

# Hard CoR News

The insider bulletin of the United Coalition of Reason

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## **Four CoR Launches**



Let's welcome our four newly-launched CoRs and share in their exciting stories!

**November 11, 2014: Eastern Iowa CoR and Central Iowa CoR**



My first introduction to the work of the United Coalition of Reason came in August 2013. An alert Facebook friend had posted a photo of the South Dakota CoR's launch of the "Don't believe in God? Join the Club!" billboard campaign. This led me to my first conversation with Fred Edwords. At this point I was only aware of a couple of atheist groups in central Iowa but Fred encouraged me to do research to locate other groups in the state. It turns out there were more than I had imagined—MANY more! I was already a member of the [Iowa Atheists & Freethinkers](#) and was encouraged by my fellow members to pursue this endeavor. When I travelled around the state that autumn, I met with groups in Cedar Falls, Iowa City, and Cedar Rapids. It was a marvelous experience making so many new friends.

At first, my instinct pointed to a statewide Iowa CoR but after a UnitedCoR visit to Des Moines by Fred in October 2013, with the leadership meeting and media training seminar, we realized it needed to be more regional. At this point we split into Central and Eastern Iowa CoRs and then had the misfortune of the long terrible winter! The Central Iowa CoR members were disappointed with the delay as they were very anxious for the launch, but they have been very patient and understanding.

We finally were able to have another meeting with Fred in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in May of this year on the first truly nice day of the year. This marked the beginning of the Eastern Iowa CoR. We had many discussions by email with the leadership of the Central Iowa CoR for a billboard slogan. We wanted it to be unique and not duplicate the bus ad slogan in Des Moines from 2009. It had come down to "Are you Godless? So are we!" when a member of the Secular Humanists of the Greater Quad Cities Area suggested simply "Godless?" along the lines of "Got Milk?" That was it!

We postponed launch until the beginning of the fall semester for the benefit of our Secular Student Alliance members. We are highly proud of the five student groups represented within the two Iowa CoRs, and they are an enthusiastic group of young people! Leadership changed from the spring to the fall semesters but the support for the coalition remained the same. Despite a few hiccups, such as with a billboard vendor general manager who suddenly decided the boards might offend some people in certain cities, we finally launched both coalitions simultaneously on November 12. The response has been, just as we had hoped it would be, overwhelmingly positive!

--Rory Moe  
Central Iowa CoR Coordinator



A few weeks ago I was invited to be the spokesperson for the brand-new Eastern Iowa Coalition of Reason. I have no background in news media, but I thought that with all the great work being done by others involved with the CoR, it was my turn to "step up." It's been exciting, easy, and lots of fun!

There was a flurry of activity as soon as the billboards went up: literally within minutes of receiving the press release in my email, my phone rang—it was a newspaper reporter already at work on the story. I confess that I babbled my way through my first interview, but the writer produced a good, clear, and fair story out of it. This was the first unexpected thing I learned as an amateur spokesperson—some media professionals want to help us tell our story well!

Over the next few days I was interviewed by a number of reporters for newspapers and radio stations. To my surprise, most of them turned out to be atheists themselves! Several told me about feeling isolated in their communities, and they seemed to enjoy talking to a fellow non-theist, one going so far as to tell me about her de-conversion from religion. I urged them to seek out other atheists on Meetup and Facebook groups, and even to consider starting an atheist group if one didn't exist in their area.

The public's reaction to the Iowa billboards has been overwhelmingly positive. News media websites have received a lot of comments—a few of which were a bit odd, but most were supportive. Many people who have seen the billboards or read about them in the newspapers have voted with their feet by becoming members of local atheist groups! So thank you UnitedCoR!

--Peter Nothnagle  
Eastern Iowa CoR Spokesperson

**November 18, 2014: [Mid-Columbia CoR \(Washington State\)](#)**



The Mid-Columbia Coalition of Reason bus ad campaign, launched in the Tri-Cities in southeastern Washington State, has been an exhilarating and positive experience for our CoR members. When one of our local news stations interviewed me about the CoR, their coverage of the story caused a social media firestorm. Within a matter of hours, there were more than 1,600 comments on the station's Facebook page. I knew that a lot of the comments were going to range from disdainful to outraged (and most of the latter were just plain absurd), but what I didn't anticipate is how many comments there would be from religious people who supported our rights to free speech even if they didn't agree with the message. I was even more surprised by how many people were excited to learn of the CoR and to see "godless" advertising brazenly making its way through the streets of the Tri-Cities on the Ben-Franklin Transit.

Since the story broke less than a week ago, we have had more than 50 new people join one or more of the CoR groups on Facebook and Meetup. Within a day, I received over a dozen emails from local people inquiring about the various groups. Thanks to the publicity the CoR received when we were mentioned by Hemant Mehta on the Friendly Atheist blog and on the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science blog, I received emails from other parts of the country as well as one from the UK offering congratulations and virtual fist bumps.

People have shared in our online venues and with me personally that it makes them feel hopeful that perhaps our religiously conservative community is becoming less so and that they feel less isolated now that they know they aren't the only ones here. Several have said they wished they'd known sooner that groups were already established in the community. That's how the bus ad campaign has really helped. Though many of our groups have been in operation for years, people usually had to intentionally seek us out to find us. These ads have put our organizations out there for all to see, not only out in the streets, but on television and social media. It'd be hard to miss us!

We're all very excited for what the future holds for our groups and the Mid-Columbia CoR. Together, with the backing of the national UnitedCoR, we expect to be able to do many great things in the area!

--Jennifer Goulet  
Mid-Columbia CoR Coordinator

**November 25, 2014: Rhode Island CoR**



On the heels of the Mid-Columbia CoR and two Iowa CoR launches, Rhode Island CoR (RICoR) launched on Monday, November 24. Rhode Island has a very active secular community. We supported [Jessica Ahlquist's fight](#) to take down her school's prayer banner and successfully lobbied for a statewide Day of Reason proclamation to coincide with the National Day of Prayer for two consecutive years, and installed secular holiday displays at the statehouse in response to the annual influx of nativity scenes. The usual suspects were mobilized for action before the RICoR launch went public. This year RICoR had its own holiday display in place just in time for the launch. The display, the "Tree of Knowledge," is accompanied by a sign with the Robert Ingersoll quote, "Banish me from Eden when you will; but first let me eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge." The media campaign for the launch consisted of an eye-popping graphic displayed on a billboard and ten bus ads.

"Separation of Church and State" is an integral part of Rhode Island's heritage. The state's founder, Roger Williams, was a theistic man who championed "soul liberty" and despised the "monstrous partiality" of sectarian dogma. Religious Rhode Islanders often overlook Roger Williams the secularist, but Williams knew that you couldn't have freedom of religion without freedom from religion. He knew that heresy assumed that the accuser is the one who got it right. He also concluded from the prosperity of Muslims and Catholics that God did not play favorites. The quote that resolves the paradox of Roger Williams as a religious secularist is featured on the holiday display for the Rhode Island Humanist Book Club, "God needth not the help of a material sword of steel to assist the sword of the spirit in the affairs of conscience." The sign celebrates Williams' birth on December 21, 1603.

Response to the launch has been overwhelmingly positive. The ads are innocuous, "Godless? So are we!" over an image of an ocean wave. Naturally, some people were offended, but that just shows you that, by social convention, religion has been exempt from scrutiny. We can't have a civilization in which the best ideas prevail if certain viewpoints go unchallenged. There are people in houses of worship who mouth the words to a liturgy that no longer rings true for them. Inertia is a powerful force. They may try to reform their religions, but that creates a serious dilemma for them. They may want to marginalize the fundamentalism in their own religion, but the reformers lend respectability to the whole endeavor. We

have to make it known that there are communities where hypocrisy isn't the price of belonging.

--Dr. Tony Houston  
Rhode Island CoR Coordinator

## Small Bus Ad / Big Montana Response



The [Missoula Area Secular Society](#) started in 2008 and was founded to bring together a community of non-theists as well as promote science, secular ethics, and critical thinking. In July 2011, the group put up a [summertime billboard](#) that was positively received and helped attract more members. We decided to use a similar tactic this holiday season with a bus ad that reads "Don't Believe in God? You're not alone." We hoped that this ad would reach out to non-theists in our community that might not be aware of our group, including those who might be feeling a little left-out during this time of religious celebration.

Given that similar holiday ads elsewhere have received negative responses, there was some trepidation from the group as to how the ad would fare. We're happy to say that there was a large and overwhelmingly positive response to just the one bus ad. We've had television segments and articles featuring the bus ad in nearly every local media outlet, which have accurately and positively portrayed our group. All of this attention has caused a large surge in the number of individuals interested in attending our group meetings and activities.

Missoula might just be one small city in Montana, but the positive response we've received seems like a shining light for the secular movement. There's no doubt that there's still lots of work to be done for greater acceptance of non-theists in America, but perhaps the response we've seen with our ad is a "sign" that the tides are turning in our favor!

--Traci Brown  
Missoula Area Secular Society

## History in the Making



George Gold, [Butte County CoR](#)'s coordinator, is preparing to make history in his local area as well as within UnitedCoR! George has had several articles and letters to the editor published in the Chico News and Review, and he has been interviewed by Chico television stations whenever the media want to talk to a "real live atheist." George has also appeared many times as a guest on Jerry Olenyn's (the KRCC Channel 7 News Anchor) KKXX Christian radio show. He has also taken his message to other cities in California, such as Redding, and has encouraged other local leaders and secular groups with his story.

After more than two years of negotiations, George has been invited to make Chico history by delivering the first secular invocation on January 6, 2015 at the year's first Chico City Council meeting. Congratulations are certainly in order for George's efforts as well as the stand being made by Butte County CoR to represent the interests of non-theists in their local area!!

## Local/Regional Conference News

November 21-23, 2014 [Skepticon](#)

Held annually in the Ozark area of southern Missouri, Skepticon bills itself as the world's largest free skeptics/freethought convention in the US. Hundreds of attendees at the Springfield event were able to experience speakers as diverse as PZ Meyers, Hemant Mehta, Greta Christina, and Daniel Bier, as well as a myriad of informational booths from groups as diverse as the American Humanist Association, CFI, [KidsHeartKids](#), and Secular Women. There was also a table of FSM supporters promoting PASTA tolerance, and even one promoting Buddhist meditation! Activities included dinosaur painting, a prom for people who either wanted to relive their High School days (or never attended their own school's event), and for "furries" (the less the latter is described, the better.)

People attending this year's Skepticon were mostly from the Midwest region, but there were attendees who flew in from both coasts just to be with others who shared similar values and experiences. Many non-theists feel isolated in their own communities, and they find events like Skepticon to be a great place to connect with others, make friends, and discover various ways to promote freethought. There were a surprising number of families in attendance with children ranging from newborns to teenagers. All had an interest in learning more about how to promote freethought philosophies and were looking to groups like the AHA for material they could use to do so. Many of the workshops or speakers were running on parallel timeslots and several people were overheard upset with the dilemma of too many choices all at one time.

If you get the chance to get to Springfield next autumn, Skepticon is a great way to learn about and experience the expression of freethought. The price of registration can't be beat, and the company you'll find yourself in is stimulating as well as fun!

--[Howard Katz](#), ChicagoCoR  
and member of the AHA Board of Directors

## Winter Displays in Chicago



Balmy weather on Saturday, November 30th made our non-theist holiday display setup at North School Park in Arlington Heights very pleasant! Eight members from the Freedom from Religion Foundation-Metropolitan Chicago Chapter (FFRFMCC) were on hand to perform the setup. While we were awaiting the nativity scene to be erected, both [Chicago CoR](#) and the FFRFMCC had already occupied two of the four positions in the park's public forum with the Chicago CoR "Good Without God" banner and the FFRFMCC's 5' x 5' Dawkins' Scarlet "A" (for atheist) sign.

Both displays are located at the park at the corner of Evergreen Avenue and Eastman Street (2 blocks north of Northwest Hwy, 1 block west of Arlington Heights Rd.). If you are in the area, I recommend going at night as our displays and the Park District's huge, beautiful, and completely secular toy-themed holiday display will be all lit up! (And please feel free to ignore the nativity!) The Chicago CoR banner and the FFRFMCC "A" sign will both be up until January 3, 2015.

Seasons Greetings and Happy Winter Solstice to all (and not just to a select few)!!

--Tom Cara  
President, FFRFMCC  
Member, Chicago CoR



## CoR of the Month



Congratulations to Pittsburgh CoR for being CoR of the Month for December! Read all about Pittsburgh CoR—including their sponsorship of the successful PASTAHCON (PA State Atheist/Humanist Conference) over the 2014 Labor Day weekend and their upcoming 5th Annual "Festivus for the Rest of Us Heathens and Infidels Holiday Party"--[HERE](#).

UnitedCoR has begun featuring a local "CoR of the Month" in the slideshow on our home page. We would like to feature your CoR in the future. We are asking each coalition coordinator (or someone representing your CoR) to send us the story of your CoR and any images you might have to help tell it. Group shots of members of your CoR (possibly taken in front of your billboard) will also help (but please be sure no one in the pictures minds having their image online).

To read about the CoRs featured so far—and to see the type of thing we are looking for—please see the page featuring San Diego CoR [HERE](#), the page featuring Butte County CoR [HERE](#), and the page featuring Dallas–Fort Worth CoR [HERE](#)

Send your CoR's story and pictures to Joseph at [Joseph-Stewart@live.com](mailto:Joseph-Stewart@live.com).

## CoR People



Karolina has been a student intern for UnitedCoR. Her involvement has allowed her to gain greater knowledge about the non-theistic community as well as to network with various leaders. As a humanist, she hopes to educate others who are unfamiliar with humanism and to work as an advocate for equality for the non-theistic community.

Karolina currently works in the healthcare field and plans to pursue a graduate degree in Environmental Science. Her volunteer and humanitarian activities have allowed her to understand the passion she has for the environment and the way humans use our Earth's natural resources.

Many thanks to Karolina for her administrative help!!

## Local CoR Social Media



Thank you to everyone who has linked your local CoR social media to UnitedCoR: [facebook.com/CoalitionOfReason](https://facebook.com/CoalitionOfReason) for Facebook and @UnitedCoR for [Twitter](#), and we appreciate your support with making November 19th as our day to count 5,000 likes. Please link into the Secular Directory's Facebook page, too.

## Instant Newsletter - Just Add Your Events!

Have you seen the latest newsletter from [Tampa Bay CoR](#)? If this is something that you'd like to be able to do, but you aren't sure how to make it happen, help from Judy Saint is here again! Create your own newsletter using our CoR master template and tips, and then receive regular well-written columns each month! Available to all CoR groups!

If you haven't had the time or content, a dedicated team of volunteers will help your CoR create your own regional newsletter. You will receive a professionally designed, fully editable template with plenty of how-to tips, plus regular, fresh content each month to reduce your load. Just add your own local events or other material no matter how small, and you're ready to go with an impressive publication with your name on it! Each month has a different theme with eleven well-written columns for you to choose from--or use all eleven! (Good for either email or print versions, whether you use PC or Mac.)

Don't delay--ask now about this ongoing newsletter support proudly offered by UnitedCoR! For further information, email Judy Saint at [newsletterhelp@unitedcor.org](mailto:newsletterhelp@unitedcor.org). She's happy to get you started today or to help you learn more.

A sample PDF of a newsletter is [HERE](#).

## Leadership Needs

Are you an interested volunteer able to help one of these local CoRs? Learn what's needed and how you can help.

[Detroit CoR](#) (Coordinator)

[New Mexico CoR](#) (Coordinator)

[San Francisco / Oakland CoR](#) (Coordinator)

[Arizona CoR](#) (Site Administrator)

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

## CoRrelated Groups

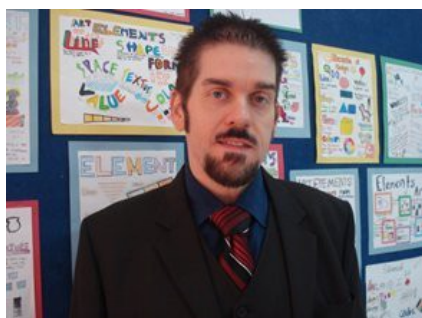


Photo of Susan B Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Charlotte Perkins Gilman from Wikipedia

Last month, our focus on secular diversity highlighted our students, and this month we want to highlight secular groups that appeal to and represent feminist and [womanist](#) perspectives. The [American Humanist Association Feminist Caucus](#) was established in 1977 to work toward equality of the sexes in all aspects of our society. Another group for your CoR's consideration is [Mothers Beyond Belief](#). The [National Organization for Women](#) has also been a longstanding supporter of secular feminist groups and has chapters all over the country. If members of your CoR are interested in working toward the advancement of women's rights and justice-based relations between women and men in all aspects of society, then be sure to check out these three groups.

If a feminist group is started within your local CoR, please be sure to contact [Secular Woman](#) to let them know of your local secular feminist groups. They will ensure that your information will be included in their lists. Also, make sure that your local CoR pages are updated with any new group, and inform the Secular Directory, to ensure that you get maximum publicity for your groups and your CoR.

## From the Heap



*Planes, Trains and Automobiles.* Seeing that it was the month of November, this Steve Martin and John Candy comedy classic seemed fitting for me. It wasn't because I was trying to get home for the Thanksgiving holiday but, rather, I was on the move in many planes, trains and automobiles, meeting as many groups as possible and taking the work and message of UnitedCoR with me. I'd like to share these travels with you and to let you know of the dedication and work of the various non-theistic communities that I found.

November 5: Known as "Guy Fawkes Night" or "Bonfire Night," this is a special day in the UK when people commemorate the foiled "Gunpowder Plot" when a group of

conspirators failed at their attempt to blow up Parliament and King James I on November 5, 1605. However, November 5, 2014, was important to me as I was preparing to join Jason Torpy (former U.S. Army captain and president of the [Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers](#)) and Chris Stedman (humanist chaplain for the [Yale Humanist Community](#)) for a “Captain and Chaplain” discussion event called “Atheists in Foxholes: Challenges and Changes for Humanists in the U.S. Military” that was held on November 6th. We were fortunate to have Professor Patrick Weil, (visiting professor of law and a senior research fellow at the French National Research Center in the University of Paris, Pantheon-Sorbonne) open the discussion and provide legal insight into the role of the U.S. Constitution and the establishment of chaplains in the U.S. military. This open discussion with Jason and Chris wasn’t the only thing on my mind, as the federal court case regarding my application to the U.S. Navy chaplaincy had just been filed, and the media was starting to run with the [story](#).



November 10: Following the successful event at Yale, Rabbi Binyamin Biber, humanist chaplain for the [Humanist Community of American University](#), invited me to speak on a similar topic to that of the meeting at Yale. There was something particularly important to me about this event: it was endorsed by the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC. It wasn’t but two weeks previous to this event at American University when the United Methodist Church’s highest church court’s ruling reinstated Reverend Frank Schaefer, who had been defrocked for officiating his son’s same-sex wedding. With these events in mind, I am hoping that the United Methodist Church might become in the future a new community partner to the non-theistic community.



November 11: The “Captain and the Chaplain” reunited on Veterans Day and extended an invitation to all non-theists for a special ceremony and memorial walk at the Arlington National Cemetery. Jason Torpy accompanied all and led a special memorial tour of atheists in foxholes, trenches, and cockpits who have given their lives in defense of our country, culminating with a visit to the grave of Civil War veteran and political leader Robert Ingersoll. The wreath-laying event was attended by many non-theists, and we were honored to have Debbie Allen—San Diego CoR Coordinator and member of the AHA board of directors—join us for the tour of the graves. This year’s Veterans Day celebration was also particularly important to me, as it was the first time I remembered our veterans and the veterans of America’s allied forces since the loss of my beloved friend [Len Arnold](#).

November 12—14: A fast-growing, and newly-forming local CoR in California known as Inland Empire CoR invited me to Riverside to meet with a large group of non-theistic community leaders and to work together to strengthen the strong bonds that were already present. On November 13, I was honored to be joined by Chief Petty Officer Doug Wright—activist and humanist leader within the U.S. Navy, and a member of San Diego CoR and the San Diego MAAF—as we spoke together at the UU Church of Riverside about the experiences of some non-theistic servicewomen and servicemen. We emphasized the need for local non-theistic communities to work collaboratively and



to actively provide diversity, not just in name but through the groups promoted by local CoRs. I am pleased to announce that as of today, there are seven cooperating groups at work in Inland Empire CoR, and that discussions are currently underway to include an additional two or three more! Be on the lookout for the launch of this coalition.

November 16: Immediately following the momentous bus ad campaign and official launch of the Mid-Columbia CoR, I held a Skype teleconference with the Tri-City Freethinkers, one of the local cooperating groups. In celebration of Tri-City Freethinkers' support of Mid-Columbia Pride week, Greta Christina was also a featured speaker, bringing her message of positive sexuality and body image to southeastern Washington State. The event drew quite a crowd, and Mid-Columbia CoR's groups have continued to grow, since the launch of the bus ad campaign.

I hope that this month's newsletter has excited you with the broad range of voices and experiences of all the various contributors. I take pleasure in the symphonic unified sounds of UnitedCoR's voices, as they remind me of the words of Rhode Island's founder, Roger Williams, when he wrote in *The Bloudy Tenet of Persecution* (1644): "Tenthly: An enforced uniformity of religion throughout a nation or civil state, confounds the civil and religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility..." As non-theists, we do not need to be uniform to be united; our diversity is what makes us stronger and allows us to ensure that there truly is something for everyone and that every person who comes to our CoRs can find a place where they belong.

**- Jason Heap**