Why we need universal health care especially in a pandemic
Speaker: Buddy Robinson
Join us via Zoom on Sunday June 7th at 10 am
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Buddy Robinson has been a consumer advocate and organizer for 45 years. For the past 40, he was Staff Director of the MN Citizens Federation NE, in Duluth. He has extensive policy experience in health care and energy/utilities, and has worked for universal health care for the past 20 years.
On May 17, Lake Superior Freethinkers convened its annual meeting via Zoom. The principal item of business - in addition to planning future programs - was to elect officers of the Planning Committee for the coming year. This year, the Freethinkers have a full slate of officers. Vice-Chair Linda Crumpton, Secretary Don Fraser, and Treasurer Charles Gessert are staying on for another term and Jim Lyttle [pictured here] takes on the position of Chair left vacant by long time Chair Jan Resberg. Jim promises to continue online access to meetings and ensure that LSF is visible to the community through Letters to the Editor and similar venues of expression in the community.

Join us for Happy Hour via Zoom from 4:00-6:00 pm This Thursday, June 4th

This month, we’ll have our first On-Line Happy Hours. How can you participate? Simple. Just click on this link https://umn.zoom.us/j/8907500663, and have a beverage of your own choosing along with your freethinking friends. We'll chat and gossip and laugh and maybe even sing a little on the World Wide Web.
Most, but not all, secular humanists have a history of affiliation with some religious tradition. Rather than having never heard the spiritual message, they have listened to it but not found it compelling. To suggest that they didn't open their hearts to it or didn’t understand the word strikes them as condescending. On surveys of the level of knowledge regarding religion, secular humanists tend to rank near the top.

In the journey to becoming a secular humanist, the separation from organized religion may have been easy, or it may have been difficult. In my case, it was relatively easy. Becoming a nonbeliever started when I was a teenager. During that time, I continued to attend church with my family, but with little enthusiasm. Like many secular humanists I have known, I had growing doubts about the claims of religion and found no satisfactory answers. I went through the motions without really believing. In college and graduate school, my separation from religion became complete. My family adhered to an unspoken rule never to discuss my lack of faith, and I, in turn, never criticized their beliefs. Peace prevailed.

Once I was out of the church, I found it relatively easy to locate other nonbelievers. For many years these were just casual friendships. We didn’t belong to any groups or associations. Later, I became interested in being more openly active in the broader secular humanist community. I joined the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), which had become one of the most significant secular humanist groups because of its size and influence. FFRF’s mission is defending the separation of state and church described in the establishment clause of the 1st amendment to the Constitution. FFRF works to support the principals in the Constitution that guarantee the freedom of religion (more on FFRF in a future column). It currently numbers over thirty thousand members around the country. The Grand Rapids Area Freethinkers (GRAF) and the Lake Superior Freethinkers (LSF) in Duluth are both chapters of FFRF.

Other secular humanists describe a much more complicated and uncomfortable process of separating from their earlier religious beliefs. Secular humanist friends describe conflicts with other members of their religion and family as typical and hurtful experiences. They often ended up with a lot of anger about how they were treated by those remaining in the church. The conflict can continue for years. There are secular groups like Recovering from Religion that actively work to help people deal with these problems.

Now research organizations like the Pew Foundation report that the fastest-growing religious affiliation is none. When asked to identify the religious affiliation they consider most relevant to them, about 25% to 30% of American adults will say “nothing in particular.” The percentage is higher among those under the age of 30. Most of these people do not identify as nonbelievers, atheists, or even secular humanists. They just don’t pay much attention to religion, and they don’t quickly become advocates for secular humanism.

As the secularization of the population continues, a surprising private group called The Clergy Project has emerged. The members of this group are all ministers who have lost their faith but often remain in the pulpit. They come from all the various denominations of religion. They provide support and assistance to each other in the struggle to come to terms with their dilemma. This group started a few years ago and now has about a thousand members. Those enrolled in the project find it challenging to quit their ministry since their livelihood is dependent on the church. Most think they cannot locate or secure another job. The Clergy Project provides a secure and safe space where they can talk to each other without fear of being exposed. They help each other in deciding how and when they will leave the ministry behind.

The decline in religious participation is something many churches are struggling to handle. As membership declines, the loss of financial support may place severe stress on the remaining members. In this changing environment for both the religious and the secular, I think there may be common ground, but it is not clear that we will be able to use it effectively. Both groups enjoy the community and fellowship that they find with others who are like-minded. Creating that sense of community with so many differences may present obstacles too significant to overcome.
A recent news item reported that almost all Americans are sure they are going to heaven. I have talked to some of them and discovered this: They will be flying on separate planes. You get your ticket from whatever cult you have selected, but each has its own airline.

They were all shocked that I wasn’t scheduled to fly and each pressed me to join his or her sect. They told me that eternity is a good long time and the flight is not so short either, I should get good seats right away.

I went to the nearby pastor and said I wanted to book some reservations. He put his arm around my shoulder and let me to his sanctuary. “Bill, if you put in with us it’s a sure bet you’ll be sitting in first-class for your trip into Eternity. All you have to do is have faith and I can supply that for you if you join up.”

I thanked him but wanted to shop around. There was a more impressive church across the street and I poked in there.

I got a warm welcome, a firm handshake and a reassuring smile. But the conversation left me unsettled. The minister said that the pastor across the street was a fool and sure to roast in hell. “No, Bill, faith without good work is useless, and at our place you contribute some money and we hire folks to do the good work for you.” I said I needed to think it over and he said that was fine, but I should hurry as a fiery doom hung over me.

So I went to the pastor on the other corner and asked if I signed on with him would I go to heaven? He got right to the point. “Look, Bill, the decision has already been made. We are each predestined for the heavenly choir or the hot place; there is nothing we can do about it. Your minister and your pastor are just whistling Dixie. Nice tune but it won’t get you predestined and you are on your way with Calvin Air Express.”

I checked at the Air Islam office next. “Oh yes, we have an immediate seating plan. And you fly with some really nice virgins. We can get you reservations. You only need to blow up yourself and a load of infidels and a building to get 36 virgins. Two buildings get you 72 virgins.” The multiple virgin part was tempting but . . . .

The last option on that block was a cathedral. The priest made me sit in his little ticket booth where he explained it all to me through a grill. “Oh those cults, ignore them! Just get to a priest for a confession before you croak and all is well. You roll the beads and do some Bloody Marys, a nice donation is good and you’re in. It even works for our guys that diddle the little boys and girls. They are all up there, you know. First class tickets and no waiting for check-in.”

You can be sure I was plenty confused. Five confirmed tickets to heaven, but each had a different flight plan. Here is the hardest part: each cult was absolutely certain all the others had flawed plans. I thought and thought. Some of them must be wrong, but which ones? I thought some more until I saw the light: They were all frauds!

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Some day I’ll just die and be done with it. I know this: Alive or dead, I don’t want to be anywhere near those liars.
ENVISIONING A BETTER WORLD

The Secular Student Alliance 2020 Virtual Conference
July 22-25, 2020

The Secular Student Alliance is hosting a four-day virtual conference for the entire secular community. Please join us for this free event, packed with amazing speakers. You can participate in live-streaming video and watch at your leisure with video on-demand.

Everyone is invited to participate.

Our Growing List of Speakers

Jared Huffman  Chris Stedman  Sikivu Hutchinson  Anthony Pinn  Kavin Sanapathy  Gary McLelland
Andrew Seidel  Alison Gil  Hemant Mehta  Alex DiBranco  Rachel Laser  Cara Santa Maria
Angela Saini  Christopher Cameron  Katherine Stewart  Elle Harris  Sarah Levin  Sean Rivera

Registration is Free

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