



Americans United for Separation of Church and State

3337 S. Bristol, #251, Santa Ana, CA 92704

On the web at www.au-oc.org Email us at orangecountyau@yahoo.com

Program Announcement—May 19, 2007

Dr. Michael Newdow—Challenges “Under God”

Special Location: Irvine United Congregational Church

4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine

May/June 2007

Volume 3, Issue 4

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May 19th at 2:00 p.m. at the Irvine United Congregational Church, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine.

Dr. Newdow will discuss both the Pledge of Allegiance litigation and the lawsuit surrounding “In God We Trust” on our currency.

After the House of Representatives passed the Pledge Protection Act, Dr. Newdow was interviewed and said “A few hours ago, the House of Representatives of the United States of America voted 260 to 167 to completely gut the Constitu-

tion of its separation of powers and violate numerous other clauses because they thought it was important enough to keep 'under God' in the Pledge of Allegiance. I don't think people would've done that for our political heritage or anything else. They did it because they want God in their government because it stands for a religious view that they adhere to, and they want to see that religious view espoused by government, which is exactly what the establishment clause forbids”.

Come hear Dr. Newdow for yourself.

The Orange County Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State is proud to present Dr. Michael Newdow.

He will provide the inside view on the reasons behind the “Under God” challenges, their legal significance and their importance to church-state separation. The event will be on

Thank You to Our Sponsors and IUCC!!

Americans United—Orange County is very grateful to all of those who helped to sponsor this appearance by Dr Newdow. We especially want to acknowledge the Irvine United Congregational Church who agreed to host this event at their church and most particularly Pastor Paul Tellström who is a staunch supporter of the separation of church and state. And of course our sincere thanks to the sponsors whose donations have made this appearance possible; for a current list of sponsors, please see the next column.

Message from the President—Steph Campbell

Do you remember opposing John Roberts and Samuel Alito? We were all pretty sure that this was not going to be a good direction for the country. On April 18th those fears became a reality. That's when the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 to uphold a law banning an abortion procedure that is rarely used. Not only does this ban the procedure but it also criminalizes doctors who perform it, regardless of whether they do it to save a woman's life or to preserve her health.

Why did they vote this way? The majority on the Supreme Court bypassed what should be a serious legal evaluation and consideration of the constitution to an opinion based on their religious ideology. A religious right ideology that

shows how little they consider that a woman should have the right to make her own health decisions. Her consultation with her doctor is on a slippery slope towards becoming a meaningless dialog while religious right ideologues are interpreting the Constitution.

In case you think that this is “over the top paranoia”, consider that Justice Kennedy's reasoning was that banning the procedure was good for women. Good because the such a ban would protect women from a procedure they might not fully understand in advance and would probably come to regret. I can almost feel him patting me on the head!

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's dissenting opinion said “This way of

thinking, that women are flighty creatures who must be protected by men, reflects notions of a woman's place in the family and under the Constitution that have long been discredited.”

We at Americans United have long been advocating that all of our members sign up to the “First Freedom First” petition to support the separation of church and state—(www.freedomfirst.org). We believe that decisions about reproductive health are decisions made by the individual and resolved by a woman and her physician. Individuals may look to their own faith and values but that's how the choices should be made—not by the religious right posturing in black robes in Washington.

—Steph Campbell

Separating God From City Hall—Rich Gillock

One of the most prevalent violations of the separation of church and state is the invocation used to begin city council or school board meetings. The purpose of an invocation derives from a primitive custom of “invoking” the benign will of a deity to bless an undertaking. It's called prayer folks, and no matter how you dress it up as “non-sectarian,” the fact remains that an invocation is a religious based custom that has no place in a secular government supposedly open to people of all, or no faith.

The courts have found that an invocation before the start of a legislative session (like a city council) is permissible as long as the prayer is non-sectarian, i.e. does not refer to a particular deity such as Jesus Christ. When it does, it is considered a sectarian prayer and is not permitted under the Constitution (see *Rubin v. Burbank*).

The council is responsible for controlling the content of the invocation to assure that it does not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Many city councils fail to do this. In the face of blatant or

repeated transgressions, public pressure must first be brought to let the council know that people are watching, and if necessary, initiate legal action.

In February, the Villa Park City Council voted 3-2 to scrap invocations altogether. This is the sensible course for modern government. It is time that we pressure the 2/3 of Orange County City Councils and the Board of Supervisors to either tighten up compliance with the law or abandon this quaint custom of invocations.

The Orange County Atheists have begun the “Invocation Project” to challenge invocations throughout Orange County [1]. Americans United in Orange County has also begun a more general monitoring program for City Councils and School Boards [2].

Get involved with your local government. It's where you live.

[1] <http://www.ocatheists.com/invocations/>

[2] <http://www.au-oc.org/activism.htm>

Every Wednesday morning at the Pentagon, top ranking officers join together for a prayer breakfast. They are members of the Christian Embassy that claims to be a non-partisan, non-denominational organization [1]. Of course when you call yourselves the Christian Embassy it tends to limit participation by many faiths.

Members of the Christian Embassy are aggressively evangelical, and in a promotional video, seven officers bragged about using their official positions to proselytize their faith. In the video, Air Force Maj. Gen. Jack J. Catton Jr. says, "I found a wonderful opportunity as a director on the joint staff, as I meet the people that come into my directorate... I share my faith because it describes who I am [2]."

Under Secretary of Veterans' Affairs, Dan Cooper, adds that his weekly prayer sessions are "more important than doing the job." This may be why the VA is giving most patients spiritual assessments that ask questions about faith, such as how often they attend church and how important religion is in their lives in order to receive care they have earned [3]. Could the scandal at Walter Reed Army Hospital have been averted if the leadership thought "the job" was more important than proselytizing?

A formal complaint has been lodged with the Inspector General because members of the military are not supposed to appear in uniform to endorse either secular or sectarian causes. In the video these officers were not only in uniform but their rank and position in the Pentagon was used without any dis-

claimer that this was not an official endorsement by the Pentagon. With this evangelical cluster within the Pentagon it makes other events appear to be part of a reshaping of our military into "Christian soldiers."

In 2005 a major investigation at the Air Force Academy was launched because of over 50 complaints of religious harassment and prejudice against those who were not evangelical Christians [4]. Charges included anti-Semitic slurs, preaching in class, official pressure to attend evangelical Christian events, misuse of government e-mail for proselytizing, and religious discrimination.

One staff chaplain told newly arrived freshmen that anyone not born again "will burn in the fires of hell." Capt. MeLinda Morton, a Lutheran minister at the Academy was removed from her administrative position when she complained about evangelical pressure being forced upon students [5].

Former acting Secretary of the Air Force, Peter Geren oversaw the Air Force investigation of the Academy. He also showed up in the Christian Embassy video saying the organization "helped me in my walk with Christ." More than 50% of the military chaplain corps is staffed by evangelical Christian ministers. This seems to be one more reason that evangelicals don't necessarily have to play by the rules.

In 2003, General James Boykin, the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, was regularly appearing at evangelical revivals, in uniform, and preaching that President Bush was "appointed by God," and that the US was in a holy war

as a "Christian nation" battling "Satan." He said about his failed mission against Islamic warlords in Somalia, "My God is bigger than his God. I knew my God was a real God, and his was an idol." While his activities came under investigation, his conduct was never punished.

But not all public endorsements in uniform go unpunished. Last year, Navy chaplain Gordon J. Klingenschmitt was court-martialed for appearing in uniform at a political protest in front of the White House, though he maintained that all he did was lead a prayer. Apparently Christian soldiers are allowed to spew rants of hate against Islam, but not to pray for peace.

With a Commander in Chief who claims that God talks to him and tells him to start wars [6], it is no wonder that the evangelical fringe in the military is having a field day. Unfortunately religious discrimination and intimidation do not help unit cohesion. Putting a Christian Crusader face on our military will not help us to win hearts and minds in the Middle East either.

[1] <http://christianembassy.com>

[2] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/10/AR2006121000883.html>

[3] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/09/AR2007010901546.html>

[4] <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/05/03/airforce.religion/>

[5] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/12/AR2005051201740.html>

[6] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/usa/story/0,12271,1586978,00.html>

We're on the web
at www.au-oc.org

Americans United-OC Chapter
3337 S. Bristol, #251
Santa Ana, CA 92704



Every Month

AU-OC Steering Committee
Usually meets following the monthly meetings. All members are encouraged to participate. Call 714-299-4551 for details.

June

Note that we will be dark in June.

July

21 – **Dr. Roy Koons**, retired oncology professor will speak on End of Life Issues (Irvine Ranch Water District, Multi-Purpose Room at 2 pm)

29– AU will conduct a joint meeting with the Humanist Association of Orange County featuring Margaret Downey, President of Atheist Alliance International (Costa Mesa Neighborhood Center, 1845 Park Avenue)

Keep Up To Date with Americans United-Orange County

Along with our newsletter, we keep people informed with what's going on in the fight to preserve separation of church and state as well as our events through the web site at www.au-oc.org and also through our Yahoo! Group. If you're not on the Yahoo! Group, send an email to us at: au-oc-subscribe@yahoogleroups.com. We meet at the Irvine Ranch Water District, 15600 Sand Canyon Ave., Irvine on the 3rd Saturday at 2:00 pm.

Irvine Ranch Water District neither supports nor endorses the cause nor activities of organizations which use the District's meeting rooms that are made available as a public service.

Join or Renew Today!

Basic membership is \$25 and includes an annual subscription to Church & State magazine. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and donations beyond the \$18.00 value of the subscription to Church & State magazine are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Email any questions to orangecountyau@yahoo.com; to join or renew, complete this form and mail to the chapter at: 3337 S. Bristol, #251, Santa Ana, California 92704

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