

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

July 2004

*Sunday, July 11*

## How Drug Laws Failed And How to Restore Civil Society

### Special Points of Interest

- August Sizzler in the Works (page 1 and insert)
- Photos from Diversity Panel (page 2)
- The "Press Conference" That Wasn't (page 4)
- On the Theism/Atheism Divide (page 4)
- The 2003-4 "Awards Dinner" Party (page 5)
- A Look at the Caltrans Plaque (page 7)

Have our nation's drug laws failed? Should we declare as much and start to take a different path? Some people certainly think so! Among them are Orange County Superior Court Judge James P. Gray and Sacramentan, Art Tuma.



Art is to be our speaker at the July general meeting, and he will be presenting an overview of Judge Gray's stinging judicial indictment of the "War on Drugs." The presentation will summarize Gray's findings and outline the recommendations Gray set out in his book, "Why Our Drug Laws have Failed and What We Can Do About It," (2001, Temple University Press).

Judge Gray's findings garnered national attention to the  
*(Continued on page 5)*

### Standard Fare

AAI Connection	2
AOF Line	2
Prior Program—Recap	3
AOF Around and About	4
Looking Ahead	5
Membership Form	6
Highway Cleanup	7

## "Summer Sizzler" In the Wings

*August Meeting Is Time to Speak Up and Speak Out!*

Too many issues burden your brain? Get some relief by unloading one or two at the August meeting, which offers members an opportunity to speak out on matters and, at the same time, show off their propensity for reasoned and authoritative commentary. Speak on issues related to freethought, to AOF itself, or to the priority issue we share with so many other of the nation's citizens—the status of church/state separation.

Plan to share your perspectives with others in our annual oratory event

at the general meeting on August 8. The insert enclosed in this newsletter has all the details. If you are short on ideas, here are some suggestions to get you rolling:

- Dangers of the "God in the Pledge" tussle
- Your favorite humorous looks at religion
- Are you sure you ended up a freethinker?
- American's faith in faith-based initiatives
- How is it that atheists get to be moral?
- Politicians and piety in 2004
- Challenges of "Coming out" to your family.
- Are the intelligent design creationists winning?

## The AAI Connection

One of the best items produced by the Atheist Alliance International is its annual *Freethought Directory*, which stays current on freethought organizations (atheist, humanist, rationalist, etc.) around the world. It lists the various U.S. groups alphabetically by state, the individual groups elsewhere by country, and various cable television programs and electronic communications too (e.g., Websites, Email discussion groups, Internet radio broadcasts, and online forums and newsletters).

In addition, there are listings for annual conventions, First Amend-

ment attorneys, speakers and debaters, national and international organizations, freethought enterprises (books, CDs, tapes, ceremonies, camps, curriculum libraries, merchandise, periodicals, publishers, recovery, self-help, and so on). In sum, the *FTD* is a fabulous resource to have on hand. Planning to travel? Take it with you for expanded opportunities to meet like-minded others.

*Ed. Note: AAI recently released its 2004 Directory in CD (order online). AOF has a few remaining print versions of last year's 2003 Directory (and CDs of it too) at great discount rates. Check out the sales table at the next meeting!*

## The AOF Line By Kevin Schultz

Thanks to everyone who attended the June general meeting, one of our largest ever. A special thanks to Paul and Mynga for running the program and to Chris Lindstrom of San Jose for helping to organize the Garrison-Martineau Project demonstration. And a big thanks to everyone else, Kay, Ken, Betty, Jerry and any others I missed, who pitched in a hand to make everything run so smoothly.

I love the Sacramento Valley area. Not only does it enjoy a rich history, a great diversity of geology, wildlife, and people, but we enjoy a great diversity of freethought. I discovered this in June as I worked with Bill Potts (President, HAGSA) and Jerry Sloan to help form a coalition of groups around the area to co-sign our press release to support Michael Newdow. Atheists, skeptics, humanists, Unitarian Universalists, brights, freethinkers — as far as Davis and Orland, we contacted

*The purpose of the organization, AOF, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community.*

over a dozen groups and individuals to show "unity within our communities" in support of separation of church and state. That really blew me away -- a dozen groups and individuals! Most right here in the greater Sacramento area.

Driving to the June AOF board meeting, however, helped put reality back into perspective. As I attempted to tune in a newly-

discovered AM radio station, I found church service after church service. No freethought radio plays on Sunday morning in the Sacramento area. Churches seem to exist one to

each block to support cultural differences, liberal/conservative differences, eastern/western differences, etc. I have a book on my shelf 3 "x 9" x 10" crammed full of the vast diversity of the American religious experience. Twelve freethought organizations can get easily lost in that religious cacophony.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## AOF Board

**President:** Kevin Schultz

**Vice President:** Kay Dickey

**Secretary:** Dave Flanders

**Treasurer:** Ken Nahigian

### Directors at large:

Tina Burgess

Beverly Church

Mynga Futrell

Don Knutson

Betty Simonsma

## AOF Committees

**Newsletter:** Mynga Futrell, Editor

Kay Dickey, Asst. Ed. (Submissions),

Jerry Sloan (Mailing)

### Visibility and Impact:

Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell, Don

Knutson, Kevin Schultz, Jerry Sloan,

(more members welcome!)

**Archive:** Jody Craig, Kay Dickey,

Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian,

Betty Simonsma

### Connections (ad hoc):

Don Shirley (Caring),

Ken Nahigian,

Tina Burgess (Youth)

Betty Simonsma

Kevin Schultz (E-mail)

### Freethought Day 2004:

Beverly Church (Chair), Mynga Futrell

(Program), Jerry Sloan (Event Day), Ken

Nahigian (Publicity), Kay Dickey (\$)

## AOF's Voluntaryiat

### Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI),

Hank Kocol (CSH),

Betty Simonsma (AA),

Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

### Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

**Internet Website:** Pat Kelley

**Meetings:** Dave Flanders,

Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma

### Membership Database:

Betty Simonsma

We welcome additional involvement from AOF members. Right now we need a volunteer to assemble "visitor packets" of print literature. Just phone the voice mail 447-3589 if you can help out. Or, send an e-mail to us at

**aofboard@rthoughtsrfree.org**

# Meeting Recap

## Civic Pluralism Panel (2 Atheists + 2 Theists = 4 Citizens)



Mynga Futrell introduces the June 13 "diversity panel" she had convened: Chris Lindstrom, Rev. Kirsten Klepfer, Rev. John Morehead, and Steve Nahm. (Chris, a San Jose atheist activist, helped Mynga by inviting participation from Morehead and Nahm.)



Paul Geisert, the panel moderator, watches as **conservative Christian** John Morehead, Baptist minister from Rocklin, shares his personal angle on civic pluralism.



Kirsten Klepfer, a Presbyterian campus minister at UC-D, speaks movingly of her **liberal Christian** worldview →



**Pluralism (n)** - the condition of society in which numerous distinct ethnic, religious or cultural groups coexist amiably within one nation as fellow citizens

↑ Steve Nahm, an **Objectivist** from San Francisco, explains aspects of his atheist philosophy, which is based on the work of Ayn Rand.



Chris Lindstrom, an **atheist** and founder of the Garrison-Martineau Project, explains the value of having atheists and Christians sit down together and converse with one another. ←



Fifty-five were in attendance at a planned "civil discussion" between persons who hold some profoundly different worldviews.. Photos by Tom Fields

### Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is a member society of the Atheist Alliance International. AOF maintains affiliations with the Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

#### AOF's Statement of Purpose

*The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community. To accomplish this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.*

**AOF News & Views:** Copyright © 2004 by Atheists and Other Freethinkers, PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182. The contents of News & Views are informational and educational. Views expressed via the articles in this publication are not necessarily those of Atheists and Other Freethinkers.

*Subscription \$12 per year (free to members).*

Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.

# AOF Addresses “Under God” Verdict At Press Conference

By Kevin Schultz

On Monday, June 14, the Supreme Court handed down a verdict throwing out Michael Newdow's case challenging 'under God' in the Pledge of Allegiance. AOF and HAGSA co-sponsored a press conference later that day decrying the deplorable decision.

Unfortunately, we raised no media attention whatsoever. Preparation for the event itself, however, proved an educational exercise which will prove useful for future endeavors.

For example, in anticipation of the Supreme Court ruling, I cooperated with HAGSA President Bill Potts and Jerry Sloan to draft press releases to address the four outcomes of the Supreme Court ruling—for, against, split court, or no standing. The weekend before Monday, June 14, we also began discussing holding a press conference. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court handed down its decision sooner than we anticipated.

Per Jerry's experience, the Supreme Court typically renders decisions on Monday mornings at 09:00 EST. Also, when decisions seem controversial, the Supreme Court usually waits until the week prior to its summer recess before disclosing the verdict. Monday, June 14

ominously represented both Flag Day, and the fiftieth anniversary of the original insertion of the words under God.

Per Jerry's suggestion, I awoke at 06:00 on the Monday morning to see

*(Continued on page 7)*

AOFer Beverly Church showed up on June 15 at the San Francisco Pledge Rally sponsored by American Atheists.

About twenty persons besides Bev went to the federal building where the original appeals court rendered its decision in support of Dr. Michael Newdow.

(That decision ruled the “under God” addition to the Pledge unconstitutional).

On June 14, the United States Supreme Court, skirting the constitutional issues, threw out Newdow's case for “lack of standing.



# An Atheist Reflects on “A Civil Discussion”

By Dave Flanders

Granted, the AOF June meeting was not supposed to be a debate, but as I started writing a meeting summary, I got to thinking about the two atheists and two theists discussing tolerance between their worldviews and ended up with a reflection on their contrasting outlooks. I guess I have a hard time in restraining my opinion.

The atheist perspective would define magic as an attempt by humans to control nature by the use of spells and incantations. Science

employs investigation to determine basic facts about the world, and applies rigorous tests to those facts to determine if they can survive. Religion is far closer to magic than to science, and can be defined as a form of magic.

Although it sounds contradictory, what we call objective thinking is possible only after we come to understand the subjective nature of thought. This is because objectivity requires that we differentiate between the internal world of

private thoughts and dreams and the external world that exist apart from us. Indeed, without such a differentiation there is no external world—nor internal consciousness, for that matter—but only an undifferentiated stew of mind and matter.

Thus science—the grand exemplar of the power of human thought, is possible only after it is recognized that thought has no “real” power.

*(Continued on page 6)*



Descriptions of all the upcoming AOF events scheduled through October are available on the Web. <http://ourtown.sacbee.com/250>

**Highway Cleanup — Sat. July 17**

8 AM — Meet at the Park-N-Ride on Hwy 99 at Elkhorn Blvd. Bring water. Phone the voice mail (447-3589) if you need a callback with more details.

**HAGSA Summer Picnics**

The Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area will take up its regular bi-monthly meetings once again in September. In the intervening time, its members are gathering for some potluck picnics. As before, HAGSA invites interested AOF members to attend these outdoor events. Call ahead to inform the host and agree upon your food item to complement the gathering. This month:

**Sunday, July 11 at 3:00 p.m.**

Mid –July Potluck  
Hosted by: Beverly Church  
Address: 2208 Sandcastle Way  
Sacramento, CA  
Phone: 359-5423 / 773-3865

**Drug War**

*(Continued from page 1)*  
subject, as did his recommendations as to what policy changes can reform drug prohibition to restore civil society. Gray had opened his book with a review of the long and ignominious history of federal presumption of Constitutionality for drug prohibition law., telling voters more than they want to know about the drug war (injustices in execution of drug law punishment, misrepresentations of evidence in arguments advocating drug prohibition.

Tuma's presentation will recount political failures to enforce drug prohibition justly (with all initially presumed innocent, and without violence or fraud). And, as chair of the local Libertarian Party, he will encourage us, as voters, to take steps to restore civil society in the nation aligned with his views. (He favors a society with minimal government intervention and free from religious laws against heretics, witches, infidels, international traffickers of illegal drugs or domestic growers of medical marijuana.)

**AOFers Enjoy Year-End Festivities**

For 13 AOFers, it was a relaxed gathering and an opportunity to *not so formally* usher out the "old board" (2003-4) while "ringing in" two new 2004-5 board members, **Bev Church** and **Dave Flanders**. The gathering was at the Fireside Room of Hoppy Brewing Co.

After the meal, Kay and Mynga took the floor to discharge a few duties delegated to them by the former board. Retiring members **Ed McConnell** and **Don Shirley** had earned their framed "certificates of service," and Ed was present to collect his. A few special surprise awards were ready to hand out as well. One of two **Oz** awardees, **Ken Nahigian**, was present to receive his certificate for "services behind the scenes". (**Betty Simonsma**, the other Oz recipient., was out of

town.) AOF's **TRIPLE V** award, for a speedy move from Visitor, to Volunteer, to Valued member, this year went to **Beverly Church**. **Kevin Schultz** was surprised with the **REACH OUT** award for his E-list work for AOF.

Soon, tables were turned. Mynga gave a framed certificate to **Kay Dickey** to honor her two years of service as editor of this newsletter. Kay and Mynga are shifting roles to improve efficiency of production, although there will likely be no noticeable differences (perhaps more pictures), since it has always been a team effort. The last table-turning was Kevin's and Kay's presenting a plaque and a necklace to **Mynga Futrell**, who recently resigned as president. Warm words and wishes accompanied all the presentations.



Ken Nahigian, Kevin Schultz, Tina Burgess, Jerry Sloan, Ken Peterson, and Ruth Rezas—it's really nice to relax!



Kevin presents Mynga with a plaque but has to pick up the presidential load!



Ed McConnell, Bev Church, Paul Geisert, Jetta Ostrofsky, Tom Nicolette, Kay Dickey, Dave Henderson

# AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, P O Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address (print legibly!) \_\_\_\_\_

## Check your preference:

\_\_\_ Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$12)    \_\_\_ Family Membership (\$30)

\_\_\_ Low-income Member (\$10)    \_\_\_ Patron (\$50)

\_\_\_ Single Membership (\$20)    \_\_\_ Donation (\$ \_\_\_\_\_ )

Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to organizations similar to AOF.

Please check here if you DO want to be on our AOF activist list.

Please check your preference. We can deliver your monthly newsletter via an attached pdf file to your e-mail address above.     E-mail newsletter     Postal mail

## An Atheist's Reflection

*(Continued from page 4)*

For many, this final break with animistic and magical thinking has been too high a price to pay for science. The recognition of science involves acceptance of the sometimes disturbing fact that nature does not care about humankind, that there are no mysterious beings who guide our destiny, and events are brought about by the operation of discoverable and quite beautiful laws. That beauty may also be terrifying and difficult to accept, but we enjoy no choice in the matter.

But perhaps that isn't completely bad news for the secular thinker. Every thought and action that results from the remarkable interactions of that personal bag of atoms belongs to them alone. These types of secular thoughts and actions can carry a far greater value than if they belonged to some cosmic mind that one can only dimly perceive. So, one could realize that atheists have abandoned mysticism, revelation, and faith, and proceeded directly to the book of nature.

Some think that science can refashion ethics and reconstruct society, thus liberating human

beings from the dead hand of tradition and contributing to the progressive improvement of humankind. The emancipation of humanity from entrenched hierarchies became a rallying cry for the American and French revolutions, which heralded liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Some would say that science strives for universality, whereas religion is divisive. The effort by established churches to define orthodoxy and punish blasphemy has largely been defeated in western democracies, though is still a burning issue in Islamic lands. Still one who questions religion in a public place in America can at times sense that it can be dangerous and possibly ruin their career.

It does appear that religion is incompatible with science if it seeks to compete with it. Religion cannot substitute its truths for those of science. Religion should neither seek to impose its theological doctrines in the political arena nor dominate ethics.

Perhaps if religion is reinterpreted primarily as a form of existential poetry, dramatizing the fragility and contingency of the human condition in an impersonal universe

and recognizing with awe and wonder the vastness and mystery of the cosmic scene, there would be better friendship between the two world views.

Fortunately, the June 13 meeting was a very civil affair. The rationality and justification that John Moorhead aspires for Christianity can increase even more sectarian differences within Christianity. Some would contend that an Objectivist belief in absolute truth and morality gives it a cult like quality. Those who don't agree with the finalized reasoned views of objectivism are "excommunicated". Christianity with a lot of mysticism added can certainly enhance one's ego and cause one to feel good. However, delusion ideas can result as well. It does appear to this author that Chris Lindstrom's position—she spoke up for atheism—atheism=science, reflects the superior form of knowledge.

It is the view of some that civil discussions such as the one occurring at the June AOF meeting will help "secularize" (in a civic sense) those involved. That is good news to the atheist—but bad news to the fundamentalist.

### Pledge Decision Response

*(Continued from page 4)*  
 if the clerks had release the Newdow decision to the public. Not seeing anything on-line by 06:20, I returned to bed. Awaking at ~09:45, I checked the news. UGH! The Supreme Court overturned the ninth circuit decision.

I arrived at work at 10:45. Jerry contacted me via instant messenger, and together we called a press conference at 15:30 at the Federal Court House on 510 I Street, Sacramento. Jerry immediately called local organizations for support, and local media outlets to announce the press conference. Bill Potts agreed to attend, and together we carpooled to the event.

Arriving early at the Federal Court House, we met Jerry, then Beverly

Church, who also attended to support us. The local media, however, failed to show. We reasoned that the last-minute nature of the press conference, as well as the relative unfamiliar nature of our groups to most media, contributed to the no-show. Additionally, we felt that with the lack of public furor regarding the decision, the media chose to ignore our groups in lieu of solely interviewing Michael Newdow and the school board's reaction.

All-in-all, while greatly disappointed with the Supreme Court's verdict, the day proved an educational one. Many thanks to Jerry Sloan and Bill Potts for all their help to put together both the press release and press

Board minutes were late in arrival. See next month's newsletter for summary of board actions at the June 13 meeting.

### Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor, Kay Dickey, at this e-mail address:

**frethnkr@mindspring.com**

or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182. Attn: Submissions Editor

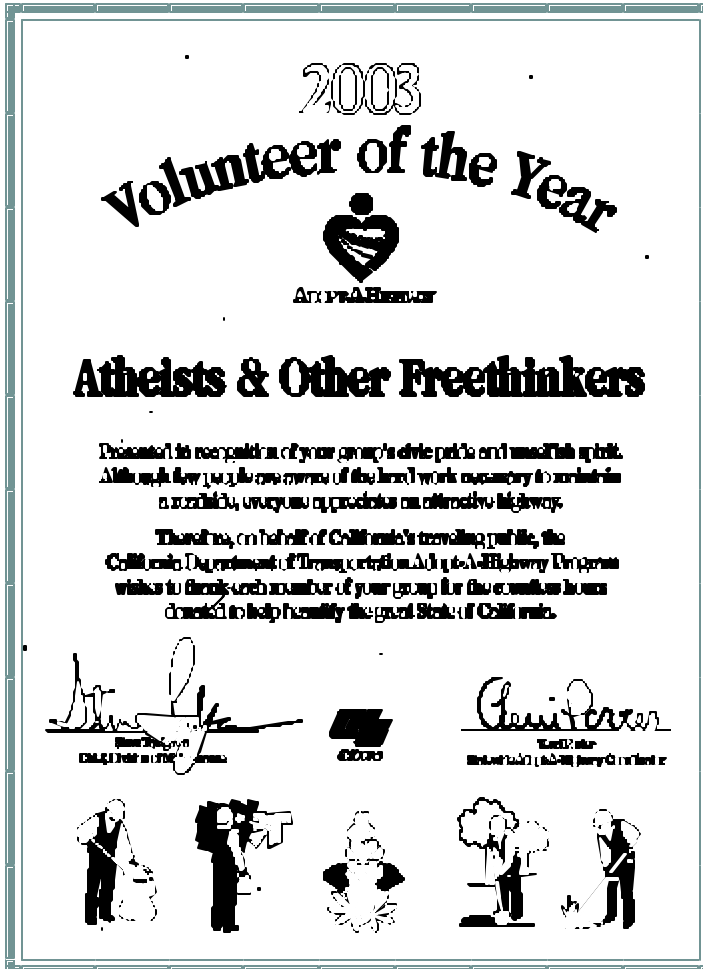
Preference is given to material that is submitted online in a PC-compatible word processing format such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Notepad*. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF also welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. All letters are prioritized by AOF 's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose. [Note: We are still accepting reader responses to the June topic "Is Atheism a Religion?" for likely publication in our August issue. Please send your comments now.]

## Highway Cleanup Ahead—July 17



A scanned image of the awards plaque from Caltrans



It would be so nice just to rest on our laurels. But...people keep throwing trash out their windows onto our two-mile stretch of highway

Could you lend AOF a hand for two hours?

### AOF Line

*(Continued from page 2)*

Freethought in the Sacramento Valley has come a long way. We all still face challenges each day, however. I'm confident that together we can all continue to further educate our community about atheism and atheistic perspectives, especially the issue of separation of church and state.

As Clarence Darrow once remarked, "You can only be free if I am free." That's what AOF is all about -- supporting the right to think and speak freely on atheistic perspectives. If you'd like to help out, if you have an idea you'd like to share, please feel free to call our voice-mail or drop us an email. We'd love to hear from you! See you next month.

### Newsletter Freebie Policy

We will be pleased to send one free newsletter to anyone upon request, but after that, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$12 per year. Or, better yet, why not become a member? That way, you'll get our newsletter FREE as part of your membership!



**P.O. Box 15182  
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182**

*We're on the Web!*  
[www.rthoughtsrfree.org/aof.htm](http://www.rthoughtsrfree.org/aof.htm)

## Calendar of Events

<b>AOF General Meeting</b>	<b>Sunday, July 11, 2:30 PM</b>
<b>AOF Highway Cleanup</b>	<b>Saturday, July 17, 8 - 10 AM</b>
<b>AOF Board Meeting (open to members)</b>	<b>Sunday, July 18, 9:30 AM</b>
Atheist MeetUp ( <i>location TBA, phone for Tina at 447-3589</i> )	Tuesday, July 20, 7 PM
Brights MeetUp ( <i>location TBA, phone for Paul at 447-3589</i> )	Monday, July 26, 7 PM
Next Freethought Day Planning Committee Meeting	Sunday, August 8, 10:30 AM

## Directions to AOF's General Meetings

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of every month, from 2:30 - 5 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour Recorder, call 447-3589.

