



WASHline

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(L) The logos for WASH's Richmond, VA and (R) Lynchburg, VA chapters .

Good News from Virginia: MAARVAL & LASH

By Mike Reid

We are happy to report that WASH's Richmond, VA chapter has reformed as the *Mighty Atheists & Agnostics of Richmond VA League* (MAARVAL). MAARVAL had a meeting on July 29th at a brewpub in Richmond. WASH president Heatherly Hodges joined them for a couple of hours of socializing and brews. The pub held a trivia contest that evening by table, so the WASH/MAARVAL gang entered it and won! The number of people in attendance was fairly small, but that's okay. The chapter is running again.* Thanks to George for acting as chapter coordinator and thanks to Heatherly for designing the cool logo.

The good news doesn't stop in Richmond! We are also happy to announce that our Lynchburg, VA chapter, the *Lynchburg Area Secular Humanists* (LASH) is up and running again! LASH had a kickoff meeting at a restaurant in Lynchburg on Saturday, August 1st. WASH president Heatherly Hodges attended this meeting as well. They had a nice turnout and everyone seemed to have a good time meeting and hanging out with fellow secularists. We thank Rebecca for stepping up as chapter coordinator.

* [NOTE: The name "Atheists, Agnostics, and Secular Humanists of Richmond" (AASHR) is no longer affiliated with or associated with WASH.]



About WASH

The Washington Area Secular Humanists, Inc. is an independent 501(c)(3) educational non-profit organization incorporated in Maryland since 1989. It consists of multiple chapters which operate in Maryland, DC, and Virginia.

WASH is a chapter of the American Humanists Association and an affiliate of American Atheists.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in articles in *WASHline* are those of the authors and not necessarily those of WASH or its chapters.



**AMERICAN
ATHEISTS**



Editor's Corner

By Mike Reid

Things were happening with WASH this summer. In July, NVC and MDC hosted a winery visit and FRESH organized a trip for all of WASH to the Natural History Museum in DC. On Saturday, September 5th, WASH president Heatherly Hodges attended a SEVASH meeting in Chesapeake, VA and gave a presentation to the group on religion's role in child abuse. As a former social worker, she is well-versed in that subject. It was a well-organized and well-attended meeting. Thanks to our awesome chapter coordinators for organizing these events!

July 4th of this year marked the Semiquincentennial (250 year) anniversary of the founding of the United States of America. In July of 1776, representatives of the thirteen American colonies declared their independence from Great Britain and founded a new nation. This new nation would be unique in the world. Unlike nearly everywhere else, it would not be ruled by a hereditary monarch and aristocracy with an official state religion. It would be a representative democracy founded on the secular principles of the European Enlightenment and its government inspired by the democracy of ancient Athens and the Roman republic. Just as important, it would have no official or national religion. All persons would be free to practice their faiths however they chose and this included persons of no faith. Many of this nation's most prominent founders were not Christians in any traditional sense. They were deists. One could make the case that eighteenth century deists were the predecessors of modern-day secularists. Sadly, there are a lot of people today who do not share the secular vision of our founders. Supported by well-funded organizations, they are rewriting our history to fit their own ends and are attempting to steer this country towards an authoritarian Christian theocracy. We must vigorously oppose them. WASH is acting locally. Our national affiliates American Atheists and the American Humanist Association are fighting the good fight nationwide. Please support us and them, if you can.

We (meaning me) made an embarrassing error 🙄 in the last edition of *WASHline* regarding the SASH student essay contest awards. Please see the erratum on page 4 for the correction.

Happy Fall! 🍂



MDC and NVC at the Winery

By Mike Reid

On Sunday, July 19th our Maryland-DC chapter coordinator Clyde and our Northern Virginia chapter coordinator Alex organized a WASH winery social at the Stone Tower Winery in Leesburg, VA. We had a nice turnout of people from our MDC, NVC, FRESH, and DCA chapters. The wines were good, the food was good, and the company and conversations even better. The weather even cooperated, so we had a nice time outside in one of the winery's pavilions.

WASH president Heatherly Hodges attended and got to meet everyone there and advocate for our organization. It was a nice time and we hope to do more events such as this in the future. Thanks again to Clyde and Alex for organizing.

WASH Logo Merch

Get cool WASH logo apparel and other merchandise at our online Zazzle store. We have stuff with both WASH main and chapter logos. Check it out!

https://www.zazzle.com/store/wash_store



WASH Tours the Hall of Human Origins

By Mike Reid

On Sunday, July 26th, Yours Truly led a tour of the Hall of Human Origins (HHO) at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC. WASH president and FRESH chapter coordinator Heatherly Hodges organized it. People from several WASH chapters and outside of WASH attended.

We started the day with an early lunch at the Elephant & Castle English-style pub near Federal Triangle. We then walked to the museum.

Mike has been a volunteer docent at the HHO for well—a long time—and knows the exhibit inside and out. Mike led our little group of heathens through the Hall describing each exhibit and discussing human origins.

The reconstructions of ancestral hominins were a favorite as they are with most visitors to the Hall. Mike made special note of his favorites, the replica Laetoli footprints in Tanzania and the *Sebelanthropus* reconstruction. We had a good time.



The Congressional Reason Reception

By Mike Reid

On Tuesday, July 21st the Secular Coalition for America (SCA), the American Humanist Association (AHA), and the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) jointly hosted their 2026 Congressional Reason Reception in the Rayburn House Office Building in DC. This semi-formal annual event brings together people from the hosting organizations and their affiliates and the Congressional Freethought Caucus.

The Congressional Freethought Caucus is an organized group within the U.S. House of Representatives of members of Congress who support the separation of church and state and oppose Christian nationalism. It is jointly led by Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA) and Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD). Currently, 35 members of the House of Representatives are members. Interestingly, more than half of them are women! We are happy to report that it now has more members than the the so-called House “Freedom” Caucus, which consists of ultra-conservative House members who advocate for Christian privilege among other right-wing causes—in other words the polar opposite of freedom.

There were finger foods, an open bar with beer, wine, and soft drinks and time for socializing and networking before the scheduled speakers took their podiums.

Reps. Huffman and Raskin along with several other members of the caucus spoke to the standing-room-only crowd. The keynote speaker was Dr. Mary Trump, the outspoken niece of President Trump. Mary Trump is a well-known and very vocal opponent of her infamous uncle. She discussed the threats to religious freedom and the separation of church and state posed by the current government. She was a hit with the audience.

Congressional staff members and staff from SCA, FFRF, AHA, and American Atheists were in attendance along with WASH president Heatherly Hodges. Heatherly spoke to as many people as she could telling them about WASH and reconnecting with friends and allies in our combined defense of reason and religious pluralism. This was a successful event by any measure.

ERRATUM

Oops! We made a *big* and embarrassing mistake in the July-August issue of WASHline on page 4 regarding SASH's awards for their annual high school student essay contest. The topic of the essay was “Describe an important decision you had to make between right and wrong.” We incorrectly reported that each student winner received \$500. The awards were in fact way more.

First Place Winners receiving \$2,500 each: Adysen Silvius and Elizabeth Whetzel both recently graduated from Central High School in Shenandoah County.

Second Place Winners receiving \$1,500 each: Xavier Garcia from Stonewall Jackson High School in Shenandoah County and Lauren Anthony from Warren County High School.

Third place winners receiving \$1,000 each: Joseph Kohrs from Stonewall Jackson High School and Jacob Stickley from Strasburg High School both in in Shenandoah County.

We apologize to SASH, the very generous donor for this award, and the students.



Humanists International president Maggie Ardiente welcomes attendees at the opening plenary.

The World Humanist Congress

By Mike Reid

Humanists International, the international organization supporting humanism and secularism throughout the world held its bi-annual World Humanist Congress (WHC) over the weekend of August 7th - 9th in Ottawa, Canada. The event was hosted by Humanist Canada. The European Humanist Services Network (EHSN), the American Humanist Association (AHA), and American Atheists were first level sponsors of the event. It was held at the comfortable Westin Ottawa hotel. WASH president Heatherly Hodges and I, your faithful reporter, attended.

Humanists International originally planned to hold WHC 2026 in Washington, DC to be hosted by American Atheists. WASH, being one of American Atheists' local affiliates, would likely have had a significant role. Due to the hostility of the current U. S. Administration to humanism and secularism in general and to the unfortunate, but understandable reluctance of international attendees, particularly those from the global

south, to come to the United States right now, they made the regrettable, but necessary decision to move it across the border to Canada.

WHC 2026 was similar to other secular conferences in that it consisted of talks by notable speakers and breakout sessions, but it had a unique and much appreciated international focus. It was the first secular conference that we attended in which the majority of attendees were not Americans. Unsurprisingly, Canadians seemed to be the largest nationality there followed by us Americans, but there were also a lot of people from Europe, and a good number from South America, Africa, and Asia.

The horror show here in the good ol' USA was a topic of discussion, but it was not the central focus of the conference. I felt the need to constantly apologize to Canadians for Trump's disgraceful behavior towards their country. I was relieved to learn that the Canadians I spoke to fully understand that he does not represent all Americans and seemed to harbor no resentment toward us. Of course, they knew that the Americans attending the WHC were unlikely to be Trump supporters. Mostly, they just seemed to feel sorry for us.

Humanist International president Maggie Ardiente opened the conference Friday evening with an inspiring welcoming talk. Maggie and her husband former AHA Executive Director Roy Speckhard are longtime and dear friends of mine. American philosopher and author Rebecca Goldstein began the conference with a well-received opening speech. This was followed by an evening of socializing and networking.

The body of the conference began Saturday morning with opening remarks by Maggie and Humanist Canada president Martin Frith. Senator Kris Wells of the Canadian Senate gave the first

talk. This seemed fitting since we were in Ottawa, Canada's capital city and the Parliament building is visible from the venue.

The rest of the day and Sunday consisted of talks by speakers from around the world and panel discussions on topics relating to humanism, the state of secularism in their countries, threats to non-believers in various parts of the world, and initiatives that humanists are taking to improve the lives of people. I was particularly impressed by outgoing Humanist International vice president Roslyn Mould of Ghana who told us about bold initiatives in her country. Heatherly engaged in a lengthy conversation with her later in the conference. Saturday evening, the WHC held a gala dinner.

American Atheists president Nick Fish and AHA Executive Director Fish Stark were among the Americans who participated in panel discussions. Nick and Fish also teamed up to give a breakout session talk on their organizations' ongoing efforts to resist religious nationalism in the United States.

British philosopher and author A. C. Grayling gave the final talk of the conference titled "On Hope." I found his talk to be particularly articulate and inspiring.

After the close of the conference Sunday evening, Heatherly organized a group dinner at a local Turkish restaurant for our friends both old and new. We had enjoyable conversations and company.

The 2026 World Humanist Congress was a great success. The talks were great, but as always, Heatherly and I most enjoyed reconnecting with friends and making new ones.

I am happy to report that the WHC is now transitioning from a bi-annual event to an annual



WASH president Heatherly Hodges at WHC 2026.

one. This means that there will be a WHC 2027! It will be held in Lima, Peru in August 2027. Check their [website](#) for details. I hope that in the near future, the political situation in the USA will have changed enough that people from outside the country will once again feel safe enough to travel here so that a future WHC can be held in our country. In the meantime, let's think about next year in Lima!



Chapter Reports

Baltimore Secular Humanists (BSH)

BSH has meetings at various times and places around Baltimore, Baltimore County, and Hartford County. Watch the meetup site for the latest events: <https://www.meetup.com/bsh-wash/>

There are also several other non-WASH meetup groups in the Baltimore area, including Human Values Network Meetup and Baltimore Atheists that hold monthly discussion groups. BSH also posts notices of university lectures that are held in-person or on Zoom. These are posted with about a week's notice.

We have posted events that are sponsored by Profs & Pints with lectures from university professors. They charge an admission fee. Some of their past lectures can be found online here.

Frederick Secular Humanists (FRESH)

FRESH meets twice monthly in Frederick, MD. Our regular meetings are held on either the third or fourth Sunday of each month (based upon library availability) at the C. Burr Artz Public Library at 110 E. Patrick St., Frederick, MD 21701. Occasionally, if that venue is not available, we will meet at the Urbana Regional Library at 9020 Amelung St., Frederick, MD 21704.

FRESH has finished its third annual Clothesline Project, a public awareness event for survivors of power-based violence.

Finishing off the summer:

FRESH will be tabling at Frederick's *In the Streets Festival* on Saturday, September 12th.

Our annual potluck picnic will be held on September 30th at Noon at Pine Cliff Park in Frederick. Hope to see you! Please RSVP for this either on the FRESH Meetup page or by emailing fresh@wash.org.

Additionally, FRESH meets on the second Sunday of each month at 6 pm for an informal social hour at the Brewer's Alley restaurant at 124 N. Market St., Frederick, MD 21701. Our events are announced on our Meetup Page.

Check our Meetup Page for announcements of monthly Sunday meetings.

For more information, please visit our webpage at <http://wash.org/fresh>

For event details please visit our Meetup Page: <https://www.meetup.com/fresh-wash/>

All are welcome to attend our events, but an RSVP on Meetup is appreciated.

DC Atheists, Humanists & Agnostics (DC-AHA)

DC-Atheists, Humanists, and Agnostics group (DC-AHA) meets at Madhatter (1319 Connecticut Ave NW, DuPont Circle) for happy hour the first Wednesday of the month at 6-8pm. The next happy hour will be on October 7th at 6 pm.

<https://www.meetup.com/DC-Atheists-Humanists-Agnostics/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/823463147714903>

Shenandoah Area Secular Humanists (SASH)

The Shenandoah Area Secular Humanists (SASH) continues its pattern of online meetings. Each month, the second Sunday morning is a two-hour discussion on a topic pertinent to humanists. SASH also hosts a monthly book club meeting online on the last Sunday morning of each month. For more information on our activities, SASH can be contacted at sash@wash.org.

<https://www.meetup.com/shenandoah-area-secular-humanists/>

Southeast Virginia Atheists, Skeptics & Humanists (SEVASH)

The SEVASH calendar remains quite busy with all of our regularly scheduled social events across the Greater Hampton Roads area, from Virginia Beach to Williamsburg, which has included gaming socials, weekly team trivia, brunches, dinners, coffee get-togethers, etc. We frequently have so many folks showing up for weekly trivia that we've registered three separate teams for the Challenge Entertainment league, two of which had just qualified for the semi-finals in which they competed back in July. The competition was strong, and neither of our teams placed well enough to qualify for the finals. Better luck next time!

SEVASH volunteers continue our mutual aid efforts stocking and maintaining our Free Food Pantries in both Norfolk and Newport News, as well as working with the LGBT Life Center's Pride Pantry.

Our Free Little Humanist Library in Norfolk continues to be actively used, especially with the recent addition of books and DVDs contributed by the American Humanist Association. And on the topic of books, our book club was supposed to be starting back up in July, but had to be postponed and will instead start back in September with folks reading *Project Hail Mary* by Andy Weir since that's a popular book right now and it deals with humanist topics of reason, empathy, and science. Voting for the next title will be done at that meeting.

All of this of course is in addition to our regular schedule of dinners, brunches, team trivia and other social / gaming events.

SEVASH events are announced on

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

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

Maryland-DC Chapter (MDC)

September 13th at 2 pm: MDC will host a winery visit on Sunday, September 13th at 2 pm at The Urban Winery of Silver Spring, 2315 Stewart Ave Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Sunday, September 27 7:00PM ET: There will be a talk via Zoom by David Fitzgerald, co-author of *Clearly Written by Boys: A Women's Guide to the Bible*.

Please see the Meetup Page below for details and to RSVP.

MDC events are posted at <https://www.meetup.com/wash-202/>.

Northern Virginia Chapter (NVC)

NVC announces its events on the main WASH Meetup page. For upcoming events, please check

<https://www.meetup.com/humanism-218/>

DC Region Atheists (DCRA)

We host a Secular Zoom Community meeting on the second Thursday of each month at 7 pm. 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>

The Mighty Atheists & Agnostics of RVA League (MAARVAL)

We serve the greater Richmond, VA area. Our events are announced on

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

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1310789454165892>

Lynchburg Area Secular Humanists (LASH)

LASH is back! If you live in the Lynchburg, VA area, please come join your fellow secularists!

Our events are announced [on Meetup](#).

Please email lash@wash.org for questions.

Other Chapters

For information on WASH's other chapters, please see the Chapter Contact Information on the chapter pages at wash.org.

The Secular Advocacy Teams

American Atheists has organized Secular Advocacy Teams (SAT) to address state-level threats to church-state separation and secular values. Maryland and Virginia are two of the states with active SATs.

The legislative sessions for both states have concluded for this year, but the MD and VA SATs are still active and preparing for the 2027 sessions.

GET Involved!

If you live in Virginia and would like to get involved in the VA SAT, please contact American Atheists Virginia State Director Aiden Barnes at abarnes@atheists.org.

If you live in Maryland and would like to get involved in the MD SAT, please contact American Atheists Maryland State Director Mike Reid at mike.reid@atheists.org.

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Bill Creasy, *Secretary*

Matt DeGrave, *Treasurer*

Mike Reid, *WASHline Editor*

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4. Charlottesville Atheists and Secular Humanists (CASH)

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