

The Minnesota Atheist

OutFront Minnesota: Equal Protection Under the Law



OutFront Minnesota (OFM) is our state’s leading advocate for equal rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people. They welcome allies regardless of sexual or religious orientation.

Minnesota Atheists supports equal rights for GLBT people based on the US Constitution’s 14th

Amendment equal protection clause and the 1st Amendment separation of state and church.

This month we are very fortunate to have **Monica Meyer**, the new **executive director of OutFront Minnesota**, as our speaker. She will discuss such issues as:

- The history of OutFront Minnesota;
- Her experience as the new executive director;
- OutFront Minnesota’s top priorities for 2011;
- Her view of the incoming Republican state legislature, especially their ability to put constitutional amendments on the ballot without involving the governor;
- The Catholic Church’s recent anti-same-sex marriage DVD mailing;
- The seven Minnesota cities that offer domestic partner benefits;
- The lawsuit filed in Minnesota by three same-sex couples seeking legal civil marriage;

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- The Iowas Supreme Court’s decision in support of marriage equality and subsequent voter reaction;
- The recent repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell;”
- The “Safe Schools in 2011” campaign and Dan Savage’s “It Gets Better” YouTube campaign;
- And finally, we will ask her to what she attributes the growing acceptance of GLBT people and whether there any lessons that atheists can learn from the GLBT community.

Monica Meyer’s talk will be preceded by a Minnesota Atheists business meeting, which will include **nominations to our MNA board of directors**, and followed by a trip to a restaurant.

Please join us.

IF YOU GO

What: Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting followed by Meyer’s presentation

Where: Roseville Public Library, 2180 Hamline Ave. N., Roseville

When: Sunday, January 16

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

1:15-1:45 p.m. - Business Meeting, including board nominations

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

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

4:00 p.m. - Dinner at:

Panda Garden Buffet

1706 Lexington Ave. N., Roseville

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 Life memberships: 28

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The Minnesota Atheist

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Minnesota Atheists is an affiliate of Atheist Alliance International, American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Council for Secular Humanism, and International Humanist and Ethical Union.

Submit material for the newsletter to editor@mnaatheists.org. Submissions may be edited. Publication is not guaranteed.

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.

Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement

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

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

The Year in Review



by August
Berkshire

2010 was a very challenging year for Minnesota Atheists. Yet despite difficult economic times that affected all nonprofits, we managed to hold our own. Not only that, but we were able to reinstate our radio show, thanks to generous donations from our members and advertising from the Humanists of Minnesota and Q.Cumbers restaurant.

Throughout the year, when things looked tough, our members came through for us, both financially and with volunteering. I counted almost 100 members who, beyond their membership dues, contributed their time and/or significant donations. We are the envy of many freethought groups in this regard, not to mention nonprofit groups in general.

Now is a good time to give a year-end review of our outreach on television, radio, festivals, and personal appearances. You will find these accounts listed elsewhere in this newsletter. Keep in mind that our TV and radio shows and our monthly meetings with speakers are all turned into podcasts, so they reach an even larger audience than on their first occurrence.

In addition to all the things we currently do, we have some new plans and challenges for

the coming year. For example, with the conservative take-over of our state legislature, it's likely we're going to have to keep a closer eye on bills introduced than we've had to in recent years.

In January, we'll have nominations for our board of directors and in February we'll have the elections. If you've ever thought of being on our board, now is the time to give it a try. Except for certain offices, it's not too demanding and you get to help determine the direction of our group.

As we ring in the new year, please give yourselves a pat on the back for a job well done. While our eventual goal is to be so successful that we no longer need to exist – when the term “Minnesota atheist” will describe 95% of our citizens – we have a long way to go to get to that point. Your help is greatly appreciated!

2010 Year in Review - Festivals & Parades

- May 2 - Minneapolis May Day festival & parade
- May 6 - Day of Reason at the MN State Capitol, St. Paul
- June 19 - Minneapolis Juneteenth festival
- June 26-27 - Minneapolis Gay Pride festival & parade
- July 17 - Rochester Gay Pride festival
- Aug. 28 - La Crosse Gay Pride festival
- Sept. 4 - Duluth-Superior Gay Pride festival
- Sept. 11 - South Central (Mankato) Gay Pride festival & parade
- Sept. 11-12 - Twin Cities Anarchist Book Fair
- Sept. 25 - St. Cloud Gay Pride festival

Minnesota Atheists Board Nominations & Elections

Nominations for the Minnesota Atheists board of directors will occur during the business portion of our **January 16, 2011** meeting at the Roseville Library (see page 1). **Elections** will be held during the business portion of our **February 20, 2011** meeting, which will also be held at the Roseville Library.

Nominations will open and close at the January 16 business meeting. We will publish candidates' statements in our February 2011 newsletter.

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

Some incumbents will be running for reelection but it is important to remember that *all seats* are open. All terms are for one year. Now is your chance to step forward and help guide Minnesota Atheists!

Candidates for all but the three director-at-large positions must have been dues-paying members of Minnesota Atheists for at least one year as of the time they assume office on March 1, 2011.

Candidates for the three director-at-large positions must have been dues-paying members for at least six months.

To run for office, you must be nominated by another Minnesota Atheists member. You cannot nominate yourself. (It's usually not too hard to find someone else at the January meeting to nominate you.)

You need not be present to be nominated (or elected). If you wish to nominate someone who will not be at the January 16 meeting, please check beforehand to make sure that person is willing to serve if elected.

Nominees should send candidate's statements (up to 150 words) to the MNA newsletter editor (editor@mnaatheists.org) by January 20, 2011. We would also like to have a digital headshot of each candidate.

For more information about nominations, elections, or holding office, contact any board member; listed on page 2. For information about publishing your candidate's statement, contact our editor, James Zimmerman at editor@mnaatheists.org.

It is only with your support that we can have a successful organization!

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

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(Answer on page 18)

Recent Events: Flynn Presentation

by George Kane

Tom Flynn, the Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism, provided the educational presentation at our November 21st public meeting at the Ridgedale Library. He spoke on the problems that the Christmas celebration presents to atheists, a topic with which he has been identified since the 1993 publication of his book *The Trouble with Christmas*.

Flynn showed that our Christmas rituals, contrary to the modern myth, are not a tradition extending back into antiquity. Rather, Christmas was seldom observed in England and America until well into the 19th Century. It was not mentioned in the *London Times* until 1820. The rituals of our Christmas are largely the invention of two fiction writers.

Washington Irving, who in his 1812 *History of New York* introduced a flying St. Nicholas, wrote Christmas stories recalling with nostalgia English family celebrations that he never experienced. Charles Dickens detailed a family Christmas as if it were traditional in 1836 in his *Pickwick Papers*.

The other “inventors” of the Anglo-American Christmas credited by Flynn were Queen Victoria, whose husband, Prince Albert, introduced the German Christmas tree to England; Clement C. Moore, who wrote *The Night Before Christmas* in 1823; iconic political cartoonist Thomas Nast, who produced the modern image of Santa Claus; and Francis Church, who, in 1897 published in the *New York Sun* the famous reply to a young girl,

“Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.”

Tom Flynn sent the following letter of thanks to Minnesota Atheists:

Now that my madcap “helladay” season road trip is winding down, I have an opportunity to catch up on thanking everyone who helped make my year-end speaking tours possible.

I’d like to extend my thanks to you and everyone from Minnesota Atheists for your exceptional hospitality during my visit to the Twin Cities, and to all the group members who turned out for my talks. Thanks also for the most pleasant trip to Q. Cumber’s, my very first experience in patronizing a



commercial sponsor of a major atheist radio program!

Thank you also for all of your help with logistical details during the planning of the event.

Best wishes for the new year. Under the circumstances I doubt you’ll be miffed if I fail to pass on Xmas greetings!

2010 in Review: Personal Outreach

(Unless otherwise noted, all presentations were by MNA president August Berkshire, representing MNA. In 2010, MNA member PZ Myers made at least 50 presentations worldwide that included atheism.)

by August Berkshire

January 20, 2010 – Interviewed about atheism by a college student from Hamline University, St. Paul, MN.

January 27, 2010 – “KKMS Live with Jeff & Lee,” KKMS Christian talk radio. AM 980. Eagan, MN. Discussion of “The God-of-the-Gaps” with Gannon Murphy, director of the Minnesota Apologetics Project. Rebroadcast on **February 1, 2010.**

February 17, 2010 – University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. Grant Steves spoke to the class “Religion, Ethics, and Educational Policy” about how a teacher’s philosophy (atheism vs. Christianity) can affect their teaching.

February 24, 2010 – St. Cloud State University (SCSU), St. Cloud, MN. Debate with Joe Boot (Ezra Institute for Contemporary Christianity) on the topic “Does God Exist?” Co-sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ and Secular Student Alliance at SCSU.

March 10, 2010, 5:30-5:40 p.m. – “KKMS Live with Jeff & Lee,” KKMS Christian talk radio. AM 980. Eagan, MN. Called in to question John Calvert, Lawyer and Managing Director of Intelligent Design Network, on “Explaining Intelligent Design.”

March 12, 2010 – Normandale Community College, Bloomington, MN. World Religions class. Presentation on atheism by August Berkshire and Grant Steves.

March 15, 2010 – Central Minnesota Friends Free of Theism, St. Cloud, MN. Informal discussion about atheism and the atheist movement.

March 21, 2010 – The Humanist Center, First Unitarian Society, Minneapolis, MN. “The Humanity of Atheism.”

March 24, 2010 – Maple Grove Senior High School, Maple Grove, MN. World Religions class. “Exploring Atheism.”

April 6, 2010 – University of Wisconsin, La Crosse, WI. “Exploring Atheism.” Sponsored by La Crosse Secular Student Society.

April 11, 2010 – Coon Rapids Evangelical Free Church, Coon Rapids, MN. “A Dialogue Between a Christian and an Atheist” with pastor Ronn Johnson.

April 13, 2010 – Argument of the Month, St. Augustine’s Catholic Church, St. Paul. A debate between MNA chair George Kane and G.K. Chesterton scholar Dale Ahlquist on “In God We Trust: God in American Public Policy.”

April 15, 2010 – Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists (CASH), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. Lee Salisbury spoke on “The Resurrection, a Necessity for Every Savior-God”

April 19, 2010 – Interviewed about atheism by a college student from Northwestern College (Christian college), Arden Hills, MN.

April 29, 2010 – Macalester College, St. Paul, MN. “A History of Freethought Organizations in the U.S. and Minnesota” and discussion for the class “Atheism Past and Present.” August Berkshire and George Kane. Afterwards, interviewed by a student for her class project.

May 7, 2010 – Or Emet, the Society for Humanistic Judaism, St. Louis Park, MN. “A History of Freethought Organizations in the U.S. and Minnesota.” Accompanied by Paul Heffron of the Humanists of Minnesota.

May 11, 2010 – St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN. Leaders from Minnesota Atheists and Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists (CASH) met with members of the Society for Atheism, Non-Religion, and Agnosticism (SANRA) at St. Olaf College.

May 18, 2010 – Interviewed about atheism by a high school atheist student from Georgia.

May 21, 2010 – Fridley Senior High School, Fridley, MN. Two comparative religion classes. “Exploring Atheism.”

2010 in Review: Personal Outreach (continued)

June 5, 2010 - American Humanist Association (AHA) annual national conference, San Jose, CA. Breakout speaker. "Exploring Atheism." Also, a presentation by PZ Myers.

June 22, 2010 - Minneapolis North Regional Library. Presentation by Eric Harmon on "Slavery and the Bible."

June 27, 2010 - Minneapolis Gay Pride Festival. Co-officiated, with a religious leader, in a re-commitment ceremony for three couples.

August 22, 2010 - 2nd Annual Midwest Humanist Conference, Lincoln, NE. "The Humanity of Atheism."

August 23, 2010 - "Our World Today" live cable TV program. Discussion about "Atheism for a Better World" with show host Suzanne Linton and MNA members August Berkshire and Bob Schmitz. Maplewood, MN.

August 28, 2010 - "Appreciate Your Mind" atheist radio show, KNDS radio, Fargo, ND. Interviewed by host Brian Magee about atheism.

September 7, 2010 - Normandale Community College, Bloomington. Stephanie and Ben Zvan discuss atheism with a World Religions class.

September 18, 2010 - Project 42: Fargo-Moorhead's Premier Freethought Conference, sponsored by the Red River Freethinkers, Fargo, MN. "Exploring Atheism." Also, a presentation by PZ Myers.

October 2, 2010 - Atheist Alliance International (AAI), annual national convention, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Breakout speaker. "Exploring Atheism: The Many Ways in which Atheism Makes Sense." Also, a presentation by PZ Myers.

October 7, 2010 - Interviewed about atheism by a Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology, York University, Toronto, Canada.

October 12, 2010 - Humanists of Minnesota's "Humanist Views" cable TV program. August was interviewed about his pamphlet "The Problem of Evil."

October 17, 2010 - Interviewed about atheism by a college student from the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN.

October 20, 2010 - Interviewed about atheism by a high school student from the Legacy Christian Academy, Andover, MN.

November 7, 2010 - Lake Superior Freethinkers, Duluth, MN. "Exploring Atheism: The Many Ways in which Atheism Makes Sense."

November 8, 2010 - University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN. Debate with Christian apologist Jon Kaus on "Can We Be Good without God?" Cosponsored by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and the Secular Humanist Association. (SHA).

November 10, 2010, 7:50-8:00 a.m. - "La Crosse Talk AM" on WIZM radio, AM 1410, La Crosse, WI. Interviewed about upcoming debate on November 16.

November 16, 2010 - University of Wisconsin, La Crosse, WI. Debate with Gannon Murphy, general editor of "American Theological Inquiry," on "Does God Exist?" Co-sponsored by the La Crosse Area Freethought Society (LCAFS) and the La Crosse Secular Student Society.

December 6, 2010 - Cougars, Atheists, Sceptics and Humanists (CASH), Lakeville South High School, Lakeville, MN. After-school club meeting. Talk on "Does God Exist?" Joined by Jeff Mondloch and Jewel Pond of the Campus Atheists, Humanists, and Skeptics (CASH) of the University of Minnesota.

December 8, 2010 - Interviewed about atheism by a college student from Northwestern College (Christian college), Arden Hills, MN.



Planning your estate?

Don't forget to include

Minnesota Atheists.

Top 10 in 2010

When people take time to remember the events of 2010 they'll probably think back to the Chilean miners who were trapped underground for 69 days before being rescued; or they might remember the horrific earthquake in Haiti that killed over 200,000 people. Perhaps they'll remember the signing of the health care bill, the contentious mid-term elections, or the rallies held on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. For me, however, the following is a list of my personal favorite and unforgettable top 10 stories of 2010:

10. God destroys Jesus, spares porn shop

Lightning strikes and subsequently burns down 75 foot statue of Jesus in Ohio but the pornography store nearby remained unscathed.

9. War on Christmas stories becoming more outrageously funny

Every year after Halloween a bunch of Christian zealots and cable news pundits try to convince us that there is a war on Christmas. Gretchen Carlson, the Minnesota native who co-hosts Fox & Friends, is one of the most vocal crusaders in the unnecessary fight to protect Christmas from no serious threats. In November Carlson demonstrated the unique journalistic standards practiced at Fox News when she reported that a public elementary school in Florida banned everything red and green because of the connection those colors have with Christmas. A little fact-checking would have revealed that the story was completely false and based solely on the fabricated claim of an angry parent. After the erroneous story aired, the school district released a statement that said "the banning of red and green is simply not true".



by Eric Jayne

8. U.S. senatorial candidate assures voters that she's not a witch

Due to the anger-fueled "tea-party" movement, and a Sarah Palin endorsement, Christine O'Donnell beat out Mike Castle—a moderate nine-term congressman—for the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate seat formerly held by Vice President Joe Biden. After she won the nomination, HBO Real Time host Bill Maher shared some interesting clips from O'Donnell's past appearances on his former Politically Incorrect show. In these clips O'Donnell shared her views about the evils of masturbation, pitiful misunderstanding of evolution, and past experiences where she "dabbled into witchcraft" and had picnics on satanic alters. O'Donnell consequently defended herself in a TV campaign ad assuring the voters of Delaware that she is not a witch. A few weeks later, Democratic candidate Chris Coons won the election by a 17 percent margin.

7. Florida pastor holds Qurans hostage and demands that Ground Zero mosque not be built

Gainesville Florida pastor Terry Jones threatened to burn Qurans to commemorate 9/11, and to protest the proposed construction of a mosque near Ground Zero. Jones dropped his threat after policy makers, military commanders, the White House, and diplomats all around the world begged him not to burn his collected pile of Qurans.



Top 10 in 2010 (continued)

6. **Steve Johnson holds God accountable for football game mishap**

We've all seen professional athletes give credit to God and Jesus for an important team victory or personal achievement, but it's rare to see it go the other way. When Buffalo Bills wide receiver, Steve Johnson dropped an easy touchdown pass in overtime against the Steelers, he tweeted: "I PRAISE YOU 24/7!!!!!! AND THIS HOW YOU DO ME!!!!!! YOU EXPECT ME TO LEARN FROM THIS??? HOW????!! ILL NEVER FORGET THIS!! EVER!!! THX THO..."

5. **Pope Benedict blamed atheism for Nazi tyranny**

After being welcomed by the Queen and the newly elected Prime Minister, David Cameron, Pope Benedict delivered a speech that blamed atheism for tyrannical movements in the 20th century, including the Nazi goal of exterminating the Jews. The Pope, who joined Hitler Youth when he was 14, must have forgotten that Hitler self-identified as a Roman Catholic.

4. **Atheists are better educated about religion than Christians**

The Pew Research Center released a study in September 2010 that showed atheists know more about religious teachings, religious origins, and the role of religion in public life more than any religious group. The study suggests that the more one investigates and learns about religion, the more skeptical they become of its teachings.

3. **Smithsonian Institute pulls short film from exhibit because Catholic League president is offended**

William Donohue, the Catholic League president who celebrated Mel Gibson's anti-Semitic film *Passion of the Christ*, chastised George W. Bush for sending out "Holiday" cards instead of "Christmas" cards, and equates pedophile behavior with being gay, convinced the tax-payer supported Smithsonian Institute to pull a four minute short film titled *Fire in My Belly* by David

Wojnarowicz. Donohue claims the film is anti-Christian because a bunch of ants crawl over a crucifix at the beginning of the piece. Olga Viso, the Director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, refused to pull the film and allowed free showings at the Walker until the end of 2010.

2. **Secularist billboards protest religious conservative fundamentalism...in Iraq**

Demonstrating the notion that freedom and liberty are secular and progressive values, completely separate from religion, Iraqi secularists fight religious fundamentalists by exercising free speech. As one Iraqi secularist put it: "We know it's fighting between the religious foolish man and the civilization man."

1. **Gay bashing, mega-church pastor in trouble for gay sex; and Pat Robertson's unique insight**

It doesn't seem right to go one full year without a gay-bashing evangelical pastor taking some heat for having gay sex or Pat Robertson sharing his insensitive remarks with the world. 2010 gave us both. First, Robertson explained that the reason Haiti experienced an earthquake that killed over 200,000 people including children was a simple matter of revenge: God was settling the score with Haitians due to an 1804 pact their ancestors made with the Devil in an effort to gain independence from their French occupiers. Sorry, but that's the cost of freedom.

Next, televangelist Eddie Long was accused of coercing four teenage boys into performing sexual acts with him in exchange for exotic trips, new cars, flashy jewelry, and cold hard cash. The popular African-American evangelist has been a vocal opponent of same-sex marriage and led a march in 2004 to the grave of Martin Luther King to promote his idea of marriage being exclusively for opposite sex couples.

Here's to a new year! May 2011 be just as exciting!

Freethought Follies and Solstice Celebration

...was held on Sunday, December 19th.





Atheists Talk: 2010 Radio Report

by Steve Petersen

Minnesota Atheists restarted our popular radio program on August 1, 2010. The host of the program is Mike Haubrich and the director is August Berkshire. Original music was composed, played, and recorded by Brent Michael Davids. This is a report of the 2010 radio programs.

August 1 Scott Lohman interviewed Robert Price on his book "The Case Against the Case for Christ."

August 8 Mike Haubrich interviewed Grant Steves on his research on Conversion, Deconversion and Religious Indoctrination.

August 15 Lynn Fellman interviewed Greg Laden on Old Bones & Modern Genetics; August 22, Mike Haubrich interviewed Todd Torkelson on Skeptical Confessions of a Ghosthunter.

August 29 MNA was live at the MN State Fair with Mike Haubrich, August Berkshire, George Kane and Laura Hutt.

September 5 Humanists of MN were live at the fair with Scott Lohman, Dale Handeen, Nathan Curland and Mike Haubrich.

September 12 Stephanie Zvan interviewed Jason Thibeault on Astrology & Evidence.

September 19, Scott Lohman interviewed George Erickson on his book *Eyes Wide Open*.

September 26 August Berkshire interviewed Dr. Mark Welter from St. Cloud State University. Dr. Welter teaches World History and this program was titled "The Bible: Folklore as Fact."

October 3 Scott Lohman interviewed Jennifer Hancock on her book *The Humanist approach to Happiness*.

October 10 Mike Haubrich interviewed Dr. Hector Avalos on Darwin and Holocaust. Dr. Hector Avalos is a Professor of Religious Studies at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa.

October 17 Lynn Fellman interviewed August Berkshire on Morality With and Without God.

October 31 Steve Petersen and Jim Barri interviewed Tom Flynn, Executive Director of Center for Inquiry and Editor of Free Inquiry and Manager of Ingersoll Birthplace Museum in Dresden, NY.

November 7 Mike Haubrich interviewed C.J. Werlemen, on the phone, from Indonesia on his new book *Jesus Lied*.

November 14 Lynn Fellman interviewed Misha Angrist, PhD., an assistant professor at Duke

University's Institute for Genome Sciences and Policy. He also holds an MS in genetic counseling and an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars. In 2009, as participant number four in the PGP, he had his entire genome sequenced. "Here is a Human Being At the Dawn of Personal Genomics 2010," is Misha's adventure of being an early adopter of the brave new world of personal genomics.

November 21 Mike Haubrich interviewed Brian Switek on his book *Written in Stone*. Brian Switek is a science writer and blogger whose new book explains the processes by which paleontologists from the 17th century forward analyzed the bones of past eras and eons to give us avian dinosaurs (we call them birds), whales, elephants and more.

November 28 Scott Lohman interviewed David Paxon from World Population Balance, an organization promoting a plan to restore balance to the population so that we can sustain not only ourselves but the rest of the biosphere.

December 5 Lynn Fellman interviewed Glendon Mellow. Both are artists who incorporate science into their art. They discussed Fossils, genes, and art.

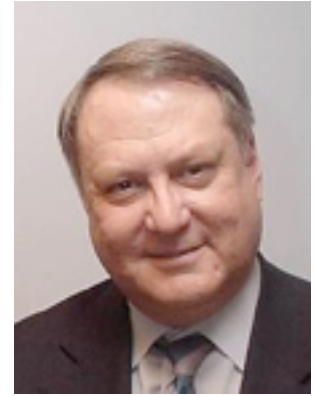
December 12 Steve Petersen and August Berkshire interviewed Tom Flynn, whose Wikipedia page describes him as "an author, journalist, novelist, entertainer, folklorist, Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism, and Editor of its journal *Free Inquiry* magazine. He is also director of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum. We discussed Tom's book *The Trouble with Christmas*.

December 19 Scott Lohman interviewed Dr. Kakalios on his new book *The Amazing Story of Quantum Mechanics, A Math-Free Exploration of the Science That Made our World*.

Having renewed our contract for most of 2011, we will have at least seven more months of programming.

The programs can be listened to on our web site (www.mnatheists.org) and are listed by date, then page back to the program you want to hear. The program is live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 am. Central Time, or streamed live from www.KTNF.com and type in a zip code. If you would like to donate to keep the program on the air, please visit: mnatheists.org/component/option,com_civicrm/Itemid,55/

News and Notes



by George Kane

I am quite aware that most members of Minnesota Atheists regularly vote for Democratic Party candidates. It is obvious from chatting at our social events that most of you saw the November elections as a downer. Republicans took control of the House, erased the Democrats' super-majority in the Senate and cast serious doubts on the 2012 reelection of President Obama.

But for advocates of the separation of church and state, there were bright spots in the 2010 election worth celebrating. Despite Tea Party triumphalism, three Senate candidates they backed, who campaigned against the Establishment Clause of the Constitution's First Amendment, all lost. They probably cost Republicans a majority in the Senate.

These three Tea Party extremists displaced Republican regulars who were favored to defeat their Democratic opponents. In Delaware, Christine O'Donnell won the Republican nomination over Mike Castle; in Nevada, Sharron Angle beat Sue Lowden; and in Colorado, Ken Buck won over Jane Norton. In each case, the Tea Party candidate used the Republican nomination as a platform from which they could promote the conservative vision of America as a Christian nation, and attack church-state separation. Each, as the saying goes, snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

During a nationally televised debate, O'Donnell demanded of her opponent "Where in the constitution is separation of church and state?" When he answered that it was in the words "Congress shall make no law respecting an Establishment of religion," she responded mockingly: "That's in the First Amendment?"

Angle reportedly called "the tenet of the separation of church and state" an "unconstitutional doctrine." Perhaps she meant extra-constitutional? That would have been just as wrong, but not so flagrant a token of ideology-driven ignorance. Under repeated questioning she later refused to correct or retract her words.

Ken Buck followed suit in Colorado. "I disagree strongly with the concept of separation of church and

state. It was not written into the Constitution," he said at a forum for Republican Senate candidates. The First Amendment, he argued, "doesn't mean that we need to have a separation between government and religion".

Tea Party-backed Republican House candidate Glen Urquhart of Delaware attacked separation of church and state as a "liberal" concept invented by Adolf Hitler. Apparently most of his electorate knew, however, that Thomas Jefferson wrote of the "wall of separation between church and state" nearly 140 years before Hitler's rise to power.

The Tea Party movement has generated a great deal of passion over the burgeoning federal debt, but its affection for extremists on the religious right is losing traction with voters.

Nevertheless, I do not expect the Tea Party crowd to back down from their religious attack on secular government. Sarah Palin went on a tour to promote her latest book, *America by Heart: Reflections on Family, Faith and Flag*, in which she rails against John Kennedy as an enemy of her god-fearing political base. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign was plagued by anti-Catholic bigotry, which he confronted in a famous address to Southern Baptist leaders. That speech has become a classic defense of the separation of church and state: *I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute--where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishoners for whom to vote--where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference--and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.*

To Palin, of course, this is heresy. She writes that

News and Notes continued on page 14

News and Notes (continued)

Kennedy's speech "essentially declared religion to be such a private matter that it was irrelevant to the kind of country we are," and that Kennedy "seemed to run away from his religion." Kennedy advocated a vision of America in which everyone can rest secure in their beliefs because government does not favor any religion, but Palin's followers want leaders who will transform America into their vision of a Christian nation.

The switch of the majority party in the House of Representatives shuffles the chairmanships of the committees that investigate proposed legislation and formulate House policy. Predictably, this will bring some paleo-Republican crusaders against science into positions of power. One worth noting is Illinois Republican John Shimkus who has been appointed to head the Subcommittee on Environment and Economy. Shimkus attracted attention in March of 2009 when he opined during a committee meeting that we should not worry about global warming, because God promised after the deluge that he would never again destroy the earth with a flood.

Shimkus stood by those remarks in a post-election interview for politico.com, reducing the consequences of global warming to coastal flooding. "I do believe in the Bible as the final word of God, and I do believe that God said the Earth would not be destroyed by a flood," Shimkus said. He also wants to pass legislation to prevent the Environmental Protection Agency from regulating greenhouse gas emissions. "We have to send a signal to EPA, while we appreciate their work in keeping our environment clean, they have to be careful they don't do it at a cost of higher energy that makes us less competitive in the world markets."

Shimkus further proclaimed the triumph of climate change denialists: "The climate debate has, at least for two years, has ended with this election. The real focus (of the subcommittee he now heads) will be on energy security."

Denialists fight the battle against climate change on the political battlefield rather than through research because it is too arcane for the general public to

evaluate. The scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change has not been diminished by the astro-turfed war on science that has been heavily funded by business interests. In the field of science, reputations and careers are built on being right. If they actually doubted the truth of man-made climate warming, the institutions funding and conducting research would be running from it, in droves.

This month my telephone has been ringing off the hook, as every charity to which I ever donated has tried to put the pinch on me for a year-end gift. Salvation Army bell-ringers assault me with a sarcastic "Merry Christmas" as I walk into my grocery store, to make me feel guilty for not dropping my coins into their kettle.

The harassment is worse during Christmas, but it is an irritation throughout the year. I will not, on principle, donate money to any charity that promotes religion, even if it is only in their name, but there are even too many secular organizations that do good work for me to support. I am frustrated that in America, help to the needy and even funding for medical research is dependent upon how good supporting organizations are at competing for a share of American charity. Would it not be better if there were an organization that evaluated the severity of the need addressed and the adequacy of the effort to meet it by each of these organizations, so that my charitable donations can be given where they will have the greatest impact?

That is the function of Foundation Beyond Belief, which distributes charitable donations to worthy secular charities. It was founded a couple of years ago by author and atheist activist Dale McGowan, a former Twin Cities resident. Minnesota Atheists is a founding member of FBB, and we are recognized for donations by our members. Contributors can specify their donations for particular charities, and can easily set up automatic monthly contributions. If you are interested, please visit foundationbeyondbelief.org for further information.

A Message from a "Foreign" Subscriber

The following is an excerpt from a letter sent to Minnesota Atheists in December from a member in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Why does a guy hundreds of miles away subscribe? Two reasons. Tom Ridding (a great guy – Jean too) is reason 1. He and I worked together at the Detroit Wastewater Treatment Plant before he moved to St. Paul.

Reason 2 is my keen interest in Minneapolis. I was born there in 1918 and lived near Lake Harriet until 1937. West High School, U. of Minn., later transferred to U. of Michigan when my family moved to Detroit. In 1935 I hitchhiked to New York where I started to work my way around the world. I came back to Minneapolis, then enrolled at the U. of Minn. I still miss my home town. Minneapolis is a fine city. And Minnesota Atheists is one of the reasons it is great. I wish we had such a fine organization here.

Keep up the good work .

-Doug Tracy

The following letter to the editor appeared in the *St. Cloud Times* on December 8, 2010.

"Atheists are trying to maintain freedoms"
by August Berkshire, President, Minnesota Atheists

Contrary to the beliefs behind the Dec. 3 letter "Let all religions share respective greetings," atheists are not trying to ban religious displays on private property, nor trying to infringe on the right of private citizens to free speech and freedom of religion.

In fact, we want to protect these freedoms by maintaining separation of church and state so that government cannot interfere in what should be private decisions, and vice versa.

The letter also wrongly proclaimed that if it wasn't for the alleged birth of Jesus, "(t)here would be no Christmas, and consequently no holidays." In fact, the early Christians co-opted existing pagan winter solstice festivals, which would probably have continued to this day (because they were so much fun) with or without the interruption of Christianity.

The sun, not the son, is the reason for the season.

Remembering Steve Landsberg

by Grant Hermanson

Steve Landesberg, best known for his role as police detective Arthur Dietrich on the TV sitcom *Barney Miller*, has died of cancer. Steve played what might have been the first openly atheist character on TV (who wasn't some kind of villain).

Upon learning that Dietrich was an atheist, Barney asks, somewhat urgently "So suppose you die and find yourself standing in front of the pearly gates, ready to be judged?" Dietrich just looks at him blankly and says "Oops."

Landsberg died on December 20th. He was 74 years old.

Book Review: *God Hates You, Hate Him Back*

by James Zimmerman

Werleman definitely gets an 'A' for idea: his goal is to make "the ultimate case for the claim that the God of the Bible is the most wicked character in the pages of history" (back cover) by discussing the highlights of each book of the bible.

Unfortunately, his follow-through isn't as good.

It's difficult to see who his audience is (page four says it's "the layman"). Believers, even those with serious doubts, are likely to be put off by his intentionally crass humor and sarcasm, if they even bothered to read past the deliberately inflammatory title (which, incidentally, has little bearing on the subject matter - the author does not believe in the god of the bible and gives his readers no guidance on how to "hate Him back"). Non-believers, on the other hand, are probably already familiar with the major themes, stories, and contradictions of the bible. They're likely to be put off by the attempts at humor as well, such as on page three, where Werleman suggests "the next time you see a guy step out of a car with a Bush-Cheney 04 sticker please be sure to kick him in the shins." And when the book introduces Adam and Eve, the author spends the first two paragraphs making obvious jokes about the Garden of Eden (did Adam have a bellybutton?), waxing on about his sexual fantasies of "frolicking naked in a garden of paradise with a super hot chick," and trying to get a laugh about the issue of sunburn on his genitals (page 17). It's hard to see how a doubter, looking for a rational, non-apologetic view of the scriptures would continue reading after that.

The book devotes 23 pages to Genesis. It could have - and should have - spent at least double that space, though, and other books similarly suffer from being skimmed over too quickly. In trying to write about all 66 books, Werleman leaves out too many highlights and includes too many books that require no demystification. The chapter on Psalms and Lamentations, for example, simply provide excerpts. Other chapters, such as the one on Obadiah, will leave

the reader wondering why space was wasted on these useless books, when there's so much more that could be said about the Gospels and the Pentateuch.

God Hates You is replete with errors, too, making it indeed a dangerous little book for people to use when arguing against the bible. For example, page 192 pokes fun at the gospel's account of the infant John the Baptist being miraculously endowed with speech. Later, the author claims that Roman soldiers "stormed the house" during the last supper (page 220). Anyone who uses these two 'facts' in a discussion with a Christian is sure to get laughed at. The author also criticizes aspects of the bible that don't seem to warrant it, such as his indictment of 1 Samuel: In discussing Hannah's tearful prayers to God that he make her fertile, Werleman lambastes this as another case of sexism - "notice how it is the woman's fault," he points out.

***God Hates You, Hate Him Back*, by CJ Werleman, 298 pages, Dangerous Little Books, ©2009**

True, the bible *is* sexist, but only one paragraph earlier, Werleman told his readers that Hannah's husband had fathered several children by his other wife. So...maybe the problem really was the woman in this instance. Later, the book rips on God for being omniscient, then, in the very next paragraph, for apparently *not* being omniscient (pages 133, 134). Other errors rendering the book useless as a resource include:

-Page 22: Noah descended from Cain (no, he didn't).

-Page 61: Miriam is Aaron's wife (no, she wasn't).

-Page 133: Job originally had six daughters (no, he didn't).

-Page 164: Belshazzar was Nebuchadnezzar's son (no, he wasn't).

-Page 232: Paul led the disciples in prayer in Acts 4 (and...no).

There are plenty of other, better books critiquing the Old and New Testaments. The author seems to feel the same way as he liberally quotes from them in large chunks. I suggest you read one of those instead.

November/December Treasurer's Report

<u>Building Fund</u>	<u>\$696</u>
Catherine Prody	\$100
Vernon Young	\$200
Valeri Miller	\$25
Daniel Norte	\$71
Theodore C. Nagel	\$300

<u>Radio Fund</u>	<u>\$1,175</u>
Arthur Scearcy	\$50
Peter Gamache	\$150
Christopher Matthews	\$300
Anonymous	\$675

<u>General/Visibility Fund</u>	<u>\$1,084</u>
Dean Spencer	\$10
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Adam Zielie	\$15
Sue Halligan	\$15
Thomas Stavros	\$15
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Kenneth Kressin	\$25
Tim Traynor	\$25
Paul Gramstad	\$45
Catherine Prody	\$50
Keith Thorkelson	\$50
Robert McGreachie	\$50
Robert R. Sieber	\$50
Valeri Miller	\$50
Eric Gilbertson	\$100
Pierre Girard	\$100
Richard Dean	\$240
Anonymous	\$165

TOTAL INCOME: \$2,955

Please note: Letters reporting your 2010 donations to Minnesota Atheists will be mailed out by the end of January. Please remember that your membership (either Student, Newsletter, Individual, Household or Sustaining) is not tax deductible and only donations over that amount are reportable donations to Minnesota Atheists.

**Current Building Fund
Total: \$128,533**



Donation amounts may not sum exactly to total due to rounding.

2010 Cable Report

by Steve Petersen

This past year was an active one for our cable program. Here is a recap of our programming.

In January, 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 it evolved from a simple list into a website and finally into a book. Mike next explained some of the Christian apologetics regarding the New Testament and why such arguments do not hold up under scrutiny.

In February, Mike Haubrich interviewed Stephanie Zvan and Greg Laden of quichemoraine.com on Intelligence and Race. Stephanie and Greg reviewed debunked the myth of connecting intelligence and Race.

March featured George Kane interviewing August Berkshire for two programs titled State/Church Laws: Part 1 and 2. This was a detailed program that covered Supreme Court decisions and both the Minnesota and US Constitutions.

For our April taping, James Zimmerman interviewed Grant Steves for two programs, one titled "The Clash of Worldviews" and the other, "The World view of Naturalism."

In May, August Berkshire interviewed George Kane on "The Days of Prayer and Reason." This covered the history of the Day of Prayer and the recent ruling by a Federal judge agreeing with FFRF that the law mandating this is unconstitutional, and also our event at the state Capitol earlier in the day.

For the first June show, host James Zimmerman interviewed MN Atheists member Ryan Sutter on ideas for what to read while on vacation this summer. Ryan suggested an eclectic range of texts, including *God*, by Alexander Waugh, which consists of hundreds of vignettes on humans' depiction and beliefs in supernatural beings; and the *Godhead Trilogy*, by James Morrow. For the second show, James interviewed Ryan on his infamous critique of Dawkins' *The Greatest Show on Earth* and on his parody-film *Flattened*.

In July, Grant Steves conducted two interviews, one with James Zimmerman on "Religion's Use of Science" and the second with Matthew Richardson on "Religion and the US Drug Policy."

In August, George Kane interviewed Randall Tighe,

American Atheists Minnesota State director, on American Atheists in Minnesota.

In September and August Berkshire interviewed George Kane on MNA Policies. They discussed how these policies relate to government decisions, religion and our members.

In October, host James Zimmerman interviewed Eric Jayne. Eric organizes and heads up the south-of-the-metro bookclub. Eric gave details on where and when the bookclub meets and how many people usually attend. Eric then discussed some of the books the club has covered in recent months.

In November, George Kane interviewed August Berkshire on "Morality With or Without God."

The December program featured George Kane interviewing August Berkshire on "Atheism 101."

I would like to thank all of our crew and sponsors of the programs and Grant Hermanson, who puts the podcasts on iTunes. Next year will be just as productive. Stay tuned!

Cable Schedule

Burnsville/Eagan Community Television: Ch. 14. Check their web site www.bect.tv for day and times. Sponsor: Kevin Hardisty.

Bloomington: Ch. 16. Monday 9:30 p.m. and 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.

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

Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Moundsview/ New Brighton: Ch. 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Shirley Moll.

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.

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

It is better to be bound on a rock than bound to the service of Zeus.

--Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*

Minnesota Atheists

www.mnatheists.org

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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. South, #55 (Men's Center, in the basement), Minneapolis. Open to men and women. Contact: tcAgnostic@gmail.com.

Third Sunday, 1:00-3:30, Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting. See front cover for details.

Fifth Sunday, Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund. Price: -\$7.00. 2011 dates: January 30, May 29, July 31, October 30.

1st and 3rd Monday, 6:00p.m. Freethought Toastmasters Club. Larpenteur Estates apartment complex, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. West, St. Paul. (Park directly in back and follow sidewalk to party room.) George Kane, nup@minn.net.

2nd and 4th Monday, 5-7 p.m. Dinner Social. Davanni's Restaurant, 2312 W. 66th Street, Richfield. Bob and Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

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

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

4th Wednesday, Meal and a Reel. Uptown, Minneapolis (Hennepin and Lake). 6:00 meal, 7:00 movie. Details in Atheists Weekly Email.

Thursdays, 7:00, Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH) meeting. See cashumn.org for details.

1st Thursday, 6:00 p.m., Atheists Talk TV Show taping. MTN Studio A, 125 SE Main St., Minneapolis. Steve Petersen, (651) 484-9277.

2nd Thursday. Rochester Area Freethinkers monthly get-together. Bill Kass, hawthorn@hotmail.com, or (507) 259-4237.

3rd Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Minnesota Atheists board meeting. Location varies. Contact George Kane, nup@minn.net.

To sign up for the Atheists Weekly Email (AWE), send a request to awe@mnatheists.org.

To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, visit atheists.meetup.com/493.



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“Have you noticed how religion is always telling you how simple the answers are, yet at the same time claims that the universe is too complex for science to explain?”

– P.Z. Myers, in the post “Sunday Sacrilege: Simple Things,” on his blog Pharyngula, 02 January 2011

**Check us out on the radio!
AM950 on Sundays at 9:00 a.m.**