

secular idaho

Humanists Of ID, ID Atheists, BUUF Sages, BUUF Humanists, BSU SSA, West Valley Freethinkers, ID Society of Reason, Cosmos Coffee Club, HumanKind, south central Idaho groups

Free Thought Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason www.tvcor.com.

January 2016 www.tvcor.org

President's Message

The high point of December was the Holiday Party, hosted by Pat and Andy. Rather than a Solstice Party just before Christmas, as we had always done in the past, this year we decided to move the end of year party to the first part of December, to better facilitate collection of gifts for an adopt-a-family (WCA family in need), and food donations for the Idaho Food Bank at this critical time. The party was a packed house, with members from all TV CoR groups dropping by. As usual, the food was great, beverages were varied, and with quantities of both that were beyond our ability to consume it all in a single evening. A good time was had by all. Party goers were very generous – a load of gifts and several hundred dollars in cash (actually in the form of prepaid cards) were delivered to our WCA family. I wish to thank all involved who helped make this year's party a big success, and especially Pat and Andy, who generously opened their home to all.

There was no HOI meeting in December, due to holiday hustle, bustle and travel. The TV CoR board did meet during the month, but the only topic on the agenda was the creation of by-laws for the umbrella group. In January both HOI and the broader TV CoR will begin planning for 2016 events, so it is time to be thinking about what we want to do in the coming year. Certainly National Day of Reason, PRIDE, Fourth of July, and Hyde Park Street Fair will top that agenda, but others may be considered. If you have a suggestion on an event we should be involved in, contact the leaders of whatever group you are involved with, so that your suggestion can be presented at a TV CoR planning meeting.

D. G. Van Curen, Humanists of Idaho

Plans to Re-organize Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason

TVCOR started out with an informal structure where all decisions were made by unanimous approval of member groups. Over the years we have approved a number of resolutions that have defined how we operate, but the time has come to codify what we have previously agreed upon and some difficult matters that we haven't faced yet.

I was directed by the board to start drafting bylaws in July and after several revisions we have a final draft that will likely be approved at our January board meeting.

To summarize some of the highlights: Each member organization has one vote and no one person can vote on behalf of more than one group.

Positive actions such as involvement in events and activities, adding new members, and electing new officers require unanimous approval.

Adverse actions such as removing member organizations and officers require a simple majority approval. Terms for officers will be two years in length and officers will be limited to two consecutive terms.

While some of this may seem counter-intuitive, the rational is minimizing the risk of coalition breaking apart due to activities, members, or officers.

If you would like to know more about these draft by-laws, please reach out to your group's leader.

Dustin Williams
Executive Director, TVCoR (proposed title)

West Valley Freethinkers, Nampa Contact Charlie B deepbluesigh@gmail.com wvfreethinkers@gmail.com

C of Southern Idaho Secular group see Facebook "Secular Student Alliance at CSI". For Freethinkers Twin Falls Contact is Erica, erical@eaglemail.csi.edu

COSMOS COFFEE CLUB conversation v begins at 6:30pm 1st & 3rd Mondays at Papa Joe's. Contact Sander Karas at <http://www.meetup.com/CosmosCoffeeClub>

Humanists in Idaho Falls meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church. Ask Doug at gerstner_doug@yahoo.com

Idaho Society of Reason is part of Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason. <http://meetup.com/nontheist/events>

Local Objectivists meet monthly, last Wed 6pm at varying restaurants. Ask Tim Scharff at scharffdesignworks@icloud.com

Meet An Atheist or several, socialize 2nd Tuesdays, typically at The Reef. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/IdahoAtheist/>

Human KIND project <http://www.human-kind-project.com/>, Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/humankindproject2014>

"The Truth about Tesla" Christopher Cooper

Christopher Cooper provides the latest of several biographies of Nikola Tesla that go all the way back into the 1940s. Perhaps the driver for the recent Tesla books is the growth of the Tesla mythology and associated conspiracy theories that thrive on the Internet. Cooper does a laudable job of pouring the cold water of reason and fact on these in this book subtitled "The Myth of the Lone Genius in the History of Innovation". His end notes will provide a wealth of references.

The author begins with a biography that avoids minutiae. Then, he gives enough basics of electricity to enable a better technical understanding of Tesla's inventions. Cooper next provides details for three of Tesla's inventions, the polyphase alternating current (AC) motor, the Tesla coil, and wireless transmission. These are used to illustrate the invention process and the United States patent system. Finally, Cooper provides an analysis of Tesla's contributions to electricity, the justification for his notoriety as inventor and scientist, and the decades of wasted time, resources and capital that characterize Tesla's career.

All of Cooper's information on Tesla can be found in a longer, very detailed earlier work, W. Bernard Carlson's 2013 tome, "Tesla – Inventor of the Electrical Age". Both works offer a plethora of photographs and illustrations, with more graphics and details in Carlson's book.

There are two innovations in Cooper's book. First, he describes the U.S. patent process. This is valuable to both the technical and general reader as it clarifies the patent process and the litigation of patent rights. The author shows how timing, money, politics, and economic situations can distort justice in favor of one of the litigants in a patent suit. This is a valuable because many of Tesla's patents were challenged and litigated. Cooper's readers are better able to digest the sometimes unfair and even tawdry results of patent litigation.

The second benefit of reading Cooper is his description of the inventing process. Cooper shows how most inventions are simply plateaus in the continuing advancement of science and

engineering. The idealized picture of the lone inventor pushing back the curtain of knowledge to provide a brand new device with no previous history of evolution fades under the focus of the author's description of historical reality.

Cooper relates these two general concepts, the invention process and the US patent system, to Nikola Tesla and his life work. The author presents multiple examples of how Tesla made extravagant claims about his supposed genius and ability to simply think and generate brand new concepts and devices to bestow the blessings of science upon the world's population. This part of Cooper's book frames a portrait of Tesla as a Barnum & Bailey styled charlatan and a scamming fraud. Tesla's investors and employers found that he could not implement his ideas, nor could he control his bravado. His legacy is littered with squandered funds, unproven and fanciful claims, and unimplemented ideas. Tesla's past is characterized by failed patent litigation and the plagiarizing of the work of others. His real accomplishments, while impressive, would probably have been provided by another had he never thrust himself upon the stage of Twentieth Century technology. Cooper proves that in most cases, Tesla's "inventions" were simply variations, tweaks or improvements upon the ideas, technological developments and devices of his contemporaries and predecessors.

Christopher Cooper provides a debunking of five prevailing myths about Nikola Tesla that now permeate the Internet on Tesla web sites of amateur scientists and conspiracy theorists. In truth, Tesla did not "invent" alternating current, Thomas Edison did not thwart Tesla to protect Edison's investment in direct current, Tesla never won the Nobel prize, Nikola Tesla did not perfect the wireless transmission of electricity, and J. P. Morgan did not kill Tesla's plan to provide the world with free electricity. This short final chapter in his book will probably gain Cooper notoriety and the disdain of the Tesla cultists, but perhaps it will impede the proliferation of the false Tesla mystique.

This reviewer suggests that Christopher Cooper's 2015 book be read first. If it cannot quench the curiosity of the reader, then it will provide a valuable introduction to the very detailed work of Carlson.

Wally Keltner



Humanists of Idaho, a chapter of American Humanist Association & Council for Secular Humanism, is a nonprofit corporation promoting ethical, democratic, and naturalistic Humanism through public awareness, education and community involvement. We have met 3rd Mondays, Jan-Nov, in upper room of the Flicks, Boise. Open discussion and dining at 6:30pm; business 7pm; program 7:30pm We meet January 18. **More at meetup page, address below.**

‘Free Will’ is a gift you give yourself

Jeanette Ross

A progression of research has replaced Christian insistence that the capacity to make life-enhancing choices is a gift only granted to the faithful.

Evidence suggests something very different. It’s clear now that the habits of doing right and doing well, of caring for others and for oneself, is most available for those nurtured within families with habits of equitable conflict resolution as well as comfortable social and financial positions. Those from unstable, insecure homes, those on the cultural margins, need to find a way to compensate, to deliberately cultivate a set of skills in order to achieve what might be possible.

Jordan Peterson is one researcher who has evened out the odds for his students by deliberately teaching a set of skills. His students blend two strategies. They reflect on and name their learning style and how they cope with stressful situations. They describe what motivates them, identify family and community patterns for setting goals and overcoming obstacles. They consider their personal strengths and weaknesses before drawing up specific, step-by-step plans for setting goals and moving ahead. They recognize stereotypes in their families and culture that permit or even encourage failure. They learn to set their own high expectations.

This lesson applies as well to any and all outgroups, in situations that require constructive change. Those with built-in privileges can most easily retain these by insisting that outsiders are not worthy or capable of improving their lot. (Their privileges are proof of their good judgment and a sign of their deity’s approval.)

Those preparing themselves to be considered as equals or leaders must be armed with confidence and a well-made plan. Opportunity comes to those who have prepared. It’s not easy and it isn’t free. It’s a deliberate act of will.

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Secular Idaho News is published monthly by HOI. Individual yearly membership (\$25) and family memberships (\$45) include SI News, paper or e copies. Contact Paul Rolig roligpd@spro.net Newsletter subscriptions \$15/year by post. humanistsofIdaho.org PO Box 44913 Boise ID 83711-0913. No charge for electronic copies; contact roligpd@spro.net

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Refuting God – a January online course with Dr. Richard Carrier

Those who recall hearing Dr. Carrier at our May Day of Reason now have an opportunity to register for Dr. Carrier's popular class on taking apart arguments for God in the public arena. In an upcoming Webinar, *Counter-Apologetics: The Best Ways to Refute Arguments for God, with Dr. Richard Carrier* – this historian and philosopher will include some discussion of arguments unique to Islamic apologetics as well as Christian apologetics. He has a decade of experience in formal and informal debate, cross-media counter-apologetics, and the history and philosophy of religion and naturalism. You can ask all the questions you’ve ever wanted about this subject, and get answers from an experienced pro.

Classes, text-based forums at SecularActivism.Org, are accessible online 24/7. Dr. Carrier responds individually to all questions and loves extended conversations. Cost, \$59, is far less than that for a university class. The sponsor for this and other opportunities is Partners for Secular Activism, a 501c3 nonprofit educational organization founded in 2014 by John Shook, PhD. Dr. Shook worked with Paul Kurtz to develop online education for a growing secular community.



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“Harness the Sun” By Philip Warburg

Today’s existential issues require frequent renewal of information. Technology and engineering rapidly transition yesterday’s scientific hypotheses, theories and experiments into fully implemented technology today. Philip Warburg’s “Harness the Sun”, published in 2015, is an update on domestic progress in the implementation of solar power, and a survey of our country’s participation in the global replacement of non-sustainable energy sources with solar. The recent Paris conference on climate change may help sustain the author’s optimistic outlook for solar power.

Warburg begins by describing the implementation of solar power installations on homes across America, and the example is his own house in Massachusetts. He considers solar installations on homes, commercial and industrial sites, public buildings and as generation inputs for electric utilities. He adds descriptions of the applicable technology, law and economics. Bottom line: the US is proving the value and economics of solar power.

This situation is not without impediments for continued rapid solar growth. One key issue, Warburg notes but does not emphasize, is economics. Solar currently requires very high rates for electricity from conventional sources and government rebates to ensure economic advantages. Rules require utility companies to purchase excess solar generated power from the owners of solar installations. Solar additions to the mix of generation sources also depend upon pressure from governments and utility commissions for higher fractions of renewable energy in the mix from all sources. However, the promises from participating nations at the recent Paris conference on climate change may enhance the economic environment for furthering solar power.

Obliging industry to bear all of the costs of products and activities could also affect change. Today, industries can

emit and pollute in many ways that are immune to consequences and costs.

Obliging industry to bear all of the costs of products and activities could also affect change. Today, industries can emit and pollute in many ways that are immune to consequences and costs.

The mineral extraction industries are rife with examples of health impacts and pollution with the costs flowing not to the industries but to the taxpayer and customer. If the coal, oil and gas industries were charged for all impacts from their extraction and production activities the cost for electricity would be significantly higher, thus enhancing the economics of solar power generation.

Warburg is critical of utility management for resistance to the adaptation of solar for power generation in both central generating facilities and at point of use. While this is very likely true in many cases, there are very reasonable explanations for such resistance. Utilities are prudent to favor stable producers of electricity such as coal, natural gas, nuclear energy and hydropower. Solar varies with the intensity of sunlight and is weather dependent and time-of-day dependent. The author does mention a couple of ways in which excess energy may be stored as heat.

Another problem is the incorporation of point-of-use power generation into the existing utility grid systems. Existing electricity generating and distribution systems have always been built for central generating stations and distributed customers. Changing to systems that accommodate large fractions of the generation to occur at points of use is expensive and arguably not the responsibility of the utilities and their stockholders. For such a heavily regulated industry in many aspects of operation and economics, teamwork and cooperation between industry, regulators and the public is necessary to facilitate the incorporation of solar energy into the utility business.

Warburg does a credible if optimistic job of surveying domestic solar energy. And the scene is changing rapidly. A bit of skepticism may prevent disappointment in those readers who expect too much too soon.

Wally Keltner

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Boise State**SECULAR
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advisor Robin W Allen

BSU SSA is a home for secular students., encouraging critical thought, open, rational, scientific examinations of the universe and our place in it. We believe ethics and morality can be based on humanistic and rational values. We present a positive view of various -isms and non-religious worldviews through debates, workshops, speakers, movies, book club, discussion, and social gatherings.

Fall 2015 officers

Lindee Neumeier - President, Colin Fenello - Treasurer

Kendra Sanford - Secretary

Danger: Idaho Legislature ConvenesBy **Paul Rolig, TVCoR Public Relations Director**

It's January, so the Idaho Legislature begins its work – much of the agenda being driven by religious right zealots. Rep. Brent Crane, from Nampa, has promised to take some kind of action against Planned Parenthood. After all, a religious right anti-abortion group talked a Planned Parenthood leader into a secretly-recorded discussion of how Planned Parenthood sometimes accepted reimbursement for costs involved in shipping fetal tissue samples from abortions to medical research facilities. After enough editing, the makers of the video claimed to have evidence that PP was “profiting” by “selling baby parts”. The truth was no such thing, but the religious right, forgetting that they are supposed to obey the Commandment against bearing false witness, made a lot of noise about it.

No fewer than nine states have now investigated, and guess what? Not a single one has found any evidence that PP ever profited by “selling baby parts”. Nevertheless, Republican Presidential contender Carly Fiorina made a teary-eyed, outraged rant against PP, and Republicans in Congress tried to cut off federal funds for PP, even though all of those funds go to programs not related to abortion. Fortunately, the funds were not cut from the recently passed and signed federal budget bill. Idaho does not provide basic funding for PP, but does reimburse some non-abortion medical services provided by PP to some Medicaid patients. Rep. Crane has not provided details, but he got a lot of press a couple months ago. See these links:

KTVB: <http://www.ktvb.com/story/news/politics/2015/10/30/idaho-lawmakers-vs-planned-parenthood/74833658/>KBOI: <http://www.kboi.com/2015/10/06/representative-brent-crane-speaks-out-on-planned-parenthood-and-possible-idaho-bills/>
Spokesman-Review: <http://www.spokesman.com/blogs/boise/2015/oct/05/lawmakers-want-target-planned-parenthood-hw-says-few-ties-state/>

On other fronts, we can expect legislation that: A) purports to promote “religious freedom” by giving religious people special rights not to have to obey non-discrimination or other laws that secular people still have to obey; B) restricts immigrants and refugees from coming to Idaho (even though only the federal government can regulate this); C) restricts the religious freedom of Muslims (and perhaps other non-Christians); D) purports to make us all safer by allowing still more people to carry still more guns to still more places.

Another attempt will be made to introduce “Add the Words” legislation, to add “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to the Idaho Civil Rights Act; it remains to be seen if it will get anywhere at all this year. Last year long and passionate hearings were held, and then the House State Affairs Committee voted it down on straight party lines. Many other issues of interest to secular, humanistic people will also be considered – watch your favorite news feed, and let your state legislators know where you stand. Their contact information is available online: Senate: <http://legislature.idaho.gov/senate/membership.cfm>

House: <http://legislature.idaho.gov/house/membership.cfm>

Primary elections will be held this spring – are you registered to vote? Find out your district at this website:

<http://www.idahovotes.gov/>



BUUF Humanists meet 3rd Sunday, 11:15:am, Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship library, next on Jan 17. Sages meet January 14 and 28, 9:30am, at Kopper Kitchen, near the Boise airport.

Sage New Year Tom von Alten

The BUUF Sages started in the 1980s, and have carried on 30-some years now, updating the cast of characters as needed. We have openings available! Newcomers are always welcomed to our friendly gatherings over a no-host breakfast. We meet on second and fourth Thursday mornings, at the Kopper Kitchen, 2661 Airport Way, 9:30 am.

To start our new year on January 14, we'll have a "potpourri" of sage advice for our younger selves: What would you tell yourself at 18, the verge of adulthood when maybe it seemed you knew it all? And we'll talk about what conversations we want to have in 2016. Contact Tom von Alten at 208 378-1217 or tva@fortboise.org for more information, or just come and see what we're up to; no reservation needed.

The Best of Guests : Humanists at BUUF JRoss

: We planned a magical feast for our monthly gathering. Emphasis here was not just on our potluck feast; each of us was urged to bring a guest, a 'virtual' guest, someone we have long admired, or wished we'd known. John brought Ben Franklin, a standard, in John's mind, as a way to measure achievement today. He looked at systems, the personal and the national, knowing that how we direct ourselves will determine outcomes. He contributed to the founding of our country (and many others) with a written constitution that was then a novelty. He was a premier diplomat and scientist. John: "I imagine taking my cell phone out of my pocket to show him; within a day he would be using it." Paul R adds, "He would start a blog." Robert knew Ben's pen name, "Silence Dogood." He bought a pew in every church" Robert added, and took air baths. Robert knows such details for a special reason; he is an 11th generation descendant.

Dan brought Thomas Jefferson, who serves a similar role. Jefferson guided the new union while remaining a man of his time, dependent on the institution of slavery. We paused to talk about the Jeffersonian Bible, a paste-up that removed magical intrusions. Jean appreciates our luck in creating a system of governance so new, although there is a warning about its dependence on its participants for sense of purpose—pirate ships were also democratic, with its sailors each holding a vote on who to rob next. Karen L brought Dorothea Lange, who had the physical burden of polio added to that of being an ethical and courageous photographer, who shifted from studio to

the suffering seen on city streets. She captured soup lines, sharecroppers and migrant workers.. Her most iconic photo was of a 32 year old woman surrounded by her hungry children; she had just sold the tires for her car to feed them. When FDR approved internment of Japanese, German and Italian citizens, Lange captured images so moving that the US military held many under an embargo for fifty years. Karen showed one, a posted sign, "Japs Keep Moving." Lange documented Manzanar, where Japanese internees were once held. Twenty-two of her photos serve as illustration for John Steinbeck's book, "The Harvest Gypsies." Aria told us that she lived in Nipoma, California, where the migrant woman was memorialized. This place was considered for years to be 'outlaw,' beyond the pale, although this has changed with a golf course, housing developments and Wildlife Nature Conservancy acreage.

Aria's guest was another pioneering woman artist, Mary Cassatt, who painted while males dominated the art field. She lived in and worked mostly in Paris. An outspoken feminist in private, she painted women and children of her social class, remaining single and finding ways to exhibit and improve her skill despite the rules of that time (she could not enter the cafes where male artists met). She promoted access to the European Impressionist movement and arranged for her own work to be available in the US, where women artists had few opportunities for art education or sales. Cassatt's prints, pastels and oils are now staples in museum collections and textbooks.

Lyndon brought Mark Twain's Letters from Earth, with their humanism, agnostic point and wit. His estate did not allow this book to be published until 1962. Andy brought our attention to Hidetsugu Wagi, inventor of rooftop antennae and methods for receiving radio waves. Paul T introduced us to Olaf Stapleton, futurist, philosopher and author of science fiction.

Jean would have liked to have a conversation with an ancestor or two, to understand their actions. Her heroine is Rachel Carson. Pat thought of her mother's father, an immigrant from Poland who was told to Americanize his name, and did so. She thinks of the courage needed to make such a move; here, he worked in coal mines in Pennsylvania. Dan F remembers listening to a popular radio newsman, a political conservative who based what he reported on facts. Woody has known more than one cult leader and is generous regarding their flaws. They do get us out of our limited worlds, he reminded us: "Two things make a prison, a feather bed and change."

For January 17, we will share advice we might give our eighteen year old selves, if only that were possible.

January 2016

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Passing thoughts on money and time Jeanette Ross

Until I turned forty, travel for me meant reading. My own community and my interior geography were equally little explored. When I was twenty, lack of funds and opportunity sent me by bus or hitch hiking to the nearest library, which in Lewiston included Great Books of the Western World. I checked out one each month, summarizing what I could absorb on a portable typewriter. College classes and visiting speakers added to my book lists and not much else. Still, I didn't question who made the decisions that created my community.

That was a world ago. Now I blend reading with travels inward and outward. I'll share a few favorites.

Learned under pressure: my milieu. From the founding fathers and English history I gained appreciation for the good luck of deists and skeptics producing documents that protect us from our biases.

From Max Weber I learned that bureaucracies aren't the worst kind of government, which ought to be obvious to those looking around. And those who feared democracy had good reason—we are susceptible to mass madness and prejudice, self interest.

In books like America's Bank by Roger Lowenstein I see that our messy heterogeneity can, even in crises, produce useful change. We forget if we ever knew about the many financial extremes we experienced until in 1913 we created a central banking system, the Federal Reserve.

Bank collapse and recessions do permanent damage. The effort needed to save us from those disasters will be quickly forgotten by most of us.. I appreciate the opportunity, in a free country, to associate with like-minded persons. Our Coalition of Reason is a big advance over the isolation so common for non-theists just decades ago. I am now a keeper of calendars, with all decks cleared the months of January through March, for Idaho Follies, our state legislature.

Our new TVCoR structure includes among its dedicated volunteers one person committed to representing us in the public arena. I am most grateful for the dedication of all our organization officers, and right now I appreciate Paul Rolig's attention to issues threatening secular values that will surely be raised by state lawmakers.

Who speaks of the advantages that come with new immigrants? The fresh perspectives, their talents, a better way to understand ourselves?

Fifteen years ago I had a grant that allowed me to interview residents of Boise who lived here through the 1950's. There were many opportunities for me to reflect on how this place has changed since then.

The 'red light district,' River street and south, was also the only place where African Americans, Greeks and Asians were allowed to buy— or rent. Three Chinese brothers rented land in Garden City, thus the name, and hired teenagers who lived south of River street. Elsewhere in town the social rules made life comfortable on the surface, with many unheard sorrows. Now we talk, disagree, and start a new organization or band or newspaper as needed.

ESSAY CONTEST sponsored by Americans United for Separation of Church and State has a timely theme: **“Tell us what separation of church and state means to you.”** In 1802, Thomas Jefferson coined the phrase “wall of separation between church and state” referring to the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment of the Constitution, forbidding establishment of an official religion, prohibiting government actions that unduly favor one religion over another, and prohibiting the government from unduly preferring religion over non-religion or non-religion over religion. Write an essay that explains why the separation of church and state is integral to preserving religious freedom in America’s pluralistic society. Include at least one primary source to support your thesis. You may also reference current events, U.S. history, and personal experiences. Length is 750 to 1000 words. Include in-text citations and a bibliography. Format: double-spaced in Times New Roman. Include a cover page with full name, email address, postal address, grade level, school name and address, name of a faculty advisor who can verify authenticity of the essay. The contest is open to all US high-school seniors and college level undergraduates. **Deadline is March 1, 2016.**

Humanists of Idaho
P.O. Box 44913
Boise, ID 83711-0913

ESSAY Contest judging criteria: Standard English usage; adherence to guidelines; carefully proofread; articulate, creative, focused response that grapples with the topic; well researched; convincing arguments with specific examples for support.

First Place essay wins \$500, second Place \$250, third Place \$100. All entrants will receive a free year-long Americans United student membership. Mail entries to Americans United for Separation of Church and State, 1901 L street NW, Suite 400, Washington, D.C. Past winners, finalists, employees and board members of AU and members of their families are not eligible.

To submit, email essay to campus@au.org with subject line of submitter’s last name, and “entry contest submission” by midnight of contest deadline—or post completed essay to Americans United for Separation of Church and State, attention essay contest submission, 1901 L street NW Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20036