



TEXAS
FREEDOM
NETWORK

NETWORK NEWS

A MAINSTREAM VOICE TO COUNTER THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT • WWW.TFN.ORG • SPRING 2007

Members in Action: TFN Lobby Day 2007



TFN members brought mainstream values back to the Capitol on March 26. Members lobbied against private school vouchers and efforts to ban foster parenting by gay and lesbian families, and for stem cell research, responsible sex education and religious freedom.

A note from President Kathy Miller

I am reminded nearly every day of this busy legislative session of the amazing power and passion of TFN's grassroots activists. Your activism is at the core of all the work we do.

On March 26, for example, we hosted a grassroots Lobby Day and training for more than 130 TFN activists, including a large group of parents from the Edgewood Independent School District in San Antonio. Despite rainy weather, the enthusiasm and passion of the supporters who came to Austin from all over our state were clear.

After a series of energetic training sessions, TFN activists made their way to dozens of Capitol offices for face-to-face meetings with their elected leaders, urging them to defeat private school vouchers and to promote responsible and hopeful stem cell research. They also called on legislators to support medically accurate sex education for teens and to oppose mean-spirited efforts to ban or restrict foster care by gay and lesbian families.

But our Lobby Day hasn't been the only time grassroots activism has been important. Calls, e-mails and letters from TFN Rapid Response Teams have been instrumental in helping us expose and defeat the religious right's aggressive and divisive agenda at the Capitol. Among our most important accomplishments so far has been beating back sneak attacks by the far right on embryonic stem cell research.

TFN supporters have also offered personal testimony on key issues – including vouchers and stem cell research – before legislative committees. Just as important, they have been critical in making sure our staff members know what's happening in legislative districts across the state. For example, our supporters were among the first to alert us about deceptive pro-voucher fliers arriving in mailboxes in targeted legislative districts in recent weeks. The fliers are part of an expensive, slick public relations campaign launched by voucher sugar daddy James Leininger of San Antonio. But the information we got about the mailers helped us refocus and sharpen our lobbying efforts against vouchers at the Capitol. In March, those efforts resulted in a defeat of vouchers on the House floor by a vote of 129-8!

But as we enter the last month of the legislative session, some of our hardest work lies ahead. James Leininger has spent nearly \$50 million pushing vouchers and vows not to quit despite his resounding defeat in March. We also know the far right is poised to strike against promising embryonic stem cell research and gay and lesbian families. And bills that would undermine religious freedom – by promoting devotional Bible courses in public school classrooms – are still alive.

We need your help in this final month. If you haven't done so already, please take the time to sign up at www.tfn.org for a Rapid Response Team. Add your voice to the thousands of other TFN supporters who are defending neighborhood schools, standing up for science, protecting religious freedom, and advocating for civil and equal rights for all Texans and their families.



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



Hello, Laura!

Laura Schroeder joins the TFN team as the new annual fund officer. She grew up in Washington, D.C., and earned her bachelor's degree in communications from The University of Cincinnati. She previously worked with Susan Harry Consulting, raising funds for local and state political campaigns. Laura enjoys all the live music and outdoor activities Austin has to offer. Welcome to TFN, Laura!



Welcome, Sarah and Neil!

TFN welcomes two new board members, Sarah Eckhardt and Hazzan Neil Blumofe. Sarah is a Travis County Commissioner, and Neil is the Cantor at Congregation Agudas Achim in Austin. They bring a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm to the TFN Board of Directors.





2007 Prayer Breakfast

Early in the morning on March 26, pastors, rabbis and religious leaders from around the state gathered in Austin to break bread with the women and men who represent them in the Legislature. The gathering was the **Texas Faith Network's** inaugural **Clergy & Legislator Prayer Breakfast**.

Challenging the stereotype of such events as conservative and partisan affairs, the Faith Network invited all of our state's legislators – regardless of political party – to this nonpartisan event. Almost 50 clergy gathered at the First United Methodist Church Family Life Center, where they heard a word of challenge from Dr. Obery Hendricks (more information on Dr. Hendricks below) and raised their voices together in prayer for our state.

The Faith Network offers a special thanks to the Jacks Law Firm for underwriting the prayer breakfast.



Rev. Dennis Harris of Fort Worth and Rev. Ragan Courtney of Austin.



(Left to Right) Jeff Lutes of Soulforce, Faith Network Director Ryan Valentine, Rev. Frank Goldsmith, Rev. Ragan Courtney, Chaplain Paul Dodd U.S. Army (Ret).



TFN Presents... “The Politics of Jesus”

TFN kicked off its second annual **Faith & Freedom Speaker Series** on March 25 in Austin. Dr. Obery Hendricks of New York Theological Seminary introduced the audience to his provocative new book, *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted*. Hendricks leveled sharp criticism at contemporary politicians who invoke the name of Jesus and yet ignore the suffering of the poor and needy. The crowd that was gathered in the beautiful King-Seabrook Chapel at Huston-Tillotson University welcomed Hendricks' challenging message, standing in line afterward to have him sign copies of his new book.

Dr. Obery Hendricks speaks at Huston-Tillotson University.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Bringing Mainstream Values Back to the Capitol

Last year's elections brought more moderate voices to the Texas Legislature. As the 80th Legislative Session moves into its last month, however, the far right is flexing its muscles. TFN is working hard to turn back the far right's agenda on four broad fronts: public education, science and health, religious liberty and equal/civil rights. Read more about these issues and specific bills at www.tfn.org/legislativewatch.

DEFENDING NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

Priority Bills on Vouchers	
S.B. 1000	TFN opposes
S.B. 1506	TFN opposes

Wealthy San Antonio businessman James Leininger is bankrolling an extravagant pro-voucher public relations campaign across the state. That campaign is targeting selected legislative districts with billboards, radio spots, newspaper columns and thousands of misleading mailers. Even so, voucher supporters suffered a big defeat in March. At the end of the month, the House voted overwhelmingly to bar public funding for private school vouchers. Political maneuvering in the Legislature could eliminate that ban before the session ends, but the House's action made passage of any voucher scheme much harder.

Two Senate voucher bills have received the most attention so far. Senate Bill 1000 by Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, would raid special education funding for public schools to pay for an expensive voucher scheme for students with autism. In addition, Sen. Kyle Janek, R-Houston, is carrying a bill (crafted by Leininger's hired hands) that would create a voucher scheme in the state's most populous counties.



TFN President Kathy Miller talks to activists from Edgewood Independent School District in Austin about lobbying lawmakers against private school vouchers.

TFN is organizing opposition to both bills, regardless of what happens to the House ban on public funding for vouchers. To offer real help to families of children with disabilities, for example, TFN has worked with senators to craft a "special education initiatives" package of bills as a far better alternative to Sen. Shapiro's S.B. 1000. That package would help public schools fulfill their promise to educate all of the state's more than 500,000 students with disabilities, including students with autism.

STANDING UP FOR SCIENCE

Priority Bills on Stem Cell Research	
H.B. 225	TFN opposes
H.B. 2704	TFN supports

The far right has taken aim at two critical issues in its dangerous war on science: stem cell research and sex education. The good news is that TFN supporters are already playing an important role in beating back these attacks.

Calls to legislators from TFN's Stand Up for Science Rapid Response Team members helped stop early efforts to ban public funding for embryonic stem cell research. But in April, the State House Affairs Committee called a snap vote – in the middle of discussion on a completely unrelated bill – on H.B. 225, which would enact such a ban. TFN is focused on keeping this bill from passing out of the House. In addition, we are supporting other legislation that would protect and promote this promising medical research.

Priority Bills on Sex Education

S.B. 3165	TFN supports
S.B. 311	TFN opposes

We have been even more proactive on another vital issue: making sure Texas teens get the information they need to protect their health and future. TFN is working with Rep. Jessica Farrar, D-Houston, on common-sense legislation – H.B. 3165 – that would require information public school students get in abstinence-only and sex education programs be medically accurate. The effect of this legislation would be to shine a light on irresponsible programs that, for example, wildly exaggerate failure rates for medically proven contraceptive and disease-prevention techniques. We are also working to beat back efforts – such as H.B. 311 by Rep. Warren Chisum, R-Pampa – to make it even harder for teens to get medically accurate information on sex education.



TFN activists have been hard at work lobbying legislators on issues such as public education, medical research, sex education and religious freedom.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Priority Bills on Religious Freedom

H.B. 289	TFN seeks revisions
H.B. 1287	TFN opposes
H.B. 3678	TFN opposes

Assaults on religious freedom have become increasingly common in the Texas Legislature. This year TFN has been working to revise proposed legislation that would expand government-funded faith-based programs and to defeat two bills that would turn our public schools into Sunday schools.

H.B. 289 by Rep. Dianne Delisi, R-Temple, would create a new public account that distributes funds to community and faith-based charities. TFN is still working to

strengthen responsible oversight and accountability measures to protect taxpayers and help insulate the fund from political interference.

Two other bills represent further threats to religious freedom. H.B. 1287 by Rep. Chisum calls on Texas public schools to offer courses about the Bible. TFN has succeeded in persuading the House Public Education Committee to add critical safeguards to the bill to protect the religious freedom of students. These safeguards will also protect school districts from legal jeopardy. State Rep. Charlie Howard, R-Sugar Land, claims his H.B. 3678 would protect religious expression by students. But the First Amendment already does so. Moreover, his bill could permit students to use official school functions to promote their own religious views before captive audiences.

ADVOCATING FOR CIVIL/EQUAL RIGHTS

Attacks on gay and lesbian families have become a staple for far-right lawmakers in Texas. In fact, early in the session Rep. Chisum said he supports assigning second-class status to qualified, loving gay and lesbian families seeking to serve as foster parents. While no bills have been filed, TFN is working with Equality Texas and other coalition partners to block amendments.

TFN needs your help!

Help us turn back efforts by the far right in the last month of the legislative session. Go to www.tfn.org to:

- **sign up** for a TFN Rapid Response Team,
- **learn more** about issues and bills in Legislative Watch, and
- **donate** and help fund TFN's critical work in the Legislature.

Thank You, Texas Freedom Fighters!

Freedom Fighters make monthly contributions by credit card or bank draft and provide the foundation for our vital work. Join Freedom Fighters today! Fill out the information on the enclosed envelope and return it to TFN or sign up online at www.tfn.org/donate.

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Becky Pastner
 by Frances L. Cohen

Becky Pastner, Steven Smith & Val Benavidez
 by Stephen Pastner & Judie Irvine

Bill Schkade
 by Lawrence "Scotty" Schkade

SUPPORT TFN'S GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY WORK!

Become a Member: With a gift of \$35 or more annually, members receive voter's guides, action alerts and invitations to activist trainings, public education events and fundraisers.

Join the Freedom Council: With an annual gift of \$1,000 or more, TFN's major donors provide the resources and commitment that are critical to fighting the religious right.

Matching Gifts: Many companies match employees' contributions to qualified nonprofit organizations. Inquire at your company's personnel office to obtain the appropriate form and send it to TFN along with your contribution made payable to the TFN Education Fund.

Planned Giving: Through planned giving, you and your family can help TFN for years to come and leave a legacy that reflects your lifelong values. Effective gift planning can generate substantial income tax savings, eliminate capital gain taxes, reduce death transfer taxes and offer supplementary income and other benefits.

Gifts of Stock: A gift of stock can be one of the most attractive ways to support TFN and the TFN Education Fund.

Gifts of Expertise: Some of TFN's supporters occasionally provide professional advice and assistance on a *pro bono* basis, typically in technical and professional fields. If you're receptive to contributing in this manner, please contact TFN.

Gifts of Time: TFN has amazing and dedicated volunteers whose critical work saves many staff hours and dollars. Typical volunteer activities include assembly of mailings, data entry and phone banking.

Please contact TFN Development Director Rachel Glast at (512) 322-0545 or e-mail her at rachel@tfn.org with questions or to make a contribution.

TFN LEGISLATIVE ACADEMY



TFN's inaugural Legislative Academy class of six interns has spent the spring semester getting hands-on experience in the political arena and grassroots activism. Texas Monthly Editor Evan Smith (center, in tie) and other political observers as well as elected officials spoke to Academy interns throughout the semester. Pictured from left to right: Legislative Academy coordinator Naveen Shakir, Ray Skidmore, Rey Pruneda II, Sam Cornish, Evan Smith, Tal DeBauche, Whitney Chlon and Rachel Burkhart.

Thanks to all of the speakers who made the Legislative Academy Speaker Series a success: Rep. Mark Strama, Roy Spence, Rep. Donna Howard, Evan Smith, former Rep. Carter Casteel, Sen. Kirk Watson, Rep. Rafael Anchia, Rep. Valinda Bolton, Rep. Juan Garcia and former Lt. Gov. Ben Barnes.



Goodbye, Naveen!

Naveen Shakir is leaving TFN after a year working as an outreach and research intern. She helped establish and run the TFN Legislative Academy during her tenure and was a key organizer in developing the TFN Student Chapter. Naveen is leaving to begin graduate work in international politics. Good luck, Naveen!

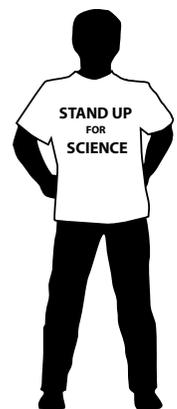


Goodbye, Sara!

Sara Struckman says goodbye to TFN after a year working as a research and communications intern. Among her responsibilities has been putting together TFN's popular News Clips. She is leaving the position to have a baby this summer and begin writing her dissertation for her doctorate in communications from the University of Texas.

STAND UP FOR SCIENCE Become a Postcard Captain!

Demonstrating broad-based public support for stem cell research is a key part of the Texas Freedom Network's Stand Up for Science Campaign. One way you can show your support is to become a postcard captain. Captains are responsible for recruiting a team of friends to distribute and collect postcards. Captains also track the progress of their teams, requesting additional postcards and reporting back to TFN staff as needed.



For more information on how to become a postcard captain, call Ian Davis at 512-322-0545 or e-mail him at ian@tfn.org.



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Why the Right Gets It Wrong
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