



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

Why Is This Election So Important to Atheists?

Note: As a 501C3 non-profit educational association, NYC Atheists Inc. is not allowed to endorse any particular candidate. NYCA can only discuss issues. You, as individuals, have the right and responsibility to endorse and support candidates. NYCA is proposing, below, an action plan for those Atheists who want to participate in the upcoming election.

I was dismayed to hear a couple of Atheists say recently that they are not going to vote at all in the November election. One said they didn't like either candidate's personality or qualifications. Another said that neither candidate nor political party supports her issues. A third said he felt that "there is no difference between political parties."

I say balderdash to all of these nonvoters! There is indeed a difference between political parties and between candidates, and it is important that you know the differences and vote accordingly. It is urgent that you vote in this election for many reasons but one reason is head and shoulders above all others for Atheists: the future composition of the Supreme Court.

The Crucial Issue

The current composition of the Supreme Court consists of four Liberal justices, four Conservatives and one leaning-to-Conservative justice. While that sounds fairly diversified, there is a catch: The ages of these Supreme Court justices range from 53 to 88 years, with an average of 68 years old. Thus, it is possible that the next president could appoint up to four new Supreme Court justices during his term.

The composition of the Supreme Court is deeply significant to Atheists because traditionally, the Liberal and middle-of-the-road justices have been more likely to look favorably on the issues of Atheism. Unfortunately, most of the older justices are Liberal. If the Liberals and middle-of-the-roads are replaced by Conservative justices, it is going to make a lot of difference in how Atheist cases are decided by the Supreme Court.

The presidential candidates, both Barack Obama and John McCain, have spoken about their judicial activism preferences and have even discussed what type of Supreme Court justice they would appoint. Therefore, my fellow Atheists, go and vote according to your Atheist conscience.

How to Get Involved

How can you personally get involved in this election? It's amazing to me how many people, evidently tired of letting things "just happen" in the political arena, really want to get involved in this election. I'm sensing there are a lot of people who want to make a difference, who want to make positive things happen and who have vowed to never again let a candidate steal an election simply because of the inertia of the people. Here are some suggestions for how to get involved and make a difference:

- 1) Individual campaigning: Do your own thing. Use the NYCA Voter's Guide and contact candidates. Become your own "campaign" office. Get involved in call-in radio shows.

2) Join an Independent Group: Link up with friends, neighbors, fellow workers, fellow members of a group; get two or more fellow atheists to join you and scale up your election activity.

3) Help the Candidate's Campaign. Go to your candidate's local headquarters and get involved in your candidate's campaign. Offer your volunteer services: answer phones, stuff envelopes, plan events, prepare food for events, staff the phone bank, type up press releases. Anything that needs to be done. A campaign, like an army, runs on its belly and on its computers.

Activism Tasks

1) Send out the NYCA Candidates' Questionnaire (it is part of our September issue) to other Atheists, freethinkers and nonbelievers, to candidates themselves, and to friends and fellow workers. People should understand what is important to us Atheists. The Questionnaire is available onscreen for emailing to your list of friends. And talk up the issues!

2) Voter Registration for yourself and others. Make sure your friends are registered. Offer to call for your candidate and remind voters to register.

3) Consider using an absentee ballot. In some elections, up to 50 percent of the voters have used absentee ballots. Some reasons for using an absentee ballot on election day: You will be out of town; you have a problem getting to the polls; you do not want to wait in line to vote.

4) Talk to voters in your community. Either one on one or by phone or email, talk to your neighbors and acquaintances, the people you see everyday. Atheist issues are relevant even to believers (many believers back the concept of separation of church and state). Talk up the reasons you think a particular candidate will respect our issues. It may be just the push a voter needs to make a voting decision.

5) Host a campaign party. Get someone from your candidate's office to come and speak to a group of friends. This could lead to an "after voting" get-together or a Watch the-Results-Come-In party. If you've done some of the above tasks to back your candidate, it might very well turn into a celebration party.

NYCA MEMBERS AT AAI CONVENTION



Front L-R: Elaine Stone, Jane Everhart
Back: L-R: Eric Stone, Ken Bronstein, Dennis Horvitz



L-R: Elaine Stone, Ellen Johnson, Jane Everhart

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION

NOT A BELIEF

Shipboard Atheist Convention Steers Clear of Controversy

U.S. Election Looms Over California Atheist Alliance Meeting



By Jane Everhart

Long Beach, CA—Hovering over the Atheist Alliance International (AAI) convention on the Queen Mary was the upcoming 2008 national election, an event that is crucial for Atheists nationwide. It added to the three-day conference the growing realization that we Atheists have a long way to go to effect change.

The Queen Mary, a beached whale of an ocean liner that has come to its final resting place in Long Beach, California and become a water-based hotel and conference center, was the site of the September 26-28 AAI conference this year.

AAI, an alliance of some 58 individual Atheist organizations worldwide, had already made Atheist history last fall with its wildly successful convention in Washington DC that has been dubbed “the Woodstock of Atheism.” That convention, with some 700 attendees clamoring to get in, helped debut the four prominent Atheist authors who have become known as The Four Horsemen of Atheism: Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris.

This year, with 350 attendees and a different mood, it seemed to this writer that what we lost in numbers and a lower-keyed ambience, we gained in seriousness of purpose, more-centered strategies and more mature concerns about where we are going.



Eddie Tabash

The Crucial Issue

The feisty California attorney and longtime Atheist activist Eddie Tabash sounded the political clarion call when he urged conference-goers to develop “the art of single-issue voting.” He implored Atheists to compromise on other issues and vote for the candidate who most understands and represents our secular issues.

“As much as possible, give some slack to the candidate who is one of us,” he advised. “We must learn from other minorities who came before us. We must take a lesson from the strategies and tactics of, for instance, gays,” who have learned the hard way how to unify behind candidates that backed them. This means, Tabash said, “compromising on issues such as immigration, guns, free-trade, welfare and health care, and focusing first and foremost on what each candidate will do for our secularist causes.”

The Ship as Metaphor

Though shadowed by the coming election, this 2008 convention still maintained its buoyancy. True, there were some disappointments: the resignation of AAI president Margaret Downey, who is always a bright and cheerful convention presence; you needed muscle power to flush the ship’s toilets and an engineering degree to turn the ship’s sink faucets off and on; it was a long trek from the bow to the stern of the oversized ship and required some fancy footwork up and down stairs to get to your next workshop; AAI’s board of directors holed up in the ship’s stern for two days, agonizing over the fine print in AAI’s bylaws.

But I like to think of the HMS Queen Mary as a metaphor for the New Atheism: The plumbing may be ancient but the décor is refurbished and shiny; there’s no distinct captain in charge just yet but the general mood is to put the boat on course toward our destination. The ship’s officers may labor mightily over who is fit to navigate and worry about getting the crew in order, and

there's dissension on exactly how to get to our safe harbor, but there's no doubt that we are getting past some rocky shoals and heading in the right direction.

But never mind. The real joy of going to a convention is seeing old Atheist friends again, hearing new ideas, learning new tactics, watching new talent rise to the fore.

Ellen Johnson's Comeback

One of the old friends who made a smashing comeback at this convention is none other than Ellen Johnson, the former president of American Atheists. These days she is at the helm of GAMPAC, the Godless Americans Political Action Committee, which she established in 2003. She has renamed it "Enlighten the Vote," and her speech urging convention-goers to "Vote Atheist First" drew the largest crowd of any workshop and won convention-wide acclaim.

Like Eddie Tabash, Johnson told Atheists to "put our issues above others because other people will support non-atheist issues."

Johnson also urged Atheists to be more proactive: "Speak softly and carry a big stick," she counseled—the "big stick" being legal action. "We need to file more lawsuits for violations of the constitution."

And "speak out!" Johnson implored. "The meek do not inherit the earth." Above all, "do not leave a place you're in if religious people do or say something offensive to atheists," she counseled, noting that some Atheists will leave a place in protest when religious people say or do something that is offensive to nonbelievers. "Stand your ground!" Johnson urged. "Tell them that what they are doing is wrong."

Atheist Humor Informs

What Atheist convention would be complete without Julia Sweeney, the doyenne of Atheist humor? Sweeney told the audience how, cornered recently by questions about Santa Claus from her small daughter, she related the legend about Santa to the little girl. After listening to Sweeney's tale, the child was so terrified at the idea of a strange obese man in red squeezing down their chimney that Sweeney had to comfort her by saying "It's just a dumb story." Funny, yes, but also an informing story: How many parents ever realize that the story of Santa Claus is not only preposterous but can also be terrifying to a child?

And no California convention would be complete without Dr. Michael Newdow, the irascible, guitar-playing, in-your-face physician, lawyer and scholar who is currently (and persistently) suing the U.S. government to remove the "Under God" phrase from the pledge of allegiance and our currency.



Michael Newdow

The Sacramento, CA-based Newdow, now apparently the James Taylor of the Atheist movement, entertained conference attendees by setting to music some of the hate mail he has received since suing the government. Most of the hate mail from allegedly god-loving religious people contains profanity, so we are loathe to print the song lyrics in this newsletter. However, here's a stab at one refrain, taken from a hate phone message Newdow received: "Cram it up your [anatomical area], you anti-American, No-god-loving p---k." OK, maybe not one for the charts but certainly well within the mode of provocative rap music lyrics. Apparently no other Atheist besides Newdow has found a use for the hate phrases thrown at us. Call it recycling.

Religious Child Abuse

For this writer, the shipboard workshops provided thought-provoking ideas to bring back to our local organization. One of my favorite workshops was conducted by San Francisco psychologist Dr. Marlene Winell, author of the book *Leaving the Fold, A Guide for Former Fundamentalists and Others Leaving Their Religion*, based on her own experiences as well as those of her clients. Dr. Winell's area of specialty is helping people recover from religious indoctrination, particularly Christian fundamentalism. (We in NYCA have a lifestyle support group for this purpose, headed by psychologist Dr. Nando Pelusi.)

"Kids don't have a choice of religion," Winell pointed out. She equated religious indoctrination with child abuse because "there is damage." She advises victims of religious indoctrination, who are often hesitant to hurt their parents by coming out as atheists, to focus not on what the parents will feel but rather, on their relationship with the "self." "Take care of yourself, not of your parents," she counsels. "Your parents still have the family of god, so they didn't lose as much."

One Politically Conservative Viewpoint

One headliner, Dr. Michael Shermer, founder of the Skeptics Society and editor of its magazine *Skeptic*, who was once a fundamentalist Christian and is now an Atheist Libertarian, told of the joys of political Conservatism for Atheists, though he granted that this was probably not the ideal place to advocate this. “Conservatives are ‘tough-minded,’” he asserted. He conceded that Liberals are often considered “tender-hearted.” Then, in line with the title of his talk, “Finding Spirituality in a Godless Universe,” Shermer read pages from one of his books that described Atheist spirituality as “a sense of wonder and awe.”

The Minnesota evolutionary biologist and award-winning blogger P.Z. Myers told conferees that he is an Atheist because “religion is a crutch.” He said he focuses instead on the “appreciation of reality.” “You don’t learn from religious experiences,” he asserted: “Religion is uninformative, inaccurate, unsatisfying, unhelpful, dishonest and empty.” Now that’s a refrain I wouldn’t mind being set to music.



Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who, for security reasons was not able to come to Long Beach but who joined the convention via live Internet, received from AAI an award specially designed by Margaret Downey herself.

NYCA’s Ken Bronstein also won acclaim for his shipboard Blood Donation program, which he undertook to demonstrate to AAI members how easy it is to conduct such a program in their locality on the annual so-called National Day of Prayer. “While the religious are on their knees praying, we, in contrast, are on our

PROUD TO BE AN ATHEIST

NYC Atheists Blog

<http://nyc-atheists.org/blog/>

feet offering the Gift of Life to humanity,” Bronstein told the assembly. Though a small minority of conferees elected to donate blood, those who did received a tee shirt and a plaque honoring their community spirit.

Where Are the Women Atheists?

The final session of the conference was something that in this writer’s opinion, was long overdue: a panel on women in the Atheist movement—mainly, the shortage thereof. Panelists were AAI president Margaret Downey, former AAI president Bobbie Kirkhart and Kathleen Johnson, the founder of MAAF, the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers.

Kirkhart pointed out that many prominent American women are Atheists, including Gloria Steinem, Jodie Foster and Angelina Jolie. Still, only 13 percent of prominent nonbelievers are women. And, Kirkhart noted, “only 30 percent of the people at this conference are women.”



Margaret Downey

Why so few Atheist women? “Women had further to go,” said Kathleen Johnson. More women than men cling to the comfort of churches, said Kirkhart. But are things improving? Apparently not much: Downey pointed out that the two female presidents of high-profile Atheist organizations have recently left their positions: Downey herself has stepped down this year as president of AAI and Ellen Johnson is no longer president of American Atheists. Both women have been replaced by men. □

VOTE ATHEISM

**This newsletter is published by
New York City Atheists Inc.
Publisher – Kenneth Bronstein
Editor – Jane Everhart**

Letters to Editor

This letter came from Dr. Vijayam Gora, Director of the Atheist Centre in Vijayawada, India, who was the guest speaker at our July 2008 Brunch Meeting.

Dear Friends,
Greetings from the Atheist Centre, Vijayawada, India.

We are happy to share with you that the Atheist Centre organized a programme of "Magic Science Festival" in which 150 magicians participated to fight superstition. It was held recently from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. at the Atheist Centre. It was a great success. All local reputed magicians joined in it. Its aim was to motivate the magicians to become agents of social change to fight superstitions and blind beliefs such as witchcraft and sorcery.

I am herewith enclosing the prominent news item that appeared about this event in India's leading English daily, "The Hindu," on 22nd September.

Vijayam
Atheist Centre, Benz Circle,
Vijayawada, AP, India

Samaram Calls for Laws Against Superstitions.

VIJAYAWADA--The air was thick with mysticism. One could sense the veil of enigma that engulfed the Atheist Centre, the venue of the Magic Festival that attracted the participation of magicians from across the State on Sunday. Magicians young and old, reputed and rookie, took part with enthusiasm in what the organizers of the event declared as the Magic Science Festival, aimed at enlightening the world on social evils like superstition and black magic.

The scientific principles behind the 'magical feats' that cast a spell on the public were laid bare to

dissipate ignorance on the part of gullible people. "We want to create a genre of truth-seeking magicians committed to the social cause. Magic is an art that can be perfected by anyone by practice. Behind every so-called 'miracle' performed by people associated with religions, there is science," asserted Vijayam of the Atheist Centre.

Noted medical science writer and social activist G. Samaram called for promulgation of stringent laws against superstition. He said social evils like black magic, prevalent especially in remote pockets of backward Telangana region, could be tackled effectively only if tough decisions were made at the policy-making level. He said politicians, who toed the line of these 'swamijis' and 'babas', played a role in propagating this 'evil'.

He said magicians must use the power of science to dispel these myths and spread the light of knowledge. □

The Ellen Johnson Story

Dear Editor,

Thanks for the article on Ellen Johnson (*The Strange, Puzzling Saga of Ellen Johnson*, August 2008)

I like the way you zeroed in on the fact that Ellen's job had become high-profile and that the men on the board seemed to have developed a case of "high-profile envy."

Lynne Williamson
Washington, D.C.

<p>ATHEISM:</p> <p>A NON-PROPHET ORGANIZATION</p>

UPCOMING OCTOBER EVENTS

OCTOBER 12, 2008 (Sunday) 12:00 PM
 NYCA Brunch, Speaker, Book Club, Library

WHERE: Press Box Restaurant & Pub
 932 Second Ave.- 49/50th St. (2nd Floor)

COST: \$20 (includes Buffet, one drink, tax, tip)

Speaker: Seth Asser M.D.
 Subject: *Parents' Anti-Medical Religious Beliefs
 Can Be Deadly for Their Children.*

Seth Asser, M.D. is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and the Pediatrics residency program at the University of California at San Diego. He is Board Certified in Pediatrics and Critical Care and formerly Associate Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at the UCSD School of Medicine where he was medical director of the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. Currently, he works as a consultant and educator in Rhode Island where he has hosted a radio talk show on controversial issues in science and medicine.

Dr. Asser has been professionally involved in child abuse and child neglect issues for over 20 years. He is medical consultant to *Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty* (CHILD), Inc, a national non-profit organization which seeks to ensure that children receive appropriate and timely medical care for serious illnesses despite religion-motivated objections of their parents. The group works to repeal state and federal laws that exempt parents from their duty to seek medical treatment should they prefer to rely exclusively on non-medical practices.

In 2004, Dr. Asser was presented with the Imogene H. Johnson Friend of Children Award for his longtime support of the work of CHILD, Inc. and leadership of the successful effort to repeal religious exemption laws in Rhode Island. In 2005, he was recipient of the American Atheists humanitarian of the year award.

Book Club / Library

After brunch, we move to the NYCA Library located on East 79th Street. We continue discussing Christopher Hitchens' *god is Not Great*, Chapter 12: "A Coda: How Religions End."

Need not have read the assignment to participate.

OCTOBER 21, 2008 (Tuesday) 7:00 PM
 NYC Atheists Meetup

Natty Adams Is Back!

Location: Stone Creek Bar and Lounge
 140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)

If you are into lively discussions, interesting people, provocative ideas, challenging conversation; if you like people who make you think and let you talk, if you'd like to get to know your fellow atheists better, what they're really like with no pretensions, no censorship, no affectations, this is the place for you.

Cost: Free (cash food and bar)

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

OCTOBER 30, 2008 (THURSDAY) 6:30 PM
 NYCA MONTHLY MEETING

WHERE: SLC Conference Center
 352 Seventh Ave. (29th-30th St.) 16th Floor

SUBJECT: To Be Announced

SPEAKER: To Be Announced

OCTOBER 31, 2008
 ANNUAL HALLOWEEN PARADE / PARTY

LOCATION: TBA

NOVEMBER 4, 2008
 ELECTION DAY

VOTE

NOVEMBER 4, 2008 (Thursday) 5:00-7:00 PM
 NYCA "Gift of Life" – Blood donation

Location: New York Blood Bank
 Citigroup Center - Lower Level
 Entrance: E54th Street-100 feet west of 3rd Ave.
 When inside -Walk straight to down escalator,
 NY Blood Bank straight ahead.

Complete your election activism by casting an additional vote for NYCA's "Gift of Life" Blood Donation.

Reservations: Not Needed

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

OCTOBER 2008

Oct. 2*	Thur.	6:30 PM	Election Activism Update
Oct. 6**	Mon.	7:00PM	NYCA Atheists Lifestyle Discussion Group
Oct. 12***	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch/Book Club/Library
Oct. 21****	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up and Discussion
Oct. 30*	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting
Oct. 31**	Fri.	TBA	NYCA Halloween Parade / Party

NOVEMBER 2008

Nov. 3**	Mon.	7:00PM	NYCA Atheists Lifestyle Discussion Group
Nov. 4	Tue.	All day	ELECTION DAY – VOTE!
Nov. 4*****	Tue.	5 – 7:00PM	NYCA Gift of Life (Blood Donation)
Nov. 9	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch/Book Club/Library
Nov. 18****	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up and Discussion
Nov. 20*	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly meeting

* SLC Conference Center–352 Seventh Ave./16th Floor-(29/30th St.)

** Location: Call Ken Bronstein 212-535-7425

*** Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (29/30th St.) – 2nd Floor

**** Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)

***** NY Blood Center – On East 54th St. -100 feet west of 3rd Ave. – Down escalator

WEDNESDAYS

THIS WEEK IN ATHEISM

6:30 PM (Manhattan Cable # 57)
Live Streaming: WWW.MNN.ORG

THURSDAYS

NYC ATHEISTS CABLE SHOW

7:00 PM (Manhattan Cable # 67)
Live Streaming: WWW.MNN.ORG

THURSDAYS

ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB

7:30 PM (Manhattan Cable # 67)
Live Streaming: WWW.MNN.ORG

NYCA
Cooper Station
P.O. Box 93
NY, NY 10276-0093

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