

# The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Established 1991

Positive Atheism in Action™

Volume 20 Number 2

February 2010

**February Meeting: Sunday, February 21st**

## Safeguard Your Religious Freedoms

There are groups in Minnesota that are busy tearing down the wall that separates state and church. These groups are well staffed, well organized, and well funded. They are also highly motivated. When their activities go unchecked, the religious freedom of all Minnesotans – believers and non-believers alike – is slowly eroded. It's time for us to fight back.

The First Amendment Watchdog Committee invites you to a seminar that will help you defend your liberties. We will begin with a presentation that will cover the basics of the constitutional framework that establishes separation, debunk popular myths you'll typically hear from opponents, explore the landmark court cases that have dealt with these issues over time, and describe contemporary issues of concern to those of us here in Minnesota.

The second portion of the seminar will be more



practical and hands-on. You'll learn where you should be looking for violations of the separation between state and church, how to make others aware of them when you come across them, and what resources you can call on to help fight them. You'll also learn how to effectively approach your legislators, what arguments tend to work with people of different ideologies, and how best to communicate with them. You'll also be introduced to effective letter writing techniques, both to newspapers and legis-

lators. Finally, you'll have the opportunity to apply what you learn in collaborative break-out sessions with other participants, working on actual contemporary issues confronting us here in Minnesota.

### Schedule:

Sunday, February 21, 2010

1:00-1:15 p.m. - Social Time

1:15-1:45 p.m. - Minnesota Atheists Business Meeting,

1:45-2:00 p.m. - Social Time

2:00-3:30 p.m. - Presentation

4:00 p.m. - Dinner at Wanderer's Garden Restaurant

### Meeting:

Ridgedale Public Library

12601 Ridgedale Dr.

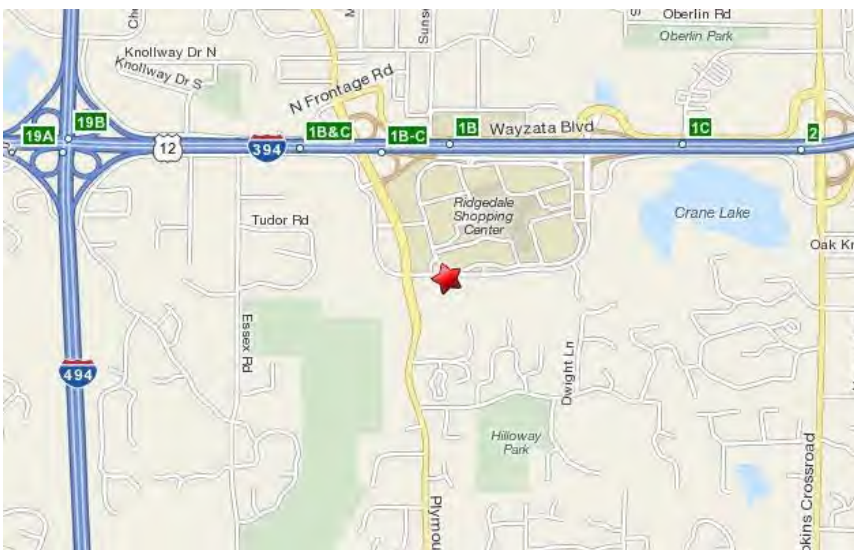
Minnetonka, MN 55305

### Dinner:

Wanderer's Garden Chinese Buffet Restaurant

13059 Ridgedale Dr.

Minnetonka, MN 55305



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**MNA Meetup members: 640**  
**Life memberships: 31**

### Honorary Members

**Dan Barker**  
**Gerald Erickson, PhD**  
**Annie Laurie Gaylor**  
**Dick Hewetson**  
**Robert M. Price, PhD**

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## *The Minnesota Atheist*

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## Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement

Minnesota Atheists is dedicated to building a positive atheist community that actively promotes secular values through educational programs, social activities, and participation in public affairs.

**Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly neighborhood atheism in order to:**

- Provide a community for atheists;
- Educate the public about atheism; and
- Promote separation of state and church.

## President's Column by Jeannette Watland

# Where are the Atheist Women?

It's a familiar scenario. You go to an atheist event and walk into a room full of men. There may be a few women, but in many cases men make up the majority of atheist groups. Why is this? There is no original sin in atheism. There is no book telling us women are inferior. We don't force our women to cover up for religious reasons and women can hold office in these organizations with no questions asked. Atheism seems like it would be the perfect platform for empowerment. So why is it that these groups have such a hard time attracting more women?

In order to answer this question, some generalizations have to be made. I don't fit into any of these generalizations, and many other women I know don't either, but these are theories I've heard on forums and other discussions on the topic that may be worth exploring, even if they aren't true. The first possible reason could be that there



simply are not as many atheist women as there are men. Religion has aspects that appeal to emotions. Women have been characterized as being more emotional and empathetic. Would women be more naturally drawn to religion because it meets their emotional needs? Second, it could be very plausible that there are as many atheist women as men, but the aggressive and negative nature of

many atheist groups is a major turn off for women. Nothing turns me off faster than ridiculing religion. Am I an abnormality, or is this a common trend? Or is the problem simple? Maybe women just don't feel like hanging out with a bunch of boys.

Whatever the reason, atheist women need to represent. It's not as if we don't have any wonderful women role models to lead the way.

Historical figures include Madalyn Murray O'Hair, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Margaret Sanger. Present day women include Margaret Downey, Annie Laurie Gaylor, and my own personal icon Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Minnesota Atheists have their fair share of amazing women. Cynthia Egli (past president of Minnesota Atheists), Crystal Dervetski (one of the hardest working organizers I know), and Stephanie Zvan



(blogger and past host of *Atheist Talk*). So I urge all atheist women out there: Get involved, be vocal, and become leaders. Show the world we can do what the men do...better.

## Upcoming Debate: Does God Exist?

August Berkshire (past President of Minnesota Atheists) will debate Joe Boot (founding President of the Ezra Institute for Contemporary Christianity) on the topic "Does God Exist?" on Wednesday, February 24, 2010, at 8:00 pm at St. Cloud State University (SCSU) in the Atwood Ballroom. The event is co-sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ and Secular Student Alliance at SCSU. It is free and open to the public.

***"Every one of us is precious in the cosmic perspective. If a human disagrees with you, let him live. In a hundred billion galaxies, you will not find another."***

– Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* [book]

## Nominees to the Minnesota Atheists Board of Directors

Nominations for the Minnesota Atheists board of directors occurred at the January 17, 2010 meeting. Elections will be held at the February 21, 2010 meeting. See the cover story for time and location.

There are nine positions to fill, elected in the following order: President, Associate President, Chair, Associate Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, and three Directors-at-Large. Bylaws provide that anyone who runs for one position and loses may run again for any other position that has not yet been elected.

Candidates for the three director-at-large positions must have been members of Minnesota Atheists for at least six months as of the time they assume office (March 1, 2010). Candidates for all other positions must have been members for a minimum of one year.

Candidates' statements are as follows:

### Nominee for President: August Berkshire



What connotation do we want the word "atheist" to have? Isn't it words like "positive, friendly, mature, responsible, ethical, compassionate, caring, helpful, and fun"? Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." Thanks to our members and volunteers, Minnesota Atheists is all this and more.

Our members have many diverse ideas on how we should proceed this coming year. Fortunately, what unites us is greater than what divides us. With a spirit of good will and cooperation, we can accomplish most of our goals.

As the state's oldest, largest, and most active freethought organization, we should take the lead in reaching out to the community, working with other freethought and even religious groups from time to time. Our three-pronged emphasis on community, education, and politics will require the efforts of all of us to fully achieve. I am excited to be a part of this future.

### Nominee for Associate President: Laura Hutt



My name is Laura Hutt. I have been a member of Minnesota Atheists for about three years. I live in downtown Minneapolis and I work as an academic advisor at Capella University. I am interested in being on the Board because I believe that Minnesota Atheists helps to "normalize" atheism with every new member and I would like to see membership soar over the next few years. In addition, I believe that we need to expedite our efforts to purchase a building: a permanent, predictable space to hold meetings, training, parties, and life celebrations such as weddings and funerals. The meet-ups have been tremendous in attracting interest and new members and a building would provide a permanent billboard that atheism is thriving in the Twin Cities.

Candidates' statements continued on page 5

**Nominee for Chair:  
George Kane**



Throughout my 14 years of membership I have served Minnesota Atheists wherever I have been needed. I have served on the board of directors for 13 years, eight of those as secretary, but also including a term as president and a previous term as chair. My other service for the organization includes a variety of outreach beyond our modest community. I am technical director on *Atheists Talk* cable TV as well as a frequent interviewer. In the past I was also a frequent interviewer on the now defunct *Freethought Forum* and *Atheist Talk Radio*. I write the *News and Notes* column on church/state separation issues, the cryptogram and other articles as needed for the Minnesota Atheist newsletter. In 2000 I started a Freethought Toastmasters Club in Saint Paul, the second Toastmasters Club in the nation formed especially for the development of Freethinkers. In keeping with our recent emphasis on Meetups, I am the organizer for social events such as the spaghetti dinners and the reel & meal.

**Nominee for  
Associate Chair:  
Steve Petersen**



When we founded this organization, we wrote this in our mission statement: "Minnesota Atheists is dedicated to building a positive atheist community that actively promotes secular values through educational programs, social activities and participation in public affairs." This has been a guiding principle with unanimous agreement. Along the way we developed the Building Fund to enhance this goal.

Several of us contend that with a solid place in the community we could boost activities that further advance our mission statement. A Minnesota Atheists Center would increase our voice, involvement of our members, and education of the public about our values and principles.

As individual atheists, we walk a lonely road, but as a collective group we stand a chance of being heard. Together we can become a rational voice in a sea of irrationalism. I am running for this board because of the members who have expressed support for the Building Fund, paid a membership, or desire to promote the atheist voice in public venues. When we speak as a chorus vs. as individuals, we create music society understands.

**Nominee for  
Treasurer:  
Brian Knoblock**



My name is Brian Knoblock, and I am running for the position of Treasurer of Minnesota Atheists. Most of my working career has been in accounting and the data analysis side of the department, so I see these as assets to be brought to the position. I am a Life Member in MNA, and have been a member of the organization since 2006, even before moving to the state. As Treasurer, I intend to bring an analytic approach to the role to make sure this organization successfully navigates our tough economic times.

**Candidates' statements continued on page 6**

**Nominee for  
Secretary:  
Rick Rohrer**



I have been active in freethought groups since 1988, and I am a charter member of Minnesota Atheists. I was co-founder of Camp Quest of Minnesota and have been pouring my energy into that organization for the last six years. I am now stepping back a bit from the role I have at Camp Quest. I want to use my new free time to more actively support Minnesota Atheists.

My main qualifications to be Secretary of Minnesota Atheists are that I am organized, I am a good writer, and I am committed to doing the job well. I have served a total of 20 years on four non-profit boards in various capacities, including Chair, Vice Chair, and at-large positions. On these boards, I have led committees devoted to planning, evaluation, finance, and policy. I will bring this experience and perspective to your Board. I look forward to serving you.

**Nominee for  
Director-at-Large:  
Karen Burke**



I was raised in a secular home in Toronto and often took my worldview for granted. Moving to Minnesota in 2001, under the reign of George W. Bush, I learned that the USA is politically, culturally and socially determined by both moderate and fundamentalist Christians. I learned about Minnesota Atheists in 2007, and realized that supporting MNA was something that I must do. I recognized the important work being done politically, and through educational and community outreach. I realized that people coming to Atheism after a childhood of indoctrination needed a friendly place to socialize, find like minded individuals, and be able to express their worldviews. Our voices demand and deserve to be heard. It is this sense of community that I wish to continue to instill among MNA membership, while also helping with community and educational outreach, fundraising for the MNA building, and legislative changes.

**Nominee for  
Director-at-Large:  
Mike Haubrich**



I am proud to be associated with and be a member of the Minnesota Atheists. In my three years I have seen a tremendous growth in membership, and it is good to see. We are reaching out to atheists in Minnesota, performing charity acts, speaking out on issues and finding ways to enjoy ourselves and each others' company.

I have had many opportunities to share my atheism on the cable and radio versions of Atheists Talk, and I am grateful. I wish to give back to the group and help assure its continued growth.

There are many approaches to atheism, but the most important is to let other atheists know that we are here and that they have a supportive group to count on.

Please support me as a member of the board of directors, and support the rest of the board as we volunteer to serve you.

**Candidates' statements continued on page 7**

## Nominee for Director-at-Large: Cody Peterson



I am running for the Minnesota Atheists board because I want to be more involved in the atheist community. With my past experiences being involved in other organizations, I feel like I could make a positive contribution to Minnesota Atheists. I want to see the atheist community have a clear vision and a clear path on how we want to achieve that vision. I will work towards this end if elected to serve on the board. Thank you.

# Remembering Vic Chesnutt

by Greg Peterson

A week after Vic Chesnutt's death by intentional overdose at Christmas, I wanted to do a little homage to the musician at a gathering of friends and family. I was the real fan...not everyone there knew him. So I put on one of his recent albums, *Skitter on Takeoff*, and poured a round of drinks for the circle. From the music coming from the speakers, I think everyone understood my affection for this singer. His voice has a broken, emotive eloquence, and his lyrics are evocative and poetic.

I explained a little of why I think his death at age 45 is a significant loss; not all deaths are tragedies, but some are, and the desperate death of a poet surely is. We toasted Vic.

I feel fortunate to have seen Chesnutt play live the few times I did. The first time was at the Turf Club in St. Paul, a dive bar that's part roadhouse, part frat house. It was a cold, icy night, and Vic got help pushing his wheelchair through the door, and getting set up on the stage. A blanket was around him to keep him warm before he performed.

Chesnutt was in a single-vehicle drunken crash at age 18 that left him mostly paralyzed, although he regained just enough movement in his fingers to de-

velop a unique, simplified style of guitar-playing to accompany his singing. Chesnutt said his accident helped him focus as a songwriter. Chesnutt also sang about his atheism, sealed for him at age 13 when he walked out of a church in the middle of a service. The two themes came together in his song, "Speed

Racer," from his first album, *Little* (1990), produced by R.E.M.'s front man, Michael Stipe: "I'm not a victim/Oh, I am an atheist."

In an interview on the public radio show *Fresh Air* in December, he told Terry Gross: "It was only after I broke my neck and even like maybe a year later that I really started realizing that I had something to say."

When I think back to that concert at the Turf Club, I remember there being a big pot-bellied stove in the middle of the bar

helping keep us warm. And when I think further it's obvious to me that there was no such stove, but that in the lyrics of one of Chesnutt's songs he so powerfully summons that image that later my mind mistook it for reality. That is the power of his poetry: an ability to conjure scenes from other lives and make them as authentic as personal memories.



**Vic Chesnutt**  
**November 12, 1964—December 25, 2009**

(Continued on page 18)



“The Pocket Preacher.”



“Larry Poppins.”



***Tenth Annual  
Freethought  
Follies***







On Sunday, December 20th, Minnesota Atheists and the Humanists of Minnesota sponsored the annual Freethought Follies charitable event. Photos are courtesy of Jerry Rauser.



# January Meeting Review

by George Kane

Our first public meeting of the decade got off to a rocky start as members and interested newcomers arrived at the Ridgedale Library. The meeting room there, it turned out, was booked for a local Democratic Party meeting. A phone call over to the Southdale Library discovered that we were, in fact, booked there instead. The group was forced to move the presentation by State Representative Phyllis Kahn to the Southdale Library, but first Chair Jack Caravela convened a business meeting, in the hall outside the Ridgedale meeting room. There we conducted the nomination of officers for the coming year, as required by our constitution. The candidates' campaign biography statements appear beginning on page four.

After a caravan to Southdale, our educational meeting began a half hour late. The confusion over meeting sites had surely hurt attendance, which was about 30. Jack Caravela announced upcoming events, and August Berkshire introduced the speaker, his state representative and long-time friend, Phyllis Kahn. She is serving her 19th term at the Minnesota House of Representatives, where she has earned a reputation for being colorful, iconoclastic, and for thinking outside-the box.

Berkshire noted in his introduction that Representative Kahn was trying to get an invitation for him to give the invocation to open an Assembly session. Kahn stated that because of the volume of contentious political issues on



this year's docket, the invitation was unlikely to come in 2010. It would be more likely to come, she averred, next year.

Kahn said that there is no important church/state separation issue coming up in the current term. She stated that she would like to have the allocation to Teen Challenge examined by the Minnesota State Auditor, but that a court ruling that reimbursing religious schools is constitutional would not be rescinded by any legislative action.

A question from the audience brought up taxpayer support of religious education in the state's charter school program. Kahn responded that she thinks that it is important to recognize what works,

*Photo credit: Steve Petersen.*



and that charter schools effectively remedy the educational achievement gap between rich and poor. She also favors continuing funding for TiZA, the Arabic language immersion school that was the target of a recent suit by the ACLU, because its opposition to discrimination against girls is

a positive influence in the Muslim community.

To be an issue advocate, Kahn advised that you should write not just to your own legislators, but also to anyone you know who is working on the bills. She advised not to send more information than can fit on an 8-1/2" by 11" sheet. Constituents, she encouraged, have a leg up on any lobbyists.

Kahn concluded by noting that state legislators are more accessible and responsive to their constituents than any other level of government. She advised those who have strong ideas on issues to attend the February 2 caucuses, to become delegates and to get on the party mailing lists.



*Southdale Library. Photo credit (this, and top): Matthew Richardson.*



# Camp Quest News

**by Jeannette Watland**

If someone were to ask me four years ago what my happy place was like, the answer would be very different than what it is today. I have never been a fan of the outdoors. I'm not athletic and have never been camping. Camp Quest of Minnesota has completely changed my perception of 'happy.' I'll even be so bold as to say that it has completely changed my life.

As adults many of us feel uncomfortable, unwanted, and discriminated against in a society where religious beliefs are valued. However, we have various social outlets and

the experience needed to deal with feeling different. Unfortunately this is not true for many children in our community. There are few to no student groups for freethinking young people until they go to college. I have heard many stories of bullying and isolation just because a child didn't subscribe to a particular religious belief. Camp Quest offers one week where children can escape and be themselves.

We teach critical thinking skills, how to be ethical without religion, and the knowledge that they aren't alone. We also throw in typical camp activities such as swimming, camp fires, archery, and crafts to make for

a memorable week. I am honored to be able to be a part of it.

There are also three ways you can become a part of the Camp Quest tradition:

- 1) You can send your children,
- 2) You can volunteer for a week at camp, and
- 3) You can donate money.

Donations go directly to Camp Quest of Minnesota and are used for things such as scholarships, food and snacks, materials, and field trips. For information on ways to help, please visit our website at [minnesota.campquest.org](http://minnesota.campquest.org).

Thank you in advance for supporting such a wonderful organization!

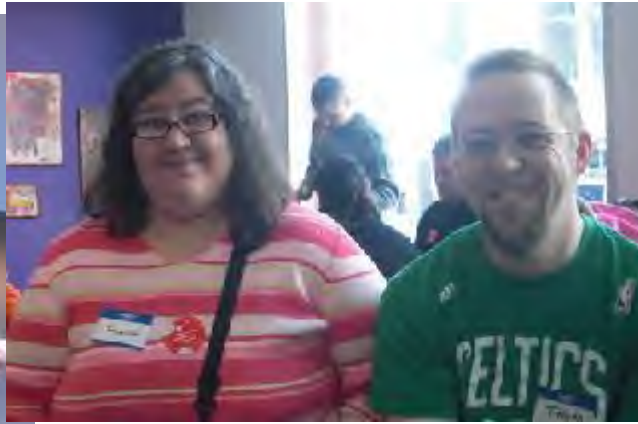
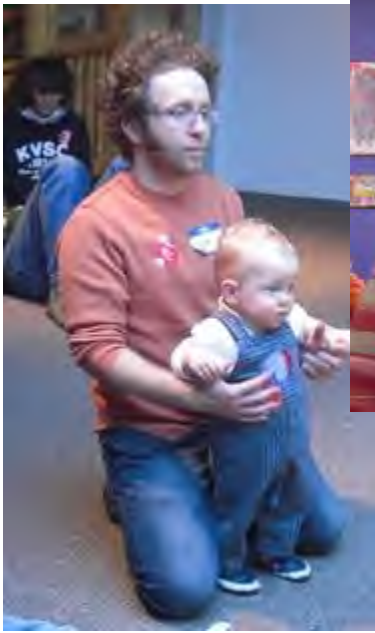
## Freethought Cryptogram

**by George Kane**

Fyt cixr avc cvaxcixm fyt jqvmx f ofzc cv cix txpsk.  
 Cixr jfst, qx qskk jxmpx rvw sh rvw'kk axc wj hmxx  
 hmvg cix Hmxyzi. CmwX jcvmr. Fyt jv, cix txpsk  
 jfst, vefr sc'j f txfk.

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**(Answer on page 18.)**

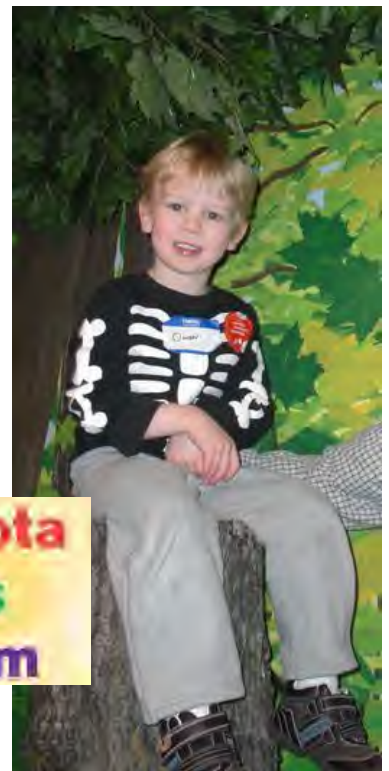


A Trip to the  
Minnesota  
Children's  
Museum!

On Saturday, January 16th, Minnesota Atheists members brought their children to the Minnesota Children's Museum in downtown St. Paul for lunch, learning, and playing. The Museum's exhibits included the new "Dinosaurs: Land of Fire and Ice." A banner above the exhibit invited attendees to "Travel back in time 70 million years," which may be 69.99 million years too many for

some museum-goers, but was just fine for this group.

Expect more child-friendly meet-ups in the near future. Visit Minnesota Atheist's Meet-up page to learn more.





*Photos courtesy of Emily Matejcek.*



# "Let My People (and ONLY My People) Go!"

by John Robinson

I recently had a conversation on the subject of gay marriage with an acquired relative who is proudly, loudly Catholic. It is her adamant opinion that gay citizens should accept only civil union status and that the term "marriage" is entirely out of bounds for homosexuals. Curious about how she could defend a policy of "separate but equal" I continued to debate her despite my prescient knowledge of where the conversation would lead.

Stating (and I think actually believing) that "she had nothing against gay people," it was clear she still advocated the position that they should know their place. We've all heard this before. ("Some of my best friends are Negroes. Why, I let one sit on my furniture, once.")

She was adamant that allowing homosexuals to enter into legal unions and calling it "marriage" redefined marriage itself. I pointed out that allowing same-sex marriage would not impact her life at all. I also expressed the opinion that marriage is a purely civil convention. She disagreed, retorting that monogamous marriage between a man and a woman was a Christian invention. She stated that allowing gays to be called "married" would require her to revise how she defines her own marriage and this was an attack on her right to her own religious beliefs.

My relative's answer was illustrative of a tactic fundamentalist Christians have been employing for some time now. They assert two assumptions as fact, and their methods have been gaining some traction:

1. Christians in the United States are, effectively, an oppressed minority.

The imagery is stark and effective. Poor, moral, faithful Christians huddling in a basement around a feeble candle and a tattered bible, trying to practice their simple, unassuming faith while UN helicopters land on the lawn to deploy armed atheists, Frenchmen, and Muslims to break up their peaceful worship services.

Television Christians, including megachurch evangelists and Sunday

## Religions in the U.S., by percentage of population



Source: CIA World Factbook (2002 est.)

talk show guests, raise this specter of an oppressed people struggling against an implacable and more powerful enemy. This enemy is engaged in a War on Christmas! This foe will not allow Christians to pray where and when they will! And this enemy would force their church to perform marriage ceremonies for whoever demands one!

There you have it: gay marriage is just another weapon to deprive Christians of their rights. There you are, just a downtrodden Christian, already at the bottom end of the power gradient, and secular humanists and other like pagans are just chipping away at the few rights you

have left. But, how, the rational mind inquires, how does granting rights to one group diminish your rights? The answer is the second myth being perpetuated by the religious right wing with some success.

2. If Christians are prevented by law or rational majority opinion from imposing their superstitions and bigotries on others, then that obstacle deprives them of their constitutionally protected religious rights.

Yes, if I am prevented from imposing my beliefs on you, then my rights are being violated. If I believe in Eddie the Magical Electric Panda, then it only makes sense that everyone else should believe in Eddie. Eddie commands that I convert everyone to his worship. By logical extension, it should be obvious that the government would assist me in codifying my personal religious beliefs, and imposing them on all non-believers. After all, it is a "fact" that our founding fathers were all cubs of the Great Panda.

So, she asked me, with all sincerity, "Why should I have to redefine my marriage?" Despite the fact that this was clearly a case of 'You cannot reason someone out of what they didn't reason into,' I first answered that allowing such rights would have no impact on her marriage at all. Any pain or inconvenience she felt would be self-generated.

As a response, she repeated her question and her assertion that monogamous marriage is a Christian invention. I tried explaining the concept of tolerance. I attempted to set forth the idea that "separate but

(Continued on page 18)

# Looking Ahead



by Eric Jayne

Predicting the future has been as popular throughout human history as sex and war. The problem with most prognosticators, however, is that their predictions are so vague that just about any significant event can be interpreted as a validation of said predictions. My following predictions for the next decade might be many things, but “vague” is not one of them. I have taken a more audacious approach by injecting specificity, so take that Nostradamus!

**2010:** Finally putting an end to the nauseating debate of how the years in this decade will be phrased, Gallup releases a public opinion poll in the summer that shows 67 percent of Americans say “twenty-ten,” while 24 percent say “two thousand-ten.” Additionally, six percent say “fourteen thirty-two” and two percent say “Xenu.” One percent said they were “unsure.”

**2011:** With fuel prices soaring to over \$13 per gallon and the release of another government study showing an increase in the national obesity rate, President Obama signs the *Bucket of Bolts for Bikes* program into law. The new program encourages car drivers to trade in their cars for a new pedal driven bicycle. With the help of government subsidies, GM, Ford and Chrysler benefit from a financial boon by manufacturing over 200 million state of the art bicycles. The economy begins to show signs of recovery, the unemployment rate plummets, carbon emissions are drastically reduced and American obesity is on a sharp decline. The program isn't considered a success, however, until gas prices fall to less than a dollar per gallon giving American consumers what they

really want: cheap gas. The big three American automobile companies answer the increased demand for cars by ramping up car production while still maintaining bicycle manufacturing. Plentiful employment opportunities make Detroit the most desired place to live, thereby increasing the median house value in the city to an astonishing \$325,000.

**2012:** Fox News and the Christian Broadcasting Network merge together for around the clock reporting of the looming apocalypse. Tens of millions of Americans are led to Israel by Pat Robertson and Sarah Palin for the second coming of Christ. This leaves the U.S. with a very small, but intelligent, voting public who overwhelmingly vote for *Real Time* host Bill Maher for president. The newly formed Secularist Party takes control of the House and the Senate.

**2013:** In what has become dubbed *nopocalypse*, tens of millions of disappointed Americans, who had hoped to be living in a heavenly kingdom by now, find their way back to the United States. President Maher is inaugurated as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States and he subsequently appoints Julia Sweeney, Sam Harris, Lewis Black and Penn Gillette to the Supreme Court. They replace the four Justices who abandoned their public duties last year to celebrate the End Times. Progress ensues.

**2014:** Two years after solving the steroids scandal with required testing and a no tolerance policy, Major League Baseball is in the midst of another damaging scandal: cyborgs. Shortly after the list of players who tested positive for cyborgism is released—a list that includes the entire Yankees starting lineup—Joe Mauer admits his own mechanical deception. Consequently, his record

breaking 85 game hitting streak and .426 season batting average are tagged with asterisks.

**2015:** Kids all over America are grooving to the new hip-hop musical style of *Islamalatin*. This Latin-Muslim hip-hop hybrid spawns a new dance called the *Fatwa cha-cha* and chart-topping song, “Jiggle Jihad Booty.”

**2016:** Now known as the “Agriculture President,” Bill Maher wins a second term. Thanks to the President's leadership and signing of the *Cash for Cannabis* bill, prescription medication costs have gone down, a distressed criminal justice system has been relieved and struggling farmers have found a lucrative commodity that increases American GDP to an all-time (ahem) high.

**2017:** Israelis, Palestinians, Iraqis, Iranians, Sunnis, Shiites, Catholics, Protestants, Kurds, Turks, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Pakistanis, Indians, Chinese, Tibetans, the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, Vikings, Packers and guerrilla forces everywhere replace ethnocentrically charged violence with kindly compassion after Pixar releases a movie with a poignantly altruistic message. Ethnic violence is wiped out everywhere and replaced with global adulation.

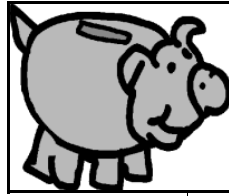
**2018:** The latest celebrity sex tape scandal depicts Pat Robertson and Michele Bachmann enjoying an evening of romping debauchery. Robertson tearfully blames Satan during his subsequent news conference. His allegation gains credibility when Bachmann acknowledges and reveals herself to be the Anti-christ a few hours later.

**2019:** Much to the chagrin of skeptics and atheists, Judgment Day arrives on Super Bowl Sunday. Johnny Unitas and Walter Payton play in the big game after the NFL reached an agreement with Yahweh to delay Armageddon by one day and let resurrected players play with their respective teams. The Bears beat the Colts 24-17.



# January Treasurer's Report

by Brian Knoblock



## \* Building Fund \*

|                |               |
|----------------|---------------|
| Dean Borghorst | \$25.00       |
| Carl Dawson    | 75.00         |
| Andrew Flamm   | 250.00        |
| Daniel Norte   | 35.72         |
| Robert Schmitz | 50.00         |
| James Whitney  | 25.00         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>460.72</b> |

## \*Visibility Fund\*

|                   |         |
|-------------------|---------|
| Brad Baso         | \$15.00 |
| August Berkshire  | 100.00  |
| Teresa Cerling    | 25.00   |
| Crystal Dervetski | 50.00   |
| Stephen Fines     | 50.00   |
| William Freeman   | 65.00   |
| Eric Gilbertson   | 15.00   |
| Paul Gramstad     | 25.00   |

|                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Richard Greene   | 25.00           |
| Paul Grosso      | 15.00           |
| Jenna Gunderson  | 15.00           |
| Sue Halligan     | 65.00           |
| James Hartman    | 25.00           |
| George Kane      | 300.00          |
| June Li          | 150.00          |
| Robert McGeachie | 50.00           |
| Vanita Mishra    | 75.00           |
| Richard Rohrer   | 165.00          |
| James Salutz     | 50.00           |
| Sara Springmeyer | 25.00           |
| Rose Stenglein   | 10.00           |
| Keith Thorkelson | 50.00           |
| Timothy Traynor  | 25.00           |
| Adam Zielie      | 20.00           |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>1,410.00</b> |

**Total Income 1,870.72**

## A Question

by Harry Ireton

How can people disbelieve Global Warming, for which there is evidence...

And continue to believe in a Supreme Being, for which there is no evidence?

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(The badge shown above is just a sample; yours needn't say "George Francis Kane" unless you specifically request that it does. -ed.)



# January Cable Report

by Steve Petersen

Our January show taping featured two separate shows.

First, host James Zimmerman interviewed author Mike Davis about his book *The Atheist's Bible Companion to the New Testament*. Mike discussed how he came up with the idea for the book and explained how the idea evolved from a simple list into a website and finally, into a book. He next explained some of the Christian apologetics regarding the New Testament and why such arguments do not hold up under scrutiny. Paying particular attention to the gospels, James and Mike cited some of their favorite contradictions as well as some themes that surface when taking a closer look at the New Testament. The show concluded with the author explaining his reasons for not authoring a similar book on the Old Testament.

For the second show, Minnesota Atheists President Jeannette Watland, and Chair Jack Caravela discussed some of the many events planned for the next several months. Among the events mentioned were game night, blood drives, spaghetti dinners, summer picnics, monthly membership meetings, participation in GLBT Pride and the Day of Reason, movie night, and the book club. Jeannette talked about setting up outings to vegetarian restaurants in an effort to include vegetarian atheists, and Jack discussed upcoming outings catering to parents with small children. James Zimmerman moderated the show

**Cable Crew:** Karen Burke, Mike Haubrich, Grant Hermanson, George Kane, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, and Brett Stembridge.

**Podcasts:** MinnesotaAtheists.org.  
Made possible by Grant Hermanson.

## Cable Schedule

**Burnsville/Eagan Community Television:** CH 14 Check their web site [www.bectv.tv](http://www.bectv.tv) for day and times. Sponsor: Kevin Hardisty

**Bloomington:** Ch. 16. Monday 9:30 p.m. Tuesday 5:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardsley.

**Minneapolis:** Ch. 17. Saturday 8:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.



Host James Zimmerman, right, interviews author Mike Davis about his latest book.

**Rochester:** Ch. 10. Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Salutz.

**Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Mounds View, New Brighton:** Ch. 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

**Stillwater:** Ch. 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m.; Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury.

**South Washington County:** Ch. 14. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Bodsberg.

**White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights:** Ch. 15. Saturday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.



L to R: Jack Caravela, Jeannette Watland, and James Zimmerman discuss upcoming MNA events.

## Vic Chesnutt (continued)

(Continued from page 7)

Chesnutt is in top form on his last album, *At the Cut*, both lyrically and musically. His wounded voice is matched to the poignant, piquant, oddball lyrics, decorated with spare, graceful instrumentation. Ironically, on this album, Chesnutt sings about his "break-up" with death, and forswears the suicidal impulse he had been battling for years. In "Flirted With You All My Life," he sings:

When you touched a friend of mine I thought I would lose my mind/But I found out with time that really, I was not ready, no no, cold death/Oh death, I'm really not ready.

In "It Is What It Is" from the same album, Chesnutt addresses his mortality and atheism:

I don't worship anything, not gods that don't exist/I love my ancestors, but not ritually/ I don't



need stone altars to hedge my bet against the looming blackness/ that is what it is.

It was heartbreaking for me to learn that Chesnutt had ended his difficult life. Given the circumstances of his suicide, it's hard not to conclude that to some degree, Chesnutt was a victim of a broken health care system. In the *Fresh Air* interview, he said he was no longer able to keep up with his medical bills and didn't know what he was going to do the next time he needed life-saving surgery. While his friends said in a later interview that health care cost concerns were not directly responsible

for Chesnutt's decision to end his life, they suspect that with more affordable and compassionate care, plus better access to services to help him manage his health challenges – including mental health challenges related to his condition – his suicide might have been preventable.

(To learn more about Chesnutt and his music, visit [vicchesnutt.com](http://vicchesnutt.com). Chesnutt's music is available at iTunes. –ed.)

## Electronic MNA Newsletters

Increase the effectiveness of your Minnesota Atheists membership dues—switch from a paper to an electronic newsletter.

It costs us about \$22.00 per year per person to print and mail a paper version of the newsletter. It costs us *nothing* to email an electronic version. Also, you'll receive the electronic version sooner and it will be in full color.

If you're interested in switching from paper to electronic, please contact [editor@mnaatheists.org](mailto:editor@mnaatheists.org).

## "Let My People Go!" (continued)

(Continued from page 14)

equal" always results in the majority oppressing the minority. I waxed mildly historical by bringing up James Madison's warning that the government acting as the tool of a wrong-thinking majority would be the most likely method used to deprive citizens of their Constitutional rights.

The conversation winding down

as such discussions always do when the imaginary friend card is played, I finally answered her question by saying, "For the same reason the Constitution requires me to redefine what is taxable."

You think you have it tough as a Christian? Try being an atheist...

## Cryptogram Answer

And they got together and swore a pact to the devil. They said, we will serve you if you'll get us free from the French. True story. And so, the devil said, okay it's a deal.

-Televangelist Pat Robertson, explaining the reason for the Haiti earthquake.

# Minnesota Atheists

www.mnatheists.org  
P.O. Box 120304, New Brighton MN 55112

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>>Minnesota Atheists has IRS 501(c)(3) status. All contributions are tax-deductible. <<

## Things to do, places to go: A Calendar for Atheists

Sundays, 6:00-7:00 p.m. **Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous**, 3249 Hennepin Ave. S., #55 (Men's Center, in the basement) Minneapolis. Open to men and women. FFI: tcAgnostic@gmail.com

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, 1-3:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting**. (No meeting in July or August.) See MNAtheists.org for details.

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday, **Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund**. Price: \$7.00. (May, August, and October 2010).

1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday, 6 p.m., **Freethought Toastmasters Club**. Larpenteur Estates apartment complex, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul. (Park directly in back and follow sidewalk to Party Room.) Roger Belfay, (651) 222-2782 or George Kane, nup@Minn.net.

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday, 5-7 p.m., **Dinner Social**. Davanni's Restaurant, 2312 W.

66<sup>th</sup> Street (corner of Penn Ave. and 66<sup>th</sup> St.), Richfield, Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday, 11:30 a.m., **Lunch Social**. Old Country Buffet, Co. Road B2 between Snelling and Fairview, Roseville. Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., **Lunch Social**. Dragon House Restaurant, 3970 Central Ave., Columbia Heights. Bill Volna, (612) 781-1420.

4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday, **Meal and a Reel**, Uptown, Minneapolis (Hennepin Ave. and Lake St.) 6 p.m. meal, 7 p.m. movie. George Kane, nup@Minn.net. Details in Atheists Weekly E-mail.

Thursdays, 7 p.m., **Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH)** See cashumn.org for program and location.

1<sup>st</sup> Thursday, 6-9 p.m., **"Atheists Talk" TV taping**. MTN, Studio A, 125 SE

Main St., Minneapolis. Steve Petersen, (651) 484-9277.

2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday, evening. **Rochester Area Freethinkers** monthly get-together. Bill Kass, hawthorn64@hotmail.com or (507) 259-4237.

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday, 6:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists board meeting**. Location varies. Contact Jack Caravela, 612-788-9665.

**To sign up for Atheists Weekly E-mail (AWE), send a request to awe@mnatheists.org.**

**To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, go to <http://atheists.meetup.com/493>.**

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"A country that attempts to govern itself from a holy book will immediately find itself in decline: the talents of its females repressed and squandered, its children stultified by rote learning in madrassas, and its qualified and educated people in exile or in prison."

- Christopher Hitchens, "The Death of Theocracy: Tehran's thugs cannot last"  
*Newsweek* magazine, January 11, 2010, p. 23

**“Check out our website at  
mnatheist.org.”**