

"Question with boldness
even the existence of a God"
— Pres. Thomas Jefferson

Critical Thinker

The Bimonthly Newsletter of United States Atheists | May / June 2004

State of USA: Goals for 2004

by James E. Archer *President, United States Atheists*

Last issue I addressed the accomplishments of 2003. These included stabilizing our finances, our new Web site, the highway cleanup program, and the new *Critical Thinker*.

This issue I would like to focus on goals and objectives for the coming year.

It is always more pleasant to talk about what has been accomplished than to address areas of weakness, but without honestly, we cannot move forward. Formulating goals requires that we make an honest assessment of where we are. So let's begin.

Meeting attendance has been below expectations. I would like to see 20 to 25 people at most meetings. Our average is well below this.

USA has no paid staff and is completely dependent on volunteer support. Typical tasks that need support are: cleaning the Center, answering e-mail, presenting meetings, highway cleanup, etc. Support for USA activities is strong in some areas but very weak in others. Part of our credibility is based on our ability to do a quality job of running the organization, and that requires support from everyone. When we fail to do a good job, it reflects poorly on all atheists.

Here are my major goals for this year:

- Maintain current programs such as the *Critical Thinker*
- Increase attendance at weekly meetings
- Assure a timely response to inquiries, such as e-mail, phone calls, etc.
- Increase participation in the Highway Cleanup Program. Our name is on this program and we need to live up to our commitment
- Consider building a more effective sign for the front of the Center to attract more members
- Continue our efforts to have more social activities, such as the Pie Social
- Keep the Web site updated with current information and expand its content
- Improve maintenance of the Center
- Hold a major fund raiser this summer using matching funds provided by a generous donor

If you have questions or comments concerning these goals, feel free to contact me at President@unitedstates-atheists.com or, better yet, come to a meeting and talk to me in person. Together we can make USA a model for atheist activism. ■

Upcoming Events

Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup

Saturday, June 12, 9:00AM Join us for about two hours of cleaning up the stretch of highway "adopted" by USA. Meet at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Rd., Portland. Dress for the weather and bring a pair of work gloves.

Weekly Meetings

Every Tuesday, 7:30PM Join us at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Rd., Portland. Guests and the public are always welcome to attend.

May 4, 11, 18, 25

June 1, 8, 15, 22, 29

"Bunk Busters"

"Bunk Busters" is the cable TV show produced by USA and co-hosted by Jerry Billings and Kendall Auel. It is cablecast through Portland Cable Access. Contact: Alfredo Torrejon at bunkbusters@unitedstatesatheists.com.

Schedule (subject to change):

Tuesdays 7:30 PM Ch. 22

Saturdays 1:30 PM Ch. 23

Sundays 5:30 PM Ch. 11

Note new time on Sundays!

For an up-to-date program schedule: www.pcatv.org/programming/tab.htm#m2681_

Web Site

Check our Web site for the latest info. www.unitedstatesatheists.com

Dial-An-Atheist

For a weekly message of common sense, dial 503-ATHEIST (284-3478).

Critical Thinker

Deadline for next issue: June 15, 2004. Submission guidelines at: www.unitedstatesatheists.com/criticalthinker. Send submissions to the editor at criticalthinker@unitedstatesatheists.com, or mail in care of the USA address.

"We must question the story logic of having an all-knowing all-powerful God, who creates faulty humans, and then blames them for his own mistakes."

— Gene Roddenberry
Creator of "Star Trek"

You Can Help United States Atheists!

United States Atheists is in the middle of a serious financial shortfall. Sadly, members have been very hard-hit by the current unemployment situation in our nation. Yet, if every member would contribute the price of two cups of coffee every week, there would be no crisis. A cup of coffee is on average—how much? The answer is a dollar and a quarter. Two cups are two-fifty. That's less than a pack of cigarettes or popcorn at a movie theater.

Since no matter how desperate USA's needs are, we are fully aware that there are those who will never help. So the burden falls on your shoulders. *This is an emergency.* Please do your best to help *your* atheist organization. USA works constantly for the cause and it's all volunteer, so 100% of your tax-deductible contribution goes to USA expenses (electric bill, postage, etc.).

The need is urgent. Without your help we simply don't know what to do. Please use the coupon on the back page of this issue and mail a tax-deductible contribution to USA now. You may also make a donation at any of our weekly meetings, held every Tuesday night at 7:30 at *your* Atheist Community Center.

— Jerry Billings
Treasurer, USA

Join us for lively discussions and good times at our weekly meetings, held every Tuesday night, 7:30 PM at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Road in Portland.

God Hates Shrimp and Gay Marriage in Portland

by Nancy Powell Vice President, United States Atheists

For many years as the co-host of “Bunk Busters,” the United States Atheists television show, Jerry Billings and I reported on what we called “smorgasbord religion” — religion when and where you want it. Pick and choose what fits your likes and dislikes and disregard all the other religious teachings of the Old Testament. For some Christians “Homosexuality is an abomination” and that is why gay marriage is wrong. But wait — the Bible also says eating anything from the sea that does not have fins is also an abomination. But where are the picketers at Red Lobster or Newport Bay? Well, I can't answer that question but I can tell you first-hand that there were plenty of religious protesters on March 3rd when Multnomah County began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. I was proud to be in attendance as an atheist minister, legally marrying many old friends and even more new ones — dozens in all. Here is what I came to know first-hand.

Multnomah County (Oregon's most populous county) started granting marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples because the county attorney said refusing to do so was unconstitutional. “The Oregon Constitution prohibits the county from discriminating against same-sex couples when they are applying for marriage licenses because that kind of discrimination based on gender and based on sexual orientation is not allowed in Oregon,” said County Attorney Agnes Sowle. The law reads: “Marriage is a civil contract entered into in person by males at least 17 years of age and females at least 17 years of age, who are otherwise capable.” The legislature's chief legal counsel said that

the state's marriage law could be found unconstitutional because it treats same-sex couples as unequal to heterosexuals.

Couples began lining up in the wee hours of the morning outside the County administrative offices. By the time I got there at 9:00 a.m., there were hundreds of people in attendance. They wanted to solidify their relationships in the way that, until that day, only heterosexual couples could — by having a legally-recognized marriage. Of the 18 weddings I performed that day, the youngest relationship was one of six years. One older couple had been together 35 years. They wished their parents could have been there to celebrate this joyous day in their lives, but none were still living. This couple had experienced so much together, and they wept as they said their vows.

So what's the beef with same-sex marriage? Granted, there is a distinction between marriage in the church and marriage by the government. Should churches be forced to perform marriages? Of course not. Why? Because they are private organizations that can choose what couples meet the criteria for marriage within the confines of their private property and the rules of their organization. Should the government follow this same rule? No! There is no legal reason that same-sex partners should not be allowed the same legal rights as opposite-sex couples. It's a simple separation of church and state issue.

Please join me in celebrating this victory in an important church-state separation issue. ■

Editor's Note: As of April 20, Multnomah County has halted issuing same-sex marriage licenses, pending further legal action.

What Would Jerry Do?

by **Jerry Billings** Treasurer & Co-host of "Bunk Busters," United States Atheists

Dear Jerry,

The Bible tells us that marriage is a sacred institution to be entered into only between one man and one woman. It has always been that way and it should always be that way. I support the president's idea to put this into the Constitution. Since I already suppose that you will not agree with me, I would like to see your reasons but read your Bible first.

— A Happily-Married
Christian Wife

Dear Married,

It is my pleasure to give you a little Bible lesson. If you have ever watched "Bunk Busters," you have seen my co-host Kendall Auel and I mention the tendency of religious folks to pick and chose the parts of the Bible that they either like or dislike. We call this "smorgasbord religion." I have read the Bible and have some biblical instructions on marriage.

Simply being married will not bar a man from bringing additional wives or female sex slaves — the bible calls them "concubines" — into the family home as King David did in II Sam 5:13; Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (I Ki. 11:3); Rehoboam had eighteen wives and sixty concubines by whom he fathered twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters.

The bride must be a virgin. If she fails the test of virginity she is to be killed at her parents' front door (Deut. 22:20 & 21). Of course, if she lost her virginity as a result of rape she may force the rapist to marry her. The Bible says, "If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay

hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days" (Deut 22:29). Talk about an abusive marriage!

A marriage between a believer and a non-believer resulted in an even 24,000 executions of the death sentence (Num. 25:1-9). Parents are not to allow inter-marriage (Ezra 9:12 and Neh. 10:30).

If a married man dies before having children, his brother must marry the widow, have sexual relations with her and cause her to become pregnant; if he refuses he shall be killed (Gen. 38:6-10). But another remedy is mentioned elsewhere: if the brother refuses, the widow shall take one of his shoes from his foot and she shall spit in his face. Ever afterwards he shall be called "The house of him who had his sandal removed" (Deut. 25:5-10).

Biblical marriage is not exactly a heaven on Earth, but who said that it would be?

— Jerry

Jerry,

Why do you make such a big thing about the reference to God in the Pledge of Allegiance? The most that can be said about it is that it is a purely ceremonial reference and harmless in context.

— A Patriotic American

Dear APA,

If you are of the opinion that the

"Under God" part of the Pledge of Allegiance is merely ceremonial, just look at what President Eisenhower had to say about it (and he should have known). Remember that it was Eisenhower who was the moving force behind the 1954 addition of the controversial words. It is clear that the law was designed for the primary purpose of advancing religion.

"In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource in peace and war."

— Flag Day speech, signing
bill authorizing addition of
the words "under God" to
the Pledge of Allegiance,
14 June 1954

"We are particularly thankful to you for your part in the movement to have the words 'under God' added to our Pledge of Allegiance. These words will remind Americans that despite our great physical strength we must remain humble. They will help us to keep constantly in our minds and hearts the spiritual and moral principles which alone give dignity to man, and upon which our way of life is founded. For the contribution which your organization has made to this cause, we must be genuinely grateful."

— Message to the Knights of
Columbus meeting in
Louisville, 17 August 1954

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www.unitedstatesatheists.com

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I would like to help out financially. Enclosed is a charitable donation:

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Please make check or money order payable to United States Atheists and mail to:

United States Atheists

6514 SE Foster Rd.

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You may also join at any of our regular meetings, held every Tuesday evening at 7:30 at the above address. Contributions are also gratefully accepted at our meetings.

United States Atheists is a 501(c)(3) educational charity run by volunteers. Donations are tax-deductible. Consult a licensed tax expert for details on how it would apply in your tax situation.

Critical Thinker May/June 2004

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