

A U S T I N

Atheist

Atheist Voters' Guide

Editor's Note: The following is an official ACA press release that was sent to media contacts Texas wide.

Press Release

For Immediate Release

October 15, 2008

Atheist Community of Austin

Texas Atheist Group Develops Voters' Guide

In 1987, then Vice President George H. W. Bush said, "...I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God."

Twenty-one years later, atheists continue to be largely ignored or denigrated by politicians. The Atheist Community of Austin (ACA) is dedicated to supporting the principle of church-state separation, to embracing the ideological diversity promoted by our Constitution, and to counteracting the pervasive negative characterization of the many non-theistic citizens of the United States. Toward that end, the ACA created a survey which was sent to 482 candidates in federal and state races in which Texans will vote. The survey focuses on the Constitutional separation of church and state, freedom of conscience, rational decision making, science advocacy, equality, and other important issues that conventional sources often do not satisfactorily address.

50 candidates returned the survey in time for their responses to be considered by voters prior to early voting on October 20. These responses have been posted at the ACA Voters' Guide Web site (www.atheist-community.org/political/votersguide).

Nonreligious/secular individuals are estimated to represent more than 14% of the population of the United States; yet candidates often ignore or openly dismiss the interests and concerns of this group in order to court religious voters—a political move that fails to address the diversity of opinion held by religious individuals who aren't a part of the more vocal religious demographics. The *ACA 2008 Voters' Guide* is intended to assist voters in making informed decisions in the coming election and to make candidates aware of the issues that their nonreligious constituents feel should be of importance to all citizens.

The ACA's *2008 Voters' Guide* Web site (www.atheist-community.org/political/votersguide) includes the complete survey that was submitted to candidates, the results of this survey, information about our methodology and links to useful information for Texas voters. ■

2008 Voters' Guide Questions

The Voters' Guide is based the the candidate's level of agreement or disagreement to the following 23 statements.

1. If I am (re-)elected, then I will listen to and fairly represent the interests of atheist constituents.
2. I will not consider religion in any decision to hire or fire a member of my staff.
3. I would sooner resign from office than allow a religious consideration to cause me to break my oath of office to support our nation's Constitution.
4. Our Constitution's provision that "The Congress shall have Power ... To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts", which was adopted unanimously at the Federal Convention of 1787, stands as convincing evidence that the Framers considered science and technology to be of fundamental importance.
5. Public schools should provide age-appropriate, scientific information on methods of birth control and ways to reduce health risks of sexual activities.
6. It is appropriate to teach alternatives to established and accepted scientific theories in public school science classes, regardless of supporting scientific evidence.
7. The age of the Earth is closer to 4 billion years than to 6 thousand years.
8. Speciation and the diversity of life are best explained by evolution through natural selection.
9. Our Constitution's provision that "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States", which applies to all divisions of government (legislative, executive, judicial, military, federal, and state, including subdivisions thereof), should never be violated.
10. Public school teachers should never be required to respond to religious tests, including to utter "under God" during the Pledge of Allegiance.
11. Whenever children in public schools are free to proclaim "under God" during the Pledge of Allegiance they are free to remain silent or to proclaim alternatives.
12. "E Pluribus Unum" or "In Science We Trust" would be a less divisive national motto than "In God We Trust", "In Allah We Trust", "In Shiva and Vishnu We Trust", or "Gott Mit Uns."
13. Our Constitution's provision that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" requires strict government neutrality in matters of religion and forbids government promotion of ceremonial Deism and monotheism.
14. A government employee who promotes, rather than accommodates, religion in his/her official capacity should be reprimanded or fired.
15. Tax exemptions given to religious organizations are discriminatory and/or burdensome to the public and should be either opened to atheistic organizations or eliminated altogether.
16. Values of properties owned by religious organizations should periodically be appraised and made a matter of public record, along with values of associated property tax exemptions.
17. A religious leader who learns of a commission of a felony should not be immune from prosecution for failure to report the crime.
18. A prison inmate should not be paroled or granted prison favors on account of religion.
19. A licensed pharmacist who, on account of religion, chooses not to dispense a prescription drug to a customer should have his or her license revoked.
20. Parents who, on account of religion, prevent their children from receiving life-saving medical treatment should not be immune from prosecution or from loss of custody of their children.
21. Schools that deny admission to, or otherwise discriminate against, children on account of the religions of the children, or their parents, should be ineligible to receive public education funds even if the funds are directed to the schools by individual parents (as with vouchers) and not by the government.
22. An employer who discriminates based on an employee's religion should be ineligible to receive public funds.
23. The legal definition of marriage should not be restricted to one man with one woman.

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About ACA

ACA provides opportunities for socializing and friendship, promotes atheistic viewpoints, encourages positive atheist culture, defends the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, opposes discrimination against atheists, provides outreach to atheists in the greater Austin area, and works with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

ACA produces a live cable access TV show and Internet radio show, presents a monthly lecture series, maintains a library of Freethought books, protests in support of civil liberties, and participates in various community service activities.

ACA operates in an open and democratic manner to provide a community of like-minded people for social interaction and support.

ACA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational corporation made up of volunteers. The membership is restricted to atheists, but does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, or disability.

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Austin Atheist Newsletter

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Submission Deadlines

Issue	Deadline
Jan. _____	Dec. 1
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June _____	May 1
July _____	June 1
Aug. _____	July 1
Sept. _____	Aug. 1
Oct. _____	Sept. 1
Nov. _____	Oct. 1
Dec. _____	Nov. 1

Bat Cruise a Success

—by Don Baker

We had our third cruise event on Town Lake, September 20, 2008. Capital Cruises was our host for the event. This year, we floated west under the series of bridges going toward Mopac. There were a lot of people out enjoying Town Lake such as rowers and swimmers. Near sunset, the boat was positioned just East of the Congress Avenue Bridge for bat viewing with a dusky backdrop. The bats were spectacular as always and we got to get up-close-and-personal with the emerging bats when we passed under the Congress Avenue Bridge for the final stop.

We had the double-decker boat this year, which gave the 40 or so people who attended lots of room to move around, eat, and socialize. We had quite a number of out-of-town people come, which was a nice change of pace. One couple came from as far away as Canada. Dallas and Houston were also represented. Some of the attendees brought their kids, which made for a real family event. An impromptu group went to dinner and Esters Follies after the cruise to cap off a nice evening.

Many thanks to everyone who came out, everyone who took

photos, everyone who brought food and/or drinks, and thanks also to Mike Swift for organizing the event this year. We hope to see

you on the boat next year! There's talk of making the event even friendlier for out-of-towners. ■



Religulous—a Movie Review

—by John Iacoletti

The recently released documentary “Religulous,” follows political humorist Bill Maher as he travels around the globe interviewing people about God and religion. Briefly, I found it to be enjoyable and a good (but not great) documentary. For atheists, it is definitely worth seeing.

Bill Maher doesn't try to pass himself off as an expert in religion, but rather asks a lot of questions and cleverly ends up letting his interview subjects lampoon themselves with their own words (and occasionally some on-screen subtitles, some fair and some not so fair).

In one scene, Maher visits a trucker's chapel in Raleigh, North Carolina (held in an empty semi trailer parked at a truck stop), and a very large and clearly offended trucker confronts him with “you start disputing my god and we got a problem”. Maher responds with “I'm just asking questions”. This guy doesn't stick around, but by the time Maher leaves the service,

he has the rest of the group laughing and praying for him. Maher's humor may have effectively diffused a tense situation, but at the same time he dilutes his commentary by focusing on absurdities such as talking snakes while telling the group something along the lines of how he understands that faith can be a good thing when it gives people in prison or poverty some hope in order to get through the day. I think that's a cop out.

Some other highlights in the film:

- Maher visits and interviews an actor who portrays Christ at the Holy Land theme park in Florida as if he is actually Christ, while the park management frantically runs around trying to figure out how Maher and his crew got in the place without them knowing.
- An interview with U.S. Senator Mark Pryor from Arkansas, who ends up admitting that “you don't have to pass an IQ test to be in the Senate,” and a few seconds later his face drops as

he realizes the implications of what he just said.

- Maher shares a smoke with Ferre van Beveren, who leads a “Cannabis Ministry” in Amsterdam, during which he informs van Beveren that his hair has caught on fire. I thought Maher was just yanking his chain, but others thought that his hair was actually on fire.
- A very odd and surreal conversation with an elderly priest near St. Peter's Square in Rome, in which the priest dismisses the teachings of the church to be nonsense not to be taken literally.
- An interview with José Luis de Jesús Miranda, a Miami religious leader who has 100,000 followers, and claims to be a descendant of, as well as the second coming of Christ.
- John Westcott, of Exchange Ministries in Florida, who purports to be a “former homosexual” and is now cured and

is married with children. When Westcott disputes the idea that anyone is born gay, Maher challenges him to explain Little Richard.

I saw Religulous at the Alamo Drafthouse in downtown Austin and it was a sold out show that ended with audience applause. I was rather dismayed when I got my check at the end of the night, to find that the management had included a disclaimer notice stating that their decision to show this film was the most difficult decision they have ever made because of its “staggering levels of intolerance and bigotry”. My jaw hit the ground. This was the last establishment I would ever expect to see a disclaimer like that from, especially for a film much tamer than many I have seen at Alamo Drafthouse. The much more mainstream Regal Arbor Theater in North Austin was passing out no such disclaimers at their showings of the film. At press time, the movie is also showing at Barton Creek Square. ■

ACA CALENDAR

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1

• **2-3:30 p.m.:** *Non-Prophets Internet Radio Show* (See Web site for details)

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 2

• **12:15-1:45 p.m.:** *ACA Lecture Series* (Austin History Center) *Membership Interaction Meeting*

• **4:30-6 p.m.:** *The Atheist Experience* (Channel 16)

• **6:30 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Threadgill's)

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6

• **7 p.m.-?:** *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

• **7-9 p.m.:** *CFI Austin Food for Thought Lecture* (Old Quarry Branch Library, 7051 Village Center Dr.) *Dr. Chris Bell: “Animals of America Before Humans Arrived”;* Free.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8

• **7 p.m.-?:** *Pub Crawl* (Dog & Duck Pub)

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9

• **11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.:** *Regular*

Sunday Meeting at Romeo's (Romeo's)

• **12:30-1:30 p.m.:** *Board Meeting* (Romeo's (outside))

• **4:30-6 p.m.:** *The Atheist Experience* (Channel 16)

• **6:30 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Threadgill's)

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13

• **7 p.m.-?:** *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15

• **11 a.m.-12 p.m.:** *Adopt-a-street Clean Up* (Jack-in-the-Box, Burnet Rd. & Anderson Ln.)

• **2-3:30 p.m.:** *Non-Prophets Internet Radio Show* (See Web site for details)

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16

• **11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.:** *Regular Sunday Meeting at Romeo's* (Romeo's)

• **4:30-6 p.m.:** *The Atheist Experience* (Channel 16)

• **6:30 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Threadgill's)

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20

• **7 p.m.-?:** *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23

• **11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.:** *Regular Sunday Meeting at Romeo's* (Romeo's)

• **4:30-6 p.m.:** *The Atheist Experience* (Channel 16)

• **6:30 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Threadgill's)

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27

• **7 p.m.-?:** *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29

• **10 a.m.-?:** *Blood Drive* (Blood and Tissue Center)

• **2-3:30 p.m.:** *Non-Prophets Internet Radio Show* (See Web site for details)

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30

• **11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.:** *Regular Sunday Meeting at Romeo's* (Romeo's)

• **4:30-6 p.m.:** *The Atheist Experience* (Channel 16)

• **6:30 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Threadgill's)

REGULAR LOCATIONS:

• *Austin History Center*, 9th and Guadalupe. Building opens at noon. Lectures are free and open to the public.

• *Blood and Tissue Center of Central Texas*, 4300 North Lamar Boulevard, 512.206.1266.

• *Dog & Duck Pub*, North of the Capitol, 406 W. 17th at Guadalupe, 512.479.0598. Informal gathering; food available.

• *Romeo's*, 1500 Barton Springs Rd. South of Town Lake.

• *Threadgill's*, 301 West Riverside Drive (at Barton Springs Rd.)

Unless otherwise indicated, events are open to all atheist and atheist friendly people, regardless of ACA membership status. Check the calendar on the Web site <www.atheist-community.org/calendar> for last minute changes.

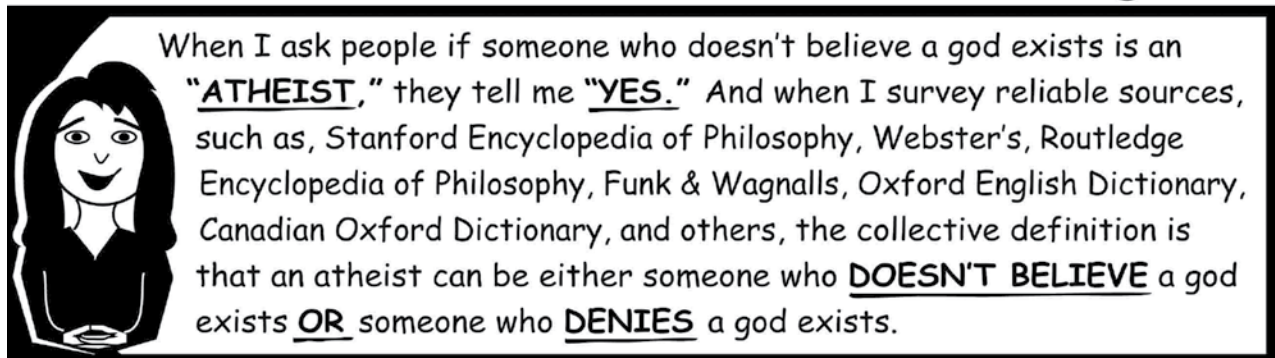
In lieu of a lecture, the November 2nd meeting will be for interaction with ACA members and the board. All members are encouraged to attend.



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ATHEIST EVE

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