



The Freethought Society News

Editors: Margaret Downey, Glen Loev, Carol Roper and Other Volunteers

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Mailing address: P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, Pennsylvania 19366-0242

Phone: (610) 793-2737 | Fax: (610) 793-2569 | Email: Newsletter@FtSociety.org

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20-Year Anniversary of Thomas Paine Day

by Margaret Downey

An afternoon and evening celebration took place on Sunday, June 8, 2014, marking the 20-year anniversary of the City of Philadelphia acknowledging “Thomas Paine Day.” The event was designed to coincide with a traditional American Humanist Association’s (AHA) post-conference activity. The AHA conference concluded at noon that day and shortly afterwards 80 people boarded two antique trolleys to enjoy a 90-minute city tour of Philadelphia. Dressed in colonial-themed costumes, **Jennifer Taylor** and I distributed fans to ticket-holding participants. The trolley tours ended at Dock Street near Thomas Paine Place (a small street located next to the Walnut Street Theatre). The Thomas Paine-themed walking tour started at that point.

Quite a few more Thomas Paine enthusiasts joined the free and open-to-the-public walking tour at 3:15 PM. Colonial-clad volunteers **Alan Gold** and Taylor assisted me. The group grew to about 90 people. This was my very first experience of leading a walking tour and I was glad that I had planned the route, written a script, staged the stops, and purchased a megaphone. Even with the large amount of people in tow, we managed to stay on the tight schedule I had charted.

I began the tour telling everyone that they were standing at a location that was once considered the most filthy section of Philadelphia. My story about the area included information on how the writings of Thomas Paine played a major role in cleaning up the location. His 1807 essay entitled “Of the cause of the yellow fever; and the means of preventing it in places not yet infected with it: Addresses to the Board of Health in America” played a major role in cleaning up the section as well as helping to stop the spread of Yellow Fever.

Soon we walked along the cobblestone ground of Thomas Paine Place and approached the *Common Sense* historical marker. There, actor **Steve Gulick** brought Thomas Paine back to life. I provided some facts about Thomas Paine and Gulick recited excerpts from *Common Sense*.

On the way towards the **Robert Morris** statue at 4th and Walnut Streets, the group was shown where **Dr. Benjamin Rush**, **Benjamin Franklin** and **Thomas Paine** enjoyed many garden walks and discussions. One can only imagine the conversations that took place in the Rush garden. Rush and Franklin encouraged Thomas Paine to write his pamphlet *Common Sense*, using words that appealed to hard-working colonists.

After a short stop at the **Robert Morris** statue, I took the group to the steps of the American Philosophical Society (APS) where I explained its historical importance and interesting connection to Thomas Paine. The world’s largest Thomas Paine memorabilia collection is housed in the APS building. One such item is a white marble bust which is kept in the office of the APS librarian. Because APS is closed on Sundays and I wanted the tour to enjoy seeing the entire bust, I pre-arranged for the bust to be turned to face an open window in that office. A friendly note in the window, placed there by the APS librarian **Martin Levitt**, wished us well.

We moved on to the portrait gallery located in the Second Bank of the United States building. The Thomas Paine portrait is located in the far right corner of the gallery. The artist is **Bass Otis** (Catalog Number INDE11881). The piece is likely a rendition or copy from English artist **George Romney**’s 1792 portrait of Thomas Paine (now missing). The

Romney work was well known in 19th century America through **William Sharp's** 1793 British engraving. American artists frequently copied Sharp's engraving, as Otis may have done in 1859. It is also speculated that perhaps Otis worked from a copy (now missing) by **Thomas Thompson** that once belonged to artist **Charles Wesley Jarvis**, Otis' mentor. The Thomas Paine portrait was given to the City of Philadelphia by **Dr. William Wright** and others in 1859.

The next stop was The Franklin Print Shop. An 18th century print shop is recreated on the site of Franklin's original property, thus the name. Independence National Historical Park rangers give demonstrations of the labor-intensive process of turning out a daily newspaper. Leather daubers stuffed with cotton are used to apply the ink. The hand-operated printing press on display is an original – not a reproduction. Printed products hang from the drying racks along the ceiling. Typesetting desks and various sized letters and numbers are included in the exhibit.

The easy walk back to 4th and Walnut Streets took the group to the 5:00 PM celebration site right on time. The celebration site was a lovely shaded outdoor amphitheater. Volunteers **Tom Melchiorre**, **Dan Hoffman**, **Tom Schottmiller**, **Susan Hibberd** and **Mary Giannone** had been working on the area set-up since 2:00 PM. The end result was lovely and welcoming. A twelve-foot-long exhibition table included a collection of framed and matted Thomas Paine Day City proclamations, a bust of Thomas Paine, free literature, and a variety of interesting colonial paraphernalia. Free water was offered to attendees and the free and open-to-the-public festivities started on time.

The celebration began with the presentation of an original song written by **James Klueh**. The live performance set the tone of the event and the crowd appeared to be excited about learning more about the great patriot and to hear additional music from the talented Klueh. He sang and played his guitar between each speaker on the program. Every song was performed to perfection. In the middle of the festivities, Klueh led the audience in a sing-along. The words to **Dan Barker's** song "The World is My Country" were distributed and everyone joined in the fun.

State Representative Mark Cohen was unable to attend the event. He was invited because his father attended the very first Thomas Paine Day in 1994. In his place, I had the great honor of reading the 2014 City of Philadelphia proclamation which was approved and printed by **Mayor Michael Nutter's** office the week before. The wording of the proclamation recognizes the important work of Thomas Paine and the fact that 2014 marked the 20-year anniversary of the Freethought Society celebrating Thomas Paine Day.

Event speakers included educator and Thomas Paine expert **Gary Berton**, former book store owner **Larry Robin**, and historian **Carol Fireing**. Gulick also entertained the crowd with his excellent portrayal of Thomas Paine.

Berton talked about historical events that happened in the area and highlighted how those events affected Thomas Paine. During his presentation, Berton mentioned that Thomas Paine questioned unethical business dealings of Philadelphia merchant Robert Morris in the late 1700s, then noted that a statue of Morris was erected nearby. Sadly, the city of Philadelphia barely acknowledges Thomas Paine's contributions and honest writing. Thomas Paine statue applications have been rejected since the 1940s and it was only in the last 20 years that a plaza, small alley, and skate park were named in his honor.

Robin presented an overview of Thomas Paine's exciting life, giving details about the many essays, pamphlets and books that inspired revolutionary thinking throughout the world. People in the audience were mesmerized by the story that included information about Thomas Paine's inventions and his close calls with death. Gulick, in the character of Thomas Paine, added exact quotes in various appropriate places in Robin presentation.

Carol Giesler informed us about the great work that was done by the Philadelphia Friendship League to honor Thomas Paine, including the commission of a bust and efforts to include him in public historical displays. The group is no longer in existence, but is best known for having helped to stop the use of Bible verses in the public school system.

At 6:30 PM many people gathered at the City Tavern restaurant, located just a few blocks from the amphitheater. The City Tavern is a replica of a historic 18th century building. Owner and Executive Chef **Walter Staib** cooks a

variety of entrees using authentic 18th century recipes, which are served by colonial-clad waitstaff. The Thomas Paine group met in a beautiful period dining room. Called the "most genteel tavern in America" by **John Adams**, it was the favorite meeting place of many of the Founding Fathers and members of the First Continental Congress. It was not difficult to imagine Thomas Paine standing in the room eager for a debate and ready to question tradition, authority and revelation.

After people introduced themselves and I proposed a toast to the legacy of Thomas Paine, Klueh sang a wonderful original song. The food was outstanding, Klueh sang another song after dinner and everyone had a fantastic time. Pictured left are Taylor and I. The photo was taken as we began our hosting duties for Thomas Paine Day. □



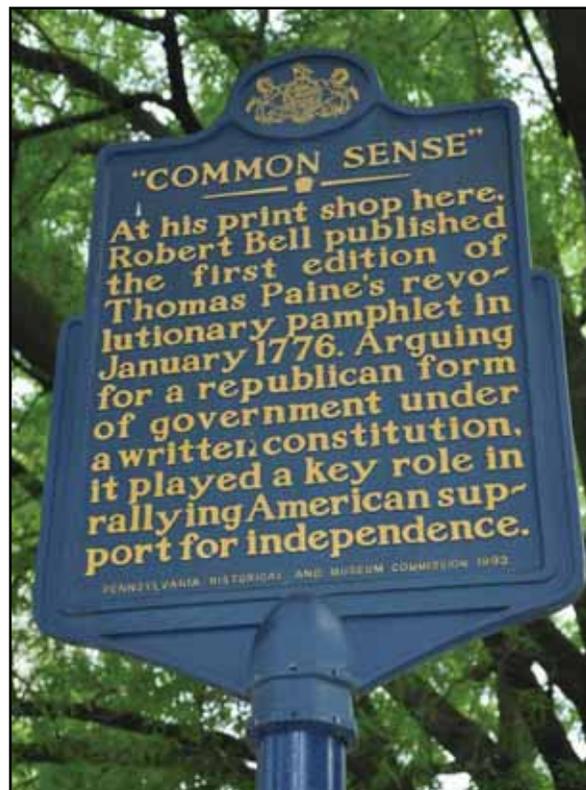
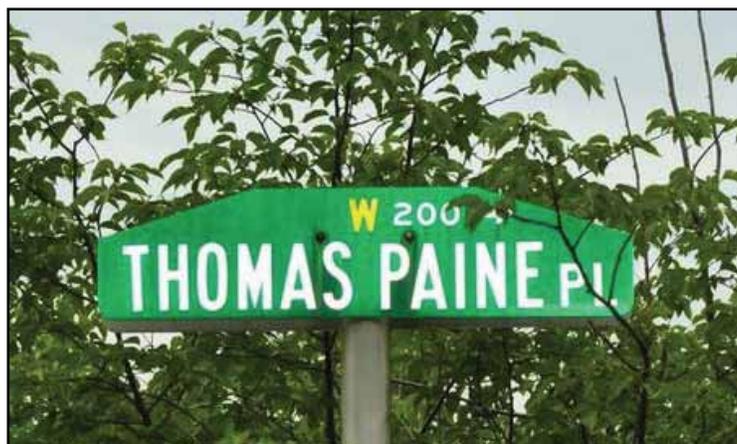
Photos of the 2014 Thomas Paine Day Walking Tour



Pictured left are (left to right) **Jennifer Taylor**, **Alan Gold**, **Margaret Downey**, and **Steve Gulick**. Taylor and Gold helped Downey with the first ever Thomas Paine-themed walking tour that took place on Sunday, June 8, 2014. Thomas Paine died on that day in 1809.

Gulick is holding a copy of Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense*. Gulick has portrayed Thomas Paine for many years and is a wonderful actor.

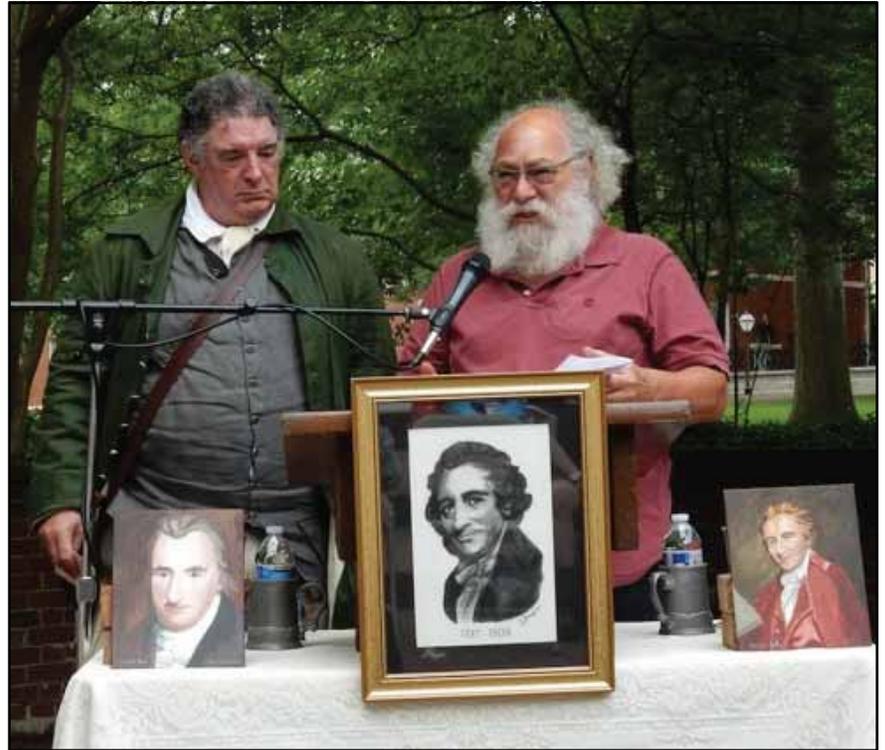
The photo was taken at the first walking tour stop where Gulick read portions of *Common Sense* to a crowd of 90 people. The stop included an overview of the *Common Sense* historical marker and how the alley next to the Walnut Street Theaters was named after Thomas Paine.



Pictured left are (left to right) **Patrick Colucci**, **Emil Volcheck** and **Dr. Kathleen Wilsbach**.

Volcheck is holding a parchment print that he obtained during the walking tour stop at the Franklin Print office. 18th century style prints are sold there for \$1. Volcheck contributed most of the photos used in the Thomas Paine Day report in this newsletter.

Photos of the 2014 Thomas Paine Day Celebration



Pictured above left is singer and songwriter extraordinaire **James Klueh**. His songs created smiles, laughs and a few tears. Klueh honored Thomas Paine's life by putting a collection of original songs together for the celebration. Some of Klueh's songs made use of Thomas Paine's poetry. Klueh will have a CD available for the 2015 Thomas Paine Day.

Pictured above right are actor **Steve Gulick** (left) and historian **Larry Robbin** (right). Their banter about the life and work of Thomas Paine was educational and interesting. Many in the audience were surprised to hear about the various times Thomas Paine almost lost his life. He overcame serious illnesses, escaped capture for sedition charges, was accidentally overlooked by executioners during his imprisonment in France, and survived a would-be assassin's bullet.



Pictured left is educator **Gary Berton**. His talk provided insight into the type of activism that Thomas Paine pursued his entire adult life. Berton incorporated interesting facts about the immediate area and the crowd was very pleased to learn so much more about the great freethinking hero and patriot Thomas Paine.



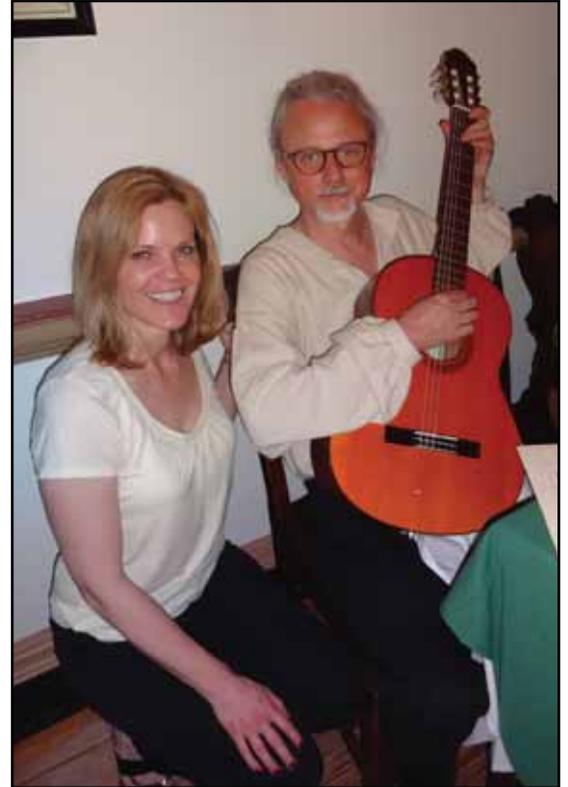
Pictured right is **Carol Giesler**. She enlightened the audience about why Thomas Paine should be honored while dressed in colonial costume.

Photos of the 2014 Thomas Paine Day Dinner



Thomas Paine Day volunteers **Jennifer Taylor** and **Greg White** are pictured on the left, dining at The City Tavern restaurant during the June 8, 2014 evening celebration.

Rhonda Nelson and **James Klueh** are pictured on the right as he prepares to entertain the dinner crowd. Klueh sang a very interesting original song about how Thomas Paine influenced the Irish Revolution. Klueh also made diners laugh when he sang a song about the fire that burned down a tavern frequented by Thomas Paine.



Pictured left are **Gary Betchan** (left) and **Tom Schottmiller** (right) enjoying each others company and a perfectly-cooked colonial style dinner.



Below are Thomas Paine enthusiasts **Ken Sambell** and **Dr. Margaret Thompson**.



At left are **Ron Solomon** and **Carol Solomon** as they enjoy the Thomas Paine Day Happy Hour at the historic City Tavern restaurant.



“Let Humanism Ring”

American Humanist Association Conference Takes Place in Philadelphia

The Freethought Society (FS) is always happy when a national nontheist group holds a conference in the city of Philadelphia. Many FS volunteers live in the Philadelphia area. Tabling is convenient and staffing is not cost prohibitive.

Pictured right is the FS treasurer **Dan Hoffman**. He, **Margaret Downey**, and **Tom Schottmiller** traded staffing duties during the three-day American Humanist Association (AHA) conference, held June 6-8, 2014. The FS table was visited by many people and FS literature was very popular.

“Luckily” a Friday the Thirteenth appeared on the 2014 June calendar, so FS Anti-Superstition T-shirts sold well.

Pictured below are left to right **Tanrei Hale**, **Rebecca Hale** (President of AHA), **Alan Gold** and former United States Congressman **Barney Frank**.



Pictured below with Rade (center, holding award) are some of the key players in the founding of UnitedCoR. Left to right are **Jan Meshon**, **Fred Edwards**, **Rade**, **Roy Speckhardt**, **Margaret Downey**, and **Joseph Stewart**. Each person in the photo contributed their time and talents to help make UnitedCoR a success.



There were many terrific speakers at the conference, including **Eugenie Scott**, former Executive Director of the National Center for Science Education. She is pictured below with a few of her Philadelphia area fans. Left to right are **Jennifer Taylor** (FS Board Member), **Scott**, **Glen Loev** (FS Secretary), and **Margaret Downey** (FS Founder and President).



Mr. Frank received the 2014 “Humanist of the Year Award.” His inspirational acceptance speech was also a rallying cry for activism. He encouraged all to never give up when you are on the humanist side of an issue.

On Saturday night, **Steve Rade** received the “Humanist Business Award.” In 2009 Rade founded and funded the United Coalition of Reason (UnitedCoR). The national project kicked off in Philadelphia. UnitedCoR works to raise the visibility of nontheistic groups in North America. This is done by promoting informal cooperation among groups, hosting of a local coalition website, training of group leaders, and funding publicity outreach (the favorite is billboards).



The next AHA conference will take place in Denver, Colorado. Please visit the AHA website to learn more about their annual conference, activism, outreach, magazine, legal work, secular celebrant training, celebrant certification program, and much more. See:

www.AmericanHumanist.org

2014 Lobby Day and Secular Summit

Margaret Downey:

The first time I ever lobbied in person regarding any type of legislation was in 2002 when I joined a coalition to speak out against **President George W. Bush's** initiative to exclude faith-based and community organizations from abiding by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, sex, and national origin. The Bush Faith-Based Hiring Initiative allows a religious organization to discriminate on the basis of religion when it hires employees and also permits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

I was asked by a coalition to represent the nontheist community in an effort to stop the initiative from being made into law (via Executive Order) and soon lobby visits took place in Washington, D.C. All went well until we visited the office of then Pennsylvania **Senator Rick Santorum**. He is Catholic and a staunch Republican. Even though we had an appointment with Santorum's legislative aide, Santorum came out of his office to greet us. I was standing at the back of the line. Santorum's official photographer was also there and he took a photo each time a hand was shaken and a few nice words were exchanged.

Santorum smiled and chatted with each representative as he walked down the line, posing for photos along the way. He was pleasant to the Quaker, the Ethical Culturist, the Secular Jew, and the Unitarian Universalist. When Santorum greeted me, he warmly clasped my hand and said, "So who are you?"

I told Santorum my name and proudly stated, "I represent the fastest growing minority in America."

Still holding my hand, he smiled and said enthusiastically, "Well, what minority is that?"

"The nontheist community," I stated.

Santorum instantly and coldly let go of my hand and snarled, "You mean atheists?"

"Yes," I said, and before I could say one more thing, Santorum turned on his heels and told the photographer, "No more photos."

Santorum went into his office and abruptly slammed the door. The group was taken aback. We were left to speak to only the aide, who took us to a conference room across the hallway.

One by one, we presented our objections to the initiative. The aide stated that Santorum himself only hires like-minded individuals and that religious institutions should have that ability as well. Still upset about the way Santorum treated me, I chimed in saying, "Oh, so Santorum does not like to hear opposing commentary or different perspectives?"

The aide said, "Well, that would not be a pleasant working atmosphere."



"So, you are saying that Santorum surrounds himself with a bunch of yes-men, then," I stated.

"I am not a yes-man," the aide proclaimed.

Needless to say, I was not making any Brownie points and the coalition became quite uncomfortable. I decided then and there that I needed a lot more training to ever become a good lobbyist. Twelve years later, I decided to try again.

The Secular Coalition for America (SCA) hosted a Lobby Day and Summit June 12-14, 2014. The training, literature and speeches SCA provided during the conference certainly changed my mind about lobbying and I now want to engage in this activity more often.

I know, from experience, how difficult it is to organize and execute a successful conference. It takes almost a year to find a

location, book speakers, organize an agenda and pre-arrange for big and small things to go well. There is also a tremendous amount of pre-event work that needs to be done to set lobby appointments and to develop helpful literature. It was obvious to me that former executive director **Edwina Rogers** had devoted a lot of time, energy and passion into the summit and lobby day. While she is no longer working for SCA, her fantastic organizational skills were evident and appreciated throughout the conference.

Kelly Damerow, SCA's Director of Federal and State Government Affairs, and SCA Interim Executive Director **Amanda Metskas** led the event with efficiency. It was impressive to see them execute the agenda with style.

On the first day, we heard speeches from **Congressmen Rush Holt** (D-NJ) and **Robert Scott** (D-VA). We also enjoyed speeches by **Senator Sheldon Whitehouse** (D-RI), and **Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren** (D-LA). It was record-setting to have four politicians address the secular community on the first day of the summit.

After the speeches, people brain-stormed in assigned groups and issue talking points were distributed. The Pennsylvania group was assigned the issue of secular tax reforms to be discussed at the office of **Senators Pat Toomey** (R-PA) and **Bob Casey** (D-PA). The Pennsylvania group consisted of **Brian Fields**, **Alan Gold**, **Glen Loev**, and me. After a quick bite to eat, we ventured out to present our perspectives.

The first stop was at Toomey's office. We were impressed with the Legislative Correspondent **Katie Cessar**. She took notes and seemed very impressed with our declarations against tax loopholes allowed to religious institutions. We used mega-churches as one example of abuse, pointing out that money goes to fund mansions and jets instead of being used for good causes – which is why most people donate to their churches.

What really got the attention of Cessar was the disclosure that \$16.75 billion additional annual revenue

could be generated if the IRS were to revoke the tax-exempt status of churches that violate 501(c)3 limitations.

When we visited with Casey's legislative aide, **Pablo Rojas**, we presented the same facts. Rojas, however, was keenly interested in our talking point about the Catholic Church being able to bypass the IRS when accounting for money in and money out. Pedophile lawsuits are being settled with donations that most parishioners intended to be used for community services. Tax reforms are needed, we claimed, for these and many other reasons.

I was proud to tell Rojas about the good work the nontheist community does – all the while abiding by IRS regulations, submitting accountability forms and following through with earmarked donations. I told him about the Foundation Beyond Belief and he took notes.

I was also very pleased to tell him about the huge increase of secular Hispanics. Fields showed him a chart demonstrating the increasing numbers of nonbelievers in America and Rojas asked to keep it. The chart revealed, that according to 2012 statistics, the percentage of the population that identifies as atheist or agnostic is estimated to be between 5.7 and 6.8 percent. This percentage outnumbered the combined membership of Jews, Muslims, Mormons, Buddhists, Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses and many other Orthodox religions!

When I sent the "thank you" card, I also sent Rojas information about the Hispanic American Atheists and Freethinkers group. Who knows, he may show up in Puerto Rico when the first Hispanic Atheist conference takes place in 2015.

Our last visit was to Pennsylvania **Representative Pat Meehan's** (R-PA) office. Legislative Assistant **Amanda Lincoln** met with us about the harm school voucher programs cause to the public school system. We expressed concern that taxpayer money is helping to fund religious education. The entanglement violates the principle of separation of religion and government. The fact is that 80% of the students participating in a voucher program in just the D.C. area attend religious schools. The blank stare we received from Lincoln indicated that she was not interested. She did not take notes and seemed bored.

When we asked for her business card, she said, "I will get you each one."

She did not return to the meeting room, but stood outside near the exit indicating that the meeting was over and it was time for us to leave. Even with the cold reception, I followed up with a "thank you" card and provided information about the shawl I was wearing. She had said she liked it very much and wondered where I had purchased it. I bet not many visitors follow through with fashion leads like I did!

The rest of the SCA summit was extremely educational. I enjoyed meeting more SCA staff and was impressed with all the workshops I attended. **Lauren Anderson Youngblood**, the SCA Director of Communications, conducted a superb media training class.

Friday afternoon panel discussions were enlightening and there are too many speakers to name in this article.

Suffice it to say that each panelist did a remarkable job in conveying important facts and information. I thanked all of them for participating.

I would like to see a bigger FS effort to get participants to the next SCA lobby day event. We need a volunteer to research van rentals and/or organize a car-pooling system. A room share effort would surely help raise participant numbers. Please contact FS if you would like to be the Lobby Day volunteer.



Brian Fields:

On June 12, 2014 I joined lobbying efforts with Downey, Loev and Gold. Together we visited the offices of Senators Pat Toomey (R-PA) and Bob Casey (D-PA).

We also visited the office of Representative Patrick Meehan (R-PA). We spoke with staffers at all three offices. The goal with Senators Toomey and Casey was to educate their staffs regarding tax loopholes for churches. The staffers in both offices were friendly, and to our surprise, Toomey's office was actually more friendly. We thought that Casey's Catholic background might have caused some resistance, but that was not the case.

Both Senate offices were interested in the \$16.7 billion a year in taxes that churches don't pay. Additionally, Toomey's office wanted to hear more about the tax exemption for ministers' housing, even when the houses are multimillion dollar properties owned by well-known ministers! Both senators' offices said they had never heard our arguments before.

We spoke with Meehan's office regarding vouchers. His staff was polite, but icy. We were told that Meehan hasn't taken a position on vouchers. His staff was interested, however, in the statistics showing nontheists as a growing voting block. I had a chart that illustrated how nontheists outnumber many major voting blocks, and the woman we spoke with seemed very interested in those numbers. However, when we finished our presentation, we were shuffled out fairly quickly.

I think that we had a very productive day. I was very encouraged by the interest from the senators' offices, and hope to get the opportunity to talk with them again.



Alan Gold:

The SCA Lobby Day and Summit event was a unique experience. It's always nice when fellow atheists get together, and when nontheists from all over the United States meet it is truly a delight.

Participants in this year's lobby day hailed from 28 states and the District of Columbia. I loved meeting everyone at the summit. Our fellow nontheists are friendly and interesting. Lobbying was fun and educational. I really enjoyed spreading the word about the secular, humanist, and atheist causes to the politicians' offices. I was thrilled to actually meet **Senator John McCain** (R-AZ) as he walked the corridors of the Russell Senate Office Building. He was in a hurry, so I said I was a big fan of his. He perked up and was very nice and even suggested we take a selfie!

The cost of the conference was reasonable. The part I liked the most was getting to know the speakers, leaders, and activists in the nontheist community. Next year I hope many more people will attend. Car pooling would make the trip go faster. The Pennsylvania group was comprised of only four representatives and I know we can do better.

The group talked to representatives from Pennsylvania, State Senators Pat Toomey (R-PA) and Bob Casey (D-PA). They were attentive and took notes. We did make an impression. Then I split off and went with SCA staffer **Sarah Cohen** to visit my home **Congressman Michael Fitzpatrick** (R-PA). His intern gave us a lot of time so I was able to cover much more than the two topics assigned: taxation of churches and climate change. I pushed for teaching science in the science classroom, not religion. The woman said in high school and through college she had no idea what evolution was.

I came to the conference mainly because I had heard about it from **Edwina Rogers**. She is no longer with SCA and will be missed. Downey, Loev, and Fields made lobbying a wonderful experience for me. Try not to miss the next one. I know that I will be there!



Glen Loev:

This was the second time I attended the two-day annual SCA Summit and Lobby Day event in Washington, D.C., and it was, for the second time, a great experience.

On the first morning of the event, attendees were treated to speeches from 3 sitting members of the United States House of Representatives, and one sitting Senator. A question and answer session followed each presentation. How incredibly impressive is that!

Last year, only one senator and one representative spoke at the summit. This year, four members of the highest legislative body in our country took time out of their busy schedules to speak to a group of atheists about issues of interest to us, and to show us that they were on our side in these issues!

I didn't count the number of attendees at the event, but would guess there were about 100. How much more impressive it would have been to those members of Congress, and how much more clout we might have, had there been 1,000 of us in attendance!

In the afternoon of the first day, there was a very informative how-to session on lobbying, going over the points that SCA's Director of Federal and State Government Affairs **Kelly Damerow** felt would be most helpful for us to present and discuss with Representatives and Senators. We were divided into groups and given background information to review. We were also provided packets of information to leave at the various offices we visited. We had time to practice in advance in regard to what and how we were going to present our legislative requests during the actual lobbying meetings.

Downey, Gold, Fields and I first visited with a staff member from the office of Senator Pat Toomey (R-PA.) The representative we spoke with was friendly and seemed sincerely interested in what we had to say on the topic of tax code reform.

Our second visit was to the office of Senator Bob Casey (D-PA). His representative also was friendly, interested in what we had to say, and intimated that he was a kindred spirit. Representatives of both senators were gracious,

appreciative of our comments on tax reform, and willing to have a photo taken with us after our meeting.

All of us were feeling very good about how our first two meetings went. Unfortunately, our last meeting didn't go as well. We met with a staff member from the office of Representative Pat Meehan (R-PA). While she was polite, her lack of questions and general reception (best described as "icy") gave all of us the impression that she was not pleased at meeting with a group of atheists. She made it clear that Representative Meehan did not agree with our position on school vouchers, and after the requisite "thank you for visiting" she refused to be photographed with us. Even if our efforts in this last case weren't effective, at the very least we showed that atheists are becoming a greater force to be reckoned with.

That evening, back at the hotel where the lobby event was held, there was a complimentary cocktail party for conference attendees and a screening of *Contradiction*, a film that examines the effects of faith among African Americans.

The next day there were several presentations, workshops and discussions on topics such as supporting science in lawmaking, empowering nonreligious youth, strategies for student advocacy on school campuses, working with other movements and the religious on areas where we have common goals, communications, and press relations. There was also a workshop on lobbying at the state level.

This was an excellent event, planned and executed very well by the SCA staff. I would highly recommend to readers of this newsletter that they consider attending next year's SCA Summit and Lobby Day. Thanks to generous donations, the cost of the event, which includes breakfasts and lunches on both days, is usually very reasonable. But most important, it is a unique and special experience being able to meet and interact not only with representatives of our nation's major secular organizations and to represent FS, but especially to be pro-active, talking with those who have so much power to influence the direction of our country.



Pictured left in front of Senator Patrick Toomey's office are (left to right) **Glen Loev, Alan Gold, Katie Cessar, Margaret Downey** and **Brian Fields**.

The office is located in the beautiful Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. In 1972, the Senate named the Old Senate Office Building after Senator **Richard Brevard Russell, Jr.**, a Democrat from Georgia who had served from 1933 to 1971. A statue of Senator Russell stands in the Russell Building rotunda. The building also became familiar to moviegoers as the setting for such classic Hollywood films as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) and *Advise and Consent* (1962).

Pictured right in the **Senator Bob Casey** meeting room are (left to right) **Glen Loev, Brian Fields, Pablo Rojas, Margaret Downey** and **Alan Gold**.

Casey defeated incumbent Republican U.S. Senator Rick Santorum in the 2006 election. He is the first Democrat to be elected to a full term and win reelection in the U.S. Senate from Pennsylvania since Joe Clark won reelection in 1962.

Casey played basketball (thus the framed jersey), and during the year he taught 5th graders at the Gesu School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, he coached basketball.



Exclusive Scouting and the Defamation of Atheists

by Martha Knox

A year ago the Boy Scouts of America adopted a resolution to end the ban on openly gay scouts. Many cheered, despite the fact that the BSA – the scouting group with the greatest resources and prominence in American society – still won't allow openly gay leaders and continues its ban on atheist leaders and scouts.

In response, **Herb Silverman**, founder of the Secular Coalition for America, lamented, "There is no similar step forward for atheists. This modified policy would still require local groups to discriminate against atheists, apparently because the Boy Scout Oath implies that an atheist can't be 'morally straight' unless he can do his 'duty to God.'"

Using this twisted logic, a number of courageous and honest atheists have been kicked out of the Scouts for rejecting all supernatural beliefs. Among them was my friend Darrell Lambert, an Eagle Scout, who had been supported by his entire troop.

Dan Kennedy was optimistic (well, sort of, I will explain below). In his response, Kennedy said, "Though Thursday's vote can be seen as a modest step forward, another possible compromise floated earlier this year would have been far more workable. You may remember that one: groups that charter troops, such as churches and civic organizations, would have been free to set their own policies."

Such a compromise would have accurately reflected how the BSA actually operates, as troops are considered part of their chartering organizations. To concoct a hypothetical, it would have opened the way for a Unitarian Universalist church to sponsor a troop that allowed gay scouts and adult leaders as well as atheists, another group banned under current BSA policy.

I write "sort of optimistic" because policies vary so much from troop to troop that I am reminded of the event that inspired **Margaret Downey** to devote herself so passionately to defending the rights of atheists: she saw her son in tears because of discrimination. Downey's son had been a Boy Scout at a troop where his atheism was tolerated. But when the family moved, he was denied membership because of his lack of religious belief.

My daughter will be old enough for scouting in a year, and as a parent I'm interested for many typical reasons. Scouting instills a sense of responsibility through community service, encourages positive relationships with peers, and offers kids opportunities and the motivation to learn new and useful skills. Scouts are generally thought of as eager to lend a hand, adept, and principled. The Girl Scouts of America is an example of a scouting organization that discriminates against none based on worldview, which personally pleases me.

I am therefore deeply grateful for the article "Ethical and Inclusive Scouting" by **Lance Finney** writing for the

group GroundedParents.com, which gives a rundown of scouting alternatives for secular parents. I live in a major metropolitan city outside of the Bible Belt, so my children have several good scouting options to choose from. Not every American atheist family is so fortunate. As an atheist parent, simply acknowledging the history of scouting can be painful. All scouting has origins, not only Christianity, but an exclusionary mindset that falsely asserts that people must believe in and worship the Christian God in order to be good.

I can't think of a clearer example of the moral defamation of atheists than the previous wording (changed less than a year ago) in the BSA's Declaration of Religious Principle, which states, "... BSA maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God." In the first part of the Scout Oath or Promise, the member declares, "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law."

Consider if such a thing were said of any other faith group: Jews can't be the best kind of citizens. Buddhists can't be the best kind of citizens. Mormons can't be the best kind of citizens. And so on. Pretty awful, isn't it?

Many of these attitudes persist today, especially in America, where atheists are the most distrusted minority. Not because of anything real flesh-and-blood atheists do (we tend to be pretty model citizens, actually), but because groups such as BSA maintain an association of God-belief with character, integrity, and high moral standards, thus associating atheism with bad behavior.

Austin Cline suggests, "...atheists are being saddled with the 'sins' of American society generally. They are 'a symbolic figure' that represent religious theists' fears about ... trends in American life. Some of those fears involve 'upper class' crimes like greed and elitism. Atheists are thus a 'symbolic representation' of one who rejects the basis for moral solidarity and cultural membership in American society altogether."

Over the years the views among many scouting organizations around the world have broadened to include all or most sects of Christianity, Jews, and even people of non-monotheistic faiths and atheists. What continues to disappoint is that so many scouting organizations persist in discriminating (most often against atheists and homosexuals, but sometimes other non-Christian faiths and certain sects of Christianity) even as they give lip service to the value of inclusiveness and brag about how inclusive they are in other respects. Prejudice against atheists, particularly when instilled in children and youth and under the guise of moral superiority, contribute to discrimination.

The BSA Scout Oath includes:

A Scout is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties. He respects the beliefs of others.

What meaning does “respect” hold if the organization is formally excluding certain people based on their beliefs regarding the meaning of life, gods, and afterlife? Or maybe they just meant that they respect the religious beliefs of others, but screw all the secularists.

Trail Life USA is an alternative to BSA that launched in 2013 specifically in response to BSA’s allowing openly gay scouts (but remember, not leaders). In their statement on Membership Standards, Trail Life USA writes:

While the program is undergirded by Biblical values and unapologetically reflects a Christian worldview, there is also a clearly defined inclusion policy for youth. Accordingly, all boys are welcome irrespective of religion, race, national origin or socio-economic status.

But all boys are not welcome since individual Charter Organizations are permitted to exclude boys of certain faiths. American Heritage Girls (AHG), a sort of sister organization to Trail Life USA, contradicts themselves even more blatantly in their own Inclusion Policy:

All girls of any color, creed, race, national origin and socioeconomic status who agree to live according to the standards of the AHG Oath and the AHG Creed are invited to be a member of the American Heritage Girls.

So AHG accepts those of “any creed” so long as they agree with their “Creed?”

Seriously, how do the leaders of these organizations not recognize their own hypocrisy? Their organizations are either inclusive (which means being inclusive to the nonreligious) or they discriminate based on religion.

Camp Quest is an excellent example of an organization that is genuinely inclusive. Though Camp Quest is explicitly set up to promote the values of humanism and is generally run by and attracts secular humanists, there are no oaths or creeds. There is nothing in their mission statement that is exclusive to any people of faith because humanist values are pretty similar to Christian values, minus the religious exclusion, sexist gender roles, sexual repression, and bigotry against homosexuals. The following is from the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Camp Quest website:

Are campers at Camp Quest required to be atheists?

Answer

No. Campers at Camp Quest are encouraged to think for themselves and are not required to hold any particular view. We firmly believe that children should not be labeled with worldview labels by adults, and instead should be encouraged to ask questions and explore different worldviews as they grow.

We do present atheism and humanism as valid and reasonable options for an ethical and fulfilling life, and most counselors at camp consider themselves to be atheists.

Would a child who believes in God be comfortable at Camp Quest?

Answer

Yes. Campers at Camp Quest explore different worldviews, and many children aren’t decided yet on their beliefs on the God question. Campers who believe in God may get a lot of interested questions from their fellow campers, but the camp environment fosters asking these questions in a spirit of dialogue and mutual respect. As far as we know, campers who believe in God have all had fun, made friends, and had a great Camp Quest experience.

This isn’t just lip service. I volunteered as a camp counselor for Camp Quest in Ohio which had relocated from Kentucky because a group of Baptists passed a law just so they could legally refuse to rent their camp grounds to us “dirty atheists.” One year we had a boy from a Catholic family who was there because his atheist grandfather had suggested it and his parents were open-minded. This boy was immensely popular with the other campers who were eager to show him the tolerance and respect that they who live in very religiously intolerant communities longed for. Sadly, I’ve met several kids who lost Christian friends because their friends’ parents found out about their atheism.

One of the purposes of Camp Quest is to let kids from secular homes know that it’s okay to choose no religion and to be skeptical of the existence of god/gods, because our kids are constantly bombarded with the opposite message.

It’s bad enough when peers tease and bully. But it is much worse when, in addition, parents, adult mentors, and whole institutions tell a child *you* don’t belong here. Go away. At that point the exclusion can feel like a hopeless situation because it seems the whole world insists they change who they are, or simply disappear.

Exclusion based on personal worldview is wrong, just as exclusion based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability, or sexual orientation is wrong. It’s wrong because it results in needless suffering. It encourages feelings of fear and shame in the people being excluded. It also encourages self-righteous bullying among members of the In-Group.

Scouting groups that exclude atheists (or gays, or other religious sects, etc.) can tell themselves that they have high moral standards all they want. In reality, they are just bullies teaching intolerance.



Martha Knox is a stay-at-home mom, artist, writer, and art teacher. She writes for the blog “[Humanist Mom](#)” and volunteers for the Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia. Also above is the Camp Quest logo.



ROBERT GREEN INGERSOLL AND THE REFORM IMPERATIVE

AN APPRECIATION OF INGERSOLL AND THE FREETHOUGHT TRAIL
AMHERST, DRESDEN, AND SENECA FALLS, NEW YORK
SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, AUGUST 16-17, 2014

**A CONFERENCE AND TOUR FEATURING
SUSAN JACOBY**

TOM FLYNN ☿ MARGARET DOWNEY ☿ CHRISTOPHER CAMERON
MELINDA GRUBE ☿ LAUREN BECKER ☿ ROGER GREELEY

AND A KEYNOTE LECTURE FEATURING
SALLY ROESCH WAGNER

Join us for an immersive two-day conference and tour celebrating Robert Green Ingersoll
and the rich reform legacy of west-central New York's Freethought Trail!

SATURDAY, AUGUST 16: A full day of lectures and presentations at the Center for Inquiry-Transnational, Amherst, New York.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 17: All-day motor coach excursion visits the Ingersoll Museum in Dresden (with its all-new interior!)
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REGISTRATION: \$165 includes everything: ground transportation, motor coach tour, and five meals.
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Attendance is strictly limited; when the motor coach is full, registration will end. Register today!

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PENNSYLVANIA STATE
atheist/humanist
conference

August 29 – August 31, 2014
Pittsburgh, PA
<http://atheistpa.org>

The Third Annual PA State Atheist/Humanist Conference will be held Labor Day Weekend 2014 in Pittsburgh. Conference activities will begin at 6:00 PM on Friday, August 29 and wrap up at 4:00 PM Sunday, August 31. Don't leave early on Sunday — we have something special planned and don't forget that Monday is a holiday!

There are multiple ticket options including an early-bird reduced ticket price for those attending all three days. Come hear over 20 speakers, comedians, and entertainers, including:



Jamila Bey
Journalist &
Radio Host



Amanda Brown
We Are
Atheism



Jerry Coyne
Why Evolution
Is True



Jerry DeWitt
Hope After
Faith



Fred Edwards
United Coalition
of Reason



Dan Fincke
Camels With
Hammers



**Vyckie
Garrison**
No Longer
Quivering



**Annie Laurie
Gaylor**
Freedom From
Religion
Foundation

The Freethought Society's 2014 Four-Month Activities Calendar

July 24

The Freethought Society is very pleased to present noted author, blogger, feminist, and secular and human rights activist **Sikivu Hutchinson** on **Thursday, July 24, 2014 at 7:00 PM**. She will be hosted at the **Ludington Library (5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania)**. Hutchinson is a dynamic speaker and the author of *Moral Combat: Black Atheists, Gender Politics, and the Value Wars* and *Imagining Transit: Race, Gender, and Transportation Politics in Los Angeles*. Her latest book, *Godless Americana: Race and Religious Rebels*, has been a huge success. Hutchinson will speak on "Feminism, Freethought, and the 99%." The event is **free and open to the public**.



Hutchinson states, "As part of the most religious ethnic group in the nation, African American nonbelievers are a tiny minority in a community which has borne the brunt of the economic downturn. While white atheist and humanist organizations go to battle over separation of religion and government and creationism in schools, black non-believers face a racial and gender divide precipitated by rollbacks on affirmative action, voting rights, affordable housing, reproductive rights, education, criminal justice, wages and job opportunities. Similar to the race/class schisms within feminism, when progressive black atheists look to atheist and humanist organizations for solidarity on social justice there is a staggering disconnect."

All this and more will be presented during Hutchinson's speech.

August 16-17

There is no official FS meeting in August. FS supporters are encouraged to attend a Robert G. Ingersoll-themed conference and Freethought Trail tour sponsored by the Center For Inquiry. Freethought Society founder and president **Margaret Downey** is a speaker at the event. Other speakers are **Susan Jacoby, Tom Flynn, Lauren Becker, Christopher Cameron, Roger Greeley, Malinda Grube, and Sally Roesch Wagner**. More information about this event can be found at:



www.secularhumanism.org/ingersollcon

September 29

The Freethought Society is pleased to host **Larry Robin** the former president of Robin's Bookstore, the oldest independent book store in Philadelphia until its closure in December 2012. His presentation, "Scott Nearing: The Making of a Radical," will take place on **Monday, September 29** at the **Ludington Library (5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania)**. The event starts at 7:00 PM. It is **free and open to the public**.



Robin is co-founder of Moonstone Incorporated and director of the Moonstone Arts Center. He created and directed The Celebration of Black Writing for 18 years, The Paul Robeson Festival for 8 years, Poetry Ink for 18 years, and various other Moonstone programs. He currently produces poetry programs.

While very few people have heard of **Scott Nearing**, Robin considers his legacy an important topic for all freethinkers. Nearing died on August 24, 1983, at the age of 100 years plus 18 days. During his lifetime, he was arrested for sedition for writing a pamphlet against the draft for the First World War in 1917, and was the first person thrown out of the American Communist Party in 1919. Attend this lecture to learn more about Nearing, the author of hundreds of books and articles on economics and politics.

October 6

The Freethought Society is very pleased to present **Jason Torpy**, President of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF). MAAF a national non-profit organization that is developing a strong community for nontheists in the military. His free and open-to-the-public speech on **Monday, October 6, 2014 at 7:00 PM** will take place at the **Ludington Library (5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania)**.



Torpy's speech, entitled "The Pathway to Equal Rights for Atheists in Foxholes," will highlight historical precedents and current events related to religious privilege in the military, the humanist community, and the role of the chaplaincy in fostering change. Topics will include humanist alternatives to church at the military academies and Air Force basic training, humanist religious preference, and the Navy's humanist chaplain candidate.

The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression and choice. FS also advocates separation of religion and government. FS publishes *The Freethought Society News* every other month. The newsletter is delivered as an ezine via email and is complimentary to supporters, donors, like-minded individuals and those who are interested in learning more about freedom of thought.

Monthly events take place in many locations across the United States, with emphasis in the tri-state area of Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey. FS activities and services depend on the financial contributions of supporters. Funds may be sent using this form or via the FS website (www.FtSociety.org/donate/). All contributions to FS are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). Please [donate](#) generously.

Yes! I want to:

- become a supporter / renew support of FS (Please enclose checks payable to the Freethought Society):
 \$30 Individual Supporter **\$35** Family Supporter **\$20** Student **\$1,000** Supporter for a Lifetime
- become a "Freethought Star" by setting up an automatic monthly donation to FS from my bank or through PayPal in the amount of (circle one): **\$5** **\$10** **\$15** **\$20** **\$25** **\$30** **\$35** **\$40** **\$45** \$ ____ (other per month)
- earmark a donation to (insert project, event or committee name): _____

Name: _____

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Check here if you prefer your sponsorship to remain anonymous.

FS will email a complimentary newsletter to potential supporters. Please provide contact information for anyone who might be interested in receiving an FS newsletter.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Use this same form to bid on the use of the FS St. Croix Cottage.

FS's cottage in St. Croix is available for use the 11th week of each year. In 2015, the week offered will be March 14-21 (Saturday-Saturday). The yearly maintenance fee for the beachside cottage at Chenay Bay Beach Resort is \$950.

The lowest bid FS can accept must meet that cost.

The bid is for a one-week stay in cottage number 6 and does not include travel, rental car or food expenses. If you are interested in placing a bid for the use of this property, please return this form to the address below:

Freethought Society
St. Croix Cottage
P.O. Box 242
Pocopson, PA 19366-0242

Email a bid to:

<http://bit.ly/17p4FfK>

For additional information see:

<http://bit.ly/1dYwjVN>

