

44th Freedom From Religion Foundation Year in Review — 2021



Photo by Ingrid Laas

A report by FFRF
Co-Presidents
Dan Barker &
Annie Laurie Gaylor

Yay! FFRF tops 35,500 members!
FFRF has reached an all-time
high this fall of more than 35,500
current dues-paying members

(our membership was 33,000 a year ago). PRRI's "2020 Census on Religion" shows the good news that almost one in four Americans remains a "None." Meanwhile, Protestant evangelicals have shrunk from 23% in 2006 to 14% of the population today. Thank you for being part of a movement that works so that reason, not dogma, prevails in U.S. social policy and law — never a more timely or important goal.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF's office, Freethought Hall, Madison, Wis.

New lawsuit: FFRF, along with a coalition of service and advocacy organizations, filed a lawsuit against eight federal agencies in the final days of the Trump administration for undoing rules that protect those receiving social services from being discriminated against.

Five ongoing cases continue against 1) Texas Gov. Greg Abbott for censoring FFRF's Bill of Rights nativity display (we're winning), 2) bible classes in West Virginia schools (we've stopped them), 3) a Ten Commandments monument in front of the Arkansas Capitol, 4) recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the city council in Parkersburg, W.Va., and 5) courtroom prayers by a Texas justice of the peace. Stay tuned! FFRF also filed four friend-of-the-court briefs.

Taking action on state/church entanglements. FFRF has handled 1,335 unique requests for help in 2021, with legal intake staff writing **477 formal complaint letters** to public officials over First Amendment violations from January to Oct. 31, 2021. A majority involved chasing religion out of the schools.

120+ nonlitigation victories. FFRF has achieved over **120 significant nonlitigation victories** since January 2021. Half involved school violations, ending religious displays, bible distributions and prayer, including at graduations and by coaches and school boards.



Photo by Chris Line

Rebecca Markert

Our legal department of nine current attorneys plus two legal assistants is ably overseen by **Legal Director Rebecca Markert**. Our newest Patrick O'Reiley Legal Fellow is **Karen Heineman**. As the FFRF Legal Director warned in her one-year anniversary analysis of what has happened to the Supreme Court since the confirmation of Amy Coney Barrett: "We're only seeing the beginning of radical changes to how religious liberty is defined in America. What's shocking is the lightning speed at which they're changing law."



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF staff attorneys, working for your rights.

2021 legal accomplishments

While FFRF is alarmed by the extremist direction of the Trump Supreme Court, we nevertheless enjoyed a very good legal year.

Final court victory: FFRF halted religious test to vote. FFRF filed suit in October 2020 over an egregious mandatory religious oath, "So help me God," required to register to vote in Alabama.

Alabama Voter Registration Plaintiffs



The case was settled favorably on April 7, 2021, with online forms amended, and voters allowed to check a box declining to include the final four words of the oath. Citizens are now also allowed to strike out the words. We thank our plaintiffs who made possible this significant victory: **Randall Cragun, Heather Coleman, Chris Nelson and Robert Corker**, who all received 2021 Freethinker of the Year Awards at FFRF's November convention.

FFRF advertises freethought



FFRF refreshes Ron Reagan TV ad. The national CBS network finally agreed, seven years after it was first recorded, to accept our 30-second TV spot by the obliging Ron (“unabashed atheist ... not afraid of burning in hell”) Reagan. The ad ran about a dozen times on CBS’ “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert.” We’re excited to announce that Ron’s ad has also been finally accepted to air on “60 Minutes” in the New Year. The ad ran several times this year on Comedy Central’s “The Daily Show,” TBS’ “Full Frontal with Samantha Bee” and MSNBC’s “Rachel Maddow Show.” We’re thrilled that Ron recorded a “refreshed” ad for us this year—containing the same iconic language as the original.



Artwork from a recent New York Times Ad, created by editorial cartoonist Steve Benson.

FFRF Print advertising educates

FFRF ran print ads in The New York Times, The Nation, The Progressive and Scientific American. We placed “In Science We Trust” pandemic-related billboards in Chicago, working with our Chicago chapter, and in our hometown of Madison, Wis. In the fall, we placed billboards urging “Sleep in on Sunday” and “Enjoy life now — There is no afterlife,” targeting irresponsible megapreachers in Tennessee and Houston (that would be Joel Osteen).



This billboard was placed in time for Darwin Day on Feb. 11, 2021.

FFRF grants \$100,000+ in student scholarships

FFRF considers our essay competitions and scholarships to freethinking students and student activists as vital investments in the future of freethought.

Many student essayists were helped. FFRF awarded \$22,900 to 13 major winners and 11 honorable mentions in its 2021 **David Hudak Memorial Black, Indigenous Students of Color Essay Competition**; \$17,050 to 10 major winners and 8 honorable mentions in its **Michael Hakeem Memorial Essay Contest for Ongoing College Students**; \$9,500 to three major winners and one honorable mention in the **Cornelius Vanderbroek Memorial Essay Contest for Law Students**; and \$21,350 to 11 major winners and 17 honorable mentions in its **William Schulz Memorial High School Essay Contest for College-bound High School Seniors**. FFRF awarded a total of \$26,650 to 10 major winners and 6 honorable mentions in its 2021 **Brian Bolton Grad School Contest**.



2021 Students of Color Essay Contest winners.

Student activist awards through SSA. FFRF is working with Secular Student Alliance to provide a variety of FFRF and FFRF-member underwritten scholarships. In 2021, FFRF has given \$1,000 each in **Cliff Richards Memorial Scholarships** to one returning Black freethinking student plus one nonreligious student from a **Historically Black College and University**. A \$1,000 **Yip Harburg Youth Activist Award**, underwritten by the Yip Harburg Lyric Foundation, went to a freethinking art major. Two scholarships, one of \$1,500 and the other \$2,000, went to freethinking law students interested in public service from the Phoenix Fund endowed by a generous FFRF member. The **Al Luneman \$1,000 Student Activist Award** went to a student who is working against religion-based anti-LGBTQ laws.

Other activist awards. The **Richard & Beverly Hermsen Student Activist Awards of \$5,000** in 2021 went to each of the two child litigants in FFRF’s successful lawsuit ending prayer in a Puerto Rican grade school last year. The \$1,000 **Strong Backbone Award**, endowed by an octogenarian member, went to Kylie Morgan, 12, for speaking up against religious proselytizing in her public school health class. **The FFRF Student Activist Award** of \$1,000, endowed by a generous FFRF couple in the Northwest who prefer anonymity, went to Alex Torrez, for fighting back against religious censorship in a school debating forum.



Kylie Morgan

\$20,000+ in tuition relief scholarships. In FFRF’s third annual distribution of the **Forward Freethought Tuition Relief Scholarships** funded by generous FFRF benefactor **Lance Bredvold**, FFRF gave \$5,000 each to an impressive group of three students and \$2,500 each to two additional students who are first in their family to attend college. This scholarship is reserved for Black, Indigenous, People of Color, homeless or otherwise marginalized freethinking students selected by **Black Skeptics Los Angeles**. FFRF warmly thanks all the generous donors to these funds.

Strategic Response Team at work

FFRF's Strategic Response Team (SRT), headed by FFRF Attorney Andrew L. Seidel, lobbies, tracks and educates about pending legislation, shapes



Ryan Jayne



Andrew L. Seidel



Mark Dann

Photos by Chris Line

public opinion with editorials, drafts statements and action alerts, and responds to imminent state/church violations. SRT works with editorial, executive and legal staff but has three full-time staff: Andrew, Attorney Ryan Jayne and D.C.-based Director of Governmental Affairs Mark Dann. Due to SRT's initiative, FFRF was approved this year for membership in the influential **Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights**.

SRT responded to the January 6th attack on our democracy with a whirlwind of short, mid-, and long-term actions, working to educate and elevate the role Christian nationalism played in that attack. The conversation about Christian nationalism has entered the mainstream in the wake of that attack, partly with help from SRT. Stay tuned for a big announcement on that front soon!

From mid-October 2020 through October 2021, SRT drafted more than **110 public statements or press releases**, 51 articles, op-eds, blogs or letters to the editor, some 50 legal letters and **90 action alerts**, which connected FFRF'ers with elected representatives 52,678 times. Ryan Jayne analyzed more than 1,500 bills and tracked more than 1,100, most at the state level. SRT had 90 (mostly remote) meetings with legislators on Capitol Hill and at the White House. Mark worked in tandem with the Congressional Freethought Caucus on seven key bills that advanced, including the Stop FGM Act, which was signed into law, and the blasphemy resolution. We also helped organize educational events for members of Congress with experts like **Ann Druyan**, and hosted distinguished legislators on FFRF shows, including **Reps. Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC), Mark Pocan (WI), and Jerry McNerney (CA)**; secular state legislators including Sens. Meghan Hunt (NE) and Kelda Roys (WI), and Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith (FL); and local elected officials such as Councilmember Kristiana DeLeon (WA.)

Major actions included extensive work on court reform with congressional offices and allied groups, including potential bills and public reports; responding to the election, the Big Lie, January 6, and the inauguration and transition of President Biden; a statewide investigation into the Catholic Church in Wisconsin; helping organize congressional action against health care sharing ministries and taking on the National Prayer Breakfast (again). "We've shown the value and need for a nimble unit that understands FFRF's missions, viewpoint, and which can swiftly counterpunch," says Andrew.

FFRF's secular 'Underground Railroad'

FFRF continues to grant emergency stipends to endangered secular activists around the world, working with a variety of other organizations. So far in 2021, \$3,500 has been given to a persecuted Pakistani atheist who is in the midst of resettlement; \$5,000 to aid the family of a Pakistani atheist who has been sentenced to death for blasphemy; \$5,000 to help relocate a Syrian atheist and his family; and \$2,500 to help an Iranian atheist with a family who has been detained and threatened. Blasphemy is a victimless crime that creates all too many victims.

FFRF Media

FFRF makes media for the rest of us (nonbelievers). By year's end we'll have mailed (and emailed) 10 issues of **Freethought Today**, our curated newspaper, ably edited by **P.J. Slinger**. "**Freethought Radio**," hosted weekly by Dan and Annie Laurie, is in its 16th year on the air (with more than 800 shows produced since April 2006) and broadcasts in **Janesville and Madison, Wis., Columbia, Mo., College Station/Bryant, Texas, Eugene, Ore., Ithaca/Watkins Glen, N.Y., Philadelphia, San Marcos, Texas, Vermont-New Hampshire's "Black Sheep Radio"**). As a podcast, the program had 9.4 million downloads since its beginning with 1.7 million unique downloads. Listen at ffrf.org/radio or through your favorite podcast provider to lively weekly updates on FFRF news plus commentary, and fascinating guests.

Making use of FFRF's **Stephen Uhl Friendly Atheist Studio** are two programs: "**Freethought Matters**" TV show and "**FFRF's Ask an Atheist**" **Facebook Live**. (Sadly, we lost **Stephen Uhl**, a major activist, this year but his studio lives on.) By year's end, FFRF will have produced more than 140 episodes of "**Freethought Matters**!" The half-hour show overseen by Multimedia Manager **Bruce Johnson**, **airs in 13 cities, 27 percent of the U.S. market.** Our "un-sermon" broadcasts Sunday morning in **Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York City, Phoenix, Portland, Ore., Sacramento, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.,** plus Sunday nights in **Madison, Wis.** All shows are archived on **FFRF's YouTube Channel**.



Dan Barker & Annie Laurie Gaylor with Ed Asner.

Photos by Chris Line

FFRF's "Ask an Atheist" Facebook Live airs Wednesdays at noon Central, then is uploaded to FFRF's YouTube channel. The participatory program showcases FFRF's expert staff, plus lively guests, on timely topics related to state/church or freethought.



Bruce A. Johnson

FFRF makes news! Since January, FFRF's Director of Communications **Amit Pal** has written or overseen 324 news releases about FFRF educational or legal actions or timely statements, with able help from **Editorial Assistant Casandra Zimmerman** and the Strategic Response Team. **Publicist Lauryn Seering** posted 539 **Freethought Now!** blogs by staff, guest blogger **Jim Haught** and Reproductive Rights Intern **Barbara Alvarez**. FFRF has nearly 74,000 Twitter followers, 469,800 Facebook friends and 41,000 YouTube subscribers, with more than 184,800 hours of viewing in 2021.



Amit Pal

Photos by Chris Line

Outreach (mostly remote) continues through pandemic

With Zoom coming to the rescue, FFRF staff participated in **32 events** so far this year, including two in-person events: FFRF Co-President **Dan Barker's** talk at the memorial for freethinking bible scholar **Hector Avalos** in Iowa, and Reproductive Rights Intern **Barbara Alvarez's** speech before the Denver chapter in November. Eleven staff members participated in one or more events including debates, the Nashville Sunday Assembly, "The Atheist Appearance," the American

Humanist Association conference, the Thomas Paine Day Celebration, the Conference on Religious Trauma, the New York Society for Ethical Culture, the Cultural and Secular Jewish Organization Conference, the American Constitution Society, the Secular Student Alliance remote conference, and several FFRF chapter events. FFRF produced **two “Coffee and Conversation” Zoom events:** Andrew Seidel’s on Christian nationalism and Attorney **Sam Grover** and Legal Fellow **Joseph McDonald**’s on freethought and public health.



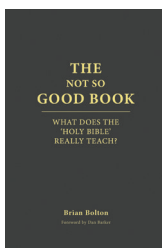
Mandisa Thomas

FFRF was again a major financial co-sponsor of the national conference of **Secular Student Alliance**, the Nov. 2 **Secular Day of the Dead**, and was a \$10,000 sponsor of the second **Women of Color Beyond Belief** conference, co-directed by Black Nonbelievers President **Mandisa Thomas** and Black Skeptics Los Angeles Founder **Sikivu Hutchinson**. FFRF also co-sponsored the **Mayday for Humanity**.

Publishing exposé on that “not so Good Book”



FFRF published *The Not So Good Book: What Does the ‘Holy Bible’ Really Teach?* by author Brian Bolton. The black and gold *trompe l’oeil* cover looks like a bible, but its pages contain Bolton’s contemporary essays constituting an arsenal of



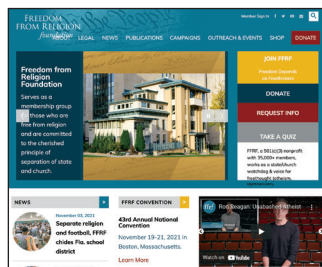
weaponry for freethinkers. The book is illustrated by Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Steve Benson (see sample).

21 Chapters Around the United States

FFRF thanks our tremendous band of dedicated volunteers who continue to lead 21 FFRF chapters around the nation, keeping local activism and socializing going even during the pandemic. To get involved: ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters, or to start a chapter contact Kristina Daleiden, chapterliason@ffrf.org

2021 Office/Staff/Board

The FFRF website redesign, overseen by IT Director **James Pchetteplace** and Communications Manager **Lauryn Seering**, has made the site more mobile friendly. Look for a much-needed revamp of FFRF’s online shop early next year!



FFRF’s Executive Board of Directors: **Stephen Hirtle**, chair, **Steve Salemson**, treasurer; **Cheryl Kolbe**, secretary; **Dan Barker** and **Annie Laurie Gaylor** (co-presidents, each with a half vote) and directors at large:



Jim Zerwick



Jeremiah Camara



Granada Higgins

Mike Cermak, **Sue Kocher**, **Todd Peissig**, **David Tamayo**, and also outgoing **James Zerwick**. We welcome our newest

Board members (directors at large sharing one vote): filmmaker **Jeremiah Camara** and businesswoman **Granada Higgins**.

FFRF’s Current State Representatives: Daniel Barker-WI, Darrell Barker-WA, Charles & Sheri Bender-IN, Lance Bredvold-MT, Robin Buckallew-NE, Chris Calvey-IL, Jeremiah Camara-GA, Tom Cara-IL, John Cavin-KS, Dianne Centa-OH, Michael Cermak-PA, Sheridan Chapin-NY, Dianne Cooper-IA, Margaret Downey-PA, Mike Dubik-VA, Zenos Frudakis-PA, Annie Laurie Gaylor-WI, Kevin Gough-CT, Ken Gould-AR, Ed & Mikel Hensley-KY, Granada Higgins-GA, Stephen Hirtle-PA, Cheryl & Ken Hofbauer-IL, Linda Hollar-TX, George & Julie Iddon-WA, Linda Josheff-WI, Sue Kocher-NC, Cheryl Kolbe-OR, Marc-Andre Lachance-ON, Aleta Ledendecker-TN, Philip Lentz-AZ, Steven Lowe-DC, Douglas Marshall-MI, Rob Moore-WI, Stefanie Moritz-WI, Paul Novak-IA, Todd Peissig-WI, Randy Pelton-OH, Judy Saint-CA, Betsy Salemson-NH, Steve Salemson-WI, Tom Schottmiller-PA, Sue Schuetz-WI, Nick Sheridan-MD, Steve Solomon-MO, Claudette St.Pierre-CO, Bonnie & Gary Stormo-SD, David Tamayo-VA, Wayne Thurston-NY, Steve Trunk-CA, Tom Waddell-ME; David Williamson & Jocelyn Williamson-FL, James Zerwick-WI, Rob Zweibach-CA.

FFRF’s distinguished Honorary Directors. Sadly, we lost honorary director and actor **Ed (“Lou Grant”) Asner**, who died in August at age 91. Harvard’s **Steven Pinker**, author of *Enlightenment Now*, serves as honorary president. Other distinguished honorary directors are: **Jeremiah Camara**, **Sean. B. Carroll**, **Jerry Coyne**, **Richard Dawkins**, **Daniel C. Dennett**, **Ernie Harburg**, **Jennifer Michael Hecht**, **Susan Jacoby**, **Robin Morgan**, **Rebecca Newberger-Goldstein**, **Mike Newdow**, **Katha Pollitt**, **Ron Reagan**, **Robert Sapolsky**, **Edward Sorel**, **Geoffrey Stone** and **Julia Sweeney**.

FFRF Staff. FFRF’s staff of 27 full-time plus three part-time workers is overseen by **Director of Operations Lisa Strand**. Our new editorial assistant is **Casandra Zimmerman**, our new shop manager is **Katina Gehn**, and **Karen Heineman** is the new Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow. **Barbara Alvarez**, **FFRF’s first Anne Nicol Gaylor Reproductive Rights Intern**, has stayed on as an invaluable watchdog on the escalating religious war against reproductive rights.



Lisa Strand



Barbara Alvarez

2021 Law school interns (some spring, some summer, some fall): **James Aird**, **Kat Grant**, **Matthew Hansen Sammi Lawrence**, **Alex Moore**, **Michael Sayle** plus undergrad interns **Raghen Lucy** and **Sukhvir Singh**.

Thank you, volunteers! FFRF volunteers worked remotely judging hundreds of student essays, assisted by FFRF’s essay coordinator, **Lisa Treu**. Volunteers, take a bow: Don Ardell, Darrell Barker, Bill Dunn, Stephen Hirtle, Linda Josheff, Dan Kettner, Jessica Kopish, Sammi Lawrence, Sue Schuetz, Karen Lee Weidig, Jenny Wilson, Katya Maes, Gloria Marquardt, David Petrashek, Mandisa Thomas and David Tamayo.

Do mess with Texas — October 2022 convention

The December Freethought Today carries coverage of our fabulous in-person celebration in Boston the weekend of Nov. 19–21, 2021, with an amazing line-up including **Margaret Atwood**, **Gloria Steinem**, **Steven Pinker**, Supreme Court commentator **Linda Greenhouse**, and activists such as **Sikivu Hutchinson** and **David Tamayo**.

We’re going to defy Gov. Greg Abbott’s explicit injunction to FFRF “not to mess with Texas” by holding our 45th annual convention at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio Riverwalk, Fri., Oct. 28-Sunday, Oct. 30. Already booked: Author and Oscar-winner **John Irving!** FFRF’s 2020 convention plans for San Antonio rolled over due to the pandemic.



John Irving