

AUGUST 2019



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NEWSLETTER OF THE LAKE SUPERIOR FREETHINKERS

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Mining, Economics, and Critical Thinking

Guest Speaker—Bob Tammen

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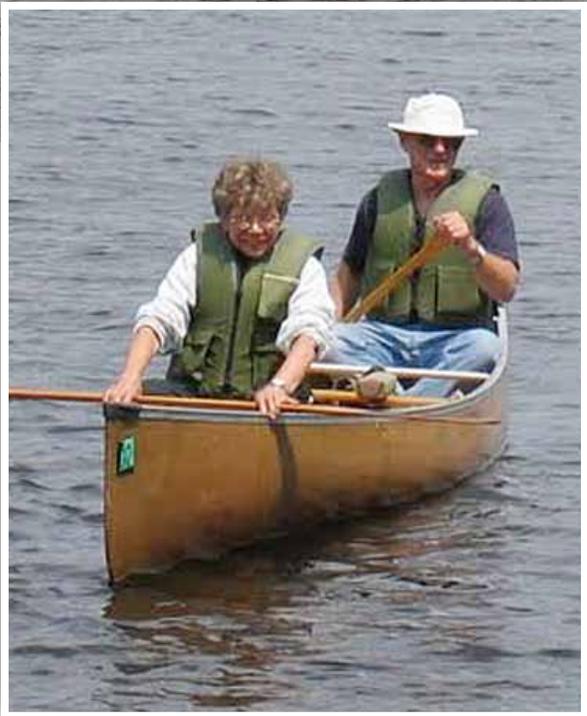
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Mining, Economics, and Critical Thinking

August Guest Speaker—Bob Tammen



As a master electrician Bob has worked in mining operations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming. When he returns to communities where he worked he finds more poverty than prosperity. While some individuals and groups might reap economic benefits from mining it is rare to see communities achieve real long term economic benefits from mining promotion. Mining promotion is a faith based activity.

Bob worked in the mines as well as in nuclear, coal, and gas fired power plants. During the last 10 years he worked on wind powered electrical projects. Bob's service on the ground in Vietnam and in the mines in the United States has led him to be sceptical about the activities of both governments and corporations. Recent revelations about Minnesota's mine permitting activities have given strong indications of corruption.

Bob's activities include testimony at veteran's and environmental committees at the Minnesota legislature. Whether its agent orange in Vietnam or Sulphates in Minnesota, government and industry have failed the public.

JOIN US SUNDAY AUGUST 4TH FOR BOB TAMMEN'S PRESENTATION

The Radisson Viking Room, 505 West Superior Street, Duluth MN

9 AM – COFFEE AND CONVERSATION

9:30 AM – BREAKFAST BUFFET AVAILABLE

10 AM – REFLECTION AND PRESENTATION



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Hawkins, Texas, removes Christian sign at FFRF's urging, finally

A Texas city has at long last removed a "Jesus Welcomes You to Hawkins" sign that the Freedom From Religion Foundation objected to years ago.

Back in 2015, the state/church watchdog twice wrote to the city of Hawkins about the blatantly Christian sign on city property after receiving local complaints.

"The Establishment Clause prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages," FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover noted. "The Supreme Court has been clear that the 'First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.'"

The city of Hawkins violated this neutrality with a prominent governmental sign that proclaimed "Jesus Welcomes You" and endorsed belief in the pre-eminent figure of Christianity, FFRF pointed out. It sent a clear message to those with Christian beliefs that they're favored community insiders and an equally clear message to those who believe differently that they're not.

Then Hawkins Mayor Will Rogers, the creative mind behind the sign, which he commissioned public school students to build, defended it with media statements such as "Jesus is not a religion, Jesus is in every religion across the globe. He's in Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism" and "If you don't believe that Jesus existed, then he would be fiction. If he's fiction, and you want to remove his name from everything, then you need to remove every fiction name that there is across the country. That means we couldn't say 'Superman welcomes you to town.'"

Fortunately, better sense prevailed in the rest of the city administration, and it heeded FFRF's

advice, albeit after many twists and turns.

The City Council voted to remove the sign after FFRF's second letter, but then events headed in a strange direction after the mayor got into a long tussle with the city. He sued eight city officials and a bunch of other residents for supposedly resisting his attempts to root out corruption. Rogers settled the lawsuit but narrowly lost his re-election bid, with the sign playing a major role in the campaign.

Meanwhile, a group of supporters of the sign claimed that it was on private property, while the city contended that it had an easement to build a road on the land and, therefore,



it was city-owned. The land turned out to be on the property of a funeral home that wanted nothing to do with the controversy, but then an entity called "Jesus Christ Open Altar Church, LLC" brought a lawsuit against the city after claiming to have bought the land from the funeral home. FFRF waited and watched while the lawsuit was underway. Finally, the city won that lawsuit on appeal and recently removed the sign.

FFRF is breathing a sigh of relief at this overdue victory for the U.S. Constitution — and for the rights of minority believers and nonbelievers in the community.

"We believe in justice for the good people of this country — even justice that is long delayed," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Finally, the city of Hawkins is in compliance with the law of the land — and has stopped sending a divisive and exclusionary message."

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, a national nonprofit founded in 1978, has over 31,000 nonreligious members and several chapters around the country, including more than 1,300 members and a chapter in Texas.



Taking the Pledge

By Anne Nicol Gaylor

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

That's the way it was written and the way school children recited it for more than 60 years.

And then came the McCarthy era, with its religious fervor, its fear of freethought and its equation of any nontheistic belief with communism. So, in 1954, the words "under God" were added.

Most students, whether elementary school children or public university students, do not know that the pledge they have repeated is different from the one their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents learned.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was first published in a national magazine, Youth's Companion, on September 8, 1892 in connection with the National Public Schools Celebration of Columbus Day in October of that year.

Simultaneously, it was printed in leaflet form and distributed throughout the country. During the celebration of 1892 more than 12 million public school students around

the country "took the Pledge."

The authorship of the pledge was disputed by the families and descendants of two members of the staff of the Youth's Companion. Francis Bellamy of Rome, New York and James Upham of Alden, Massachusetts were both staff members of the magazine at the time the Pledge originally was published. In 1939 the United States Flag Association decided to appoint a committee to determine the disputed question of authorship.

The committee was composed of two historians, Charles Tansill and Bernard Mayo, and a political scientist, W. Reed West. These three studied the evidence submitted by the two contending families and decided on May 18, 1939 that Francis Bellamy was the author, a finding accepted by the American Flag Committee.

Bellamy had served as chair of the committee which prepared the National Public Schools Celebration of Columbus Day in 1892 and was responsible for much of the publicity which attended it.

When it was first published, the Pledge of Allegiance contained the phrase

"my flag." Eventually this wording was criticized because some worried types thought that foreign-born children and adults, when giving the pledge, might have in mind swearing allegiance to the flag of their native countries. In order to eliminate this concern, the First National Flag Conference, held in Washington, D.C. on June 14, 1923, recommended and adopted a change in wording substituting for "my flag" the more specific "the Flag of the United States."

An unconstitutional change that has not been challenged was made by Congress in 1954. House Joint Resolution 243, approved by President Dwight Eisenhower (Public Law 396, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session) amended the language by adding the words "under God."

Anyone debating separation of state and church in this country, whether in public or private conversations, can expect to be told in no uncertain terms by religionists that we are not a secular nation and "if you don't believe it, tell me why we refer to God in the Pledge of Allegiance."

Do tell them!



Upcoming LSF Social Dinners with Sue Anderson

Aug 24th	Pier B Resort Hotel	800 W. Railroad St., Duluth MN 55802	(218) 481-8888
Sept 18th	Little Angie's Cantina	11 Buchanan St., Duluth MN 55802	(218) 727-6117
Oct 16th	Grandma's Saloon	522 South Lake Ave., Duluth MN 55802	(218) 727-4192
Nov 20th	Clyde Iron Works	2920 W. Michigan St., Duluth MN 55806	(218) 727-1150
Dec 18th	J.J. Astor (Radisson)	505 W. Superior St., Duluth MN 55802	(218) 727-8981

Is the State Department using 'God-given rights' to trample human rights?

The State Department is setting up a religiously inclined commission, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation is determined to figure out what it's all about.

The state/church watchdog is seeking records for Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's new "Commission on Unalienable Rights." FFRF is concerned that this group will redefine human rights through the conservative Christian nationalism that Pompeo promotes.

Although the news of the commission broke publicly just a few days ago, FFRF got wind of it last month, submitting its Freedom of Information Act request on June 5. It's seeking out records of the commission's charter describing the "size, composition, members, duration, and/or frequency of meetings of the commission," as well as its correspondence and meeting recordings.

"The distinctive mark of Western civilization is the belief in the inherent worth of human beings, with the attendant respect for God-authored rights and liberties," Pompeo said in May. The conflation of "God-given rights" and "human rights" seems to be a hallmark of this commission. Speaking to the National Catholic Register, one State Department official said, "We believe by our nature as human beings that we enjoy unalienable rights and our founders believed in God," saying the Founders "believed that God gave us these unalienable rights that could not be taken away by man."

"This language is worrisome. The Founders, Thomas Jefferson in particular, focused on human rights, not Pompeo's 'God-given rights.' It's a common misunderstanding that can be very problematic," explains FFRF's Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel.

"God-given rights depend on geography. Do you live in Indiana, India or Iran? They depend on those who claim



Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

to know God's will. Do your leaders think Muhammad's, Martin Luther's or Martin Luther King Jr.'s interpretation of God's will is correct?" as Seidel has written elsewhere.

Most alarmingly, "God-given" rights can be taken away by those claiming to speak for God. And Mike Pompeo, who is running this show, has a bad history of mixing his theology with his public office, something FFRF warned the country about when he was nominated to head the State Department. "To worship our Lord and celebrate our nation at the same place is not only our right, it is our duty," the then-Kansas congressman began a speech to a Wichita congregation in 2015 that encapsulates his worldview. He bemoaned the supposed official campaign to "rip faith from our schools." Pompeo also exposed his Christian fundamentalism in stating, "America had worshipped other gods and called it multiculturalism." Pompeo concluded by describing politics as "a never-ending struggle . . . until the rapture."

When a rapture-hungry, end-times Christian starts talking about "God-given rights," watch out. It usually means someone's rights are about to be trampled: a freethinker's right to be a nonconformist, a woman's right to reproductive choice, an LGBTQ's right to marry their partner or a black American's right to civil liberty.

"Our government needs to buttress human rights, not religious rites — much less religious wrongs," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. Gaylor will be monitoring in person this week's U.S. Department of State Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington, D.C., which has as its core focus the persecution of Christians around the world.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation will be watching the "Commission on Unalienable Rights" closely and challenging the State Department should it delve into theological territory.



Upcoming LSF Presentations

DATE	PRESENTER	TOPIC	HOST	REFLECTION
Sep. 1st	Katherine R. Welsh	Women's Health Center	Charles Gessert	Jim Lyttle
Oct. 6th	Frans de Waal (video and discussion)	Moral Behavior in Animals		