

FACT

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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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A Matter of *FACT* & The Voice

March 2010

Science and Religion in the Classroom

By the time you receive this Newsletter, the Texas Primary Elections will be over and the candidates for each party will have been determined. One of the contests (or rather several of the contests) being watched carefully are the eight seats on the State Board of Education which are being filled in this cycle. A brief report can be found on page 4.

Freethinkers are interested in these races because of the strong ideological bent of some of the incumbents, and the intersection of science and religion in the public school system.

The guest speaker for the FACT General Meeting on March 20th, will be Dr. Daniel Boice, a Senior Research Scientist at Southwest Research Institute. In addition to conducting basic research in astrophysics and observational astronomy, he has practical classroom experience, having taught astronomy and mathematics at UTSA and SAC. Dr. Boice designed many of the astronomy lab activities used by UTSA, and has also mentored gifted high school students in the sciences.

Thus he is an especially favored position to discuss science and religion in the public school system.

General Meeting, Saturday, March 20th @ 1pm
Community Unitarian Universalist Church
4818 E. Beverly Mae

Camp Quest Texas

I hope you have heard of the Camp Quest movement, the secular alternative to summer Bible camps. They are being held for children from 8-18 in several states, now including Texas!

The purpose of Camp Quest is to provide children of freethinking parents educational camping experiences dedicated to understanding the natural world and to improving the human condition through rational inquiry; critical and creative thinking; scientific method; self-respect; ethics; competency; democracy; free speech; and, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, the separation of religion and government. Activities include science experiments, debates, hiking, swimming, canoes, camp fires, star gazing, crafts and more.

This year, Camp Quest Texas will be held during the first week in August at Brownwood, Texas. If you have children, or nieces or nephews, or grandchildren who are struggling in the hyper-religious environment, I urge you to look into this wonderful summer adventure for them.

There will be an informational meeting about this project in the San Antonio area on March 21st at 3:00 PM. Go to www.meetup.com/CampQuestTexas for the exact location, and RSVP under the "San Antonio Area Family Meet and Greet" banner.

This meeting is a great opportunity to meet other like-minded parents, find out the details of the camps, and allow your children to socialize with other kids they may see at camp.

Nick Lee

Protect Yourself Against the God Virus

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

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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.

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

Is the religious brain infected with a virus, in the same way as their sinuses might be, or their computer?

That was the motif of the talk given by Darrel Ray, Ed.D., an organizational psychologist and author of three books, to the February General Meeting of FACT. His latest book is entitled "The God Virus", and explores the parallels between physical and psychological illnesses and how they manifest themselves. Dr. Ray notes that all religions take great care to infect children with the God Virus at a very young age, before they have a chance to build up an immunity to it. Once established in the brain, this virus is very difficult to cure, short of a secular epiphany.

With degrees in Sociology, Religious Studies, and Psychology, Dr. Ray has applied all three disciplines to ferret out the mechanisms that make the God Virus especially viral. Two of these, used especially effectively by Christians, are guilt and threat. As self-esteem is eroded in the mind, the idea of absolute obedience takes hold. If you do not follow the rules, you are made to feel guilty and that you will be punished, if not in this life, in the next.

Dr. Ray draws on his own experiences as the child of fundamentalist, evangelical parents who frequently took their young son to Bible-thumping religious revival meetings. He was taught that people of other religions (or of no religion) were sinners who would wind up in hell. It was only after he matured and earned degrees in religion and psychology that he began to see the mental health hazards of prejudice, myth, and superstition.

For more information about his concepts, log on to www.thegodvirus.net.

In addition to lecturing about his latest book, Dr. Ray has begun to establish local groups around the country for people recovering from religion as he did. He very cleverly call these "Recovering Religionists", where people in the same stage of transition can come together and help each other through the process. These are not just 'talk-talk' groups, but follow psychological methods developed by Dr. Ray. To locate a group near you, go to <http://recoveringreligionists.com>.

For those who missed seeing Dr. Ray at the FACT General Meeting, there is another chance to hear him talk about his book "The God Virus". After leaving San Antonio, Dr. Ray made a presentation in Austin, and also was booked on the Public Access TV Show, "The Atheist Experience". The episode is archived as program #645 and can be viewed at <http://www.atheist-experience.com/>.

Nick Lee



Every Monday at 12:30 and 8:30 PM
 Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20
 Grande Cable Channel 19
 AT&T U-verse Channel 99
FREETHOUGHT FORUM
 Hosted by Hugh Henry

“Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are!”

by Nick Lee

Many of you remember that invitation to the Munchkins from the Good Witch, to meet the “young lady who fell from a star.” The poor dears were cowering in fear at this intruder into their idyllic life.

For the past 30 years, freethinkers, atheists, agnostics and other non-believers have been cowering in the corner while the shadow of the religious right has been striding over the land. (Turns out, the shadow is much bigger than the body that cast it, but like the folks in Plato’s cave, we were fooled.)

There are some good reasons why non-believers are reluctant to announce themselves publically, especially for those who are still active in their careers, and especially in the Bible Belt. Although tales of workplace discrimination are largely anecdotal, there is a perception of peer pressure to ‘conform to the norm’ among co-workers. You may also hear stories of sabotage to the office cubicle or ‘keying’ of cars by zealous religionists.

As uncomfortable as such confrontations may be, however, the law is on our side, and there are remedies.

On the brighter side, co-workers may not be as hostile as perceived, and since religious beliefs are not an integral part of workplace discussions, it is possible for believers and non-believers to co-exist without conflict.

The more reluctant we are to let friends, neighbors, and co-workers know about us and the less other people understand the basis for our lack of belief, the easier it is for them to demonize non-believers and ascribe all kinds of ‘high crimes and misdemeanors’ to freethinkers. They are wrong and misinformed, but it is up to us to correct their misperceptions.

Many national atheist organizations are currently urging their members to speak up and reach out to the wider community, in an effort to increase our visibility and to let believers know we are not monsters. One effort is “The OUT Campaign”, begun by Richard Dawkins, which proudly features t-shirts and pins with the Scarlet Letter “A” (for Atheist). This campaign has been picked up by over 1700 web sites and blog spots around the world.

The OUT Campaign calls for atheists to:

- COME OUT and let friends and family know of their non-belief;
- REACH OUT to other nonbelievers to let them know they are not alone;
- SPEAK OUT about discrimination and injustice;
- KEEP OUT religious incursion on our civil liberties; and
- STAND OUT as a role model in community service.

This is the path taken by the African-Americans in the ‘60s and by the gays in the ‘70s. As a result, both groups have achieved wide-spread acceptance in American society, not to mention political recognition. But in both cases, it was not just ‘groups’ that took action; it was individuals acting out and standing up and demanding respect.

Can YOU do that much in your personal life?

IF

If cathedrals had been universities
 If dungeons of the Inquisition had been laboratories
 If Christians had believed in character instead of creed
 If they had taken from the bible only that which is GOOD
 and thrown away the wicked and absurd
 If temple domes had been observatories
 If priests had been philosophers
 If missionaries had taught useful arts instead of bible lore
 If astrology had been astronomy
 If the black arts had been chemistry
 If superstition had been science
 If religion had been humanity
 The world then would be a heaven filled
 with love, and liberty and joy

Robert Ingersoll



Change of “Lunch Bunch” venue to Simi’s Indian Buffet attracted full house before February General Meeting

Primary Texas SBOE Election Results Are In

by Lee Nichols

Progressive and centrist Texans hoping to sweep the religious right wing out of the State Board of Education—and end the recent national laughingstock headlines that wing has made lately—got a mixed bag of results in the March primaries.

On the upside, GOP voters in District 9 (central East Texas) finally got embarrassed enough by former board Chair Don McLeroy—and his pro-creationist, anti-evolution crusade—to turn him out of office (barely). Out of 115,916 votes cast, a mere 860 were the edge in favor of moderate Thomas Ratliff, son of former Lt. Gov. Bill Ratliff. And out in the Panhandle, moderate GOP incumbent Bob Craig easily held his District 15 seat against challenger Randy Rives. On the downside, Republicans in District 12 (suburban Dallas) decided they don't like moderation and removed Geraldine "Tincy" Miller in favor of the more conservative George M. Clayton with 52% of the vote. Actually, Clayton could be a mixed bag himself: As noted by the Texas Tribune, he's (thankfully) against punishing teachers for poor results on standardized tests. He does, however, appear to be yet another creationist.

In District 5 (central Hill Country, including Travis County south of the river), the endorsements of San Antonio business leaders like HEB's Charles Butt and car dealer Red McCombs got challenger Tim Tuggey no traction—his challenge to far-right incumbent Ken Mercer went down in flames, 69% to 31%. Mercer will face Texas State professor Rebecca Bell-Metereau, who easily won the Democratic nomination over three others. Bell-Metereau knows she'll have a tough fight in a district drawn to favor Republicans, but she thinks Texans have lost patience with the religious extremists. "People are tired of these backward people trying to force 18th century thought on 21st century people," she said at a Democratic Party election night gathering at Serrano's in Central Austin. "I think there are ... Republicans who do not agree with the swing the Republican Party has taken. I think there are people who accept science, who accept real history, and they don't want to see that happening to their own party."

District 10 (Central Texas, including Travis County north of the river) is still up in the air: Dem Judy Jennings was unopposed, but in the GOP, voters must still decide between former educator Marsha Farney of Georgetown (35.5%) and conservative activist Brian Russell of Austin (35.3%). (McNeil High teacher Rebecca Osborne, perceived as the most moderate of the three, took 29%). Russell is the handpicked successor of right-wing zealot Cynthia Dunbar, who is stepping down after one stormy term. Farney's beliefs are hard to peg—when given the opportunity to disavow creationism last month, she would only tell the Chronicle: "My faith is not shaken by evolution. ... It should be taught as a theory."

Source: <http://www.austinchronicle.com/>, March 5, 2010

UT Austin Partner in \$25M NSF Evolution Study

The University of Texas at Austin is part of a \$25 million, multi-university center established by the National Science Foundation (NSF) that will study evolution in action in natural and virtual settings. The center, titled "BEACON: Study of Evolution in Action," is one of five highly coveted Science and Technology Centers recently established by the NSF. BEACON is short for the "Bio/computational Evolution in Action CONSortium."

In contrast to evolutionary studies focusing on fossil records or comparing DNA among species to discover common ancestry, BEACON scientists will focus on evolution as an ongoing process. They will use organisms in laboratories and at field sites, and use "digital organisms" undergoing real evolution on computers.

BEACON will be a resource for academia and industry, performing basic research while helping create new technologies to solve a wide range of scientific problems. In addition, the goal of the center is to educate a generation of multidisciplinary scientists and improve public understanding of evolution at all levels.

The approximately \$2.5 million of initial BEACON funding for The University of Texas at Austin will be used to support interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research projects, graduate training, undergraduate research, and outreach to high schools and the public through the Texas Memorial Museum.

For more details, visit the center's Web site at <http://beacon.msu.edu>.

Source: <http://www.utexas.edu/news/>, February 23, 2010

Health Care Reform Aborted?

by Marc Janssens

As a secular humanist I believe that every self-respecting nation should provide basic healthcare for its citizens. It also makes good economic sense because a healthy population is a productive population. This does not mean that it should be completely free. For example, modest co-pays for specific types of services and those who can afford it are necessary to control abuse.

The U.S. is the only developed country that does not provide basic health care for a substantial number of its citizens. According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau statistics, approximately one in seven Americans lacks any type of health insurance. In 2007 this amounted to a total of 45.7 million people (15.3% of the population). This number includes those who have been denied coverage because of a pre-existing condition, but not those who have some health insurance but have been denied coverage for specific illnesses because of a pre-existing condition.

At the end of 2006 I was diagnosed with unrelated colon and kidney cancers. In December 2006 I had a colon resection followed by six months of chemotherapy and a partial nephrectomy in July 2007. So far my recovery has been very successful. My primary insurance covered 90% of the costs, but fortunately I had supplemental cancer insurance so that out-of-pocket expenses were minimal. Last year my employer changed supplemental cancer insurance carriers. I submitted an application to the new company, but was denied coverage because of a pre-existing condition. This kind of situation is not reflected in the Census Bureau statistics.

What is the cost of having so many people with no or inadequate health insurance? The emergency room is in many cases the only treatment option for uninsured and underinsured people who cannot afford to pay. The result is that hospital emergency rooms are often crowded with people that have relatively benign conditions and do not require costly emergency room treatment. It is hard to imagine this being cost-effective. In addition, uninsured and underinsured patients with illnesses such as the flu usually have to wait many hours before they see a nurse or doctor, which increases the risk of infecting others in the waiting room.

This is just one aspect of the impact of the problem on healthcare costs. The more important aspect is that of the number of deaths due to uninsured/underinsured people not receiving the necessary care or not receiving care in a timely manner. In 2009 researchers at Harvard University reported the results of a study, which found that every year approximately 45,000 people die in the U.S. due to lack of health insurance. This is more than the annual number of deaths on U.S. highways! Other studies have demonstrated that uninsured people get healthier when they turn 65 and join the government Medicare system.

The healthcare reform bill that is currently considered by lawmakers in Washington DC provides a unique opportunity to address (part of) the problem. The bill passed the House of Representatives in November of last year, but not without an anti-abortion amendment introduced by Congressmen Bart Stupak, a liberal Democrat, and Joseph Pitts, a conservative Republican. The health reform bill that was introduced in the Senate did not contain the Stupak-Pitts abortion-coverage ban. Although the Senate voted by a 54-45 margin to table a similar abortion-ban amendment, essentially defeating it, a provision that may jeopardize women's abortion coverage introduced by Senator Ben Nelson was passed in the Senate bill. The challenge is now to come to an agreement on the final bill with the House.

In an interview with "Good Morning America," Congressman Stupak said he would bring down the entire bill unless there is a complete abortion-coverage ban in the new health system. Bart Stupak is a Catholic and his anti-abortion stance is obviously motivated by his religion. He is a prominent leader in Democrats for Life. But is he really pro-life? Based on the Harvard study it seems like Mr. Stupak, if he is indeed going to bring the bill down, does not care too much about 45,000 actually living Americans who die every year because they lack health insurance. These are people with family and friends that will go through the emotional pain and suffering at the death of a loved one.

According to the Guttmacher Institute the rate of induced abortions in the U.S. in the 30 years following Roe vs. Wade declined from a peak of 29 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44 in 1980 to 20 per 1,000 in 2004. To accelerate the decline would it not make sense to adopt the policies that have proven to be successful in other countries in reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies? Experience in countries like the Netherlands, where the abortion rate is about one third of that in the U.S., clearly indicates that these policies, which involve sex education of middle school students and easy access to contraceptives, are much more effective than a ban on abortion. In fact, history has shown that a ban is not likely to significantly reduce the demand for abortions and women will then have to resort to self-induced or back-alley abortions with high risk for injury or death.

Unfortunately, these policies will not sit well with the religious conservatives either.

'Dream Team' Agrees Huge Asteroid Killed Dinosaurs

by Traci Watson

For decades, scientists have debated exactly what kind of cataclysm was responsible for the extinction of the dinosaurs. Did a giant rock from outer space blast T. Rex and his ilk off the face of the Earth? Or was a huge volcanic eruption to blame?

Now the jury is in—maybe. In a recent issue of the prestigious journal *Science*, a "dream team" of 41 researchers from 12 nations declares that the evidence points overwhelmingly to a mountain-sized asteroid that walloped the planet 65 million years ago. The monstrous boulder left an equally monstrous scar, a 120-mile-wide dimple known as the Chicxulub crater on the Mexican coast.

"We assessed the whole picture," says Kirk Johnson of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. "The answer is quite simple. ... The Chicxulub crater really is the culprit."

What killed off Earth's dinosaurs and many other life forms 65 million years ago? An international research team has concluded it was an asteroid that hit Mexico. The holdouts who downplay the asteroid's role are unconvinced.

"It's the same old story from them," says Norman MacLeod of the Natural History Museum in London, referring to the team that wrote the new paper. "The authors conveniently forget to mention critical data."

But MacLeod and another prominent doubter, Gerta Keller of Princeton University, don't dispute that a colossal space rock hit the Earth roughly 65 million years ago. And whether or not that led to the demise of the dinosaurs, new research is painting an increasingly detailed picture of the hellish conditions after the asteroid's arrival.

It would take a mighty rock to do in the mighty lizards known as dinosaurs, and on that count the Chicxulub asteroid fits the bill. It was big -- more than seven miles across, three times the width of Manhattan -- and it was moving fast -- 20 times the speed of a rifle bullet. When it hit, the explosion unleashed a billion times more energy than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, says Gareth Collins of Imperial College London.

In a paper published last year, Collins found that the asteroid in 30 seconds drilled an initial crater 19 miles deep, nearly penetrating the Earth's crust. Earthquakes of up to magnitude 11 -- 1,000 times more powerful than the recent Chilean earthquake -- shook the area, and tsunamis more than 300 feet high inundated nearby coasts.

Collins has created Google Maps-based scenarios of what happened.

The impact was so violent that it melted and vaporized both the asteroid itself and the spot the asteroid hit. Within an hour, melted rock had splattered as far as northern Canada, says David Kring of the Lunar and Planetary Institute. An immense plume of vaporized and melted material burst through the atmosphere and into outer space. Within a few hours, tiny drops from that plume began raining down through the atmosphere all across the Earth's surface.

As they fell, these drops grew hotter, literally broiling the planet for several minutes, according to another 2009 study. Any exposed animal "is not going to do so well," says the University of Vienna's Tamara Goldin, one of the study's authors.

The combination of dust, soot and caustic chemicals filling the air blotted out the sun, Kring says. The sky close to the crater first glowed red then went pitch black. All over the globe, a biblical darkness fell, lasting perhaps a week, maybe nearly a year.

The darkness shut down photosynthesis, the process by which plants capture sunlight to grow. Huge swathes of forest died. Entire classes of animals perished.

But that's where the narrative gets disputed. The authors of the new study say that more than 60 percent of species went extinct, including most dinosaurs. MacLeod, though, says that dinosaurs were in decline for millions of years before the asteroid hit. He also wonders why, if the asteroid strike was such a doomsday event, some classes of species survived and even thrived.

Keller questions even more basic claims, such as the dating of the asteroid strike. She argues that the Chicxulub rock hammered Earth hundreds of thousands of years before the mass extinctions shown in the fossil record.

Just such arguments -- and media coverage of them -- are what prompted the scientists to publish their new paper, Goldin says. After ignoring Keller and other skeptics for many years, the pro-crater forces got so frustrated that they decided to put all the evidence together.

"It is almost impossible to change the skeptics' minds," Goldin concedes. "But we hope we can communicate to the scientific community and the public that this impact-induced environmental catastrophe did happen."

Source: <http://www.aolnews.com/>, March 5, 2010

“Idiot America” by Charles Pierce

A Book Review by Marc Janssens

The cover page of this book immediately piqued my interest. It seems to imply that the belief of dinosaurs co-existing with present-day animals when Noah sailed his Ark is an example of the stupidity that became a virtue in America. After reading through the humorous account of the author’s visit to the Creation Museum in the book’s introduction posted on amazon.com, I decided to get and read my own copy. Freethinkers will most likely appreciate this book as much as I did.

Pierce gives three premises that flow throughout the book: (1) any theory is valid if it sells books, soaks up ratings, or otherwise moves units; (2) anything can be true if someone says it loudly enough; and (3) fact is that which enough people believe, truth is how fervently they believe it. These three premises are an excellent guide to understanding how propaganda of nonsense works.

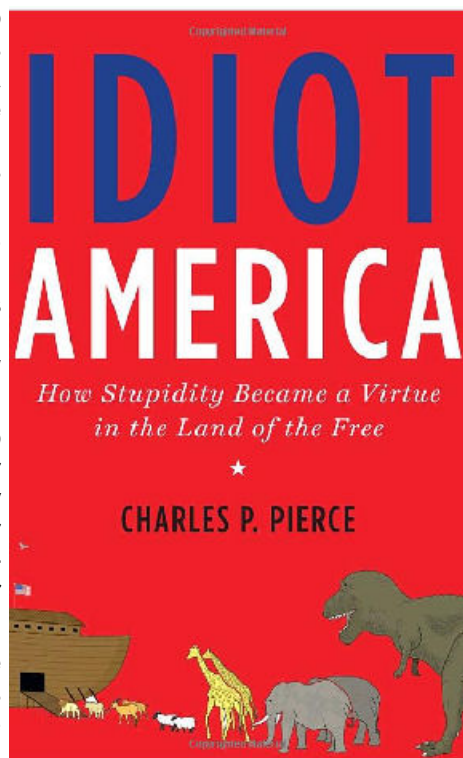
A comment on amazon.com concisely explains the book’s thesis: “Too many people in this nation believe what they are sold, what they hear repeated over and over, and what they feel in their guts, not what they should reflect upon in their alleged brains. They do not read carefully (or at all) nor do they think critically. Logical thinking based on clearly established fact has been stigmatized by a those people who have the power to work an uncritical public into their webs.”

Pierce essentially takes us through a number of examples to illustrate his point. Another comment on amazon.com summarizes the book’s highlights as follows: “The author takes us to Dover, as well as: the Creation Museum in Hebron, KY, where dinosaurs are depicted wearing saddles before delighted children; a political talk-radio convention in Manhattan, which inspires a beautiful history of Nashville AM radio’s popularization of rhythm & blues and the effects of the Fairness Doctrine’s repeal; the pastoral Woodside Hospice in Florida, whose loving, professional staff, dedicated to tenderly guiding patients through their final days, was sucked into the nauseating nightmare of the Terry Schiavo case; an Alaskan barrier island where the effects of global warming are far more evident than to our many buffoons in Congress; the Bush White House, as it sifts out facts and well-informed advice in favor of a predetermined, ill-planned march into Iraq; and the 2008 election, in which three Republican candidates at a televised debate say they don’t believe in evolution, and Sarah Palin’s comical appearance on the national stage sums up nearly all the author’s tenets. We begin each chapter spending time with the thoughtful James Madison, a Founding Father whose faith in the Great Experiment would be sorely tested today.”

Some have criticized Pierce for having a liberal bias as the examples in *Idiot America* are all from the right wing. Conservatives are free to compile their own list, of course. However, the fact that Pierce does not mention any liberal “Idiots” (I am sure some exist) does not diminish the veracity of his observations and the validity of the book’s thesis.

Pierce is often very entertaining, but overall the book is quite alarming and depressing. It offers a good explanation for why the country is as polarized as it is. Unfortunately *Idiot America* is also a warning that there might be even worse days ahead.

“*Idiot America: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free*” by Charles Pierce. Doubleday, 2009, ISBN: 978-0767926140, 304 pages, Hardback \$26.00.



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FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org

Or P.O. Box 160881, San Antonio, TX 78280

Meet the Flintstones

by Ross Ramsey

Nearly a third of Texans believe humans and dinosaurs roamed the earth at the same time, and more than half disagree with the theory that humans developed from earlier species of animals, according to the University of Texas/Texas Tribune Poll.

The differences in beliefs about evolution and the length of time that living things have existed on earth are reflected in the political and religious preference of our respondents, who were asked four questions about biological history and God:

- 38 percent said human beings developed over millions of years with God guiding the process and another 12 percent said that development happened without God having any part of the process. Another 38 percent agreed with the statement "God created human beings pretty much in their present form about 10,000 years ago."
- Asked about the origin and development of life on earth without injecting humans into the discussion, and 53 percent said it evolved over time, "with a guiding hand from God." They were joined by 15 percent who agreed on the evolution part, but "with no guidance from God." About a fifth — 22 percent — said life has existed in its present form since the beginning of time.
- Most of the Texans in the survey — 51 percent — disagree with the statement, "human beings, as we know them today, developed from earlier species of animals." Thirty-five percent agreed with that statement, and 15 percent said they don't know.
- Did humans live at the same time as the dinosaurs? Three in ten Texas voters agree with that statement; 41 percent disagree, and 30 percent don't know.

The questions were devised by David Prindle, a University of Texas government professor who authored a book called *Stephen Jay Gould and the Politics of Evolution*, about the late evolutionary biologist. "The end in mind ... is to establish the relationships, not just to get raw public opinion," he says. "We can do some fancy statistical stuff. ... Is it religion driving politics or is politics driving religion? My hypothesis is that religious views drive politics."

The most common religious denominations in the survey were Catholic and Baptist, with 20 percent each, followed by nondenominational Christians, at 10 percent, and Methodists, at 6 percent. Eight percent chose "spiritual but not religious," and 7 percent chose "other." Only 6 percent identified themselves as atheist or agnostic. An overwhelming majority said their religious beliefs were extremely important (52 percent) or somewhat important (30 percent). Only 35 percent go to church once a week or more; 52 percent said they go once or twice a year (29 percent) or never (23 percent).

Church attendance isn't much different among Republicans and Democrats in the poll, though Republicans who do go to church say they go more often. More than half of the Democrats—51 percent—go to church "never" or "once or twice a year." That's true of 45 percent of the Republicans in the poll. Forty-two percent of Republicans say they attend church at least once a week, compared to 35 percent of Democrats.

Democrats (28 percent) are less likely than Republicans (47 percent) to think that humans have always existed in their present form and more likely (21 percent to 7 percent) to think humans have developed over millions of years without God's guidance. About the same percentages of Democrats and Republicans (40 and 36 percent, respectively) believe that evolution took place over time with God's guidance. Democrat Bill White's voters were the most likely to believe in evolution without a divine hand (33 percent); on the Republican side, by comparison, only 6 percent of Rick Perry's supporters were in that category.

Has life on earth always existed in its present form? Republicans are more likely to agree (29 percent) than Democrats (16 percent). They're less likely to believe that life evolved over time with no guidance from God (8 percent to 24 percent). Democrats are slightly less inclined to believe in evolution with a "guiding hand from God" (50 percent to 55 percent).

[Continued on the next page ...](#)

Meet the Flintstones (Cont'd)

Republicans are less likely to believe that humans developed from earlier species of animals; 26 percent agree, while 60 percent disagree. Among Democrats in the survey, 46 percent agree that humans evolved from earlier species; 42 percent disagree. Perry's voters were most hostile to this premise — 67 percent disagree.

About the same numbers of Democrats and Republicans—43 percent—disagree with the idea that dinosaurs and humans lived on the planet at the same time. Republicans were slightly more likely to agree with the idea (31 percent to 27 percent). Perry had more voters in each group on the GOP side, but Kay Bailey Hutchison had the largest share of voters who believe in that coexistence.

Prindle says the results recall a line from comedian Lewis Black. "He did a standup routine a few years back in which he said that a significant proportion of the American people think that the 'The Flintstones' is a documentary," Prindle says. "Turns out he was right. Thirty percent of Texans agree that humans and dinosaurs lived on the earth at the same time."

Source: <http://www.texastribune.org/>, February 17, 2010

Secular Coalition Visits the White House

by Herb Silverman

Representatives from the Secular Coalition for America met with White House officials on February 26 to discuss issues of concern to secular Americans. We were grateful to have a place at the table, with a chance to hear from Obama administration representatives, and for them to hear from us about issues that affect all Americans. This historic meeting marked the first time in history that a presidential administration has met for a policy briefing with the American nontheist community.

The Secular Coalition for America includes 10 national nontheistic member organizations, and its mission has two goals: to increase the visibility of, and respect for, nontheistic viewpoints in the United States; and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government as the best guarantee of freedom for all. Aside from the discussion of our issues with White House officials, the mere presence in that place for about 60 of our representatives from around the country marked a proud moment for all secular Americans.

Before giving particulars, I want to dispel some grossly unfair but predictable media comments that show why we are working so diligently to fulfill our mission. In response to the news that we would meet at the White House, the advocacy group called In God We Trust ripped the Obama administration "for meeting to plot political strategy with 60 atheist activists." Its chairman, Bishop Council Nedd, said we represent "some of the most hate-filled, anti-religious groups in the nation."

Then Sean Hannity claimed on Fox News that the Obama administration is giving special treatment to atheists, and that religious groups "have not received this treatment from the Obama White House." I suppose in Hannity's America a two-hour meeting with Secular Americans is "special treatment." But a recent two-day meeting sponsored by the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, with more than 60 religious leaders gathered at the White House, was not special. Perhaps meetings between White House officials and religious leaders really are nothing special, since they occur on a regular basis. And President Obama has met with and paid deference to numerous religious leaders, including Pope Benedict, which brings me to another media alert about the Secular Coalition for America.



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

Available Sizes: Small, Medium, Large, XLarge, 2X and 3X

Also Available: One Size Fits All Vests (Red)

Price for All T-Shirts and Vests: \$15.00

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Secular Coalition Visits the White House (Cont'd)

The headline in a press release from the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights stated, "Obama Aides Host Catholic Bashers." Catholic League president Bill Donohue referred to representatives of the Secular Coalition for America as "some of the biggest anti-religious zealots in the nation," and that many of us "would crush Christianity" if we could. (Interestingly, my dictionary defines "zealot" as a fanatical adherent to a cause, especially a religious one.) The Catholic League ended its diatribe with, "It is important that the public learn of the contents of this meeting. We will do what we can to find out what happened." What on earth are they expecting--an atheist plot to take over the government?

Apparently, the Catholic League's crack investigative team never thought to contact any of the Secular Coalition representatives at the meeting. So for the Catholic League and others who would rather opine than investigate, I'll make it easy for you by telling what happened at the meeting.

Administration officials included Tina Tchen, Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement; Paul Monteiro, Associate Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs; Bryan Samuels, Commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services; Mazen Basrawi, Counsel to the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the Department of Justice; and Bill Carr, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel.

These are the topics we addressed.

Childhood medical neglect and abuse: We seek to close legal loopholes for the religiously based medical neglect of children, because no child should ever have to suffer for lack of medical attention, regardless of a parent's motivation. Liz Heywood, a survivor of a childhood bone disease left untreated by her Christian Science parents, was scheduled to speak, but unable to attend due to weather-related travel difficulties. Sasha Bartolf, Legislative Director of the Secular Coalition, read her moving statement.

Military proselytizing and coercion: We seek to ensure that the men and women who risk their lives to protect American values, including freedom of conscience, are respected at all levels of the U.S. military. No service members should ever be coerced into religious participation, subjected to proselytizing, or discriminated against because of their religious beliefs or lack thereof. Those who spoke included Kathleen Johnson, Vice President and Military Director for American Atheists, and past President of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers. She is a retired Army First Sergeant and a Department of the Army civilian. Jason Torpy also spoke. He is a former Army Captain, Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran and West Point graduate, who serves as president of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers. MAAF is a nontheist community with members in all branches around the world.

Fixing faith-based initiatives: We seek to make certain that religious organizations receiving federal funding for social welfare programs cannot discriminate in hiring on the basis of religion; that program beneficiaries are never subject to proselytizing; and that secular options are made equally available to those in need. Sean Faircloth, Executive Director of the Secular Coalition and former Majority Whip in the Maine legislature, spoke on unfulfilled promises by the Obama administration to fix abuses that unconstitutionally funnel money to religious institutions.

So there you have the Secular Coalition for America agenda presented to White House officials. We think these secular values are also American values. It's not religion bashing or Christian bashing to mention that government neutrality toward religion is not the same as government hostility, that the government should not favor one religion over another or religion in general over non-religion, and that over 30 million Americans are good without God.

Those who continually accuse the Secular Coalition for America of hate-filled, religion bashing apparently haven't even checked our website. You'll see policy statements consistent with our positive mission. We may disagree with some religious activities and discriminatory remarks directed toward nontheists, but you will find no blanket condemnation of religion.

Of course, nothing will stop rants from those who would rather denigrate and stereotype than examine evidence.

Source: [The Washington Post](#), February 28, 2010

"No written law has ever been more binding than unwritten custom supported by popular opinion"

Carrie Chapman Catt, American feminist (1859-1947)

March Events

March 10th – THCF Lunch in the NW

1:00 pm - Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill

Country Freethinkers' Lunch (held monthly)

Host: Sally Chizek

Discussion Topic: One of the following three

“Is Political Islam on the march?”

“The roots of today's wars”

”Genetically modified food”

Taste of China Super Buffet

3711 Colony Dr (Off Wurzbach near I-10)

March 20th – The Lunch Bunch

11:30 am: Join us for good food before the Meeting

Simi's Indian Restaurant (Buffet)

4535 Fredericksburg Rd (Inside 410)

March 20th – FACT General Meeting

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

Speaker: Dr. Daniel Boice

Topic: “Science and Religion in the Classroom”

Community Unitarian Universalist Church

4818 Beverly Mae East (off Babcock)

March 27th – FACT Discussion Brunch

9:00 am - Join us for a brunch and discussion the last Saturday of every month.

Topic: Freewheeling Discussion

DENNY'S Back Room

4510 Fredericksburg Rd

April Events

April 6th—THCF First Tuesday Lunch

April 14th—THCF Lunch in the Northwest

April 17th—Potluck

April 24th—FACT Discussion Brunch

March 2010						
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			

April 2010						
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	

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

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- Dues are non-refundable.
- New members who join after the 1st 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.