



TEXAS
FREEDOM
NETWORK

NETWORK NEWS

A MAINSTREAM VOICE TO COUNTER THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT · WWW.TFN.ORG · SPRING 2006

TFN Exposes Leininger Bid to Buy Legislature

Voucher special interests have launched a fresh assault on public education in this year's elections – and the Texas Freedom Network is taking the lead in exposing the big money behind that attack.

TFN has been sounding the alarm about the unprecedented efforts of wealthy San Antonio physician and businessman James Leininger to buy a Legislature that will turn his obsession – a reckless private school voucher scheme – into law. By the March 7 party primary elections, Dr. Leininger had given nearly \$2.8 million to pro-voucher candidates and political action committees.

Leininger's massive campaign contributions accounted for nearly all of the money raised by two PACs he created. More than \$1.8 million went to one PAC funding far-right challengers to just five GOP House incumbents. Those incumbents had dared to vote against a voucher scheme last May. Another \$500,000 went to a PAC supporting pro-voucher incumbents. They included state Rep. Kent Grusendorf, an Arlington Republican who is chair of the House Public Education Committee and a key Leininger ally.

TFN has made sure that Leininger's unprecedented campaign spending hasn't gone unnoticed by voters. News stories about his spending have run in media outlets around the state. In addition, major newspapers in Austin, Dallas and San Antonio have published an opinion column by TFN President Kathy Miller that points out the shocking details of Leininger's efforts to buy this year's elections.

"James Leininger is teaching Texas schoolchildren a sad civics lesson this year," Kathy writes. "When wealthy special interests can't get lawmakers to give them what they want, they just buy new lawmakers."

Alerted to Leininger's efforts, voters are already sending a clear message that they oppose vouchers and don't like it when wealthy one-man special interests try to buy elections. Three of the five anti-voucher incumbents Leininger targeted for defeat won their GOP primaries and will be on the November ballot. In addition, Rep. Grusendorf lost decisively to an anti-voucher Republican in his bid for re-election.

Leininger's efforts have not been limited to PACs and legislative races, however. He and his wife have also given more than \$300,000 directly to far-right candidates, including two who appear headed toward winning seats on the State Board of Education (SBOE). That result would give the religious right a majority of seats on the SBOE – just as state board members prepare to revise science curriculum standards, including the discussion of evolution in biology textbooks.

For more on the 2006 elections and Leininger's efforts, see pages 4-5.

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A note from President Kathy Miller

All around us today, we see the increasing intermingling of religion and politics. We find candidates and elected leaders dragging our churches into partisan politics, even using our houses of worship as campaign props. In addition, the Texas Republican Party platform calls the separation of church and state a “myth” and declares the United States to be a “Christian nation.” In last month’s State Board of Education primary elections, religious-right candidates openly advocated teaching religion, in the form of creationism, in public school science classes.



As you know, the **Texas Freedom Network** has worked for 11 years to expose the ways far-right religious extremists have used faith to divide our communities to push their political agenda. But to stop this agenda, we must gain a deeper understanding of the public’s attitude toward the religious right and its strategies. We must also find new ways to influence public opinion against that agenda.

This year, the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund embarked on a year-long public opinion and education project to gain a deeper understanding of Texans’ core values, their reactions to the tactics of the religious right and the point at which Texans find these tactics to actually demonstrate *disrespect* of their own faith.

Soon, TFNEF will release a report on faith and politics in Texas that will highlight the results of this one-of-a-kind research. By sharing the information with our members, our advocacy partners and the general public, we hope to provide mainstream voices across our state with another critical tool to counter the agenda of religious extremists.

A GIFT HAS BEEN GIVEN...
IN HONOR OF

Peter Scheuer
by Charlotte and Bill Flynn

Dr. Gordon Creel
by Ann and Terry Maxwell

Michael Conlee
by Jackie Shanks



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Network News is the official newsletter of the
Texas Freedom Network and the
Texas Freedom Network Education Fund.

Goodbye, Kirk and Kristin!

In March we said a sad goodbye to **Kirk Rice**, our development director for the past three years. Kirk’s contribution to the stability of the organization has been invaluable. He brought a new level of commitment from our supporters and transformed TFN’s annual Austin celebration into the must-attend event of the year. Kirk heads to Washington, D.C., to take on the religious right at the national level by working for the Human Rights Campaign. We’ll miss you, Kirk!



Kirk Rice

TFN also says goodbye to **Kristin Alkire**, who served as office manager since last summer. Kristin’s dedication, warmth and good humor will be sorely missed by staff and volunteers. Kristin moved temporarily to California, and we are happy to see her back in Austin.



Kristin Alkire



Ian Davis

Hello, Ian and Bryan!

Ian Davis brings a wealth of experience as a grass-roots organizer to his new position as TFN’s outreach coordinator. A fifth-generation Texan, Ian has worked on political campaigns at the local, state and national levels and particularly enjoys helping volunteers make a difference in their communities. He also enjoys grilling with his new Weber grill, playing golf, watching movies, camping in state parks and swimming at Barton Springs.



Bryan Treat

Bryan Treat joins the TFN staff as office manager after more than 10 years of accounting, marketing and business development in the video production market. An avid cyclist, Bryan completed the Texas AIDS Ride in 1999 and 2000 and has recently picked up kayaking as a good excuse to get outdoors. His most obvious unhealthy activity is following the Boston Red Sox.

Respect Our Faith: Keeping Partisan Politics Out of Churches

This year people of faith have a decision to make about the November elections: not for whom to vote, but whether we will let politicians – of either party – exploit our faith for cheap political gain.

To help protect our houses of worship from partisan politics, the Texas Faith Network has launched the Respect Our Faith campaign, a grass-roots movement of clergy and religious laypeople.

Through a pledge for religious leaders (see below) and pledge for laypeople, Respect Our Faith will establish and promote ethical standards to guide both religious leaders' involvement in electoral politics and political leaders' involvement with religious communities.

Clergy and lay people from across the full spectrum of religious and political beliefs will come together to encourage healthy civic and political involvement in congregations. But we will also speak out against partisan political activities that are harmful to a healthy democracy and disrespectful of our religious congregations.



Together we can stop opportunistic politicians from dragging our congregations into partisan politics.

Sign the clergy pledge or the layperson pledge online at

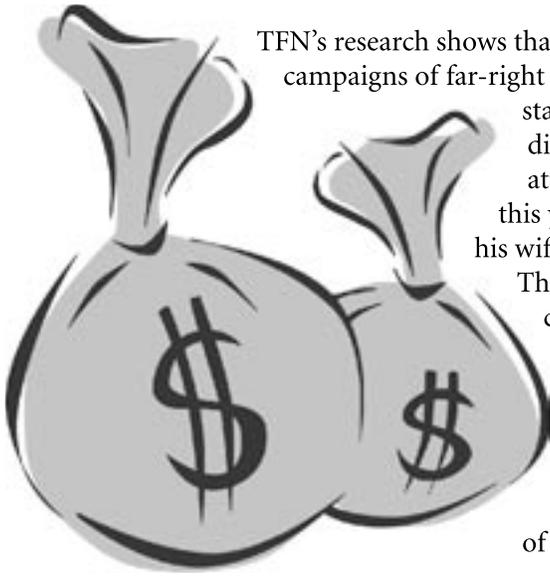
www.respectourfaith.org

CLERGY PLEDGE

I PLEDGE TO PROMOTE FAITHFUL CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY BY:	I ALSO PLEDGE TO PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF MY CONGREGATION BY:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensuring that all political points of view are respected in my house of worship; ➤ Helping all members of my congregation to become informed about candidates and issues; ➤ Encouraging all members of my faith tradition to vote; and ➤ Inspiring the members of my congregation to let their faith convictions inform and infuse all of their actions in the public sphere. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Refraining from endorsing – or appearing to endorse – a candidate or political party in my capacity as a religious leader; ➤ Inviting all candidates to address my house of worship, if I invite any at all; ➤ Refusing to allow the distribution of partisan political literature in my congregation; and ➤ Avoiding the direct involvement of my congregation with partisan organizations or campaigns in any electioneering activities.

Leininger: The Religious Right's Sugar Daddy

This isn't the first election in which James Leininger has poured millions of dollars into the campaigns of far-right candidates, especially those who support private school vouchers. According to a Texas Freedom Network analysis of campaign finance records, Leininger and his wife have spent nearly \$10 million on state elections since 1997. (Final spending totals for the March 7 primary this year will not be available until summer.) He has also contributed more than \$1 million to federal candidates and state Republican Party committees around the country.



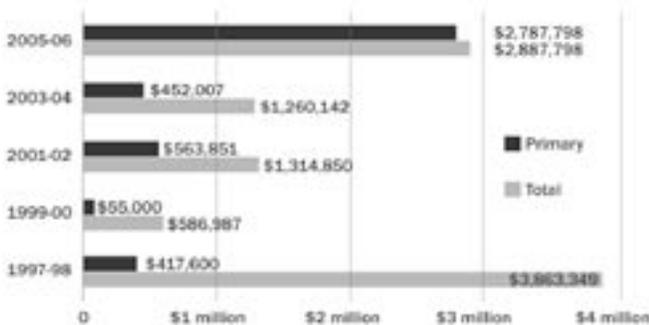
TFN's research shows that in past elections, Leininger contributed most of his money to the campaigns of far-right Republicans in general elections. With Republicans now controlling state government, however, Leininger has shifted his focus. He is now directing huge sums of money into primary election campaigns in an attempt to purge moderate Republicans from office. Leading up to this year's March 7 GOP primary election, for example, Leininger and his wife spent nearly \$2.8 million to support pro-voucher Republicans. That is more than five times what he spent in any Republican primary campaign season over the past decade.

Leininger's goal is to replace moderate Republican officeholders with candidates who support a far-right social agenda on issues ranging from public education to gay rights. His success in legislative races this March was mixed. On the State Board of Education, however, Leininger's money was pivotal in the victories of two candidates backed by the religious right. (See page 5.)

Leininger has also been a major donor to conservative ballot campaigns. In 2003, for example, he gave \$100,000 to a PAC that backed a constitutional amendment allowing the Legislature to limit damages in civil lawsuits. Leininger last year was also a major donor to a PAC supporting Proposition 2, a constitutional amendment barring same-sex marriage and civil unions in Texas.

How Much Money Has Leininger Spent in State Elections? (1997-March 2006)

Source: Texas Ethics Commission



How Much Money Has Leininger Given to PACs? (1997-March 2006)

Source: Texas Ethics Commission



SPECIAL SESSION ALERTS

As we go to press, legislators are back in special session once again to tackle the state's school finance crisis. TFN is monitoring the session for any efforts by far-right lawmakers to push private school vouchers and other reckless schemes. Stay informed by signing up for TFN News Clips and Alerts at www.tfn.org/subscribe.

Leininger: Dragging Public Schools into the Culture Wars

James Leininger's efforts to buy the Legislature go back at least a decade. Yet the first state body Leininger seriously targeted for takeover by the religious right was the State Board of Education. In fact, Leininger is almost single-handedly responsible for dragging the SBOE – and the state's public schools along with it – into the nation's raging culture wars.

Leininger began funneling tens of thousands of dollars into the campaigns of far-right SBOE candidates in the early 1990s. Among the earliest beneficiaries of Leininger's massive campaign contributions was Donna Ballard, a Republican who was one of the most extreme far-right members ever to sit on the SBOE. Ballard's campaigns were notorious for campaign mailers accusing her opponents of promoting homosexuality, teen sex and abortion in public schools.

As the religious right has increased its power on the SBOE since then, far-right board members have worked to censor school textbooks on issues such as evolution, civil rights, sex education and even environmental issues. Their efforts continue even today, 11 years after the Legislature – embarrassed by the SBOE's descent into ideological warfare over public school textbooks – moved to limit the state board's authority over textbook content.

Now the board has asked the state attorney general to overturn that 1995 law and give the SBOE full authority, once again, over textbook content. The **Texas Freedom Network** strongly opposes such a move. In March, TFN joined other grass-roots and education groups in submitting a legal brief in support of the law and the Legislature's actions.

Meanwhile, Leininger and his wife have continued their efforts to make the SBOE a stronghold of the religious right. This year the Leiningers have made large financial contributions to two far-right candidates for the state board: Cynthia Dunbar, R-Richmond, and Ken Mercer, R-San Antonio. The two have also been endorsed by the leaders of far-right groups such as the Texas Eagle Forum, Vision America and WallBuilders.

In addition, both Dunbar and Mercer have said they support including information about the religion-based concept of "intelligent design" in the biology textbooks. Doing so, of course, would entail watering down the teaching of evolution – a major goal of the religious right.

The expected election of Dunbar and Mercer to the board in November (they face no Democratic opponent) Could give the religious right eight of fifteen seats on the SBOE. One member of the board's religious-right bloc, Republican Don McLeroy of Bryan, faces Democrat Maggie Charleton of College Station on the November ballot. A McLeroy win would put the religious right in the position to determine what Texas schoolchildren learn in biology textbooks when the science curriculum standards are revised in 2007.

THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT BLOC ON THE SBOE

Geraldine "Tincy" Miller, R-Dallas
(board chair)
Barbara Cargill, R-The Woodlands
David Bradley, R-Beaumont
Terri Leo, R-Spring
Gail Lowe, R-Lampasas
Don McLeroy, R-Bryan



Currently, six members make up a core faction of religious extremists on the SBOE. The addition of CYNTHIA DUNBAR of Richmond (above left) and KEN MERCER (above right) of San Antonio after the November election this year will give the religious right an 8-7 majority on the state board.

THE STATE OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT: 2006

This spring the Texas Freedom Network is releasing the first in a planned series of annual reports on the religious right in Texas. The 2006 report focuses on the religious right's increasing influence in the state's electoral politics. Readers can learn about the religious right's takeover of the Republican Party, the role of wealthy campaign donors such as James Leininger, the creation of a network of pressure groups and the development of leaders who advance the movement's agenda.

An information-packed appendix also provides readers with details about the religious right in Texas, including a "Watch List" of key far-right leaders and data on groups and political action committees tied to the movement. Read the report at www.tfn.org/RRreport06/.

Mi Casa es Su Casa

TFN threw open the doors to its new headquarters in January and celebrated its new location with old friends and new! Cantor Neil Blumofe performed a house blessing, while TFN board member and newly elected state Rep. Donna Howard, D-Austin, received a down-home hoot and holler after winning District 149 in Austin a few days before! We are very excited to have a permanent home and room to grow in our fight for real Texas values: religious freedom, individual liberties and public education.

a



d



b



c

a. Volunteers and other supporters gathered for the housewarming. b. TFN's location near the University of Texas campus helped attract students to the celebration. c. Larry Bethune, Bobby Kendrick, Rowland Cook d. State Rep. Donna Howard and Kathy Miller

TFN Welcomes New Board Members



Tom Weber is a partner at the Austin law firm of McElroy, Sullivan & Miller, LLP, where he practices energy, environmental and water law. Tom served as interim Deputy Chief of Staff & District Director for U.S. Congressman Lloyd Doggett, D-Austin, during the recent Texas redistricting. A graduate of the University of Houston Law Center (J.D. 1995)

and the University of Texas (Master of Public Affairs 1993; B.S. Engineering 1987), Tom is married to his law school sweetheart, Delane, and has two kids, Miranda and Henry.



Ann Parrish is a longtime advocate for church-state separation and supporter of the Texas Freedom Network. Ann also works on women's rights issues and supports various animal rights organizations. She serves on the board of Artreach-Dallas, a nonprofit that provides access to the arts and cultural events for economically disadvantaged youth and

adults as well as the disabled and elderly.

2006 FAITH & FREEDOM

speaker series

Packed House Helps Inaugurate TFN Speaker Series

The Texas Freedom Network kicked off its 2006 Faith and Freedom Speaker Series in Austin in March with national bestselling author and Tikkun founder Rabbi Michael Lerner. Rabbi Lerner delivered a stirring message to a standing-room-only crowd of more than 750 people in the beautiful sanctuary of Congregation Beth Israel.



Lerner expounded on themes from his new book, *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right*. His call on progressives to re-engage the nation's spiritual concerns, rather than cede this ground completely to the religious right, was clearly welcomed by the large audience. The lecture was followed by a book club discussion at TFN headquarters. Contact us (tfn@tfn.org) to get on our book club list.

The Lerner event was the first in TFN's statewide speaker series. With events featuring nationally recognized speakers planned for Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth and San Antonio, look for TFN in a community near you.

Audience members at the first Faith and Freedom Series event in Austin.



**NEXT STOP
HOUSTON**

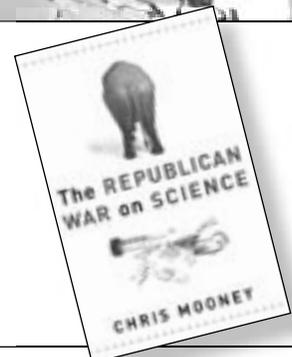
FAITH AND FREEDOM SPEAKER SERIES - HOUSTON

SPEAKER: Chris Mooney, author of the bestseller
The Republican War on Science

JUNE 22 - 7 P.M.

LOCATION: Watch for a TFN announcement soon on the location.

For information or tickets, visit www.tfn.org or contact TFN at 512.322.0545.





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Why I Volunteer: Kitty Page

I grew up in '50s Louisiana and still remember the "Whites Only" signs, even in the churches, and the summer the neighborhood pool was closed because of integration. I remember when my family shunned my favorite gay uncle. I wondered then, and still all these years later, at the ability of the religious right to justify their brand of intolerance and ignorance. In the recent past, I fought an extended skirmish with the same religious-right types to keep them out of our schools in Wimberley and to preserve our separation of church and state. At that time, I learned of TFN from a friend. Once I contacted them, they were so helpful and supportive. I knew I'd found a home of like-minded people and that I would volunteer as much as I was able. With Texas in the clutches of people who wrap themselves in moral coats and try to force-feed us their beliefs and pass laws to crush our independence, TFN is the guard at the gates of true freedom. I'm glad to be standing there with them.



Celebrate with TFN in DALLAS!

The Texas Freedom Network is headed to Dallas for the city's annual members' reception on May 25. Longtime supporters and new members will gather to celebrate TFN's efforts for religious freedom and individual liberties. Regen and Jeff Fearon have offered up their home for what is sure to be a great party! TFN's annual Houston event is set for June with details on a date and location to come.

Please make plans to join fellow TFN supporters for these wonderful events. Look for information on location and times in your mail and at www.tfn.org.