

September–December
2023

Volume 33
Number 5

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Witness Underground November Public Meeting

Witness Underground is a documentary film about how some young people made a creative outlet for themselves despite growing up in the oppressive, insular cult of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The film went on the festival circuit last year and won a couple awards. The film’s producers are trying to finish it up now and plan to get it on some streaming services like Apple, Amazon Prime, and TUBI. To raise money for this, they have launched a Kickstarter campaign at:
<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/witnessunderground/witness-underground-cult-documentary-release>



This includes a three-minute video summary. The site also includes a lot of information about the film and its participants, as well as merchandise and perks you can get in exchange for making a donation.

At our November Public Meeting we will feature excerpts from the film, an appearance by Zoom of its director, Scott Homan, and an in-person appearance by one of the film’s interviewees, James Zimmerman. James is a local member of Minnesota Atheists, a former editor of our newsletter, and the author of *Deliverance At Hand! The Redemption of a Devout Jehovah’s Witness*.

Sunday, November 19, 2023

1:00–1:15 PM: Social
1:15–1:45 PM: Business Meeting
1:45–2:00 PM: Break, Presenter
Set-Up, Social Time
2:00–3:30 PM: Program
3:30–4:00 PM: Social Time
4:00 PM: Leave for dinner

Dinner:
Los Ocampo
615 University Avenue West
St. Paul, MN 55103

Rondo Community Library
461 Dale St N
St Paul, MN 55104
(There is free underground parking off of University Ave.)

Online:
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82344512218?pwd=VWNDclk2b-VUxeWJDnAzU3BhQnNRdz09>

Or call in:
+13092053325,,82344512218#,,,*676832#

Progressives Vote in Force!

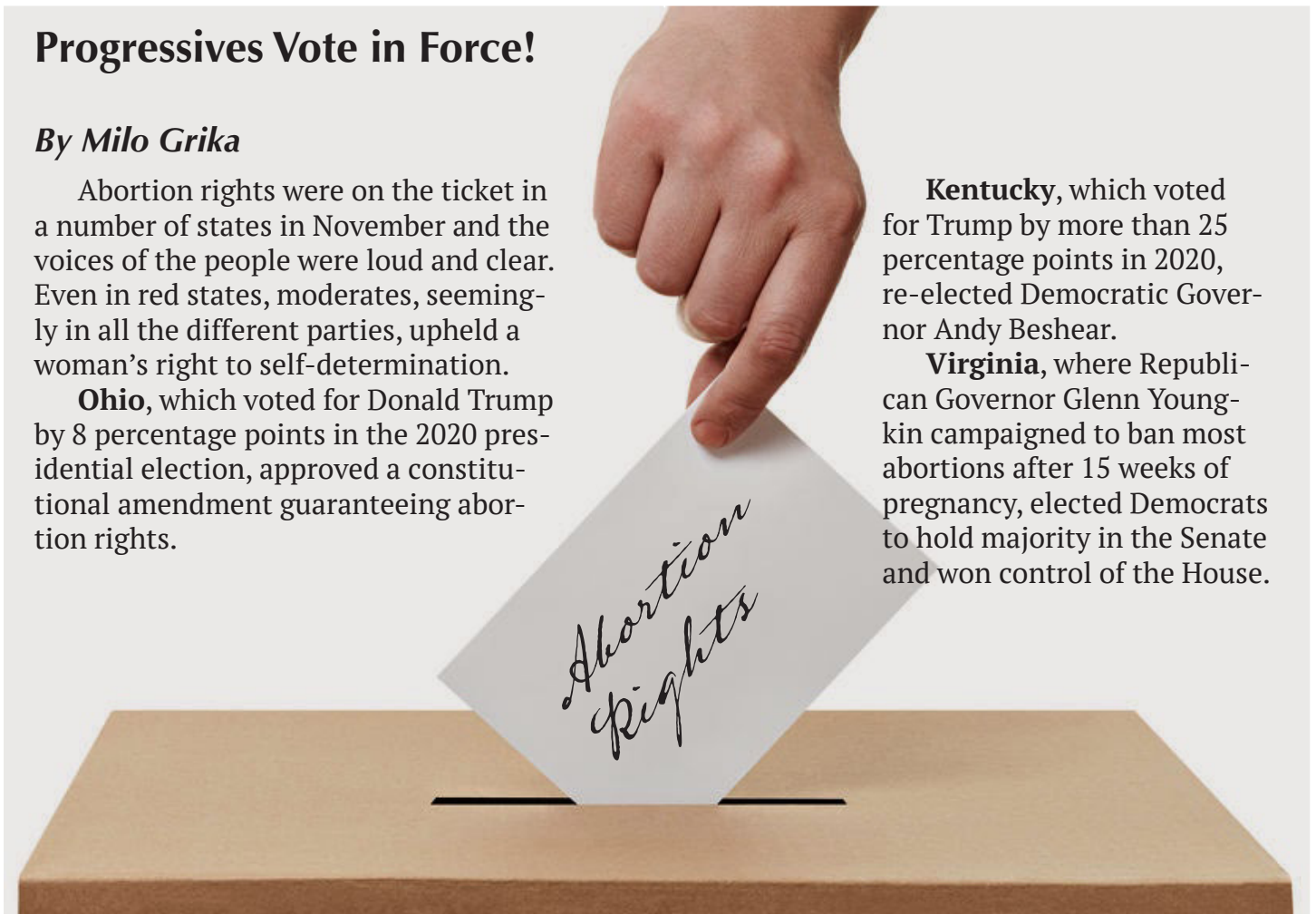
By Milo Grika

Abortion rights were on the ticket in a number of states in November and the voices of the people were loud and clear. Even in red states, moderates, seemingly in all the different parties, upheld a woman's right to self-determination.

Ohio, which voted for Donald Trump by 8 percentage points in the 2020 presidential election, approved a constitutional amendment guaranteeing abortion rights.

Kentucky, which voted for Trump by more than 25 percentage points in 2020, re-elected Democratic Governor Andy Beshear.

Virginia, where Republican Governor Glenn Youngkin campaigned to ban most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, elected Democrats to hold majority in the Senate and won control of the House.



Cryptogram

By George Francis Kane

C ycri bacxkl gl bare ghr, icbapnb hrkghm bp
swgdr ph srhlpx; fe dpxnbhe cl bar iphwm, gxm fe
hrwckcpx cl bp mp kppm.

Bapfgl Sgcxr, Bar Hckabl pq Fgx, Sghb 2



News and Notes

American Birthright curriculum standards

By *George Francis Kane*

Public schools are a perennial battleground for promoting religion with the endorsement of government. There is always opposition to the teaching of evolution, but for a couple of decades the conflict has been most apparent over the teaching of US history, as Christian nationalists try to exaggerate and glorify the role of Christianity.

At the time that I am writing this the biggest headlines of attempts at a Christian takeover of public education are coming out of Florida. That state implemented its “Civic Literacy Excellence Initiative,” developed with the help of the Bill of Rights Institute, a pervasively Christian advocacy organization founded and funded by Charles Koch. Florida is also the first state to approve PragerU, an unaccredited, conservative advocacy group, as an official vendor. This allows teachers to incorporate its educational/entertainment videos, which downplay systemic racism and promote the idea that the founding of America was based on biblical teachings, as supplemental materials in their classrooms.

Other states are experiencing a legislative push to implement the “American Birthright” curriculum standards. These were developed by the Civics Alliance, another conservative advocacy organization, to focus civics education on Western civilization, American exceptionalism, patriotism and Christianity.

The Civics Alliance educational standards direct that there should be an “emphasis on the

equal dignity of all individual humans in the eyes of God.” They even view themselves as a modern incarnation of a biblical mission: “American Birthright is a myriad of slings for the army of Davids who face the Goliath of the education establishment.” The National Council for the Social Studies, the largest professional social studies organization, observed that “we view these suggested standards as an attempt to return to a time when United States social studies classrooms presented a single narrative of U.S. and Western history that glorified selected aspects of history while minimizing the experiences, contributions, and perspectives of Indigenous peoples, people of color, women, the LGBTQIA+ community, the working class, and countless others.”

These emphases are intentional: Civics Alliance’s objective is conservative indoctrination. The introduction to their American Birthright standards states that, “We also teach our children social studies so they can learn why their country deserves to be loved, and to learn what we owe to our ancestors—the heroes of the American past

We ... teach our children social studies so they can learn why their country deserves to be loved ...

who deserve our gratitude because they created a free and prosperous country and bequeathed it to us, their posterity.

We teach our children

social studies so they can learn to understand the enduring character of the American nation and to love the customs that should define and unite us as a people.... They should also learn America’s common language of liberty, patriotism, and national memory.”

Clearly, their objective is to churn out little patriots, rather than citizens who understand and resolve the issues that America actually faces. They hope to reverse the influence of modern professional educators, as explained in the Preface to their curriculum standards: Some

educators are so caught up in pedagogical “theory” that they have forgotten that facts come first. Some activists in our schools, public and private alike, are so antagonistic toward



Seeking Membership Committee Volunteers

By Chris Matthews

Minnesota Atheists is searching for volunteers for our Membership Committee. The Membership Committee reports to the Board and makes recommendations intended to attract new members and retain existing members.

The recommendations may include one-time or recurring events, outreach activities, website or social media content, or anything else you can imagine. We're seeking folks who want to help add to the voice and impact of Minnesota Atheists as we continue to promote positive atheism in action.

If you are interested in joining the Membership Committee or if you just have questions, please reach out to any board member or to the entire board via an email to board@mnatheists.org. We thank you and look forward to hearing from you!

Education continued from page 3
our culture, without recognizing what they owe to it, that they seek to erase our worthy history of liberty from the curriculum. Instead of an informed and intelligent patriotism, they foster a cynical spirit devoid of appreciation for the richness and complexity of the American past.

The Civics Alliance has affiliate organizations in nine states, and it seems to have made a mark more in state legislatures than Congress. A post on their web site, "10 State Policies to Restore Excellent K-12 Public Education in America," lays out their battle-plan for a state-by-state takeover of public education.

Samuel Johnson said in 1775 that "patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel," and so it is with Civics Alliance's American Birthright curriculum standards. They belabor "liberty" as the spark of genius at the conception of the American nation, but deride every movement to expand it beyond the narrow segment of the population who originally enjoyed it.

Treasury Report

January-June 2023

By Chris Matthews

General/Visibility Fund Donations

\$500 Alice Lesney
\$400 George Kane
\$322 Cash donations, 5th Sunday
\$250 Ross Meisner
\$150 Steve Petersen
\$130 Ben Zvan
\$130 Michelle Tjernagel
\$100 Douglas Benson
\$20 Peter N Holste
\$20 Kingshuk Mandal
\$15 Tim & Joanne Dunnigan
\$5 Peter Neuman
\$159 AmazonSmile
\$6 PayPal Giving Fund

\$2,207 Subtotal

Building Fund Donations

\$0 Subtotal

Atheists Talk (Radio Fund) Donations

\$125 Ken Holmbeck
\$125 Subtotal

\$2,332 Total Donations

Expenses

\$2,660 Newsletters
\$2,029 Move Research Library
\$749 IT, General Exp
\$256 Parade, Booth, etc.
\$900 Misc

\$6,594 Total Expenses

Current Building Fund — \$150,537



How to Start a New Religion

by August Berkshire

1. Say you admire all the religions of the past (and steal whatever you find most useful from them). Find a passage in a previous holy book to “demonstrate” that the “divine plan” is not yet finished. Make up a few new things to add to the made up things of previous religions.
2. Say you admire all the prophets of the past, but you are here as the final prophet to complete the message/revelation.
3. Invent a bothersome ritual and/or an unusual article of clothing so your followers can feel special.
4. Ask for donations, because spreading the “truth” doesn’t come cheap.



Upcoming Monthly Events

Hybrid Freethought Toastmasters Meeting 1st and 3rd Monday of every month from 6:30–8 PM
Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1280 Larpenteur Ave W, St Paul.
freethought.toastmastersclubs.org.

Hybrid Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting 1st Wednesday of each month at 6:30 PM. Email chair@mnatheists.org for the meeting link.

Freethinking Females

Online 2nd Monday of every month at 7 PM

In Person Last Monday of every month at 5:30 PM, Sweeney's Saloon, 96 North Dale Street, St. Paul.
Shattering the myth that atheist groups are male dominated with a females-only event.

Online Blasphemer's Brunch 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:30 AM

Bowling for Deities Last Saturday of every month at noon,
(usually) at Flaherty's Arden Bowl, 1273 West County Road E, Arden Hills

In-person Trivia Night Every Sunday from 5:30–8 PM

Venn Brewing, 3550 E 46th St
Suite 140, Minneapolis

Online M.A.S.H! (MN Atheists Social Hour!) Every Tuesday (**note the day change**) from 5:30–6:30 PM
RSVP in Meetup and a Zoom link appears in the announcement.

Online In Depth — Discussion and Debate Every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month from 3–4 PM

For more events and instructions for connecting to online events, visit:

www.meetup.com/MinnesotaAtheists 



The “Nones” That You Know Winston Churchill

By *Milo Grika*

Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, (30 November 1874 – 24 January 1965) was a British statesman who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1940 to 1945, during the Second World War, and again from 1951 to 1955.

“I can assure you I do not flinch—though I do not accept the Christian or any other form of religious belief”

— Winston Churchill

Cryptogram Answer

I view things as they are, without regard to place or person; my country is the world, and my religion is to do good.

Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, Part 2

Get Famous (Sort of)

You too can become published by simply submitting something to The Minnesota Atheist newsletter:

Have a blog?

Let us reprint it.

Just send your input to editor@mnatheists.org and we'll do the rest.

Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations

Membership Levels

- ☐ One-year student membership \$10
- ☐ One-year individual membership \$35
- ☐ Three-year individual membership \$90
- ☐ One-year household membership \$45
- ☐ Three-year household membership \$115
- ☐ One-year sustaining membership \$75
- ☐ Three-year sustaining membership \$200
- ☐ Life membership \$600

Donation Funds

General Fund \$ _____

Building Fund \$ _____

Atheists Talk Fund \$ _____

I would like my donation(s) to be

- ☐ private
- ☐ public
- ☐ attributed by my name only

for reporting in the Minnesota Atheists newsletter and on the website. (By default, each donation will be considered private.)

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State ZIP _____

☐ Just email newsletter Email address _____
(Required for student memberships and email subscriptions)

Donations are tax deductible. Membership fees are deductible for the amount beyond their fair market value.

Student memberships include a subscription to the PDF version of *The Minnesota Atheist* delivered by email. All other memberships include a subscription to the printed version delivered by postal mail. If you would prefer the PDF version delivered by email, please check the box and provide your email address.

Please make checks payable to:

Minnesota Atheists.

Students, please enclose a copy of your fee statement or school identification.

Minnesota Atheists
PO Box 120304
New Brighton, MN 55112

8 The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Positive Atheism in action since 1991

Minnesota Atheists is dedicated to building a positive atheist community that actively promotes secular values through educational programs, social activities, and participation in public affairs.

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of America

Atheist Alliance

International

American Atheists

The American

Humanist Association

Council for Secular

Humanism

The International

Humanist and

Ethical Union

Secular Coalition

for America

NOTE: The numbers for “Regular memberships” and “Life members” are now based on financial data. These membership numbers undercount actual members, since one household membership could represent more than one member. Future numbers reported in the newsletter will continue to be based on financial data.

Minnesota Atheists Membership

(as of Dec. 31, 2022)

Regular memberships:

53

Life members:

55

Meetup members:

3,936

Minnesota Atheists Goals

Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly, neighborhood atheism in order to provide a community for atheists, educate the public about atheism, and promote separation of state and church.



The Minnesota Atheist — September–December 2023

Published by Minnesota Atheists

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