



March 2006

# SIN CITY SECULARIST

Official newsletter of The Las Vegas Freethought Society

Volume I, Issue I

The Las Vegas Freethought Society (LVFS) is an autonomous nonprofit, educational organization that serves as a forum for freethinkers - atheists, agnostics, humanists and other like-minded individuals in the Las Vegas area.

We promote freethought as a viable alternative to mystical and theistic belief systems.

We promote the Jeffersonian principle of separation of religion and government, the rights of nonreligious people in our society, free inquiry and thought, a naturalistic view of the universe, a reasoned criticism of supernaturalism and a reason-based, secular ethos.

Our membership is open to all like-minded people without regard to race, age, gender, sexual orientation, physical disability, or political or other affiliations.

Our membership includes people who maintain a variety of differing views on political and other topics, but all agree that one can live a meaningful, happy, productive and ethical life without superstitions.

<http://www.lvfs.org>

**P.O. Box 19146  
Las Vegas, NV  
89123**

## Local Events

- **March 11, 2006  
at new time  
11:00 a.m.—  
LVFS Member-  
ship Meeting**



Our speaker will be Professor Mehran Tamandonfar, PhD. Dr. Tamandonfar is chair of the Political Science Department at UNLV and an expert on Middle East Politics.

This will be a most topical LVFS meeting. Please join us!

Las Vegas Freethought Society Meetings are held at the Spring Valley Library, located at 4280 S. Jones Blvd (corner of Jones and Rochelle). Check <http://www.lvfs.org> for more information.

- **March 21, 2006  
at 7:00 p.m.—  
Atheist Meetup**

Meet other local atheists and freethinkers for conversation and friendship! Come to an Atheists Meetup to discuss atheism-related beliefs and philosophies and consider spiritual and religious influence in America.



The Atheist Meetup is held at Jason's Deli located at 3910 S. Maryland Parkway (North of Flamingo Rd. and South of The Boulevard Mall).

For more information on the Las Vegas Atheist Meetup Group visit:

<http://atheists.meetup.com/30/>

For more information on Meetup please visit:

<http://www.meetup.com/>

- **End of March -  
Margaret  
Downey**



Atheist activist, Margaret Downey, will be visiting Las Vegas at the end of March and she will speak to us.

Margaret is the founder of the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia (<http://www.fsgp.org>) and the Anti-Discrimination Support Network. Margaret also serves as a secular celebrant (<http://www.secular-celebrations.com>).

Margaret's talks are always fun and interesting. You won't want to miss it. The date, time and location will be announced soon.

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## From the Desktop of LVFS's President

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Las Vegas Freethought Society. The LVFS has been in the works for just over a year and is now in full gear. Last month, LVFS held its first "real" meeting. Ryan Smith gave a great presentation on his struggles growing up as a "fundamentalist Mormon" and breaking away from it while on his mission in Latin America. Everyone in attendance seemed to have a good time, and about half met up afterwards for a bite to eat.

We are "auditioning" restaurants to meet at after the monthly LVFS meetings. For the first one, we went to Black Bear Diner, at Tropicana and Jones. Most who went liked it as a meeting place. Next month will be a great Chinese place called Chang's Hong Kong Cuisine, located on Decatur, just north of Tropicana. We are soliciting ideas for other restaurants within a two mile radius of our meeting place. If you have a "nominee", please send it to me ([clark@lvfs.org](mailto:clark@lvfs.org)). The only real requirements are that they must allow patrons of all ages, must be able to accommodate a party of 10 to 15 and should be reasonably priced. We are also soliciting for ideas for speakers, functions and social events. Please e-mail me if you have any ideas.

I want to thank a few people who helped get LVFS off the ground. First, Ray "RayJ" Johnson who, despite being unable to attend most functions due to his work schedule, diligently maintains the LVFS website (<http://lvfs.org>), and has written most of the PHP scripts for it. RayJ also manages the LVFS treasury and membership list. Two catalysts who really came on recently are our co-executive directors, Brian Klenk and Ryan Smith. Both have done a lot to get LVFS functional. Rob Pickthall and my better half, Jennifer Adams, have gotten the newsletter underway, with Rob editor of content and Jenn handling layout. Thanks to everyone who joined LVFS or attended an LVFS related function. You are helping to build a great community of godless folks in Sin City.



Clark Adams  
President, Las Vegas Freethought Society  
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## From the Sin City Secularist Staff



Rob Pickthall, Content Editor  
Jenn Adams, Layout Editor  
  
[LVFS-Editors@yahoo.com](mailto:LVFS-Editors@yahoo.com)

We would like to join Clark in welcoming everyone to the first newsletter for LVFS. It is truly exciting to see our numbers beginning to swell!

We hope that you enjoy this newsletter and see it as a good sampling of what is going on in the world from a freethought perspective. Even more so, we would like to invite you to contribute to its content. We plan to publish on a monthly basis and should be able to accommodate most submissions. If you run across anything in the media that you find interesting and topical, forward it on and we will try to include it. Also, please take the time to let us know what you think about the content, its relevance, and its quality. We are looking for helpful feedback that allows this budding project to grow into something of which all of us can be proud.

For this issue, we have compiled a great press release from Annie Laurie Gaylor of the Freedom From Religion Foundation; an interesting array of local stories and commentary; national news articles; and some irreverent humor from the print media and the Internet. For obvious reasons, a recurring theme is the Danish Mohammed cartoon "controversy" and the resulting backlash from both sides. You might laugh. You might cry. You're likely to shake your head and wonder, "Why?!?!" We sure did.

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## Religious Extremism Great Advertisement for Atheism



By Annie Laurie Gaylor

From: <http://www.ffrf.org/news/2006/advertisement.php>

Religious extremists are doing such a good job of demonstrating the harm of dogma and religion all by themselves that there is really very little left for rationalists to do. Rev. Pat ("take out Chavez") Robertson calls down God's wrath on the pro-evolution voters of Dover, Penn. Next he deems Ariel Sharon's stroke an example of divine punishment.

The notorious Rev. Fred Phelps of Topeka, Kansas, a one-man argument for atheism, switches from picketing the funerals of AIDS victims with his loathsome "God Hates Fag" signs, to demonstrating around the country at funerals for soldiers who have died in the Iraq and Afghan wars. Their deaths, you see, are "God's punishment" for U.S. tolerance toward homosexuals. His ugly picket signs read: "Thank God for IEDs [improvised explosive devices]," "Thank God for 9/11," "Thank God for Body Bags," and "Thank God for Dead Soldiers." Phelps even protested at the memorial service for the 12 West Virginians who died in the Sago Mine!

Because of just this one religious fanatic (and his congregation, largely his extended family), midwest legislatures are now debating bans on protests at funerals, such as the bill passed last week by the Wisconsin legislature.

For doing what good cartoonists are supposed to do--equal-opportunity satirizing of orthodoxy--Muslims around the world are in a frenzy of protesting.

Furor has erupted in Europe and throughout the Muslim world over the relatively tame cartoons by Danes last fall on the subject of Islam or Mohammed. (Sample: suicide bombers line up in heaven as the gatekeeper cries: "Stop, stop, we ran out of virgins!") The reprinting of the cartoon series by European newspapers last week sparked the storming of the Danish embassy in Indonesia, the arson of the Danish Embassy in Lebanon, and the burning of the Danish and Norwegian embassies in Syria. It has even resulted in the firings of news staff in France, Jordan and elsewhere. Palestinian marchers chanted that cartoonists and editors "should have their hands cut off."

It may be forbidden for practicing Muslims to depict Mohammed, but the rest of us still have free speech rights. These outraged Muslims ultimately seek censorship of critical views of religion (blasphemy laws couched as anti-hate speech) through government. It is dispiriting to see the British Foreign Minister and former Pres. Clinton joining in the criticism, and alarming to see some newspaper staff eating their own in their haste to distance themselves from threats.

Without religion, and without the unrelenting social pressure to kowtow to its dogma and demands, think of the problems our planet would be free of! How can anyone assess the number of religion-made problems, and look over these religion-bred fanatics in action, and not wonder about the value of religion and blind faith in it?

That religion is the number-one instigator of war, divisiveness, and violence, is so very obvious, yet so pointedly ignored. One has only to look at those claiming to know God's will, to see religion's harm. Most terrorists and instigators of political violence in the world today claim a pipeline to their deity, from the 9/11 suicide bombers to many warmongering ("God Bless America") politicians. Uganda's guerillas--who have slaughtered, raped and maimed tens of thousands, and abducted 25,000 children--call themselves the "Lord's Resistance Army." Is this a coincidence? What kind of advertisement is that for "the Lord"?

Personally, I would be happy if religion would quit trying so hard to make atheism look good. The world would be a lot safer.

See the Mohammed cartoons for yourself: <http://mohammed-drawings.blogspot.com/>

*Annie Laurie Gaylor is co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, and is editor of its newspaper, Freethought Today.*

*The Freedom From Religion Foundation (<http://www.ffrf.org>), based in Madison, Wis., is a national association of freethinkers (atheists, agnostics) that has been working since 1978 to keep church and state separate.*

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## New Nevada “Intelligent Design” Amendment Initiative

On the front page of the March 1, 2006 Las Vegas Review-Journal is a story about the Intelligent Design "initiative" in Nevada:

[http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj\\_home/2006/Mar-01-Wed-2006/news/6129541.html](http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2006/Mar-01-Wed-2006/news/6129541.html)

Fortunately, there is also critical editorial of it in the Las Vegas Review-Journal:

[http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj\\_home/2006/Mar-01-Wed-2006/opinion/6128872.html](http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2006/Mar-01-Wed-2006/opinion/6128872.html)

And another one in the Las Vegas Sun:

<http://www.lasvegassun.com/sunbin/stories/editorials/2006/mar/01/566672350.html>

There's a thread about it at the Internet Infidels Discussion Board:

<http://www.iidb.org/vbb/showthread.php?t=156822>

David Merritt of Armagosa Valley had this letter in the following day's Las Vegas Review Journal:

Steve Brown's undoubtedly well-intentioned petition for a constitutional amendment regarding the teaching of evolution is wrong on so many levels that one hardly knows where to begin ("Evolution a theory, father says," Wednesday).

Why should the Nevada Constitution mandate the content of school curriculum in any branch of science? Shouldn't that be the job of the Board of Education and educators? Would we need a new constitutional amendment every time a new scientific discovery is announced?

Giving special legal status to the opinions of a small minority of scientists is not democracy in action. Science is not a democracy, and facts of nature are not decided by majority opinion. Otherwise, why not give special constitutional mention to the minority who don't believe in relativity, quantum theory or the germ theory of disease?

As long as we're mentioning other theories, Mr. Brown thinks should we put in the state constitution a mistaken usage of the word "theory." The word in science doesn't mean what Mr. Brown thinks it does. Let's not have state law attempt to define scientific terminology.

And, as long as we're being honest, why don't we mention something about that small minority of scientists who reject the theory of evolution in biology: that they reject it overwhelmingly on religious grounds. It's a poorly kept secret, but it ultimately drives every attempt to dumb down biology instruction through political interference.

And since we're thinking the state should introduce religious ideas into public schools, why not just take this to its logical conclusion and have the Nevada Constitution mandate the content of Sunday school curriculums as well?

It's a sad fact that science education in Nevada, and indeed nationwide, is lacking. Mr. Brown, along with millions of others, is living proof of that fact. I see no reason, however, to perpetuate our ignorance of science by making it part of the state constitution.

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## VOICES OF LVFS:

LVFS member, Fred Spoerl, rebutted a letter in the Las Vegas Sun from a local regarding the supposed Christian foundations of the American governments. The initial letter can be found at:

<http://www.lasvegassun.com/sunbin/stories/sun/2006/feb/15/566657412.html?carroll>

### Letter: Constitution shuns religious labels

February 18, 2006

In reference to Timothy R. Carroll's letter of 2-15, he must be living in a dream land to think our Constitution was based on Christianity. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution do not contain a single word about Christianity, the Bible, Jesus Christ, nor is there any mention of the Ten Commandments, Heaven or Hell, not a single word.

Thomas Paine, the man that sparked the American Revolution, and was one of, if not the main contributor to the writing of the constitution. He stated, "All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no more than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit". He was a deist, as were a many of our founding fathers, believing in a god that had nothing to do with the Christian god...I'm sure most of the people of that time believed in some form of god or another, as to claim to be an atheist, would probably have been hazardous to your health. Thomas Paine also stated, "Of all the systems of religion that were ever invented, there is none more derogatory to the almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason, and more contradictory in itself, than this thing called Christianity".

Thomas Jefferson wrote in a letter to Dr Woods, "I have recently been examining all the known superstitions of the world, and do not find in our particular superstition (Christianity) one redeeming feature. They are all alike, founded upon fables and mythologies".

These are the writers of our Constitution and this is what they thought of Christianity.

In 1797, the Treaty of Tripoli, negotiated by George Washington and signed by John Adams, declared "the government of the United States is not in any sense, founded on the Christian religion".

Many of our States had and still do have antiquated laws on their books such as it's unlawful to own a sex toy, adultery etc. All of the religious requirements, for office, were declared unconstitutional by the very Constitution Mr. Carroll is stating was based on Christianity.

Please Mr. Carroll go study some US history.

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## National Events

Atheist Alliance International Convention

Kansas City, MO, April 14 -16, 2006

Speakers include Julia Sweeney, Lori Lipman Brown, Hector Avalos, Paul Mirecki and LVFS' Clark Adams

Visit: <http://atheistalliance.org/conventions/2006/index.html>

American Atheists Convention

San Antonio, TX, April 14 -16, 2006

Speakers include Michael Shermer, Robert Dreyfuss and Eddie Tabash

Visit: <http://www.atheists.org/convention>

American Humanist Association, 65th Annual Conference

Tampa, FL, May 11-14, 2006

Speakers include: Julia Sweeney, Stephen Pinker, Michael Newdow and Herbert Hauptman

Visit: <http://www.americanhumanist.org/conference/>

Iceland Atheist Conference

Reykjavik, Iceland, June 24-25, 2006

Speakers include Richard Dawkins, Julia Sweeney, Dan Barker and Margaret Downey

Visit: <http://www.samt.is/conference/>

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## National Rational News

### Atheists Hoping to Assert Rights in Religious Era

From the San Francisco Chronicle, Monday, February 20, 2006

This is an excellent article regarding the national atheist movement to gain more open acceptance in an increasingly religious era. Las Vegas local and lobbyist for the Secular Coalition for America, Lori Lipman Brown, is featured and quoted extensively.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2006/02/20/MNGV3HBONH1.DTL>

### The Atheist and the Christians

From the Star Tribune (Minneapolis), February 24, 2006

This positive atheism story from Minnesota features "affable atheist" August Berkshire, Vice President of Atheist Alliance International, speaking to students at a fundamentalist Christian school.

<http://www.startribune.com/614/story/268354.html>

### U.S. Agrees Not to Fund Abstinence Program

From the Associated Press, February 23, 2006

"The federal government agreed to stop funding a nationwide program that promotes teen abstinence to settle a lawsuit alleging the money was used for Christian proselytizing."

Full story at: [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20060224/ap\\_on\\_re\\_us/abstinence\\_suit](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20060224/ap_on_re_us/abstinence_suit)

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## Freethought in Media

### Blasphemous Humor:

Great cartoon on if atheists reacted to cartoons as Muslims did at: <http://www.cagle.com/news/Muhammad/images/ofarrell5.gif>  
Check out Cagle's other cartoons on the topic at: <http://www.cagle.com/news/Muhammad/main.asp>

Hilarious, though a bit over the top, animation satirizing the Danish Mohammed cartoon controversy at:  
<http://www.zipperfish.net/free/yaafm12.php> **NOTE: This clip includes some rather salty language so, you know, probably not something to play at the office.**

### Movies:

See hilarious trailer of upcoming movie "Flock of Dodos - The Evolution-Intelligent Design Circus" at:  
<http://www.flockofdodos.com/>

### Television:

When will the Catholic Church learn that boycotts just let the kids know where the cool stuff is? Read here about the Church's failure to stop New Zealanders from watching a South Park episode:

<http://www.cbc.ca/story/arts/national/2006/02/23/boycott-southpark-ratings.html>

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