

## Launches of New Coalitions Punctuated by Vandalism

Sacramento CoR in California and Detroit CoR in Michigan both enjoyed high-profile public launches followed by unfortunate acts of vandalism.



It began on February 9 when the Sacramento Area Coalition of Reason announced its ten-billboard blitz of the greater Sacramento area. Yes, ten. The new CoR opted to use the smaller “poster” billboards as opposed to the larger and taller Interstate type. As a result, a wide spread of advertising was secured without breaking the bank, using the slogan, “Are you good without God? Millions are.” The local media were clearly impressed, covering the ad campaign on the leading television stations as well as in the *Sacramento Bee* and other print media.

Among the factors that CoRs need to consider when using smaller billboards, however, is that they tend to be closer to the ground and more accessible, usually being on smaller roads instead of major arteries. And this can make vandalism easier. Thus, after only a week, the first act of vandalism occurred. Someone spray painted the words “also lost?” under “Millions are.” This

was a first for United CoR. It also created a media opportunity. A press release announcing the vandalism went out on February 16 and was greeted with even more news coverage. Moreover, Clear Channel, the owner of the billboard, effectively painted over the graffiti free of charge.

But then, a week before the billboards were slated to come down, two more were vandalized, one of them so completely that almost all of the vinyl was ripped off the frame. In the subsequent third round of publicity this generated, one television station suggested that the devastation was so great that it may have constituted an “act of God,” the weather having been windy the night before. But they weren’t committed to this explanation. In any case, Clear Channel agreed to let two of the other billboards remain in place an extra week to make up for the damage.



After all of this, on March 3, the Detroit Area Coalition of Reason had its public launch with a baker’s dozen of king and queen sized ads on the sides of SMART buses that run through Detroit and out to the suburbs. The slogan chosen was “Don’t believe in God? You are not alone.” Press response was sudden and overwhelming, including television, radio, and print media all over the area. But then, nine days later, Detroit CoR was informed that three of the bus ads had been vandalized, the word “Don’t” being defaced or ripped off completely. This led to a second press release on March 15, which generated a new round of media responses. SMART agreed to replace the three ads free of charge. But such bus ad vandalism was another first for United CoR.

In both cities, the local CoRs reacted by increasing their resolve to stand behind their messages, seeing an even greater need to get the word out in order to change the culture. In both cities the local police were contacted so there would be official records of these acts. And in both cities the increased publicity ensured that the work of the vandals not only gained them nothing but even backfired.

## Getting into the Spirit of Earth Day

Thursday, April 22, will be Earth Day. This popular, secular observance is a natural for those in the community of reason. It has both scientific and social concern aspects that that can engage local groups in CoRs around the country. Therefore, United CoR recommends that the leadership of each CoR consider the idea of holding a joint Earth Day event with all their local groups. Such a gathering could foster greater cooperation among the groups and also offer a positive media outreach opportunity focused on the environment or on an improved understanding of life on planet Earth.

If you need Earth Day public relations and event ideas, write to United CoR National Director Fred Edwards at [Fredwords@UnitedCoR.org](mailto:Fredwords@UnitedCoR.org) .

## Spreading the Good Words

At 10 a.m on April 4, 2010, at the American Atheists convention in New Jersey, a distinguished group of leaders from across the secular movement will be asked to offer, very briefly, a contribution as to how we—all of us, individuals and local, regional, and national organizations in the community of reason—can become more visible, better known for who we really are. This won't be a discussion or a panel but, instead, a very fast-paced series of ideas. Each invitation-only participant will have a strictly enforced two minutes (120 seconds) to introduce herself or himself, declare any organizational affiliation (optional), and then state, show, describe, sing, or explain an idea. This can be whatever the presenter wants, and need not be in English words:

- the entire script of a 30-second TV ad
- a slogan or catch-phrase
- a song/jingle/ditty, either words only or sung by the presenter
- a billboard (text or, if preferred, a drawing of what the billboard should look like)
- a bus placard (text or, if preferred, a drawing of what the placard should look like)
- a magazine or newspaper ad (text or, if preferred, a mock-up of what the ad should look like)
- an idea or set of ideas as to how we should all go about gaining free publicity or coordinating our ads
- an idea or set of ideas about how financing might be generated for buying ads
- something else the organizers haven't even thought of

This is intended to be a serious collection of creative ideas, not a spoof—but a lighter or witty touch is welcome. This event and the spreading of the ideas afterward is jointly sponsored by American Atheists and the United Coalition of Reason (other cosponsors possibly to be added).

Ideas need not be original or wholly new: American Atheists, FFRF, FreeThoughtAction, and United CoR have all had past success with billboards; bus ads and placards have been used effectively in the UK, in Washington (American Humanist Association), by the FFRF and

United CoR, and in New York City (NYC Atheists). Many, many ads and free events, large and small, including of course the Godless Americans March on Washington in 2002, have helped in the past.

All the participants will be filmed, the result will be edited only to eliminate serious gaffes, and the result will be made widely available to local and national groups or individuals, either for free or for a most nominal charge (\$4 perhaps) to cover the costs of producing and mailing the DVDs.

This isn't intended to be a finished product but instead a further step toward improving our (for all of us) public relations. The effort will, of course, benefit American Atheists and United CoR, as well as those who regard themselves as valued allies. But there will be no objection whatever to the result being used to help any atheist, freethought, humanist, nontheist, rationalist, secular humanist, ethical culturist, etc., group, either in the ideas offered or in what may grow out of it.

Every participant will agree as a condition of participation that the ideas or images presented are thereafter in the public domain—credit to presenters being appreciated but not required. These ideas, once let loose, will then have the freedom to grow on their own.

## News in Brief

On March 12, **ArizonaCoR** hosted a special screening of *Creation*, the movie, in Tempe and conducted a Q & A period afterwards with Professor John Lynch of Arizona State University.

On February 15, the **Center for Inquiry of Southern Arizona**, located in Tucson, sponsored its own billboard, designed by United CoR, using the slogan “Are you good without God? Millions Are.”

**Endorsements of United CoR from national organizations** have increased, the number now reaching nine. You can see them all on the links page of the United CoR website.

And while you're there, check out the **new improvements in the United CoR website**, including informative FAQs and a new resources page to aid local CoRs. The next step is the design of a new, more user friendly, Web template for the local CoRs.

If you missed the January or February issues of *Hard CoR News*, you will now **find all back issues online** in convenient PDF format. Check them out, download them, print them up, and share them with others.