

**PRESIDENT'S
SERMON:
MOST IMPORTANT
ELECTION OF
OUR LIFETIME**

P 2

**ATHEISM SHINES
AT 2016 REASON
RALLY: Tyson Gill**

P 4

**DON'T BLAME
SECULARISM
Phil Zuckerman**

P 5

IN THE NEWS

P 6

**UPCOMING
EVENTS**

P 7



NYC Atheists Inc.

An Affiliate of American Atheists



VOTE DEMOCRATIC

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PRESIDENT'S "SERMON": Why the 2016 Election is the Most Important of Our Lifetime

by Kenneth Bronstein

The conventions are coming! From July 18-21 in Cleveland (Republican) and July 25-28 in Philadelphia (Democratic), delegates will confirm their Presidential nominees—Trump and Clinton. They will also confirm the vice-Presidential running mates. Their other important business will be to write and ratify their party's platform. Pay close attention to it—for yourself and for NYCA.

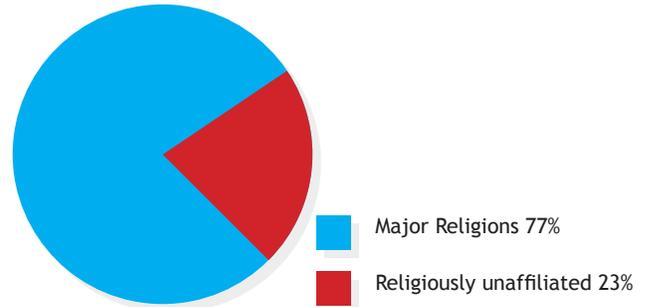
It's not just about what happens now, or in the next four years. What makes this election particularly critical is that our next President stands to nominate at least two Supreme Court Justices during his/her term. They will determine the outcome of every High Court decision for the next several decades. One seat still remains empty, with Congress refusing to confirm, or even to meet, any candidate for it until after the new President is inaugurated next year. Additionally, Justices Ginsburg and Kennedy are octogenarians and Justice Breyer is in his late 70s.

If the Republican candidate wins the 2016 election in November, he will surely nominate extremely conservative Justices, like Scalia and Thomas, to fill these vacancies. How critical is that? Just remember: President George H. Bush replaced Thurgood Marshall with Clarence Thomas 25 years ago; we are still living with the negative fallout. So, with this scenario, we can count on losing the battle for the separation of Church/State and a great deal more, perhaps for generations.



This is NOT a Church. US Capitol building - Washington, DC.

The only way to change this outcome is to be a single-ticket bloc voter in November. This time out, we must vote a straight Democratic ticket—not just for the Presidency, but for every open seat in the House and Senate as well. Our rights depend on the next President's choices for the Supreme Court and on the power of a Democratic Congress to confirm them and to shape future legislation. Period!



Percentage of adults who are religiously unaffiliated.

Yet voting is not enough. We must also get involved *now* in the primaries and stay involved right up to November 8th! We've developed strategies to use the candidate scorecards, data bases, and mailing lists we've created since January to take fast, effective action. Members will be assigned responsibility for leading the plans forward.

If you're interested in joining this initiative, please email me at nycatheists@gmail.com right away.

You've put your shoulders to the wheel to make this happen. But, since we first talked about gearing up for the election, there have been developments we could not have predicted; they underscore the urgency of our efforts. To strengthen our clout, this is the moment to employ our resources to reach every Senator and Representative in Congressional office, and candidates who are running for office. Note that in 2016 the entire House is up for re-election, and one-third of the Senate as well.

We know the Separation of Church/State is our primary mission. Electing a Democratic President and working to build a Democratic majority in Congress is the only way we can achieve and secure it in the current political climate. And we have company: according to the *Wall Street Journal*, 23% of American adults already have no religious affiliation. They are mostly Democrats, and NYCA should seek them out. So the coming elections are where our work begins—the first steps in reaching that goal.

If you still hesitate for any reason to embrace the task at hand, just consider some of the likely scenarios should a Republican President be elected and Congress again be ruled by a Republican majority.

Let's begin with a few of special interest to NYCA: The line between religious institutions and government support for them with taxpayers' dollars will be eroded further by new Church subsidies, faith-based initiatives, the extension of tax exemption to those only indirectly connected to the church, and—most troubling of all—"Religious Freedom", which really means that anyone, if he claims

his religious beliefs mandate it, can legally discriminate against anyone else, even if his actions go against existing antidiscrimination laws.

But there's more—much, much more. Beyond our own mission lie issues that are vital to our future as a country. President Obama's executive orders (issued after some very steep uphill climbs) will be reversed; think Dreamers and the undocumented parents of US citizens; a minimum wage of \$10.10 per hour for Federal jobs (with hires free from discrimination on the basis of race, sexual orientation or gender); health insurance affordable for all; women's rights; reversing the damage of escalating income inequality; safeguarding the environment and slowing climate change.

These are all pressing items worthy of support, perhaps close to your heart. But the environment and climate change already have considerable support from around the country, and considerable funding (government and private) as well. Your efforts and your vote in 2016 are crucial to our mission and future because we're establishing our base for the struggle ahead.

Your vote has greater impact on our behalf right now than what you can do to support other causes, however worthy.

Throwing our support wholeheartedly into the separation of Church/State in this 2016 Presidential election year requires that we do first things first: elect—as *single-ticket* bloc voters—a slate that will provide a legislative and judicial arena in which our beliefs receive the respect and support they deserve going forward. There is simply too much political volatility, and too much at stake, for us to hesitate. We must take decisive action now to thrive and be heard in the future. Once that goal has been reached, we will shape our long-term strategy: to become *single-issue* bloc voters, seeking out legislators who will safeguard the principals of Separation from 2017 on. What's most important right now is for us to develop our teams and schemes to achieve our immediate goals for the outcome of November 8th. With the structures and heavy lifting in place, moving on to our long-term strategies will be both easier and more effective.

In our next Newsletter, I will be sharing the specifics of our ongoing legal challenges, focusing on the most egregious economic and social examples of how America is losing ground in the struggle to keep religion out of essential medical care (hospitals, pharmacies, clinics); schools; textbooks; and outrageous government-subsidized favors for religious groups. Winning these challenges will be part of our agenda for the future.

In the meantime, be a Democratic single-ticket block voter on November 8th. We can talk about it afterwards.



Pro-Choice demonstration, US Supreme Court

LATE-BREAKING NEWS : Supreme Court Surprise

The Supreme Court has just delivered two verdicts that prove, emphatically, how critical their future votes will be for the country and for NYCA. And why every seat counts in every decision.

1. The case, *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*, strengthens the original protections of *Roe vs. Wade* (1973), by rejecting a lower court's decision to deny women in Texas access to safe medical procedures in abortion clinics. It required that clinic doctors have admitting privileges at hospitals within a 30-mile radius of the clinics, and that the clinics themselves offer hospital-style "ambulatory surgical centers."

If approved, the law would have effectively denied most women in Texas the pro-choice option it was designed to eliminate. Regarding the 5-3 majority opinion (Ginsberg, Kagan, Kennedy, Sotomayor and Breyer, vs. Alito, Thomas, and Roberts), the *Washington Post* stated "the outcome would almost surely have been 5-4 had Justice Scalia not died in February." In fact, Justice Thomas quoted Scalia in support of his own dissent. www.supremecourt.gov

2. With some relevance to issues in the Hobby Lobby case (but with a different slant), the Court's refusal to hear *Stormans Inc. vs. Wiesman* would also have had another outcome had Justice Scalia been present to rule on it. In essence, it allowed pharmacists to refuse, on religious grounds, emergency contraception to customers who requested it. The ACLU applauded the decision: "When a woman walks into a pharmacy, she should not fear being turned away because of the religious beliefs of the owner or the person behind the counter." But, as *The Atlantic* cautioned: "Storman's spent nearly 10 years winding its way from the West Coast to reach the Supreme Court. The next challenge is out there, somewhere. The question is not whether the Supreme Court will face these issues again, but when."

ATHEISM SHINES AT 2016 REASON RALLY

by Tyson Gill

Over the years I have attended a fair number of rallies for various progressive causes. Many frankly left me feeling kind of disheartened and embarrassed. They were often a circus of special interests with everyone vying to draw attention to their own pet causes and showing no apparent interest in the subject of the rally. Those events displayed none of the unity and solidarity necessary to garner the political attention that they desperately needed to achieve their collective goals. They instead proved that we were too laughably fractured and fragmented to be taken seriously.

Though the turnout was disappointingly low compared to 2012, the 2016 Reason Rally made me feel proud to be an Atheist. It was inspirational and entertaining. The speakers were intelligent, engaging, funny, and on-message without being scripted in lockstep. The crowds were diverse and enthusiastic. There were no subgroups waving banners and shouting for women's rights, choice, gay rights, or climate change. To be sure, the speakers spoke passionately about all these important issues, but they clearly recognized as did the audience that religion is the common enemy inhibiting progress in all of these areas and that Atheism is their common solution.

One of my favorite parts of the rally was chuckling at all of the clever Atheist slogans on the hats, t-shirts, and signs. All were sensitive but direct, nerdy and funny but powerful. All displayed pride in their Atheism. It is significant that the vast majority of these accoutrements did not say "freethinker" or "secularist" or "agnostic." Most of them proudly embraced the label of "Atheist." Even more significant is that the speakers did not try to skirt around Atheism as I feared they might at a "Reason Rally." Quite the opposite, every speaker largely embraced Atheism in a completely unapologetic and unabashed manner. It was not a stealth "Atheist" rally. It was an overtly Atheist rally. We have clearly come out of the closet. Hopefully a tipping point has been reached and many more "secularists" will follow.



Larry Decker

That is not to say I was completely happy with the speakers. Larry Decker, President of the Secular Coalition, along with some others, made what I thought were incoherent pleas for respecting religion. On the one hand they proclaimed how dangerous religious beliefs are, but then on the other tried to chide us into respecting religious beliefs. Unfortunately we cannot have it both ways. I understand that Larry is endeavoring to build partnerships with religious organizations, but it

is difficult in practice to condemn "bad" beliefs while simultaneously respecting all beliefs. We may pick and choose "nice" beliefs that we feel deserve our respect, but believers are not obligated to abandon

those beliefs we deem "bad" nor will they be content to remain politely quiet behind any arbitrary wall of separation between church and state. Further, in my opinion and as some speakers affirmed, there are no "good" beliefs. Every belief, even when politely and inoffensively personal, tangibly damages our capacity to reason as individuals and as a society.

Of course, plenty of religious crazies converged on the Mall as well, apparently believing they might convert an Atheist or two. But thankfully they were restricted from entering the rally area. Some marched around the periphery brandishing their signs claiming that Jesus would send us all to hell.

I saw some Atheists engaging in heated discussions with these religious zealots, and I really wished they could refrain from doing so. Being taken seriously enough to engage in "rational" debates over their nonsense is exactly what these religious crazies want. How much better it would be if, like the one preacher standing alone by a tree reading his Bible through a portable amplifier, these people were all just completely ignored as being unworthy of engagement. They only come because we react to them; and if a preacher preaches and no one even bothers to notice, can it be said he is preaching at all?

There were some speakers who were especially noteworthy. Actor John Davidson told an extremely powerful personal story about how for many decades he was too cowardly to come out as an Atheist for fear of how it would impact his career. Another actor, John Delany, who played the "god" named Q on Star Trek, spoke to us as a god with a creatively compelling and masterfully delivered argument for Atheism. Robyn Blumner, President and CEO of the Richard Dawkins Foundation, offered her full-throated and totally unqualified support for Atheism, with no trace of the intellectual uncertainty expressed by Dawkins himself. And finally, crowd favorite Bill Nye reminded me of why he is a superstar of our movement by eloquently dissecting the role of religion in Global Climate Change denial.

Overall, the event was uplifting, but not angry. It was optimistic, but not naïve. It was enthusiastic, but focused and open-eyed about the challenges we face. It was inclusive of all secular persuasions, but yet unabashedly Atheist. It was an event should make us all proud, encouraged, and emboldened.

△ Dr. Tyson Gill is author of the highly recommended book, *Belief in Science and the Science of Belief: A Guidebook to Fact-Based Thinking*, available on Amazon.com.

DON'T BLAME SECULARISM FOR MODERN SOCIETY'S ILLS

by Phil Zuckerman

Whenever tragedy strikes in America, some conservative politician or pundit will inevitably blame it on secularism. In the aftermath of the shooting at Umpqua Community College in Oregon, for example, Fox host Bill O'Reilly cited weakening religion as the culprit. "As the world becomes more secular," he declared, "civilized restraints to bad behavior drop." Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee offered similar sentiments after the 2012 school shooting in Newtown, Conn., blaming such wanton violence on the fact that "we have systematically removed God from our schools."

The theory is simple: If people become less religious, then society will decay. Crime will skyrocket, violence will rise, and once-civilized life will degenerate into immorality and depravity. It's an old, widespread notion. And it's demonstrably false.

If it were true that when belief in God weakens, societal well-being diminishes, then we should see abundant evidence for this. But we don't. In fact, we find just the opposite. Those societies today that are the most religious — where faith in God is strong and religious participation is high — tend to have the highest violent crime rates, while those societies in which faith and church attendance are the weakest — the most secular societies — tend to have the lowest.

We can start at the international level. The most secular societies today include Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Czech Republic, Estonia, Japan, Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, South Korea, New Zealand, Australia, Vietnam, Hungary, China and Belgium. The most religious societies include Nigeria, Uganda, the Philippines, Pakistan, Morocco, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, El Salvador, Colombia, Senegal, Malawi, Indonesia, Brazil, Peru, Jordan, Algeria, Ghana, Venezuela, Mexico and Sierra Leone.

It is the highly secularized countries that tend to fare the best in terms of crime rates, prosperity, equality, freedom, democracy, women's rights, human rights, educational attainment and life expectancy. (Although there are exceptions, such as Vietnam and China, which have famously poor human rights records.) And those nations with the highest rates of religiosity tend to be the most problem-ridden in terms of high violent crime rates, high infant mortality rates, high poverty rates and high rates of corruption.

Take homicide. According to the United Nations' 2011 Global Study on Homicide, of the 10 nations with the highest homicide rates, all are very religious, and many — such as Colombia, Mexico, El Salvador and Brazil — are among the most theistic nations in the world. Of the nations with the lowest homicide rates, nearly all are very secular, with seven ranking among the least theistic nations, such as Sweden, Japan, Norway and the Netherlands.

Now consider the flip side: peacefulness. According to the non-profit organization Vision of Humanity, which publishes an annual Global Peace Index, each of the 10 safest and most peaceful nations in the world is also among the most secular, least God-believing in the world. Most of the least safe and peaceful nations, conversely, are extremely religious.

As professor Stephen Law of the University of London observed: "If a decline in religiosity were the primary cause [of social ills], then we would expect those countries that have seen the greatest decline to have the most serious problems. But that is not the case."

What about within the United States? According to the latest study from the Pew Research Center, the 10 states that report the highest levels of belief in God are Louisiana, Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee and Oklahoma (tied with Utah). The 10 states with the lowest levels of belief in God are Maine, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, Alaska, Oregon and California. As is the case in the rest of the world, when it comes to nearly all standard measures of societal health, including homicide rates, the least theistic states generally fare much better than the most theistic. Consider child-abuse fatality rates: Highly religious Mississippi's is twice that of highly secular New Hampshire's, and highly religious Kentucky's is four times higher than highly secular Oregon's. It is, of course, impossible to conclude from any of this data that secularism, in and of itself, causes societal well-being, or that religiosity causes social ills. Peacefulness, prosperity and overall societal goodness are undoubtedly caused by multiple, complex factors — economic, geographic, cultural, political, historical and so forth. That said, it is clear that a strong or increased presence of secularism isn't the damaging threat to society so many continually claim it to be. If only the likes of O'Reilly and Huckabee would take heed.

△ Phil Zuckerman is a professor of sociobiology and secular studies at Pitzer College in Claremont, Calif., and the author of *Living the Secular Life*.

IN THE NEWS

NEWS ITEMS

- Supreme Court Strikes Down Texas Abortion Restrictions: <http://goo.gl/v94SjC>
- Supreme Court won't hear challenge to rule that pharmacies dispense emergency contraception : <https://goo.gl/PrZb6b>
- Pool Rules: No Running, No Eating and, Three Times a Week, No Men : <http://goo.gl/hW7xjN>
- Indiana State Trooper Is Fired for Proselytizing During Traffic Stops : <http://goo.gl/mGk7Ye>
- Muslim Boys at a Swiss School Must Shake Teachers' Hands, Even Female Ones : <http://goo.gl/4NhrPS>
- Two Transgender Democrats Nominated in Western GOP Strongholds : <http://goo.gl/Dp3G3B>
- **NYC LOSES \$627 MILLION CHURCH PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION**
According to former White House senior policy analyst Jeff Schweitzer, PhD, US churches own \$300-\$500 billion in untaxed property. New York City alone loses \$627 million in annual property tax revenue due to 9,500 churches being tax-exempt, according to a July 2011 analysis by New York's nonpartisan Independent Budget Office.
- Independent Budget Office of the City of New York, "City's Multitude of Property Tax Exemptions Add Up to a Wealth of Revenue Foregone," ibo.nyc.ny.us, July 15, 2011

**WANTED
PRO BONO LAWYER**

Contact Ken Bronstein
212-535-7425 / nycatheists@gmail.com

NYCA CAMPAIGNS

- Single-Ticket Voting Bloc. This year, we must vote a straight Democratic ticket for the Presidency, and for every open seat in the House and Senate as well. Our rights depend on the next President's choices for the Supreme Court and on the power of a Democratic Congress to confirm them and to shape future legislation. Period!
- NYC Atheists 2016 Election Project: Deploy data bases and position scorecards to US Congress and Senate, and to Governors and Assembly Members of New York State, New Jersey, and Connecticut
- Develop Position Scorecard
- Stop "God Bless America" speech conclusion.

**LIFE BEGINS
WHEN YOU
BECOME AN INCOME
TAX DEDUCTION**



Ken Bronstein and "Pastafarian" Lindsay Miller
(wearing colander) at Reason Rally.

UPCOMING EVENTS



July 4, 2016

July 4th Picnic

Location: Conservatory Garden - Central Park,
5th Avenue / 105th Street

Meeting place will be in the upstairs gazebo behind the fountain.
Bring your own food and drinks. Rest room facilities available.



July 10, 2016 : Sunday 12 Noon
NYCA Brunch

Speaker : Susana Martiez-Conde
Subject: Neuro Magic, Techniques for
Tricking the Brain
Professor of Ophtalmology, Neurology,
and Physiology and Pharmacology
SUNY Downstate Medical Center

Location: The Press Box Restaurant
932 Second Avenue, Between 49th / 50th Streets, 2nd Floor

Cost: \$20, includes buffet entrees, salad, one soft drink and
coffee. Tax and tip included.



July 15, 2016 : Friday 6:30/7PM

NYCA Book Club

Will Resume September 2016

Host: Lisa Smith

Location: Stone Creek
140 East 27th St. (Rear Room)
(3rd / Lex)

Book: *TBA*

Cost: Free, recommended purchase of drink or food to
compensate Stone Creek for their space.



July 19, 2016 : Tuesday 7pm

We Want To Hear Your Opinion NYC Atheists Discussion Meetup

Group Leader: Lee Moore

Subject: The Atheist Brand

Should we continue to encourage
everyone to call themselves Atheists
openly instead of other terms such as

Skeptic, Humanist, Freethinker and so on.

Location: Stone Creek
140 East 27th St. (Rear Room)
(3rd/Lex)

Cost: Free, recommended purchase of drink or food to
compensate Stone Creek for their space.



July 28, 2016 : Thursday 6:30 pm

NYC Atheists Monthly Meeting

Speaker : Christopher E. Mason

Subject : First New York City Subway
System Map with Microbes

Location : SLC Conference Center
15 West 39th St. 3rd Floor

Cost: \$10 donation

WHY DO RELIGIONS KILL OTHER RELIGIONS TO SEE WHO HAS THE BEST GOD?

UPCOMING EVENTS

July 2016

July 4 - NYCA July 4th Picnic - 12:30 pm *****

July 10 - NYCA Brunch / Speaker - 12 pm *

July 15 - NYCA Film Club - 6:30 / 7 pm **

July 19 - NYCA Meet-up Discussion Group - 7 pm **

July 28 - NYCA Monthly Meeting - 6:30 pm ***

August 2016

NYC Atheists on vacation except for
Saturday Street Tabling

August 6, 13, 20, 27

11am to 6pm

Columbus Circle - Broadway, 59th Street
Front of the Time Warner Building

* PRESS BOX RESTAURANT & PUB
932 Second Ave. 2nd Floor

** STONE CREEK BAR AND LOUNGE
140 East 27th St. Rear Room

*** SLC CONFERENCE CENTER
15 West 39th Street, 3rd Floor

**** CONSERVATORY GARDEN
5th Ave. 105th Street - Upstairs Gazebo



NYC Atheists

NYCA CABLE SHOWS

Wednesday	MNN	RCN	FIOS
Atheism in History 5:30 pm	1997	84	35
Thursday	MNN	RCN	FIOS
NYC Atheists 5 pm	67	85	36
My Road to Atheism 5:30 pm	67	85	36

NYC ATHEISTS

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In This Issue:

Page 2: Most Important Election
of our Lifetime

Page 4: Atheism Shines at 2016
Reason Rally

Page 5: Don't Blame Secularism

Page 6: In The News

Page 7: Upcoming Events