



WASHline

In This Issue:

President’s Message 1
Editors Corner 2
AI Opportunities and Risks 3
The Council for National Policy 5
World Heat Update 7
American Atheists – Virginia Law 7
American Atheists – Virginia Action 8
American Atheists – Maryland Action 8
Christian Nationalism Update 9
Understanding Religious Trauma 12
Update on AI 15
Chapter Reports 17
Chapter Contact Information 19
WASH Contact Information 19

To: The Wide WASH Community,

I want to express my deeply felt gratitude to the many WASH members who recently joined our community. If we continue at our current rate of growth this year, we might double by the end of 2025. Your support is acknowledging the many secular activists who work for positive legislation, community and rational thought in our region. You have realized that a very small commitment of money can validate and encourage a visible difference in the quality of life for many.

I am especially grateful that my small efforts to produce our newsletter has made this possible. In a time of exponentially increasing insanity, I cherish my opportunity to communicate our shared efforts to create kindness and sanity. For those of you who have not yet had the time to show your support for what we do, please let yourself take a moment to support WASH - <https://wash.org/donate>

Don Wharton, Editor, WASHline

President’s Message

by Heatherly Hodges

There’s a quote by one of my favorite fantasy authors, Charles DeLint: “The magic in the world is in whispers and small kindnesses.” During my social work career, I often held onto that message. Social work is a profession where small victories are infrequent, big victories are even rarer; you have to hold onto the tiny victories, the littlest steps towards progress, the incremental improvements. You have to hold on to the small kindnesses.

Right now, the world is overwhelmed with political corruption, devastating climate forecasts, war, terrorism, poverty, and violence. We’re bombarded daily with news stories of so much injustice we become numb: 8 year olds forced to carrying their father’s baby, transgender youth beaten or denied access to basic medical care, women at the brink of death before being allowed to have an abortion, obvious displays of racism, blatant violations of the separation of church and state. With deep fake AI technology, will we even be able to trust what we see on the news? It’s enough to make anyone want to hide and hibernate from the bad news, or just soldier on and pretend the horrific is normal.



Image- by KC Green

In the coming months we’ll head into election season. Our strength, resilience and hope will be sorely tested. I truly hope the election will be one that preserves both the letter and the spirit

of the law, one that protects the separation of church and state and upholds the basic principles of democracy. But there are no guarantees. And until then, we have to stand together and fight for the candidates we believe in, for the laws we believe in and for the values we hold sacred. For some of you, that may be volunteering with your local political party. For some it may be protecting abortion clinics and funding food drives or little free libraries. For some it may simply be remaining educated and informed, and for others, it may be simply holding on, day by day, persevering.

All of those are equally valid. Whatever you do to get through the day and to try to help others, no matter how small the effort, is worth it. Another quote I love, paraphrased from “The Star Thrower,” by Loren Eiseley, refers to someone throwing starfish back into the sea after a storm. Seeing the hundreds of other starfish on the beach, a passer-by remarks that it is impossible to make a difference when so many are in need. The response: “But I made a difference to that one.”

That is what I urge you to do, both through the election season and beyond. Do not feel overwhelmed at the enormity of pain and injustice in our country, in the world. Pick some small thing and make a small difference. We cannot fix homelessness on our own, but we can feed one person, or two or three. We cannot change the laws causing injustice for transgender individuals, but we can support those we know, and vote accordingly. We cannot stop wars, but we can help refugees.

Step by step, day by day, we are making a difference. Some WASH chapters, such as SHOR is cleaning roads and holding food drives, SEVASH is sponsoring food drives and a little free library, SASH held its annual scholarship contest, FRESH held our Clothesline Project, and that is just a small sample of our chapters’ efforts. Those are my small kindnesses I hold onto each day. What are yours?

President's Message Addendum:

On Sunday, WASH learned that the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) is suing American Atheists and Planned Parenthood regarding the disbursements of a deceased donor's estate. More detail can be found [here](#).

While we can respect the FFRF's right to advocate financially for their organization, there are several concerns. First, if they succeed in their case, not only will Planned Parenthood and American Atheists have lost the money they received in the donation, they will have had to spend thousands of dollars to litigate in court. These are two organizations which are directly or indirectly tied to secular issues (abortion is a human rights issue, therefore a humanist value). There are resources lost that would otherwise be spent fighting for secular issues, maintaining the separation of church and state, and protecting abortions rights and healthcare.

Secondly, FFRF has chosen to pursue this lawsuit in an election year that could be pivotal to both abortion rights and church-state separation. Finally, by choosing to move directly to a lawsuit rather than first pursue private discussion or mediation, FFRF is damaging vital allies for the secular movement.

Each WASH member must evaluate the information available (with undoubtedly more to follow) and make their own decisions regarding the FFRF. For myself, my husband, Mike Reid and I have canceled our FFRF membership and will not be attending the FFRF convention in October.

Editors Corner

by Don Wharton

At the beginning of this *WASHline* I shared my gratitude toward our many new members. That gratitude extends to the WASH leaders and members who bring their efforts to create community, fight for rational laws, and provide clarity of thought consistent with scientific realism. They do the hard work that makes WASH worthy of the wider support we are seeing.

Our President provided an elegant message that balanced her world on fire message with her appeal to do the small things that can make a difference to those around us in the here and now. As she says, hold on to the small kindnesses. They provide hope for something better. My friend Jeff Bloom opened my eyes to the role of Council for National Policy. How could I have no clue about this organization that plays such a central role in the tidal wave of oppression that may destroy

democracy as we know it? Mr. Heffron has provided a deeper understanding about why so many can seem to have lost all connection with reality. I am finding myself with compassion for those who do not even know that they are suffering from their religious trauma. This is why they are passing it on to others and voting for the visibly insane.

I especially value what Gary Berg-Cross brings to our community. AI will radically change everything about our culture, whether we survive those changes or not. Gary is more optimistic than myself about AI because he spends more time with those who focus on it creating positive value with it. Having his high-level expertise shared here will help us make sense of the waves of changes that will be coming.

Aiden Barnes and Matt DeGrave lead a Virginia state team tracking local and state law. Virginia is more at risk for Christian nationalist legal atrocities, than DC or Maryland. I cherish that they are bringing such passion and energy to those issues. They affect so many in our region. Matt gives us a detailed review of Virginia state law and Aiden gives us an elegant call to arms in a fight that is very much worth fighting. Mike Reid is bringing his passion and intelligence to a similar effort in Maryland.

I view Christian nationalism, climate change, and AI as the three forces that can visibly change everything we now have toward the worst. How can climate change continue to blast through all time record high temperatures and that fact not create alarm bells in every corner of our society? AI is evolving at a rate that is absolutely ferocious. And Christian nationalism is no longer a remote threat. It is here and now with malicious intent wrapped in their profound delusion that authoritarian change will actually make things better. I hope my very less than adequate articles give some window into facts that were not known and perhaps suggest creating pathways to something better.

Please take advantage of the many WASH chapters that create community and resources that help us through these very troubling times. Our Chapter Reports are included after our articles. Emily Newman is especially to be noted because she brings the resources of AHA to what she can make available to us.

AI Opportunities and Risks

Third of three articles on AI

by Gary Berg-Cross

Earlier articles have discussed the basics of modern machine learning (ML) systems, especially ones using learning that leverages what are called deep neural nets and generates informational “products” like images and dialog. These so-called Gen-AI applications are trained using vast amounts of data and excel at pattern recognition found in digital data including images and dialog. A second article discussed the ubiquity of intelligent applications, like Gen-AI, currently in regular life. This last article in the series looks at selected issues especially risks but also opportunities with near-term AI technology which seems to offer a mix of opportunities but also down sides. Likely benefits range from task efficiency and automation in many fields, including science, better data & information analysis with resulting insights and enhanced medical and social well being. Businesses are excited by the possibility of cost savings and better user relations. And we can already see that more intelligent systems are helping scientists and public officials studying large scale problems such as predicting and mitigating climate change, drug and materials design and smart cities. For example, AI systems leverage sensor networks collecting data on traffic flow, energy consumption, noise pollution, and air quality. AI and ML helps scientists analyze this data to identify patterns and trends.

But even now, it is clear that the modern form of intelligent systems that leverage large language models (LLMs) and other forms of optimization can be used for both beneficial and less benign purposes. Meaning there are many pros and cons to consider to ensure that AI systems are used for the Common Good such as better, more efficient jobs.

A recent study by Oxford Economics/Cognizant suggested that 90% of U.S. jobs will be affected by AI by 2032. Being affected is not the same as being eliminated (only about 1% of people are expected to struggle finding jobs during this transition). Nonetheless, many individuals stand to see their work life significantly & rapidly changed, hopefully supplemented and enhanced by this technology. Like previous automation opportunities, increasingly intelligent AI comes with risks

ranging from impacts like job dislocations, operational and financial business risks, algorithmic discrimination, data bias, and lack of accountability. On the down side as a Digital Age Op-Ed: 'Ethical AI' matters put it:

"We're already seeing examples of what can go wrong when artificial intelligence is granted too much autonomy. Amazon had to pull an artificial intelligence operated recruiting tool after it was found to be biased against female applicants. A different form of bias was associated with a recidivism machine learning-run assessment tool that was biased against black defendants."

And Gen-AI impacts may also include aspects as hard to gauge as reputational impacts. All of which raises the question of what are issues to consider as Gen-AI systems come into wider use. A general way to frame some issues is to consider general factors that make software systems trustworthy. Five factors captured in the letters TRUST are often used to discuss such system trustworthiness. These start with the Transparency (T) of the system which details its scope, mission, and things like policies, & capabilities or status. It is easy to see that AI systems that can learn and adapt during their use risks some new, unexpected Behavior. This is especially true as systems and intelligent agents become capable of emergent capabilities not planned or built in. Some Gen-AI models' particular inner workings have been kept secret, making the systems functional black boxes and difficult to understand. Current narrative/chat AI systems lack transparency such as how they are trained and what are known limits to their processing when they generate answers. As a result, mitigation of potential biases or safety risks from unpredictability is difficult.

A second factor is to consider the R getting at who or what is Responsible? Are big companies that develop Gen-AIs responsible for their mistakes or even unintended impacts? What, for example, are the standards for stewardship involved and what thought goes into such stewardship? Self driving car behavior and other capabilities of current Gen-AI systems raise responsibility as well as transparency issues. An underlying problem here with Gen AI is exactly how intelligent do we trust they are. This is hard to

determine.

The user focus (U) of chat systems, for example, supports easy user dialogues. This makes them seductively attractive for users. But we can ask, "are their outputs aligned with individual or human group interests?" We know that response errors combined with their lack of transparency make them untrustworthy at times. And real-time feedback from users is not yet effective in changing systems.

Sustainability of systems (S) involves organizational resources & funding, digital object management, technical infrastructure, and security risk management. How do we, for example, handle ML that requires extensive training on data? How do we manage the impact of energy requirements for a sustainable world? On the other hand there is the promise of more efficiency once systems are built. a Gen-AI model for weather prediction called Pangu-Weather, forecasts temperature, wind speed and pressure, as well as other variables and these predictions are about 10,000 times faster than numerical weather-prediction models. This makes them good candidates for timely predictions. The problem is that it is trained on prior recorded weather and weather is changing due to climate change. Another consideration is that people and projects often underestimate the amount of computational resources that are needed to sustain modern AI. This is another risk. Together these first 4 illustrate the fact that there are many interacting factors in judging things like AI.

Lastly, technology (T) of Gen-AIs, such as architectures and foundations introduce some unique risks. The performance characteristics of current types of Gen-AI systems and the various technology, learning approaches and models they are based on are not well understood. Technical training on large cultural corpus of information is one of the Gen-AI foundations and the resulting knowledge model can perpetuate cultural biases and misinformation. This can result in generating discriminatory content and/or factually incorrect information called "hallucinations". These may be entirely new, generated information (which amounts to a sort of emergence) that sounds plausible, but which isn't grounded in reality. Users can easily mistake these fabrications as established facts. But it seems fair to argue that using current LLMs, however they are trained, remain inherently unstable and shouldn't be in

charge of important tasks. As an example there is the very large topic of weaponization of an AI system technology. We don't know how easy or hard this actually is and what safeguards are or can be built into current systems. We haven't had to build an ethical or moral agent technology. It's something we might be confronting soon and some aspects of this will be discussed in a future article.

Gary Berg-Cross, a WASH Board Member, is a cognitive psychologist who worked for a number of decades in good old-fashioned AI. While retired from full time work he is still professionally active and Co-chairs the ESIP Semantic harmonization work cluster and is one of the co-organizers of annual online conferences on topics related to knowledge and AI. The recently completed "Ontology Summit 2024" conference topic was "Hybrid Neuro-Symbolic Techniques for and with Ontologies and Knowledge Graphs."

The Council for National Policy

Part One: The Goals and Leaders

By: Jeff Bloom

It is obvious to any observer of U.S. national politics and policy in 2024 that there has been a coordinated effort at the national, state, and local levels to enact legislation that restricts or eliminates the civil rights of women, LGBTQIA+ citizens, and racial and religious minorities, and to impose religious doctrine on all through civil law. The uniform and pervasive nature of this effort across the nation, with similar or identical language appearing in most of the bills being introduced into state legislatures on every issue, shows that this is not just a coincidence or a result of chance – there is clearly a coordinated effort going on here. As many of us have sought to understand who is behind this effort, who is funding it, and who is carrying it out, there are several well-funded organizations mentioned regularly in the popular media as providing the funding and legal know-how – organizations such as The Heritage Foundation, Liberty Counsel, Alliance Defending Freedom, the Family Research Council, Moms For Liberty, and more. However, there is another organization most people have never heard of that is largely responsible for wielding the power of all the other groups, and many individuals, combined as an effective political force and a powerful advocate for public

policy: The Council for National Policy ("CNP").

What follows is the first part of a two-part introduction to the CNP intended to help you get to know the CNP's goals, its organizational structure and leaders, and the issues in which the organization has been engaged in recent years. Part One will outline the goals, structure, and leadership of the CNP. Part Two, to be published in a later edition of *WASHline*, will explain how the CNP connects with its allied organizations and will illustrate with several examples the way in which the CNP uses the much larger budgets and notoriety of its allied organizations to advocate for public policy and affect social change in the USA. In writing both parts of this series I've drawn from the CNP's website, as well as articles published in the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, *The New Republic*, and *The Atlantic*.

The CNP's own public statement of its general beliefs is simple: they declare that they believe in limiting the size and scope of government; they believe that the founders of the nation created it based upon Judeo-Christian values and that such values should be upheld; and they believe that the nation is worth defending. Putting aside the historical inaccuracy of the claim that the nation was founded on Judeo-Christian values, rather than the principles of the Enlightenment and a republican government with a Bill of Rights, these principles sound vague and malleable enough to align with almost any modern political agenda and policy platform. However, the general statement of beliefs that is on the CNP's website does not begin to describe the much more specific policy goals pursued actively by the Council since its founding and its role in coordinating and promoting the activities of many other groups that are publicly much better known and better-funded. It is almost impossible to determine exactly how many members the organization currently has, and who the members are, because the membership roster is kept secret. The CNP's board members have remained mostly static over the decades of the organization's existence, with founders such as Richard Viguerie and Morton Blackwell still active. However, there is a regular policy of rotating new people onto the board, and into officer positions, as the subject focus of the organization changes.

Recent additions to the CNP's slate of officers have included several that position the organization to engage more effectively in

promoting current policy objectives that have been the recent focus of anti-libertarian, Christian nationalist, and anti-LGBTQIA+ groups. One of the new officers is board president Thomas Fitton, the leader of Judicial Watch, who is experienced in filing large numbers of Freedom of Information Act requests with the U.S. government, and then following up with lawsuits when all the requested materials are not produced. Fitton has promoted disinformation about climate change science, voter fraud, Hillary Clinton's emails, and the investigation by the Office of Special Counsel led by Robert Mueller that looked at the influence of Russia's government on the 2016 election. More recently, he focused the efforts of CNP on repealing the ruling in Roe v. Wade. In 2020, President Trump appointed Fitton to the D.C. Commission on Judicial Disabilities and Tenure.

During the 2016 campaigns, Tony Perkins, the president of the Family Research Council, became the president of the CNP, where he could spearhead the movement to elect Donald Trump by marshaling the support of fundamentalist Christians. Perkins' successor in 2020, William Walton, is a wealthy financier who used his presidency position to push then-president Trump to reopen the U.S. economy sooner rather than later during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Walton is also a trustee of The Heritage Foundation and a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute, a pseudo-scientific organization that promotes Intelligent Design ideas and disinformation about the theory of evolution by natural selection, the leading credible theories related to the origins of the known universe, and other subjects.

Other recent additions to the board of CNP include: Ken Blackwell (Vice President), a Senior Fellow at the Family Research Council; Jenny Beth Martin (Secretary), co-founder and national coordinator of Tea Party Patriots and a columnist for the Washington Times; retired U.S. Army Lt. General William G. Boykin, executive vice president of the Family Research Council and former leader of the Army Airborne Special Forces Command, who has claimed that Islam is the "greatest threat of our time" and not worthy of first amendment protection, and who is the CNP's go-to expert on military matters; and Chad Connelly, who was named by CNP Gold Circle member Reince Priebus (former Director of the Republican National Committee) as the first National Director of Faith Engagement for the

RNC. CNP board member Kevin Roberts is president of The Heritage Foundation, a founding source and vital sponsor of the CNP to this day. Roberts has been the CEO of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, which was funded largely by Koch Industries and others in the fossil fuel industry. Roberts has written a long series of opinion-editorials for the *Washington Examiner* promoting a series of opinions on issues central to the concerns of the CNP – "Critical Race Theory," the Black Lives Matter movement, climate policy, and others.

CNP directors are officially unsalaried, but they are often paid by the organizations allied to the CNP. For example, Tom Fitton was paid \$382,215 in 2019 by Judicial Watch, and Jerry Boykin made \$178,840 in 2020 as executive vice president of the Family Research Council. On June 1, 2022, The Heritage Foundation, a major sponsor of that year's CNP meeting, announced its new "Innovation Prize" that was intended to "financially support organizations providing innovative solutions to the most pressing issues facing America." The \$100,000 awards that year went to: Alliance Defending Freedom headed by CNP board member Michael Farris; the Independent Women's Forum headed by CNP Gold Circle member Heather Higgins; and the State Financial Officers Foundation, the board of directors of which includes CNP members Lisa Nelson, who is also CEO of the American Legislative Exchange Council, or "ALEC," which was founded in tandem with The Heritage Foundation in 1973.

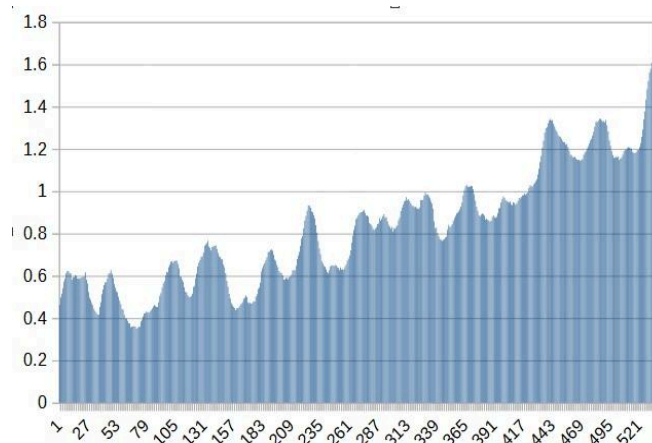
In "Part Two: How The Organization Changes Public Policy and Society," to be published in a future edition of *WASHline*, I will briefly explain how the CNP works in concert with its better-known and better-funded partner organizations to exert power at the national and state levels way beyond a level that its modest budget would suggest. I'll also use several recent examples to illustrate how the CNP uses its connections with these organizations to influence public policy at the national, state, and local levels, and change society in keeping with its goals.

Editor's Update - For those who would like a far more in depth treatment of this important issue, there is a movie, **Bad Faith**, that can be watched on Tubi [here](#). There is no charge to view it, and given the importance of this issue, it would make sense to organize a group viewing of it.

World Heat Update

by Don Wharton

In what has become an obscene continuation of new global heating, there are two new 12 month world average high temperature records set since our last WASHline. Both [April and May](#) were the hottest such months on record. We have now exceeded 1.6 degrees C above the pre-industrial average, with the May annualized average record now 1.63.



This level almost guarantees that 2024 will exceed the 1.43 record of 2023. We have 14 straight months of the highest sea surface temperatures for the month. As usual, I am using the European [Copernicus Climate Change Service](#) for the data included in the graph above. The vertical axis is the 12 month average world temperature degrees Centigrade above the pre-industrial average. The horizontal axis is the month number starting from January 1980.

The NOAA Atlantic storm predictions are [record high numbers](#), of 17 to 25 storms, with 8 to 13 being hurricanes. This is because the Atlantic sea surface is starting with record high temperatures at the start of the summer. [Hurricane Berle](#) just became the first category 4 hurricane to occur in June. That means that 130mph is the new all time record for sustained hurricane wind speed in June.

Over 1,300 people died in the Hajj, an Islamic pilgrimage that occurs every year in Saudi Arabia. A number of sources reported that temperatures reached or exceeded 125 degrees F. Much of Florida received 20 to 25 inches of rain in a single storm ending June 14. Parts of Montana, South Dakota and Iowa received [all time record rainfall](#). That linked article reported that the Big

Sioux River crested almost 7 feet higher than the prior record. The LA Times reported that 90,000 acres were already burned in California by June 22. We can expect numerous additional American fire, drought, and flooding catastrophes through the rest of this year.

American Atheists – Virginia Law

by Matt DeGrave

New laws in Virginia starting in July.....and the laws that should have been enacted.

The 2024 Legislative session saw many bills being introduced in Virginia, a lot of these bills were terrible. Thankfully almost all of the really bad bills failed to pass through the Senate. Let's take a look at some of the bills that passed and were signed into law by the governor and some of the good bills that passed but were not signed by the governor. Since we're currently exposed to so much bad news, we'll start by outlining the good from this past session.

The Good, I mean we can do better, but it's better than nothing:

HB 78 Search warrants, subpoenas, court orders, or other process; menstrual health data prohibited.

This is important because of all of the attacks against women's rights to privacy. There have been questions as to why this should be enshrined into law, the answer is simple, if abortion is ever outlawed in Virginia this information could be used to punish women who even miscarry.

HB 174 Marriage lawful regardless of sex, gender, or race of parties; issuance of marriage license.

There were other laws that would have enshrined this into the constitution of Virginia that were rejected, this is a good law but it does not go far enough. If the Supreme Court repeals *Obergefell V. Hodges* it would leave same sex couples in limbo.

The Bad:

HB 519- was rejected by Governor Youngkin, there are two changes in this proposed bill the concern here is the rejection of section D of the bill:

“D. Notwithstanding any other law, the Board may not take any action identified in subsection A based on the alleged provision or receipt of abortion care not prohibited under the laws of the Commonwealth, regardless of where such abortion care was provided or received.”

Similarly, **SB 716** was rejected by Governor Younkin, this bill would have prevented medical service providers from being intimidated away from providing reproductive health including abortive services to patients. Younkin claims this bill would tie the hands of the board of health, but the bill specifically calls out that providers cannot be punished from providing legal services.

This is not a comprehensive list, there were many laws that were proposed this session. As more extreme representatives are elected, we will see an increase in laws that attempt to limit the freedoms of our loved ones and ourselves. This could mean limiting a service that we rely on or outright banning things that we know should be legal. The election cycle in Virginia is hard to deal with because it seems like we never get a break but please continue to support positive legislation and keep up to date on current elections and legislation.

An honorable mention this session goes to Compassion & Choices' Medical Aid In Dying bill, which was so close to passing. This is the closest that this legislation has come in the Virginia legislature, and we hope that we can make even more progress in the 2025 session and actually get this bill passed.

Matt DeGrave is on the leadership team of the American Atheists Virginia group. He also serves on the WASH Board of Directors as Treasurer.

American Atheists – Virginia Action

Aiden Barnes

American Atheists' VA State Director's call to action: Urge your state legislators to protect church-state separation — Join the VA Secular Advocacy Team!

Comrades! Project 2025 has us in its sights!

Our voices discussing this frightening

Christian Nationalist vision for our country is vital to alerting the public and rallying action to stop it. The Christian Nationalists know their attempt to gut the government is unpopular, so they've masked their aims with jargon and legalese. Secular activists have studied and translated this 900-page playbook and the results are alarming.

Project 2025 is an unprecedented threat to church-state separation, equality, and our democracy. It is chilling and real. We must never stop fighting for freedom without favor and equality without exception. With your help, we can continue to sound the alarm and protect true religious freedom. One of the ways you can help is to join our VA Secular Advocacy Team. Contact our team's co-chair Matthew DeGrave (matthew.degrave@atheists.org) for more info.

Church-state separation enables us to live as ourselves and believe as we choose, as long as we don't harm others. And it frees us to come together as equals and build a stronger democracy. Don't take this freedom for granted, fight back against Project 2025 and all efforts threatening this fundamental American principle!

Aiden Barnes is the American Atheists State Director for Virginia. He serves on the WASH Board of Directors and is the past President of WASH.

“He who hath not a uterus should shut the fucketh up. Fallopian 3:36”

Protest sign outside the Supreme Court during the case against mifepristone on March 26.

American Atheists – Maryland Action

by Mike Reid

American Atheists is forming Secular Advocacy Teams (SAT) in numerous states. State SATs fight Christian Nationalism and threats to church & state separation at the state level. Happily, these are less of a factor in Maryland than in many other states, but that does not mean that Christian Nationalists are not active here or that such attacks and attempts to use the force of law or public funds to advance religious doctrines do not happen here, they are and they do. If you are a

Maryland resident and care deeply about protecting church & state separation, please consider joining the Maryland SAT.

The Good: A problematic bill was introduced into the House of Delegates this session: **HB1234** *County Boards of Education – Volunteer Aides – School Chaplain*. This bill would have allowed laypersons to act as chaplains to provide counseling services to students in public schools. These chaplains would then be free to preach or minister to students on the school premises and during school hours. This bill is similar to dozens of others introduced in state legislatures around the country as a round about way to slip religion and evangelism into our public schools. Only trained and certified counselors who keep their religious beliefs to themselves while on the job should be allowed to provide counseling services to students in public schools. This bad bill was cross-filed in the state senate as **SB0612**. Happily, it failed in committee and is dead for now.

The Bad: A medical aid in dying (MAID) bill that would give end-of-life choices was introduced again in both chambers. The *End-Of-Life Option Act* was introduced in both the House of Delegates (**HB403**) and in the state Senate (**SB0443**). This bill has been introduced in the legislature every session for the past few years. Sadly, it failed to pass again, but it keeps getting closer. Maybe next year.

Mike Reid is American Atheists' State Director for Maryland, co-chair of the Maryland Secular Advocacy Team, and a former president of WASH (mike.reid@atheists.org).

Christian Nationalism Update

By Don Wharton

Some of my friends joke about religion as being a bullet to the brain, given its ability to destroy rational thought. In Gaza, religion is creating real bullets to real brains. There are also bombs ripping bodies apart.

Over 85% of residents are homeless. A similar level of devastation has been wrecked on all built infrastructure. Over half of all children are facing extreme dietary insecurity – more accurately called famine. The lack of water is

creating a similar extreme risk of death by dehydration. Medical care, transportation, communication, schooling, banking, and food preparation and sale are all extremely difficult or non-existent. The Israeli goal is the totally delusional notion that Hamas can be completely destroyed. Israel is fortunate that some people in the military are now clearly stating that this goal is delusional. In fact it is possible that Hamas correctly thinks that they are winning. They are seeing Israel condemned by most countries and many people within countries that have not yet condemned Israel. They also have Israel locked into a “forever war” which will have Israeli soldiers vulnerable to being killed. There is much more wrong with Israeli policy that will not be listed due to lack of time and the reasonable use of space in this newsletter.

The reader might think that I am pro-Palestinian from the above. That is not true. I fully accept the Israeli position that Hamas is far worse. Hamas would easily kill an atheist such as myself. In so far as there is rational and humane political activity in the region, it is from the more secular areas of Israel. The problem is that such rational groups are lacking in political power. I cite the Gaza situation to show the extreme results of the hate mongering and dehumanization that can be empowered by religion. It will not help if most religious believers value kindness and rational thought. The Neo-fascist elements of fundamentalist Christianity are far more organized and willing to violate our historical norms of civilized behavior. Let us look at the probable near term assaults on the rights of blacks, Latinos, LGBTQ+, women, those who value education, those who want limits on the horrors of gun violence, church state separation, progressives in general, the homeless, and those from other national backgrounds.

The stacking of the Supreme Court with religious extremists will be a major enabling factor for future waves of oppression. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is the single most visible legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. It has been almost totally gutted by prior actions of the Supreme Court. A more recent finding of the court can be taken as a training manual for how to obliterate remaining black political influence. Gerrymandering with modern software can stack the vast majority of black votes in the fewest possible voting districts. The power of black voters in the remaining districts is obliterated if the design keeps the

results below a level of any likely win for a candidate favoring black interests. Latinos and other minority groups can likewise have their political power decimated. All that the legislators need to do is make sure that the claimed goal is to maximize the power of a political party. If racists forces take over a given political party the racist intent can now be totally hidden from any sanctions from the Voting Rights Act.

Today, June 28, the Supreme Court has just gutted much Federal power to regulate anything by overruling the Chevron deference of 1984. This has extreme Christian nationalist implications. There are over 18,000 prior court decisions supporting regulatory policy by this legal policy of deference to the experts in those agencies. This finding not only reduces agency ability to create new rules. Many existing rules supporting progressive policy are now open to court challenge. This should be understood as a massive power grab that takes power away from trained specialists in regulatory agencies and allocates it to a more conservative and less informed Federal Judiciary. Powerful industries prefer to not be regulated at all. This finding allows them to challenge any and all regulations that they do not like. More importantly Christian nationalists can bring suits against regulations they do not like and have them selectively heard by a Christian nationalist judge. This will be devastating for the separation of church and state.

Matthew Kacsmaryk is a Federal judge who will have his power radically increased by the removal of the Chevron deference. He is assigned 95% of all cases filed in Amarillo, Texas or in many of the surrounding towns allocated to his court. He has already created a crazy train of Christian nationalist findings based on his very reliably extreme Christian nationalist views. Any appeals from his court goes to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. This appeals court is arguably the most conservative in our nation. The result is a very reliable crazy train dumping the most insane Christian nationalist opinions onto the Supreme Court docket.

The Supreme Court has dismissed two abortion related cases due to lack of standing. These should not be taken as wins for women. Many observers suggest that the Court is just deferring oppressive anti-women action until next year to prevent outrage during voting this

November. Mifepristone is one of the safest drugs ever researched by the FDA. Some "conservative" jurisprudence suggests that the FDA should consider the drug to be lethal to fetal "persons." Over 60% of current abortions are done with medication that uses this drug. Much of that is mailed into states that have laws banning abortion.

The Comstock Act of 1873 is still Federal law. No provision of that law has been used in over half a century. It is a zombie law, but the explicit wording of that law would allow Christian nationalists to bring it back to life and outlaw the mailing of mifepristone. Thus the courts have multiple ways to overrule the existing uses of this drug. Manufacture of anything related to abortion could also be outlawed.

The Court likewise dismissed a challenge to EMTALA (Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act) in Idaho. This law mandates medical abortions, in any medical emergency room, to preserve the life and health of women. There were numerous opinions, both within the Supreme Court and outside it, declaring that EMTALA does not protect women as progressives claim. They claim the health of the fetus is also a patient to be protected under this law. For me, this is an outrageous and very twisted interpretation of the law. The Fifth Circuit Court has also supported a Texas law violating EMTALA. There are too many Texas women who desperately search for travel options out of state or are forced to wait in hospital parking lots until septic infection or blood loss reach the point of visibly threatening the life of the woman. The Supreme Court treatment leaves that travesty in place.

A recent study has documented a 23% increase in Texas infant deaths due to genetic abnormalities. Women have been told that their pregnancy has no chance, but by law they are forced into the horror of going through a live birth. The anti-choice forces claim this just protects unborn babies with disabilities. They have no respect for the doctors and women who know that there is no positive outcome and an absurd risk to the health of the woman. Women have lost their capacity to carry future pregnancies because of this legally mandated medical insanity. We can be sure that women have died because of these laws. Friends and relatives of these women have not pressed this point in individual cases because there are medically complexities that can obscure the cause of death. But we are seeing significant

increases in overall maternal mortality in states with these abortion bans. We know women die.

Many states have moved or planned to move state educational funding to voucherized systems. This is designed to remove funds from public schools and use them to finance religious schools. Louisiana has passed a law mandating that the Ten Commandment be posted in all public schools. The Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction is mandating that the Bible be in all public classrooms and used for instruction in all grades from 5 to 12. Trump has promised to abolish the Department of Education. This would remove almost all of the “woke” influence now imposed by Federal law. The Supreme Court has in the last year posted a number of findings for school related prayer and state funding of religion. It is not yet clear to what extent our rights to publicly funded secular schools will be destroyed in the near future.

Trump has announced that he intends to pass a law that there will be only two recognized sexes, male and female. And they will be assigned at birth. Almost half of all states have passed anti-trans laws. The Supreme Court has already agreed to hear one such case. Many politicians are already running on abolishing the rights of trans people to serve in the military. My reading of conservative jurisprudence is that it is much more than trans rights at risk. Gay marriage is based on views that have been thoroughly excoriated by conservative commentators and sitting Supreme Court justices. We may have felt that gay marriage is safely included in American law. The prior net majority support for gay marriage among Conservatives has collapsed due to the hate and fear mongering of religious and conservative media. The *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision was a 5-4 decision by a much more liberal court. The new majority of conservative justices now sitting on the Supreme Court will be less inclined to see the Constitution as supporting gay rights. It is unlikely that the Supreme Court justices will feel a need to hear a specific gay marriage case to abolish that right. A trans rights case will be more than enough to allow them to issue a more sweeping anti-gay decision. Time Magazine now correctly claims that [gay marriage is on the ballot this year](#).

The Supreme Court has found that the City of Grants Pass can criminalize homelessness. This was a 6-3 decision along the starkly political

divide. I am on the Board of Directors of Atheists Helping the Homeless, DC. I asked my friend Kevin Gawora to write an article for our newsletter in support of compassion for the homeless. I am hardly an unbiased observer. However, the import of this decision could be far worse than we now imagine. Asserted prospective plans are to round up the homeless and remove them to the many concentration camps now planned for the processing and deportation of millions undocumented immigrants. They assert that this will “clean up” our cities and provide housing for those who need it. The implicit effect will be a jail sentence that removes any freedom to travel to explore economic opportunity or find possible compassionate support for their needs.

According to Wikipedia there were 50 killed and 867 injured in a 2017 shooting in Las Vegas. The shooter had numerous rifles with bump stocks that turned them into functional machine guns firing many hundreds of rounds a minute. The ATF (Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) then issued a regulation banning these bump stocks. Earlier this month the Supreme Court overruled this regulation. It was an arbitrary decision based on a highly technical interpretation of the law defining a machine gun as any weapon that can fire “more than one shot,” “automatically” and “by a single function of the trigger.” Bump stocks use the holder and the recoil from each firing to cause each triggering of the rifle. Clarence Thomas’s opinion ruled against the ATF because the mechanism of action was not totally internal to the rifle. However, the blast of bullets is started by one pull of the trigger and the law never explicitly demands that the machine gun function must be internal to the rifle mechanism. This is just an arbitrary decision from a court willing to support an obscene glut of firepower with little limits or concerns for the impact of resulting mass killings.

I have asserted that the Constitution allows Congress to legally regulate the Supreme Court and all of the rest of the Federal judiciary. Numerous right-wing commentators and mega-funders have claimed that the independence of the Supreme Court is absolute as a separate branch of government. A lawyer friend semi-legitimately suggested that *Marbury v. Jefferson* was a problem for my position. He is right in that many and perhaps the majority of legal scholars now feel that the Supreme Court has the right of judicial review of any and all law. This was seen to be acceptable in the quaint past when

the Supreme Court was seen to be cautious and objective about using this presumed power. I am afraid that this presumption of unlimited power is totally false.

Marbury's advocates argued that Section 13 of the Judiciary Act of 1789 allowed the court to force Jefferson to deliver a commission to become a justice of the peace. The written clause of Section 2 of Article III precluded the Supreme Court from having this power. Thus the Supreme Court had a right to invalidate the section 13 provision that asserted they had this right. This was a humble acknowledgment that their power was limited. It is profoundly bizarre that many now assume that this finding allowed global judicial review of any and all law. The rest of Section 2 says, "In all the other Cases before mentioned, the supreme Court shall have appellate Jurisdiction, both as to Law and Fact, **with such Exceptions, and under such Regulations as the Congress shall make.** (My emphasis)

As far as I am concerned, Clarence Thomas is in gross violation of Federal bribery laws. I would love to see him arrested and prosecuted for accepting bribes from someone who has taken their cases to the Supreme Court and may take additional cases to that court. This is an explicit felony under the terms of existing bribery laws. We are operating with a presumption that the Supreme Court has an absolute power to invalidate or starkly define the permissible interpretation of any and all law. This becomes a functional absolute monarchy that can exercise power without limits. The Constitution provides for legislative limits on this power. We need to invoke those limits.

The Heritage Foundation solicited views from roughly 100 "conservative" groups and distilled them into a 900+ page set of radical far right recommendations called *Project 2025*. It is dedicated to creating a "unitary executive" that can abolish the "deep state." It is hard to select one part of this document as the one that is most insane. Perhaps the plan for the Justice Department to more fully reflect the will of the President qualifies as the single greatest insanity. It would obliterate the independent and balanced application of Federal law. It would be the central policy change required to create an authoritarian state. A Presidential order applying Comstock to abortion is one example of what could happen.

The Supreme Court has given complete immunity to the President for "official acts." This seems to include demands from the President to abort the peaceful transfer of power if they are made to his Vice President or Attorney General. Justice Sotomayor said in her brief, "In every use of official power, the President is now a king above the law." This will enable the all powerful "unitary executive" conceptualized by *Project 2025*.

This article addresses a small fraction of the tidal wave of theocratically inspired, Neo-fascist horrors poised to demolish much that we value. But this article is already longer than I want it to be. I am sure that many will want to protect ourselves and our friends from the deaths, injuries, and planned destruction of our rights and opportunities. We cannot work against them if we do not see them coming.

Understanding Religious Trauma

by P. Michael Heffron

"Addiction is always a poor substitute for love." quote by Gabor Mate

In part three of Understand Religious Trauma, we consider the idea of neuroception, and how the effects of the two very different kinds of "love" – the genuine thing and the "near enemy" of attachment that is its mirrored opposite – can wreak havoc on a child's emotional development.

Recall that in our last article, we explained how feelings of guilt and shame effect our sense of safety and self-worth, and how unconditional love teaches us to feel a sense of safety found in the former while conditional forms of love teaches us to feel a constant sense of judgment, and therefore danger, that comes with the latter. The effects of this difference on our emotional health is like the difference on our overall health from a diet high in fruits and vegetables versus a diet high in processed sugars and fast food. And as we need the former to grow and stay healthy, emotionally and physically, the latter is like an addiction to a slow acting poison.

And to understand the difference, we first need to understand the idea of neuroception.

Neuroception refers to the neural circuits that allow our bodies to register whether an environment is safe or dangerous. Unlike perception, which delivers cognitive insights in the form of thoughts and sensory data, neuroception occurs outside of conscious thought.

Since neuroception is primitive, generated by parts of the brain that evolved much earlier than our conscious minds, our bodies sometimes detect and respond to signs of danger even in circumstances we consciously recognize as safe. Coined by neuroscientist Dr. Stephen Porges as part of the polyvagal theory, neuroception explains how the nervous system evolved to detect danger throughout our evolutionary history.

According to the polyvagal perspective, long ago, as our species developed a wider set of behaviors, neural circuits evolved to “turn off” our defensive responses so we could convey and interpret social signals from others, learning to cooperate and co-regulate for the benefits of all. Porges refers to these circuits as the social engagement system, and it’s what enables communication, cooperation, and even creativity, along with other uniquely human processes. Interestingly, our automatic responses become increasingly primitive the more stressed we become. When we don’t feel physiologically safe, our bodies lose the ability to “down-regulate” or shut down our ancient defense systems. This is why stress can feel so debilitating: in these defensive states, it’s physiologically harder or impossible to access higher-order states like creativity, focus, and the ability to connect with others.

Trauma affects our neuroception. As Gabor Mate points out in *The Myth of Normal*, most Trauma is pre-verbal. Stored in somatic memory, in our bodies and in our nervous systems, trauma is expressed as changes in our biological stress response. This leads our nervous system to process information through the lens of past experiences. If your childhood home was like a warzone and church is this peaceful place of serenity or play, for example, your nervous system reacts to one as a danger zone, triggering a hypervigilant state of mind, and the other as a safe haven that is more relaxed. It can also make safe people feel dangerous and dangerous people feel safe. You may date an abusive partner because they feel

familiar to your family upbringing, reminding us on a neuro level of the home we grew up in, and avoid dating people who feel safer because there's no spark, so to speak, because they feel strange and unfamiliar to us.

In her book *When Religion Hurts You* (2023), Dr. Laura Anderson takes an honest look at how elements of fundamentalist church life—such as fear of hell, purity culture, corporal punishment, and authoritarian leaders—can cause psychological, relational, physical, and spiritual damage. “Because of the way I had embodied those messages about the consequences of going to hell, my body started to panic again, because I didn’t have this assurance of salvation,” Anderson explained to Religion News Service. Her fears were still ingrained in her body.

“Prior to the last five, maybe 10 years, most dialogue around religious trauma in professional spaces suggested that to heal from it, you just needed to become an atheist. And for a myriad of reasons, I disagree with that. It can turn into fundamentalism very quickly, just on the other side of the spectrum. Also, that cognitive shift to atheism doesn’t address how trauma is embodied, how those messages, practices and lifestyles live inside of us even after we believe new things.

Research and clinical interventions show us trauma is a physiological state that is happening in our bodies. So when we understand religious trauma as trauma, it helps to validate the actual lived experience. Many of my clients have experienced shame and confusion over having psychological responses even after they don’t believe the same things anymore.”

Replacing the security of unconditional love with conditional forms of “love” that require the acceptance of beliefs about one’s sinful nature and purpose is like replacing baby formula with beer. And like the physical damage that can occur to a child’s body with such a replacement, so a child’s emotional health can likewise become sickly and deformed.

To visualize the damage that the “near enemy” of counterfeit love based mostly on attachment can have on our emotional and even spiritual development, we can compare it to the different physical effects that can result from different “near enemies” of mirrored arrangements

of atoms on a molecular level. That difference, and how one is perfectly healthy while the other can produce horrible deformities, can be seen in two kinds of isomers.

During the 1950s and 1960s, a rash of babies were born with physical deformities. As it turned out, this was the result of two kinds of molecules known as isomers that looked like mirrored reflections of each other, otherwise known as "chiral."

An isomer is defined in chemistry as "each of two or more compounds with the same formula but a different arrangement of atoms in the molecule and different properties." Examples include Glucose and Fructose sugars. Like the near enemies of love and attachment being similar but opposite, so isomers can be chiral because they come in left-handed and right-handed versions. In 1953, those two versions were used in a medication given to women in 46 countries for anxiety, trouble sleeping, tension, and morning sickness.

But like the invisible dangers that come from conflating attachment-love with genuine love, the left-handed and right-handed isomers had opposite effects. The right handed version, which was perfectly safe, had the desired sedative effect on those pregnant women. The left handed version, however, resulted in the "biggest man-made medical disaster ever." More than 10,000 children were born with a range of severe deformities, from the malformation of arms and legs into flipper-like appendages that come from phocomelia, to thousands of miscarriages. The compound molecule created with these two kinds of isomers is better known as thalidomide.

Childhood trauma is different from other trauma, like war trauma or natural disaster trauma. While attachment is a core need for children to bond with parents, according to trauma expert Gabor Mate, "our other core need is authenticity." Mate defines "authenticity" as "the quality of being true to oneself, and the capacity to shape one's own life from a deep knowledge of that self." Christianity, however, requires us to believe that "being true to oneself" is to accept we are born sinners in need of saving from a damnation we deserve just for being born.

But here's the problem. The majority of

trauma experienced by children happens with intimate family members, especially a parent. Whenever an interpersonal trauma occurs by a close family member, there's an implied sense that we deserve it. Their total dependence upon their parent to survive means no amount of abuse ever causes a child to stop trusting or loving their parent as always being in the right. Simply put, the parent is like Mount Sinai while the child is like water that conforms to the shape and laws of the mountain.

As Stephanie Martson pointed out, children see their parents as a god, and God's power over our lives boils down to His ultimate ability to treat us as we deserve to be treated, whether we are invited into heaven or cast into hell. And the child interprets their interactions with their parents the same way. If the parent is angry toward the child, the child accepts they must therefore be responsible for causing that anger and seek to learn how to avoid doing so again. So, there's a level of blame that accompanies the abuse and the trauma. If someone hates me this much, so the belief tells us, it must therefore mean there is something wrong, not with them, but with me.

In this respect, there is no difference between the spiritual journey and the hidden trauma journey. Carl Jung captured this idea when he said "until we make the unconscious conscious, it will control our lives and we will call it fate." And Kant captured the same idea when he said "only the descent into the hell of self-cognition can pave the way to godliness." Indeed, even Jesus captured this sentiment when he explained "the kingdom of God is within you." All of them were expressing what the ancient Greek philosophers called both the hardest thing to do and the most necessary of all: "know thyself." And to do that, we have to turn toward our trauma, not run away from it and toward a "savior," which is spiritual bypassing.

Next time, we will begin to explore how organized religions, by instilling a need for approval in order to cultivate such spiritual bypassing as a virtue, paves the road to fascism.

Update on AI

by Don Wharton

The current record on AI is quite mixed. There are astonishingly positive achievements in many narrow areas of expertise. I have a friend with a Ph.D. in biology who has now come around to being very enthusiastic about the potential to compute solutions to aging, cancer and other life based issues. On the other hand, AI will often flub simple questions, such as: How many days are there to the election? Somehow the AI systems were never forced to learn their addition and multiplication tables. We just need to allow our LLMs to post numbers to standard arithmetic accumulators and request the desired arithmetic operation. The LLMs also flub questions that require any depth of logical analysis.

Gary Berg-Cross and I have a modest disagreement on AI. We agree that there needs to be a synthesis of LLM and symbolic processing systems. Gary suggests that it will be five years before that happens. My feeling is that literally hundreds of billions of dollars are being thrown at AI, and the conceptual simplicity (to me) of doing this, it may occur more rapidly than that. Gary is actually an expert directly engaged with this. See the [Ontology Summit 2024](#), and [March 6 video](#). So Gary's credentials in this field are awesome and mine are non-existent. I will enjoy watching these sessions to further learn how and why he is right and I am wrong on this.

Where is the AI field now going? There is a lot of emphasis on multi-modal systems. Thus people will want to ask an AI system to simultaneously process text, video, audio files and perhaps the user screen images, other apps, and real time verbal interactions with a person using a system. A major improvement with new releases is the increased scale of information that can be accessed and processed at one time. Many see the future to be app-systems providing broad support that is informed by all modes of information use. There seems to be significant current use of AI systems to provide interactive customer service. An [Inc. article](#) says, "Swedish buy-now-pay-later startup Klarna just announced that its customer service chatbot is doing the work of 700 customer service reps.." The Inc. article cites a report saying, "The number of writing jobs declined 33 percent, translation jobs declined 19 percent, and customer service jobs declined 16 percent,". A

[Forbes article](#) cites a Citigroup study suggesting that 54% of banking jobs, insurance (48%), energy (43%) and capital market (40%) jobs could be replaced by AI. Other sources suggest that banking jobs are already declining at a ferocious rate.

The automated driving application now has [Waymo cabs available](#) to all residents of San Francisco. Tesla is still claiming that their service will be available later this year. It has been a long time for this service to be certified as reliable at scale for a wider population.

One of the AI newsletters that I read had a story about someone who unleashed an AI bot on social media to interact at random with people and provide sales leads for his company when it seemed appropriate. He was quite happy with its effectiveness. Apparently few people recognized it as a bot without any human actually there. My count of criminal bot (or actual con-men) attempting to Friend me on Facebook is now five. In my case I felt that the phoniness was obvious.

Facebook found that 19 of the 20 most trafficked Christian sites on Facebook in 2015 were controlled by Russian bot farms. That vulnerability of American Christians is still there. However, bad actors now have vastly more powerful and automated tools. The [Voice of America reports](#) on Chinese Twitter accounts pretending to be Trump supporters. OpenAI working with Microsoft Treat Intelligence disrupted numerous hostile state actors (Russian, Iranian and Chinese) from using their AI systems. That article is [here](#). China is actively working on their own AI systems and will hardly need OpenAI for their malicious activity.

Let me close on a more positive report. Asteroid Institute, a program of B612 Foundation, and Google Cloud announced the most significant results of their partnership to date: identifying 27,500 new, high-confidence asteroid discovery candidates. 100 of them have the potential of near Earth trajectories or collisions. These were found with an integrated search through over 5 million images. That report [here](#). I regard a major milestone in the evolution of our species to be the point when we both know about all asteroids that might end our existence and we have the mechanisms to prevent that end. Unfortunately the recent flyby of [MK 2024 on June 29](#) showed that we have much more to do. It was discovered only a week before.

Chapter Reports

Baltimore Secular Humanists (BSH)

We have meetings at various times and places around Baltimore, Baltimore County, and Harford County. Watch the meetup site for the latest events: <https://www.meetup.com/bsh-wash/> There are also several other meetup groups in the area, including Human Values Network Meetup and Baltimore Atheists, that hold monthly discussion groups. BSH also schedules university lectures that are held in person or on Zoom.

DC American Humanists (DC-AHA)

DC-Atheists, Humanists, and Agnostics group (DC-AHA) currently meets for monthly happy hour the first Wednesday (6-8pm) of the month at Across the Pond in Dupont Circle. Our Zoom programs are hosted by the American Humanist Association.

Our Get-Out-The-Vote Happy Hour Monday, April 29 was a success with 8 volunteers completing over 125 postcards encouraging people in swing states to vote. Thanks to the Secular Coalition for America for getting addresses!

The Inaugural Congressional Reason Reception on Wednesday, May 1 was enjoyed by all (video at <https://youtu.be/1taq4vDRWxc>). The American Humanist Association, Freedom From Religion Foundation, and the Secular Coalition for America, celebrated the important work of secular legislators as well as "honoring" this year's worst violator of separation of church and state.

On Thursday, June 20, we heard from Dr. Anthony Pinn on "What Is Black Humanism?" At the Washington Ethical Society, Mahogany Books (a local black-owned bookstore) sold Pinn's latest *The Black Practice of Disbelief*, and he signed copies while chatting with folks. [I can share video link this week, or you can direct people to AHA's YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/@HumanistVision>]

On Tuesday, July 9, we're hosting a Zoom Webinar panel on "Food Production and Insecurity in America" (<https://americanhumanist.org/events/panel-discussion-food-production-and-insecurity-in-america>) that will explore many tactics needed to protect all

from hunger. Speakers include expert advocates on local food supplies options, healthy farming, and national trends.

American Humanist Association's 83rd Annual Conference theme is The Future is Humanist: Shaping Tomorrow Together, being held virtually September 14-15. As our global community navigates through significant transitions (good and bad), there's never been a more critical time to stand together, tackle pressing issues, and carve out a brighter tomorrow. Visit <https://conference.americanhumanist.org> for registration for individuals and watch parties, sponsorships, and programming.

DC Region Atheists (DCRA)

We host a Secular Zoom Community meeting now on the second Thursday of each month at 7pm. We nourish our connections with like-minded secular people and discuss a broad range of topics on religion, science and secularism. Please RSVP for a monthly meeting at: <https://www.meetup.com/dc-atheists>

Frederick Secular Humanists (FRESH)

FRESH had a very successful 2nd annual PRIDE event! We're looking forward to reaching out to new potential members! In July, in addition to our regular Monday Meetup, FRESH will host Emily Newman of the American Humanist Association and chapter coordinator of the DC-AHA chapter. August will be featuring the WASH/American Atheists/American Humanist Association/Black Secular Collective Picnic, followed by our local FRESH picnic in September. Hopefully the weather will cooperate!

FRESH has an active calendar of meetings. Please see FRESH's [webpage \(wash.org/fresh\)](http://wash.org/fresh) with a link to its Meetup page to RSVP and for any updates.

Maryland-DC (MDC)

MDC will host an in-person Summer Book Club meeting on the topic: From Bacteria to Bach and Back - Part 2 on August 13 from 10 to noon. This will be held at Gary Berg-Cross's house (13 Atwell Ct. Potomac MD). More details are on Meetup. A final summer book club meeting is planned for Saturday August 17th with a topic yet to be determined from discussion at the July meeting.

Events will be posted at:

<https://www.meetup.com/wash-202>

All are welcomed. We appreciate secular and scout-minded people who like to discuss a broad range of topics including science, religion, democracy, psychology and secular philosophy.

Shenandoah Area Secular Humanists (SASH)

We are still meeting once a month by Zoom to discuss issues important to humanists, like the encroachment and assistance of AI in our lives, free will and similar topics. We continue to meet by Zoom because we have folks participating in our discussions calling in from far-flung places: New Mexico, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and even New Zealand. We also have a very active book club, reading and discussing one book per month. We recently read (and highly recommend) Seth Andrews's "Christianity Made Me Talk Like an Idiot" which recommends writing one's own ten (or more) commandments. In June, we'll discuss Paul Bogard's "The End of Night."

Southeast Virginia Atheists, Skeptics & Humanists (SEVASH)

SEVASH recently applied for and was awarded with a \$1,000 grant from the American Humanist Association to be spent building, stocking, and maintaining 2 Free Little Humanist Libraries to be deployed in the Hampton Roads area. AHA will also be donating several books for this effort, and we're collecting contributions from our local members as well. One of our members is on the Regional Committee of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, so we'll be sourcing materials from them as well.

During the month of June, SEVASH volunteers tabled at 3 local Pride events. The first of which was Pride in the 'Peake, a family-focused Pride event that was started by members of SEVASH (Amber, Jeremy, and Brie) with an estimated attendance of nearly 7,000 people! We also tabled at the main HR Pride event in

Norfolk and at Suffolk Library's "Parking Lot Pride" event. At each event, we had many positive reactions when folks saw our table and many positive interactions with the folks that came to talk to us, including religious attendees who understand why church-state separation is as important to our freedom to live as ourselves as it is to our freedom to believe as we choose.

some expressing surprise that we even have a local secular group. So it seems like we need to do more outreach or get better at advertising our presence for other local secular folks to find and engage with the community.

SEVASH has also been working with their Tidewater DSA comrades to stand up for the rights of trans students, pushing back against VA Governor Youngkin's illegal and cruel anti-trans policies at our local school board meetings, most recently in Newport News.

Activism aside, we've also been keeping our social calendar fairly active... we have a bi-weekly book club and weekly team trivia events in addition to our regularly scheduled lunch and dinner socials.

<https://www.meetup.com/sevash/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/sevash/>

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