



TEXAS  
FREEDOM  
NETWORK

# NETWORK NEWS

A MAINSTREAM VOICE TO COUNTER THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT · WWW.TFN.ORG · FALL 2007

## TFN Counters Religious Right's Agenda for Public Schools

This year far-right pressure groups and their cronies in state government have intensified their assault on religious freedom in Texas public schools – but the **Texas Freedom Network** is fighting back!

Earlier this year, TFN built a wall of opposition to a deeply flawed bill calling for mandatory Bible classes in public high schools. With TFN leading the way, lawmakers overhauled the bill, adding requirements for statewide standards for curriculum, textbooks and teacher qualifications. The heavily revised bill, which passed overwhelmingly, also includes other measures to protect the religious freedom of students - preventing anyone from using Bible classes to promote their own narrow religious dogma in public schools.

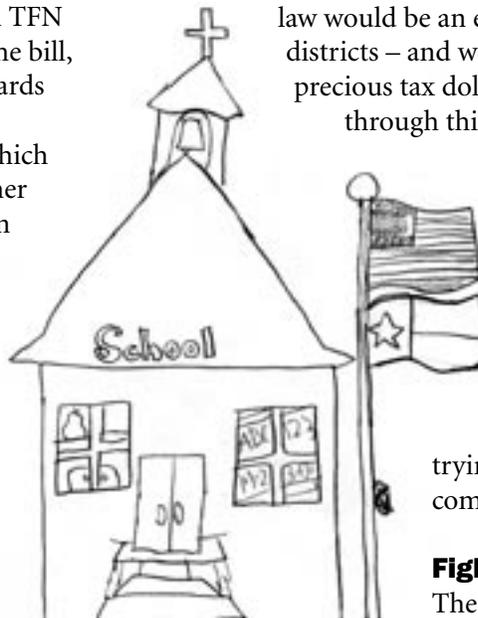
### Religious Expression in Public Schools

Another new law backed by the far right, however, is fundamentally at odds with the principle of religious freedom. The deceptively named “Religious Viewpoints Anti-Discrimination Act” forces public school students to participate in public events that may promote religious views they and their families don’t share – or may even find deeply offensive.

The law mandates that officials turn school events – such as morning announcements, football games, and graduation ceremonies – into so-called “limited public

forums.” This outrageous law would allow speakers to pray or even try to convert other students required to listen or attend the event. Even worse, the law ties hands of local officials when students whose religious beliefs are ignored or even belittled turn to them for help.

TFN warned lawmakers that implementing the new law would be an expensive nightmare for local school districts – and we were right. Local officials are using precious tax dollars to pay attorneys to guide them through this state-mandated mess. But the law’s supporters are demanding that school districts implement a “model policy” that actually threatens the First Amendment protections for the religious freedom of all students – including those of minority faiths. One weary school official in Abilene has summed up the problem: “Really and truly, we’re just trying to have school, and I think this is a complicating factor.”



### Fighting Back

The attorneys who wrote this bill – and who make a living suing school districts over issues like this – have refused to retreat. So the Texas Freedom Network has stepped up our efforts to counter this blatant assault on religious freedom.

TFN has authored newspaper op-eds and worked with reporters statewide who are trying to understand this unnecessary, complicated law. TFN’s outreach and field team has also engaged legal experts, activists and progressive allies in efforts to monitor implementation of the law. In addition, we are working with lawmakers to determine how the law can be changed to ensure that extremists can’t hijack our public schools to promote their own narrow religious agendas.

Stay informed by signing up for TFN News Clips and Action Alerts at [www.tfn.org](http://www.tfn.org). Together we can turn back the far right’s newest assault on religious freedom in Texas public schools!

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## A note from President Kathy Miller

Cecile Richards founded the Texas Freedom Network to unite folks across the state in a single goal: to promote mainstream values as a counter to the growing influence of the religious right. This year, TFN spent a lot of time traveling our vast state to bring more and more people together in this unifying mission.

Our work this year has included dozens of public speaking engagements, our very successful Faith and Freedom Speaker Series, town hall meetings, book clubs and much more. Through all of these, TFN continues to develop new strategies and devote significant resources to serving as a true *network* – linking people together in a movement that has a real impact on public policy in our state.

In the course of our travels this year, we met a woman in Dallas whose excitement was contagious after hearing Rev. Jim Wallis call on progressive people of faith to promote *our shared values* in Texas public policies. We met an Arlington woman who, as the mother of a child with autism, knows firsthand the dangers of draining scarce special-education funding from our neighborhood schools to fund private school vouchers.

We visited with a science teacher from Lewisville who refuses to allow extremists to censor classroom instruction on evolution in biology classes. We heard from dozens of people in Odessa who believe public schools are not the place for Bible classes that promote one religious view over all others. We met a college professor in College Station who wants his government to support stem cell research and maintain hope for those suffering from debilitating illness. And we met hundreds of people at Christ Church Cathedral in Houston who believe strongly in the mainstream values of religious freedom and civil liberties.

Each of these folks come to TFN with different issues they care deeply about. They are unified, however, in knowing that defeating the divisive and extremist agenda of the religious right is the key to winning on all of those issues.

Our movement is growing every year. This year, TFN proudly boasts more than 28,000 supporters. Next year we will host leadership development workshops to train leaders on effective advocacy skills and to help them work effectively for change in the 2008 elections. We've expanded our field staff to reach even more activists across the state. We're involving student field interns to draw more young people into our network. And we are educating our members on ways they can volunteer and contribute to key candidates for office who will help restore the political balance in our state.

If you haven't already formally joined our network of activists, please do so today. Simply go to [www.tfn.org](http://www.tfn.org) and click JOIN. Today, as in our beginning, our network can only be as strong as the individuals who join it.



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### A GIFT HAS BEEN GIVEN...

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#### *In Honor of*

Melvin Lack's Birthday  
by Anita Knight

Network News is the official newsletter of the  
Texas Freedom Network.

## TFN'S OUTREACH/FIELD INTERNS



### Goodbye, Emily!

The Texas Freedom Network says goodbye to Emily Sentilles, who served as our summer 2007 research fellow. Emily, a graduate student at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas in Austin, was a key part of the TFN research team. She also helped compile our popular daily and weekly news clips.

### Hello, Fall Interns!

The Texas Freedom Network welcomes Bren Gorman and Jordan Nadler as TFN's fall research fellows. Bren and Jordan are graduate students at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at UT-Austin. TFN's field team also includes three new interns this fall. Garrett Mize and Andrew Walker are both government majors at UT-Austin. Jerrica Anderson is a biology major at Huston-Tillotson University in Austin.



Bren Gorman, Garrett Mize, Jerrica Anderson,  
Andrew Walker, Jordan Nadler

## Are You a ‘Friend of God’?

### Filmmaker Alexandra Pelosi Charms Packed House at TFN’s Houston Speaker Series Event

Houston’s historic Christ Church Cathedral played host to a standing room-only crowd of more than 400 people as the Texas Freedom Network’s Faith & Freedom Speaker Series came to town on August 23. The crowd was thrilled – and appropriately appalled – by the new documentary film “Friends of God,” which profiles some of the most influential members of America’s conservative evangelical Christian community. Afterward, the film’s producer – Alexandra Pelosi – made the movie come to life with riveting firsthand accounts of her encounters with prominent leaders of the religious right.

The TFN Education Fund extends a special thanks to Christ Church Cathedral for hosting this memorable event and to our Houston-area partners – Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the National Council of Jewish Women and ACLU-TX.



*More than 400 TFN members turned out to screen ‘Friends of God’ and hear from Emmy-winning filmmaker Alexandra Pelosi*

## TFN Exposes New Education Board Chair as Anti-Science Creationist

In August a recorded lecture surfaced putting the new chair of the State Board of Education on record opposing both sound science education and religious tolerance.

The recording was unearthed by *The Texas Observer* just weeks after Gov. Rick Perry appointed Don McLeroy, a Bryan dentist, as chairman of the state board. McLeroy delivered the lecture at Grace Bible Church in Bryan in 2005. A full transcript and an audio file of the lecture are available at [www.tfn.org](http://www.tfn.org).

During his hour-long lecture, McLeroy recounted the controversy over teaching evolution during the state board’s adoption of new biology textbooks in 2003. He was one of only four members on the 15-member panel who voted to reject the textbooks. Those four members argued that the textbooks failed to discuss creationist-fabricated “weaknesses” of evolutionary theory. McLeroy said:

*“It was only the four really conservative, orthodox Christians on the board [who] were*

*willing to stand up to the textbooks and say they don’t present the weaknesses of evolution. Amazing.”*

Such statements are particularly insulting to Roman Catholics and millions of other Christians who see no conflict between their religious faith and accepting the science behind evolution.

But McLeroy didn’t stop there. At one point during the lecture, he clearly tied “intelligent design” – a religious-based concept billed by supporters as an alternative to the scientific theory of evolution – to Biblical creationism:

*“Why is ‘intelligent design’ the big tent? Because we’re all lined up against the fact that naturalism, that nature is all there is. Whether you’re a progressive creationist, recent creationist, young earth, old earth, it’s all in the tent of ‘intelligent design.’”*



*Don McLeroy (R-Bryan) characterizes evolution-‘intelligent design’ debate as clash between ‘orthodox Christians’ and all others*

TFN President Kathy Miller warned science supporters to brace for what might be a rough ride in 2008 when the state board revises state science standards:

*“This recording makes clear the very real danger that Texas schoolchildren may soon be learning more about the religious beliefs of politicians than about sound science in their biology classes. Even worse, it appears that Don McLeroy believes anyone who disagrees with him can’t be a true Christian.”*

**CD recordings of the Rev. Jim Wallis’ presentation at the TFN Faith and Freedom Speaker Series event in Dallas on July 24 are now available. If you would like one, please call 512-322-0545 or e-mail [tfn@tfn.org](mailto:tfn@tfn.org).**

# 'Let Freedom Sing' Gala Is a Smash Hit!

More than 700 supporters joined the Texas Freedom Network board and staff on Oct. 6 at La Zona Rosa in Austin to celebrate TFN's 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

The evening was filled with extraordinary performances by the energetic dance band Skyrocket! and the phenomenal Ruthie Foster. Supporters "let freedom sing" and celebrated TFN's mission of religious freedom and individual liberties. With one of the best silent auctions in TFN history, guests had the opportunity to bid on one-of-a-kind artwork, wonderful spa packages, exciting getaways, and dinners at some of Austin's best restaurants. This year's live auction spotlighted 4 VIP Tickets to the Daily Show with Jon Stewart – the best-selling item of the night!

Thanks to all the great supporters who made it out to the event and to all of those who helped make this year's event a success. In particular, we would like to thank our event sponsors and the live auction, silent auction and food donors. Your generous support enables us to continue the important work of defending mainstream values.

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*The phenomenal Ruthie Foster lets freedom sing!*



*Trish Murphy, lead vocalist of Skyrocket!, brings the house down.*



*Connie & Dan McLendon with Hon. Libby & Dale Linebarger.*



*Richard Hartgrove, Seabrook Jones and Marc Harmon*



*TFN Board member Tanya Voss and Event Co-Chair Suzee Brooks*



*Lulu Flores and Alicia del Rio*



*TFN President Kathy Miller and Hon. Sarah Eckhardt*



*Lucina Suarez, Tom Shipley, Robert Sullivan and Debbie Martin*

### **2007 Samantha Smoot Activist Award Nina and Joe Brown**

**D**uring the “Let Freedom Sing” gala, TFN President Kathy Miller and Board Chair Diane Ireson presented the 2007 Samantha Smoot Activist Award to Nina and Joe Brown of Houston. Nina, who suffers from Parkinson’s disease, and her husband Joe have traveled the state to build support for stem cell research, which gives hope to so many people with serious illnesses. These untiring supporters of responsible medical research also lobbied lawmakers and spoke at committee hearings in the wee hours of the morning during this year’s legislative session. Without a doubt, they embody the hope and energy of TFN activists across the state.

*TFN President Kathy Miller, Nina & Joe Brown, and TFN Board Chair Diane Ireson*



## TFN Celebrates Real Texas Values in Dallas!

Long-standing supporters and new members joined TFN staff and board members in September for our annual members' reception in Dallas. Lisa Blue and Fred Baron generously hosted the event in their beautiful home and welcomed more than 150 supporters to toast TFN's many accomplishments. We extend a special thanks to Lisa Blue and Fred Baron for their continued generosity. And thank you to all our sponsors!

*Dinah Miller, Phyllis Bernstein,  
Tom & Sally Dunning*



*Janie & Cappy McGarr  
with Lisa Blue*



*Karla Barber, Lisa Kraus,  
Joy Mankoff and  
Naomi Aberly*



### 2006 Retirement Law Offers Charitable Gift Opportunity

The Pension Protection Act of 2006 allows taxpayers aged 70½ or older to direct tax-free distributions to be made directly from their IRAs, generally only to qualified public charities such as the TFN Education Fund, and only through December 31, 2007. The maximum amount any taxpayer may contribute in this way is \$100,000 for 2007.

Administrators of IRAs are currently implementing their own rules for handling these kinds of distributions. You will need to check with your specific account trustee to see if there are any limits they impose.

**Please contact TFN at 512-322-0545 with questions or to pledge a planned gift.**

## TFN HEROES

### Grassroots Heroes

TFN was honored to present the 2007 Grassroots Hero Awards to Mara LaViola and Nagla Moussa at our Dallas reception in September. These two incredible and inspiring women worked tirelessly on behalf of children in special education and to oppose private school vouchers during the legislative session this year.



*Mara LaViola, TFN President Kathy Miller,  
Nagla Moussa*

### Legislative Hero

Rep. Scott Hochberg, D-Houston, received TFN's 2007 Legislative Hero Award for his determined support for religious freedom during this year's legislative session. Rep. Hochberg's

leadership was instrumental in putting key safeguards for religious freedom into a bill on Bible classes in public schools. Rep. Hochberg also raised the alarm about a deeply flawed bill promoting religious agendas in public schools. Supporters of religious freedom have a great friend in Rep. Hochberg.



## TFN's Student Chapter Is Back

We're excited to capture the energy of student activists in new and creative ways and involve more young people in our grassroots efforts. Last year the **Texas Freedom Network** extended our campus outreach by establishing a new student chapter at the University of Texas at Austin. Our student chapter worked to educate



other UT students on core TFN issues. In addition, they debated the Young Conservatives of Texas on vouchers and stem cell research, and more than a hundred students attended the events.

This year the student chapter is planning additional forums on evolution and sex education. TFN is also making plans to open chapters on other college campuses across the state. If you or one of your family members would like to learn more about these exciting activities, then please call 512-322-0545 or send an e-mail to [tfnlonghorns@gmail.com](mailto:tfnlonghorns@gmail.com).

## TFNEF Builds Grassroots Leadership

The **Texas Freedom Network Education Fund** is excited to launch its first Leadership Development Institute events this winter! The TFN Education Fund is actively working to create a mainstream alternative to the right's extremism.

The TFN Education Fund has conducted extensive public opinion research, including a statewide poll and focus groups across Texas. We want to share what we've learned and give local leaders the tools necessary to help us reclaim the "values debate" for mainstream Texans.

Specifically, the Leadership Development Institute will provide full-day trainings in:

- Current Local and Statewide Political Landscape
- Legislative & State Board of Education Advocacy
- Messaging Development & Effective Use of Media
- Effective Grassroots Organizing

Our first two trainings will be held in Fort Worth on January 26, 2008, and in Houston on February 2, 2008. To apply for a spot, contact Val Benavidez, TFN's outreach and field director, at 512-322-0545 or [Val@tfn.org](mailto:Val@tfn.org).



## State of the Religious Right: 2008

Keep an eye out in January for the **Texas Freedom Network Education Fund's** third Annual report on the religious right in Texas. Since the TFN Education Fund published the first such report in 2006, the *State of the Religious Right* has become a must-read for the news media and for everyone who opposes far-right extremism in Texas.

## Stand Up for Science with the Texas Freedom Network in 2008!

The Stand Up for Science campaign promotes promising medical research into stem cells, responsible sex education for Texas teens and the teaching of evolution in public schools.

**We need your help! Join TFN's Stand Up for Science Rapid Response Team today!**

Please fill out the form below and fax it to 512-322-0550 or mail to:

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You can also sign up at [www.tfn.org/subscribe/](http://www.tfn.org/subscribe/)

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| <input type="checkbox"/> writing a letter to the editor                             | <input type="checkbox"/> calling my State Board of Education member   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> becoming a postcard captain                                | <input type="checkbox"/> joining a rapid-response "phone tree"        |
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