an event I have no intention of honoring: American Religious History Week. OK, it's not official yet. But it is spelled out as Resolution 888 in the bowels of a House committee, sponsored by Republican Congressman Randy Forbes and backed by thirty-one other Representatives (including Joe Barton, Michael Conaway, John Culberson, Louis Gohmert, Ralph Hall, Jeb Hensarling, Samuel Johnson, Kenny Marchant, Michael McCaul, Randy Neugebauer, Ronald Paul, Ted Poe and Peter Sessions [all R-TX], Ed.). This is an insidious attempt by the radical Christian right to rewrite American history, to turn the founding fathers from deists into Christian fundamentalists, to proclaim us officially to be a Christian nation. If you want to know why Mike Huckabee is dangerous, why his brand of right-wing Christian populism is so frightening, you should read this resolution.

Sent to me by the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, the resolution has passages like this: "Whereas political scientists have documented that the most frequently-cited source in the political period known as The Founding Era was the Bible" and "Whereas the United States Supreme Court has declared throughout the course of our Nation's history that the United States is 'a Christian country', 'a Christian nation', 'a Christian people', a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being' and that 'we cannot read into the Bill of Rights a philosophy of hostility to religion..."

The House resolution can be found at <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=hr110-888>

Source: February 2008 FIG Leaves, newsletter of the Free Inquiry Group in Cincinnati, OH

## CFI Raises Concerns over Civics Textbook

The Center for Inquiry (CFI) released a 25-page report detailing what it calls “egregious errors” sufficient enough to warrant “immediate correction,” in a widely used civics textbook found in many secondary schools around the country, including advanced placement courses. CFI believes that the textbook *American Government: Institutions and Policies*, 10th edition, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006) contains inaccurate and misleading statements, in particular in its analysis of global warming and certain constitutional law issues. In response, CFI’s legal experts have analyzed the textbook and prepared a critique that sets forth recommended changes.

Derek Araujo, a lawyer and executive director for CFI’s New York office, spearheaded the textbook review project. Araujo stated that he was “surprised and dismayed that a textbook used in advanced placement courses would contain clearly erroneous statements about significant issues, such as global warming and school prayer.” Araujo recruited leading scientists, including Stuart D. Jordan from NASA, to provide their assessment of the book’s treatment of global warming.

CFI’s critique focuses on six areas: the science of global warming; the legality of school prayer; the significance of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*; the alleged influence of the religious concept of “original sin” on the structure of the Constitution; the meaning of the Establishment Clause; and the significance of the Supreme Court’s decision not to hear a case (what lawyers refer to as the denial of a writ of *certiorari*).

Ronald A. Lindsay, CFI’s general counsel, characterized the errors as “significant and inexcusable. For a civics textbook to state—as this book does—that the Supreme Court will not allow students to pray in schools betrays either a serious misunderstanding of the law or a willingness to have the textbook serve as a propaganda vehicle for the Religious Right.”

CFI maintains that it is very important for civics students to obtain accurate information about our Constitution, our legal system and public policy issues, and that instructional material should be objective and free of ideological bias.

The textbook critique was researched and written by Araujo, Lindsay, and Jordan. A downloadable PDF copy of the full report is available from the Center’s web site can be found at .

Source: <http://www.centerforinquiry.net>

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## Non-Religious Outnumber Those of Other Faiths

The most detailed estimates to date of Americans’ religious affiliations reports that a significant portion of U.S. citizens claim “none of the above,” placing the unaffiliated second only to Roman Catholics in number. The 35,000-responder U.S. Religious Landscape Survey from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life shows that 16.1 percent of Americans have no particular religion at all, while 23.9 percent identify themselves as Catholic. The next largest “belief group” is Evangelical Baptist at 10.8 percent. All other denominational groupings show in the single digits or less.

The study also shows the number of Americans who identify as atheist or agnostic has risen from 3.2 to 4 percent, while a “remarkably high” 44 percent have rejected the religion placed on them in childhood. “People are finding out that what they’ve been handed in youth doesn’t work, or isn’t important enough to defend when confronted with marriage or some other life situation that forces them to examine it,” said Paul Kurtz, founder of the Council for Secular Humanism. “But when the shuffling is done, this study shows that three people are dropping religion altogether for each one gaining a faith.”

The study also confirms the previous 2004 Pew Forum-University of Akron study findings that those who identify as strictly secular comprise more than 10 percent of the population, only on a much larger scale.

Source: [http://www.centerforinquiry.net/newsroom/non\\_religious\\_outnumber/](http://www.centerforinquiry.net/newsroom/non_religious_outnumber/)

Submitted to San Antonio Express News, March 14, 2008. Not published.

### Re. Billy Graham's column.

Question: A friend of mine says the Bible is very negative toward women, which is why society has oppressed women throughout history. Is this true? Answer from Dr. Graham: "No, it is not true."

I beg to differ with you Dr. Graham---we must not be reading the same Bible. There are at least 200 verses that specifically belittle and demean women. Here are a few. (To save space some verses paraphrased):

- Genesis 3:16 - Women cursed; maternity a sin, marriage a bondage.
- Exodus 21:7-11 - Unfair rules for female servants, may be sex slaves.
- Leviticus 12:1-14 - Women who have sons are unclean 7 days; if they have daughters unclean 14 days.
- Leviticus 19:20-22 - If master has sex with engaged women, she shall be scourged.
- Numbers 1:2 - Poll of people only includes men.
- Numbers 31:16-35 - "Virgins" listed as war booty.
- Deuteronomy 22:23-24 - Woman raped in city, she & her rapist both stoned to death.
- Judges 19:22-29 - Concubine sacrificed to rapist crowd to save man.
- Proverbs 7:9-27 Evil women seduce men, send them to hell.
- Isaiah 3:16-17 - God scourges, rapes haughty women.
- I Corinthians 11:3-15 - Man is head of women; only man in God's image.
- I Corinthians 14:34-35 - Women keep in silence, learn only from husbands.

I believe Dr. Graham claims at the very beginning of the human race both women and men were created by God, and he stamped his image equally upon them both. Doesn't sound too equal to this woman.

Sally Chizek

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Published in San Antonio Express News, May 1, 2008.

### Re. Whose day of prayer?

I read "Day of Prayer is a time to unite on shared ideas, values" by Imam Omar Shakir (Religion, Saturday). Not so fast Imam Shakir. You wouldn't be welcome at the National Day of Prayer because you're not a Christian.

The National Prayer Committee is centered on the Lord Jesus Christ. According to their Web page, America's National Prayer Committee exists to provide collective servant leadership to the national prayer movement. A message from the chairman, Dave Butts, American National Prayer Committee, reads as follows: "As we work and pray together over our nation, our desire is to see a fresh awakening in the Church to the presence of Jesus Christ."

Sorry, they do not want us involved with them. You are Muslim, and I'm an atheist.

Sally Chizek

## HEY, LETTER WRITERS!

We're looking for well-crafted letters having to do with the separation of church and state, atheism, or any other relevant topic. Members are encouraged to forward published letters, or ones which were rejected by the mainstream media, for publication.

Send them to: [FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org](mailto:FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org) or PO Box 160881, San Antonio, TX 78280

# The Texas Preamble

by Dan Nichols

You'd think this was a form of line dancing or the Texas Two Step. It's a tad bit more ominous, taking credulity to a supreme level. Credulity is not a trait that is lacking in the Lone Star State, as is evident to all who encounter the expanding waistline of the bible belt. Welcome back brothers and sisters and all ye who enter here.

I attended my Democratic Party Primary. The caucus followed for all those documented primary attendees. Yes Sir, we have a primary and a caucus. Be advised, there have been a few undocumented aliens in the bunch. I downloaded a copy of the Texas Democratic party platform to take along.

The Preamble to our platform reads as follows: "Texas Democrats believe our government can be as good as the people. We have faith that democracy, built on the sacred values of family, freedom and fairness, can afford every Texan, without exception, the opportunity to achieve their God-given potential." Remember, this is the Democratic party platform!

As you might expect, the GOP isn't proud, particular or limited in its reflections on the supernatural, although a tad to the right of purple prose: "Throughout the world people dare to dream of freedom, of opportunity, of a beautiful country in which to grow, to raise their family, to worship God in their own way without fear. The embodiment of that dream is America." The platform ends—nope, not kidding!—with "We pray God Bless Texas. God Bless the U.S.A. God bless us all!"

Straddling the line between Minnesota and Texas is a hard act at times. I did download the preamble to the Minnesota DFL platform. Eureka! What you'd expect of straight thinkers of the pragmatic bent: "The Ongoing Platform is the declaration of basic principles adopted by the State Convention for which the party stands. It represents the views and needs of the people who align themselves with the party." Among those views are separation of church and state and the right to privacy. [Marie Castle was on the platform commission when the Ongoing Platform was developed and helped ensure that it was entirely secular. Ed]

The MN GOP does itself proud as well. Little mention of deities, souls or the supernatural, with the exception of that ever-present "creators endowment clause."

Any other flies in the ointment from other state platforms? Yup! Here's Kansas: "Kansas Democrats are committed to putting the people of Kansas first by promoting values and policies that advance the common good." Toto and Dorothy would be wondering if they're still in Kansas. No mention of the supernatural.

The Kansas GOP goes one better in its post-preamble statement of purpose:

"The Republican Party believes that the primary focus of education should be on expanding academic knowledge from a core education. In a global economy, our students must be proficient in math and science."

In ending I'd like to quote this statement by a fellow Frenchman, a former Catholic priest who found a higher calling—atheism!: "I would like, and this would be the last and most ardent of my wishes, I would like the last of the kings to be strangled by the guts of the last priest" Jean Meslier (1664-1729)

Perhaps fundamentalist could be substituted for King. I say this as a reflection upon former President Jimmy Carter's book, Our Endangered Values, and his comments on fundamentalism as a whole.

Source: Communication in April 2008 newsletter of MN Atheists for Human Rights



**FACT T-Shirts for Sale (Grey w/Black Logo)**

Small-XLarge.....\$12.00	3X.....\$15.00
2X.....\$14.00	Vests (Red).....\$17.00

To order or for further information, contact Sally Chizek  
Sally.Chizek@FreethinkersACT.org (210) 656-3796

## “God’s Problem” by Bart Ehrman

### Book Review by Marc Janssens (☆☆☆☆☆)

The subtitle of this excellent book is “How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question – Why We Suffer.” This book is of particular significance because the author is a world-renowned Bible scholar and the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

In the first chapter Ehrman explains how he was a devout and committed Christian until he lost his faith. He was raised in Kansas as an Episcopalian and was “born again” in his early high school years. After training for the ministry at a fundamentalist Bible college, Ehrman obtained a B.A. from Wheaton and a master’s and Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary. After graduating he became a pastor at the Princeton Baptist Church. Then Ehrman started to question his faith and the inability to find a satisfactory explanation for the question of theodicy (if there is an omnipotent and all-loving god, why is there suffering?) made him lose it completely. Ehrman’s goal in writing the book was to explore the biblical answers to the problem of suffering.

The first Biblical explanation explored by Ehrman is the Old Testament prophetic view that suffering is God’s punishment for man’s sinful behavior. The chapter starts with a discussion of the Holocaust, “the most heinous crime against humanity in the known history of the human race”. How could God allow the deaths of six million Jews and five million others to happen? Based on sections from the books of Amos, Hosea and other Old Testament prophets, Ehrman identifies the origins of the idea that suffering is punishment from God. However, the prophets were only referring to the suffering of their contemporaries. The prophetic view is not a satisfactory explanation for every individual instance of suffering.

The classical view of suffering extends well beyond the Old Testament prophets and is the view of most authors of the books of the Hebrew Bible. The classical view even permeates the New Testament in the form of the Christian doctrine of Atonement, i.e., the idea that suffering of one can substitute for the suffering of others. This makes it even harder to accept the classical view. How can justice be done by punishing an innocent person for somebody else’s misbehavior? But it gets worse. An important difference between the Old and New Testament authors is that the latter often portray God’s punishment as eternal. In other words, no matter what we do, until judgment day there is no escape from the seemingly random effects of God’s wrath.

There is the notion that suffering comes not only directly from God but also indirectly from humans who misbehave. Humans can misbehave because they have free will. If the Holocaust is a punishment from God, why were the Nazis held accountable since all they did was execute God’s plan? If the Nazis’ atrocities were not caused by God, why did He allow it to happen?

The next Biblical explanation discussed in the book is that suffering is and can be redemptive. The idea that God manifests his power of salvation through suffering is found throughout the Bible. But does this mean that something good always comes out of suffering? “Our own suffering may, on occasion, make us better people ... but other people do not – decidedly do not – suffer to make us happier or nobler.”

The book of Job is used to explore another explanation: suffering is God’s test of faith. Job was a very wealthy and pious man. Satan claimed that Job was only pious toward God because of his wealth. To test the hypothesis, God allowed Satan to take everything away from Job, including his ten children and his health. Job remained faithful and at the end of the book God restored to Job his former wealth and more. He gave him another seven sons and three daughters, as if that can undo the suffering he endured as a result of the savage murders of his first ten children. The chapter on suffering as a test of faith is concluded with a discussion of Ecclesiastes. The author of this book does not offer an explanation for suffering, but observes that it simply is something that happens for reasons that we don’t understand. We should avoid it as much as we can and enjoy our life here on earth while it lasts.

In the last few chapters Ehrman explores the apocalyptic explanation for suffering. The apocalyptic perspective originated with Jewish thinkers who observed that when the people of Israel returned to God as commanded by the prophets, their suffering did not end. In some cases it actually got worse. Apocalypticists were writing in times of terrible suffering. Their view was that for unknown reasons God had temporarily relinquished control to the forces of evil, with human suffering as a result. They were trying to encourage their readers to hold on because God will soon overthrow the forces of evil and bring an end to the misery. But the expected apocalypse has never come. In the meantime it has resulted in complacency amongst believers, “an unwillingness to deal with evil as we confront it in the here and now ...”.

## Fort Riley Atheist Soldier Speaks Out on Lawsuit

by John Milburn

Like hundreds of young men joining the Army in recent years, Jeremy Hall professes a desire to serve his country while it fights terrorism. But the short and soft-spoken specialist is at the center of a legal controversy. He has filed a lawsuit alleging he's been harassed and his constitutional rights have been violated because he doesn't believe in God. The suit names Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

"I'm not in it for cash," Hall said. "I want no one else to go what I went through."

Known as "the atheist guy," Hall has been called immoral, a devil worshipper and — just as severe to some soldiers — gay, none of which, he says, is true. Hall even drove fellow soldiers to church in Iraq and paused while they prayed before meals.

"I see a name, rank and United States flag on their shoulder. That's what I believe everyone else should see," he said.

Hall, 23, was raised in a Protestant family in North Carolina and dropped out of school before earning his GED. It wasn't until after he joined the Army that he began questioning religion, eventually deciding he couldn't follow any faith. But he feared how that would look to other soldiers.

"I was ashamed to say that I was an atheist," Hall said.

It eventually came out in Iraq in 2007, when he was in a firefight. Hall was a gunner on a Humvee, which took several bullets in its protective shield. Afterward, his commander asked whether he believed in God, Hall said.

"I said, 'No, but I believe in Plexiglas,'" Hall said. "I've never believed I was going to a happy place. You get one life. When I die, I'm worm food."

The issue came to a head when, according to Hall, a superior officer, Maj. Freddy J. Welborn, threatened to bring charges against him for trying to hold a meeting of atheists in Iraq. Welborn has denied Hall's allegations. Hall said he had had enough but feared he wouldn't get support from Welborn's superiors. He turned to Mikey Weinstein and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation. Weinstein is the foundation's president and a U.S. Air Force Academy graduate. He had previously sued the Air Force for acts he said illegally imposed Christianity on students at the academy, though that case was dismissed. He calls Hall a hero.

"The average American doesn't have enough intestinal fortitude to tell someone to shut up if they are talking in a movie theater," Weinstein said. "You know how hard it is to take on your chain of command? This isn't the KFC shift manager."

Hall was in Qatar when the lawsuit was filed on Sept. 18 in federal court in Kansas City, KS. Other soldiers learned of it and he feared for his own safety. Once, Hall said, a group of soldiers followed him, harassing him, but no one did anything to make it stop. The Army told him it couldn't protect him and sent him back to Fort Riley. He resumed duties with a military police battalion. He believes his promotion to sergeant has been blocked because of his lawsuit, but he is a team leader responsible for two junior enlisted soldiers.

No one with Fort Riley, the Army or Defense Department would comment about Hall or the lawsuit. Each issued statements saying that discrimination will not be tolerated regardless of race, religion or gender.

"The Department respects (and supports by its policy) the rights of others to their own religious beliefs, including the right to hold no beliefs," said Eileen Lainez, a spokeswoman for the Department of Defense.

All three organizations said existing systems help soldiers "address and resolve any perceived unfair treatment."

Lt. Col. David Shurtleff, a Fort Riley chaplain, declined to discuss Hall's case but said chaplains accommodate all faiths as best they can. In most cases, religious issues can be worked out without jeopardizing military operations. "When you're in Afghanistan and an IED blows up a Humvee, they aren't asking about a wounded soldier's faith," Shurtleff said.

Hall said he enjoys being a team leader but has been told that having faith would make him a better leader.

"I will take care of my soldiers. Nowhere does it say I have to pray with my soldiers, but I do have to make sure my soldiers' religious needs are met," he said. "Religion brings comfort to a lot of people," he said. "Personally, I don't want it or need it. But I'm not going to get down on anybody else for it."

Hall leaves the Army in April 2009. He would like to find work with the National Park Service or Environmental Protection Agency, anything outdoors.

"I hope this doesn't define me," Hall said of his lawsuit. "It's just about time somebody said something."

Source: Associated Press

## Expelled: What Do the Critics Say?

The "Rotten Tomatoes" web site collects reviews of new movies from critics around the nation. The score of a movie on the "Tomatometer" is based on a tally of the critics' recommendations and determines whether it is a "Fresh Tomato" or a "Rotten Tomato".

Ben Stein's creationist documentary "Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed" was released in theatres on April 18. With a score of 9% (only 3 out of 33 critics felt the movie was worth seeing) Expelled is clearly very rotten. None of the 13 top critics gave the movie a thumbs up. Here are a few excerpts from their reviews.

Embracing evolutionary theory will turn you into a close-minded, God-denying Nazi -- that's the upshot of this ludicrous propaganda piece.

*Reece Pendleton—Chicago Reader*

Regardless of your personal views, Expelled's heavy-handed bias (a visit to Darwin's home gets the same eerie music as a tour of Dachau) is exasperating.

*Adam Markovitz—Entertainment Weekly*

This documentary purporting to examine the issue of freedom of expression in the debate between the competing arguments of 'intelligent design' and Darwinism squanders the potential fascination of its topic with its simplistic, heavy-handed approach.

*Frank Scheck—Hollywood Reporter*

This is propaganda, a political rant disguised as a serious commentary on stifled freedom of inquiry.

*Claudia Puig—USA Today*

It shows us bogus security files, as if some cabal is spying on everyone. It shirks the facts. And it madly edits images to equate Darwin with Hitler, and Ben Stein with -- yes -- Ronald Reagan. Typical of all propaganda, it also distorts language.

*Stephen Whitty—Newark Star-Ledger*

Stein's schlumpy presence is disarming, though his know-it-all nature is at odds with his free-speech posing.

*Joe Neumaier—New York Daily News*

The movie itself is an example of design by faith and emotion rather than intelligence, defined as rationality grounded in proof.

*Nell Minow—Chicago Sun-Times*

One of the sleaziest documentaries to arrive in a very long time, Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed is a conspiracy-theory rant masquerading as investigative inquiry.

*Jeannette Catsoulis—New York Times*

Stein claims to denounce the tyranny of dogma, then browbeats us with his own.

*Rafer Guzman—Newsday*

Stein spends the first half of the movie setting himself a trap, and the second half squirming in it.

*Kyle Smith—New York Post*

Bizarre and hysterical.

*Vadim Rizov—Village Voice*

The man made famous by Ferris Bueller, however, quickly wades into waters far too deep for him.

*Jeffrey Kluger—TIME Magazine*

The film's flippant approach undermines the seriousness of its discourse, trading less in facts than in emotional appeals.

*Justin Chang—Variety*

Consensus: Full of patronizing, poorly structured arguments, Expelled is a cynical political stunt in the guise of a documentary.

Source: <http://www.rottentomatoes.com>

## ICR Fails to Obtain Certification in Texas

At its April 24, 2008, meeting, the Texas Higher Education Coordination Board unanimously voted to deny the Institute for Creation Research's request for a state certificate of authority to offer a master's degree in science education through its graduate school, recently relocated to Texas, as the Houston Chronicle (April 24, 2008) reported. The board's vote accorded with a recommendation issued on April 23, 2008, by the board's Academic Excellence and Research Committee, which in turn was based on a recommendation by Raymund Paredes, the Texas Commissioner of Higher Education.

According to a THECB press release, "Paredes based the recommendation on two considerations: 1) that ICR failed to demonstrate that the proposed degree program meets acceptable standards of science and science education; and 2) that the proposed degree is inconsistent with Coordinating Board rules which require the accurate labeling or designation of programs ... Since the proposed degree program inadequately covers key areas of science, it cannot be properly designated either as 'science' or 'science education.'"

Paredes's recommendation was echoed by a host of scientists in Texas. Recently, for example, a survey conducted by Raymond A. Eve for the Texas Freedom Network and NCSE polled 881 science faculty members at fifty public and private Texas universities for their opinions of the ICR's request for certification; nearly 200 faculty members responded, with 185 (95% of respondents) opposed to certifying the program.

At the committee meeting, the Dallas Morning News (April 23, 2008) reported, Paredes said, "Evolution is such a fundamental principle of contemporary science it is hard to imagine how you could cover the various fields of science without giving it the proper attention it deserves as a foundation of science." "In insisting on a literal interpretation of biblical creation," Paredes added, the ICR's science education program "gives insufficient coverage to conventional science and does not adequately prepare students in the field of science education."

The Austin American-Statesman (April 24, 2008) editorially applauded the board's decision, writing, "We applaud the board for setting this precedent in what will surely be a long series of battles involving science education in Texas. After the wars over the teaching of both evolution and intelligent design that have splintered Kansas for the past nine years, Texans can breathe at least a momentary sigh of relief. ... Paredes and the coordinating board took a correct and principled stand in denying the creationist institute's science course."

Despite the board's vote, the issue is not definitively resolved yet. The ICR will now have 45 days to file an appeal or 180 days to reapply for another certificate of authority. After the committee's vote, the Dallas Morning News reported, the ICR's chief executive officer Henry Morris III "said the institute may revise its application or take its case to court. 'We will pursue due process,' he told the board. 'We will no doubt see you in the future.'"

Source: <http://www.ncseweb.org/>

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## Pro-Science Board Member Wins Primary

In the March 4, 2008, primary election, Pat Hardy won the Republican nomination for the District 11 seat on the Texas state board of education, with 59% of the vote. A two-term veteran of the board, Hardy was challenged for the nomination by Barney Maddox, a urologist from Cleburne, Texas, who told the board in 2003 that the state standards were trying to "brainwash our children into believing in evolution" and who is billed by the Institute for Creation Research as "author of the biological sciences course material for the Creationist Worldview distance education program offered by ICR." The Associated Press (March 5, 2008) reported, "Hardy said her opponent kept his evolution views out of campaign mailings but did tell social conservatives he would vote with them. 'They could have taken a chance and pushed some of those buttons,' Hardy said."

The race was particularly important for the integrity of science education because, as the Texas Freedom Network explains in its recent valuable report *The State Board of Education: Dragging Texas Schools into the Culture Wars*, the far-right faction on the state board of education now holds seven seats on the fifteen-member board. The addition of Maddox would have ensured a reliable majority for the faction, which already is expected to launch a campaign aimed at undermining the treatment of evolution in the Texas state science standards as they are reviewed and revised in 2008. The state science standards determine both what is taught in Texas's public school science classrooms and the content of the biology textbooks approved for use in the state, which is one of the largest textbook markets in the country.

Source: <http://www.ncseweb.org/>

## May Events

### May 6<sup>th</sup> - THCF First Tuesday Lunch

1:00 pm: Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill Country Freethinkers' First Tuesday Lunch (held monthly)

Host: Julie Fisher

Discussion Topic: "Living Biblically: What would be hard for you?"

**Ping's Restaurant (by HEB in Leon Springs)**  
**24165 W IH 10 # 221**

### May 14<sup>th</sup> – THCF Lunch in the Northwest

12:30 pm - Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill Country Freethinkers' Lunch (held monthly)

Host: Julie Fisher

Discussion Topic: "Obama! Hillary! McCain! What is the best and worst of each candidate?"

**Martha's Mexican Restaurant**  
**5822 Babcock Drive (Near Huebner)**

### May 17<sup>th</sup> – The Lunch Bunch

11:30 am: Join the "Lunch Bunch" for good food and great conversation before the General Meeting

**Sarika's Thai Restaurant**  
**4319 Medical Dr, Near Fredericksburg Rd**

### May 17<sup>th</sup> – FACT General Meeting

1:00 pm: General meetings occur on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of every month (unless otherwise announced)

Speaker: John Courage

Title of Presentation: "Clean Elections"

**Community Unitarian Universalist Church**  
**4818 Beverly Mae East (off Babcock)**

### May 31<sup>st</sup> – FACT Discussion Brunch

9:30 am - Join us for a brunch and discussion the last Saturday of every month.

Host: Jane Tuck

Topic: TBD

**DENNY'S Back Room**  
**4510 Fredericksburg Road**  
**(South of Crossroads Mall)**  
**New Location! Different Day!**

## June Events

### June 3<sup>rd</sup> — THCF First Tuesday Lunch

### June 11<sup>th</sup> — THCF Lunch in the Northwest

### June 21<sup>st</sup> — General Meeting

### June 28<sup>th</sup> — FACT Discussion Brunch

May 2008						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

June 2008						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

**FACT**  
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*Opinions and statements made by authors, contained herein may not reflect the position of FACT and are, therefore, not the responsibility of FACT, its officers, directors, or editors.*



## FACT MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Return this form to :** FACT, P.O. Box 160881, San Antonio, TX 78280-3081

### ANNUAL DUES (Jan-Dec)

A.	Individual Paying Member	\$30
B.	Family (2 or more members)	\$42
C.	Active Duty Military/Full-time Student (non-voting)	\$18

- Membership dues are due in January.
- Dues are non-refundable.
- New members who join after the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the year will pay a prorated amount for the remainder of the year.
- Members who paid dues the previous year, but who are paying late, will be liable for the entire year.
- Donations in addition to dues are always welcome.