

Hard CoR News

The insider bulletin of the United Coalition of Reason

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Local/Regional Conference News

Local coalition conferences have been busy this summer with their events and gatherings! Have a look at these examples:



Colorado (August 15-17)

With a theme of "Celebrating Secular Diversity," the Third Annual Colorado Secular Conference welcomed just over 200 attendees to Aurora, a suburb east of Denver. As if to illustrate the [Colorado Coalition of Reason's](#) commitment to inclusion, ethnic, age, and lifestyle diversity were more visible at this year's event. Keynote speaker Greta Christina delivered a powerful address setting forth the reasons why attention to minority rights issues belongs on the secularist agenda. Other talks were delivered by Jamila Bey, Mandisa Thomas, Becky Hale, Mikey Weinstein, Matt Dillahunty, Hemant Mehta, and Amanda Metskas, among others. UnitedCoR National Director Fred Edwards conducted a two-hour media training seminar. And the conference served as the kick-off for Sunday Assembly Denver.

Mark your calendars for next year's Colorado Secular Conference, which will be held jointly with the national conference of the [American Humanist Association, May 7-10, 2015!](#)



FREEOK | THE OKLAHOMA FREETHOUGHT CONVENTION

Oklahoma (August 9-10)

The 2014 Oklahoma Freethought Convention, organized by FreeOK, was held in Tulsa this year and featured a stellar lineup of speakers that included Nate Phelps, Jamila Bey, Sarah Morehead, C.J. Werleman, Kelly Damerow, and Faisal Saeed Al Mutar. At the end, UnitedCoR National Director Fred Edwards held a two-hour marketing seminar for local group activists. There were 150 in attendance and activists were brought together to reenergize both [Tulsa CoR](#) and [Oklahoma City CoR](#).



Atlanta (June 21-22)

"Hotlanta" certainly became hotter when the Atlanta Area Coalition of Reason held its twin launch events during the summer solstice weekend. A politics blog from Jim Galloway in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution hailed [ATL CoR](#)'s work as "a new cultural presence." The coalition's president, Mandisa Thomas, thanked the local groups for their combined work to make its unique launch campaign a huge success.



Albuquerque (May 3, 2014)

The "Unholy Trinity Tour" brought an ungodly message to Albuquerque when the activist work of Matt Dillahunty, AronRa, and Seth Andrews was featured at [New Mexico CoR's](#) launch event. Local groups from Las Cruces, Roswell, Los Alamos, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe assembled at the University of New Mexico to hear the stories and insights of these three speakers about their moving away from religion and their activist work across many states, especially the southwest.

CoR People



Jason Heap

Jason recently joined the UnitedCoR staff in the new position of coordinator. (<http://thehumanist.com/news/all/meet-the-united-cor-staff-jason-heap>). Jason's extensive work and travel overseas in education has put him in contact with people from various religious and cultural backgrounds, which he has used to lead schools and their communities. Jason is also the applicant to become the first Humanist chaplain in the United States armed forces.

Jason's work as an educator for the past ten years has put him in positions as a humanist leader. As a teacher of Religious Studies and Philosophy in the United Kingdom, helping students and their families understand that he was a humanist was a challenge by itself but, over time, most people were appreciative that he was able to teach about religion in an objective manner. Jason worked with and counseled students who had "faith questions" of their own and these experiences were traumatic for them, especially if they came from conservative and hyper-religious families that wouldn't accept their children if they didn't follow in the tradition. Likewise, managing schools in international contexts helped Jason emphasize and focus on diplomatic relations among people of varying viewpoints. By this means he was able to lead schools toward achievable goals and prevent the process from getting hung up on cultural and religious differences. Similar to his own experience, Jason recognizes that there are other women and men across the United States whose life experiences change over time. For Jason, he soon realized that England and most of Europe had embraced scientific ideals and moved away from the sort of evangelical theistic

worldview so prominent in the States. His travels around the world have put him in touch first-hand with other religions, such as Daoism, Shintoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism: religions that don't look toward a theistic being to control life and ethics but rather encourage people to look to themselves for the answer to life's questions.

Newsfeed Updating

The UnitedCoR newsletter and national website are in need of your help! With the recent growth of UnitedCoR and the blossoming of local coalitions, we want to celebrate every stride that is made. Therefore no item of news is too small. If your local CoR has held a conference, sponsored or participated in a charitable event, or done something else of interest, please post it on your local CoR website and let the cyber-community know what you've done. Then send us an email drawing our attention to it so we can boast about your activity through our [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) pages as well as this e-newsletter. We're also planning to feature the work of a local CoR each month on the UnitedCoR website.

Legal Action

The work of UnitedCoR and local CoRs hasn't gone without resistance from some local forces uncomfortable with our exercise of free speech. (Actually, it wasn't free, because we paid to speak up through our billboards, bus ads, and high-profile events!) But through our network of support from other secular groups and individuals, and sometimes with the aid of legal action, we have proved consistently able to secure positive outcomes..

Therefore, if your local CoR experiences difficulties and you need legal advice, please contact the UnitedCoR for assistance.

Here is a reminder of our two most high-profile and important victories:

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: early July 2014 The Port Authority of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, paid \$20,000 in damages to UnitedCoR and \$40,000 in legal expenses to the Appignani Humanist Legal Center of the American Humanist Association in a major court settlement. . The lawsuit was filed after the Port Authority refused to run \$5,700 worth of bus ads aimed at promoting the [Pittsburgh Coalition of Reason](#).

The king-sized ads, to be placed on the sides of twelve buses serving Allegheny County, would have read: "Don't believe in God? You are not alone." Fred Edwards, national director of UnitedCoR, explained his reasons for agreeing with the Port Authority's settlement offer. "Although we still maintain that we were improperly denied the opportunity to run our ad, as originally conceived, under the Port Authority's old ad policy, the old policy is now gone. So even if the courts allowed our original ad to run, it would merely be grandfathered in as an exception. It wouldn't improve the situation for others." Edwards also added that the Port Authority hadn't applied its new ad policy correctly: other religious groups were allowed to run their ads, but atheists groups were denied.

Little Rock, Arkansas: June 2011 UnitedCoR filed a federal lawsuit against the Central Arkansas Transit Authority (CATA) and its advertising agent, On the Move Advertising, for declining to run \$5,260 worth of bus ads aimed at attracting local atheists and agnostics. The queen-sized ads, which were to be placed on the sides of eighteen buses serving the Riverfest event, would have said: "Are you good without God? Millions are."

The complaint and a motion for a preliminary injunction were filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas. Legal services were donated by the Appignani Humanist Legal Center of the American Humanist Association, also headquartered in Washington DC. The bus ads were to launch the new [Central Arkansas Coalition of Reason](#). The ads would have directed inquirers to the Central Arkansas CoR website, inviting them to consider joining any of the groups in the coalition. But after negotiations with On the Move Advertising and CATA failed in March and couldn't be revived afterwards, UnitedCoR

had no choice but to pursue legal action.

UnitedCoR alleged that CATA and On the Move violated UnitedCoR's free speech rights under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution because CATA, as a governmental entity, was wrong for using its disfavor of the nontheistic message of UnitedCoR's ads as a reason for refusing to run them on its buses. UnitedCoR also argued that CATA was wrong for asking them to pay a "damage deposit" on speech it labeled "controversial." Such acts, the legal brief stated, amounted to unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination against UnitedCoR's speech.

Little Rock seemed to have forgotten the lesson on government discrimination against atheists that they were taught in 2009. The Arkansas Society of Freethinkers, one of the groups now part of [Central Arkansas CoR](#), had won a lawsuit allowing its nontheistic winter holiday display to appear near a Christian crèche on state capitol grounds.

United Coalition of Reason Overview/History

The United Coalition of Reason, Inc. began its work a little more than five years ago, being incorporated on February 13, 2009. A year earlier the leaders of all the local nontheistic groups in the greater Philadelphia area met and agreed to form a local coalition which they called the Greater Philadelphia Coalition of Reason, or [Philly CoR](#). It was fitting that a high-profile billboard on Interstate 95 in Downtown Philadelphia heralded new cooperation among united nontheistic groups, just as this same city was the birthplace of freedom through a united coalition of colonies over 230 years earlier. In the wake of the publicity that followed, some of those involved decided to "export their revolution" all across the United States through the formation of a national UnitedCoR. Fred Edwards was brought on board to head up the operation and the national organization had its public launch on March 30, 2009, alongside that of the [Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason](#).

From then through December 2009, over 20 local CoRs began to blossom. From San Diego to Boston, Columbus to Tampa, Baltimore to Portland, local CoRs became stronger through cooperative planning and work. Using the advertising theme of "good without God," some local CoRs coordinated their launches with the publication of Harvard University Humanist Chaplain Greg Epstein's book Good without God. Immediate media coverage of CoR activity extended beyond U.S. borders with coverage by the China Daily and Al Jazeera television.

Since 2009 UnitedCoR has gone from strength to strength, expanding its network from 20 local coalitions to 75, representing nearly 40 U.S. states and one Canadian province. The richness and breadth of experience within the UnitedCoR network has brought together such interest groups as students, parents, science education groups, LGBTQ activists, humanistic Jews, [Camp Quest](#) organizers, and church-state advocates, clearly demonstrating that there is something for everyone within UnitedCoR.

In sum, over 15,000 people have been supported by United CoR's work, including those reached through UnitedCoR seminars at regional conferences, websites, and interactions with national organizations.

Leadership Needs

At the moment, we currently have three local CoRs that need some volunteers to help them keep the plates spinning:

[New Mexico CoR](#) (Coordinator)

[Detroit CoR](#) (Coordinator)

[Butte County CoR](#) (Coordinator)

If you are interested, please contact UnitedCoR for more information and for help with leading a local CoR.

Forthcoming Special Days in 2014

Please put the following dates into your calendars. Use these special days to help build and cement connections within your local coalitions, as well to create publicity:

Banned Books Week (September 21-27): <http://www.bannedbooksweek.org/>

National Secular Service Day (October 5): It's always the first Sunday in October, and if you would like some ideas of ways to serve, please look at the CFI website from 2011:

http://www.centerforinquiry.net/oncampus/blog/entry/national_secular_service_day/

Winter Solstice/HumanLight (around December 21) <http://americanhumanist.org/HNN/details/2011-12-humanlight-a-holiday-for-humanists>

If your local CoR has held any events around these dates, please remember to post them to your local CoR website and send us an email with lots of pictures. We want to help promote what you're doing and celebrate with you!

CoRe Values

As there has been considerable recent growth within local CoRs, and new people have been getting involved, we want to take this moment to remind everyone about the core values and work of UnitedCoR. UnitedCoR offers four key services:

1. We lay the groundwork for forming an informal, local Coalition of Reason to act as a forum for group leaders. We are also a clearinghouse for public information on local groups.
2. We offer free Web hosting and a design template for each local CoR website.
3. We provide free public relations and media training to local group leaders so they may improve the public profile and outreach of their individual groups and the local CoR.
4. We provide funding for a local publicity campaign aimed at bringing traffic to the local CoR website.

The publicity campaign is usually a billboard in a highly visible place in a city, metro area, or other definable media market. But UnitedCoR will readily fund an ad campaign on buses or commuter trains or by other means.

The primary focus of UnitedCoR is local: your groups in your communities. We don't compete with other national organizations. And our local work is designed to foster the current and ongoing success of existing groups, not by changing their nature or adding new groups or an additional organizational level to the mix. Our ultimate aim is to help unaffiliated nontheists learn about local activities and, ideally, to join in what you're doing.

There is no obligation, financial or otherwise, to UnitedCoR from any local CoR or the groups within it. Once the media training has been provided and the advertising campaign launched, the rest is up to the groups involved as to what direction their CoR will take next. However, we'll be here to help you with whatever direction your local CoR takes.

UnitedCoR is privately funded and needs no additional financial support. Therefore, donors wishing to contribute to UnitedCoR's efforts nationally will be asked to give, instead, to appropriate organizations in their local area.

From the Heap

"To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly." I stumbled upon this gobbet from Henri-Louis Bergson, a French philosopher from the turn of the 20th century. When I first read this, I was at a point in my life where I hadn't the chance to realize how important this quote would be for me as my life has gone on. Similar to Bergson's experiences, I too was questioning what I considered to be religious "truths." Bergson was a student of mathematics and science (two subjects I failed at miserably in high school), and he wavered between these fields and the humanities. I initially began studying music education and opted for religion, philosophy and history (an exceptionally odd combination for someone who would eventually leave religion altogether only to revisit it ten years later as a specialist subject to teach in UK government-funded schools). These two short-term outcomes of my life were unknown to me at the time as I was only trying to equip myself with something intelligent to say for the following day's philosophy lectures (this is why I had been reading about Bergson to begin with), but this 15-second "intellectual contribution" to try and impress my classmates would have more of an impact on my life than I would ever imagine.

That momentary quest was quite possibly one of the major leaps I made away from dogmatic thinking into a world filled with questions. The black and white that I had known for so long, and felt a sense of comfort from, began to appear more like black bars in front of a white cell wall. I began to see shades of grey for the first time in a long time. Or was it that the black and white appeared to be a bar code of some sort, ensuring that I moved from one place to another as I had been instructed to do? Either way, the road to critical inquiry, questioning what I had always been told was "the way it is" was open to me and I was all too happy to start down that path. That was 20 years ago this month, and I am still on that road. Yes, I will admit that I have "cut my feet on the road less-travelled" but the experiences and things I have seen for myself far outweigh the discomfort of the bumps, scuffs and bruises.

When we consider the work that we are doing as the national CoR as well as the local CoRs in our network, we bear in mind that there are others on their own nontheistic paths and have reached different points along the way. Some of our friends in the movement feel equipped and prepared for the changes that this journey creates, whilst others may still be in the process of going beyond "comfort zones." All of us feel the effects of forces and stressors in life that compel us to move in new directions, and through the work of the partnership between UnitedCoR and local CoRs, people should feel supported and know that they are not alone.

If what you have read in this newsletter, or on any CoR website, has captured your attention and you realize you aren't alone with your work in this movement, then please take comfort that there are others, just like yourself, who are experiencing the processes of changing and creating as Bergson had said. The processes of changing and creating are not simple and can't be accomplished instantaneously. They are certainly difficult to successfully complete in total solitude. As coalitions we serve, strengthen--and succeed!

- Jason Heap