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What Is Freethought Arizona?

Freethought Arizona is a blog for freethinkers in general and Arizona atheists, agnostics, skeptics, and secular humanists in particular. Here in Tucson, we have several active organizations supporting the freethought community. They include: Tucson Atheists, Skeptics of Tucson, and the Freethought Arizona meeting organization. The Freethought Arizona web site is www.freethoughtaz.org

In Phoenix, there are chapters of such national organizations as Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), the American Humanist Association, and Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU). Many freethinkers belong to more than one of these groups. Each organization occupies an important niche in support of nonbelievers and their philosophical, social, and political concerns. You can learn more about them and when they meet by going to their various websites.

FFRF and AU are the most politically active. They aggressively challenge in court government violations of the Constitutional Principle of Separation of Church & State. Freethought Arizona is more



Secularist awaits frank discussion of faith-based ideas in public square

by Don Lacey on Jun. 03, 2012, under [Arizona Families](#), [Atheism](#), [AZ Politics](#), [Campaign 2012](#), [Christian Self-Righteous Arrogance](#), [Christianity](#), [Critical Thinking](#), [Education](#), [Ethics](#), [Faith](#), [Fundamentalism](#), [God & Bible](#), [Government](#), [History](#), [Logic](#), [Materialism](#), [Religion](#), [Responsible Government](#), [Science](#), [Separation of Church & State](#), [Willful Ignorance](#)



Editor's note: Dr Gil Shapiro is a board member of FreeThought Arizona. On occasion, his opinions appear in print. Below is an opinion piece that came out in March in the Daily Star and is reprinted here with their permission.

Yesterday, the subject of the blog was CAP (Center for Arizona Policy) and how they might be in violation of IRS rules. They have been reluctant to engage us in debate while simultaneously claiming that it is the secular community that is ducking them.

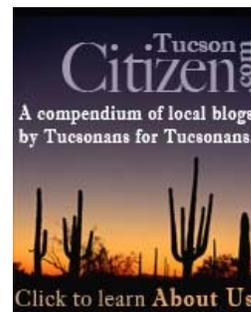
by Gil Shapiro

Two distinct concepts commonly confused are: church-state separation and religion-politics.

Republican candidate Rick Santorum's recent remarks, "I don't believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute" and "The First Amendment means the free exercise of religion and that means bringing people and their faith into the public square" are prime examples of this confusion.

The United States began as a nation without an official religion. But that fact never minimized the impact religious forces have had on our politics and culture over the years.

The relationship between religion and politics in American history has been a tug of war. This has occurred not only between believers and non-believers but among believers of the



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academically oriented and offers monthly programs and smaller discussion groups often focused on aspects of science, religion, skepticism and/or humanism. Tucson Atheists and Skeptics of Tucson engage in thought-provoking discussions, but are more social.

Many of these organizations are partners in the Secular Coalition for Arizona (SCA), a political organization whose primary goal is to keep religion out of government. For this reason, Secular Coalition for Arizona often finds itself in opposition to the policies advocated by the Center for Arizona Policy (CAP).

Generally, we freethinkers don't care what others believe about the supernatural. We think of all religions as silly, often dangerous, superstitions. Individual religious beliefs are none of our business, until believers make it our business by trying to force their religious worldview and primitive morality on the rest of us through law and public policy. Then we care a lot. Thus, we have a natural antipathy toward the fundamentalist-dominated Arizona legislature and Governor Brewer.

Freethought has a long and illustrious history. Freethinkers are "free" because we are not locked in ideology, doctrine, or dogma. Freethinkers make lousy followers because we dare to question authority, tradition, revelation, and dogma. Instead, we believe that opinions, and especially laws and public policies, should be based on science, empirical evidence, verifiable experiences, independent historical accounts, and sound logic.

same and different denominations and religions. At times, religion and politics have found common ground and at other times their interplay has been contentious and divisive.

Unlike most secularists who respect both clauses of the religion section of our federal Constitution's First Amendment, many social conservatives show contempt for the Establishment Clause (Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion) and a biased interpretation of the Free Exercise Clause (... or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;).

The Establishment Clause, church and state separation, refers to a prohibition of our government from establishing a national religion, preferring one religion over another, or privileging religion over irreligion.

This clause does not prohibit discussion and debate of religious matters in "the public square." History tells us that religion has always been part of the fabric of American political and cultural life.

Religious ideas were expressed by the Puritans at Plymouth Rock, during the American Revolution, by both the Union and the Confederacy during the Civil War to justify their respective causes, and by religious [leaders](#) such as Martin Luther King and others who advocated for some of America's major reforms such as: temperance, suffrage, abortion and civil rights.

Additionally, nothing in the Constitution prohibits a person or group from pursuing overtly religious agendas in "the public square." Indeed, the fundamentalist Christian Center for Arizona Policy is our state's most influential lobbying group.

The Free Exercise Clause is similarly misunderstood by many social conservatives who interpret it to mean that Americans have the right to unrestrained religious [liberty](#) and freedom of conscience.

"If we don't believe in it, we won't do it!" say these faith-driven advocates. The slippery slope to social chaos never had better friends. Perhaps a reasoned secular response, "Your supernatural religious freedoms end where our natural human and civil rights begin" would be an enlightened idea for fundamentalist zealots to ponder. Incidentally, evangelical Christians should realize their liberal and moderate brethren do not respect religious bullying.

Secularists have always agreed with Santorum's call for public discussion of faith-based ideas. So now, riding on his excitement for dialogue with our camp, we look forward to the opportunity to scrutinize those ideas and their origins, especially those considered "matters of conscience" (ethics, morality and values). If those religiously-based beliefs withstand the test of rationality, we will gladly join forces with his camp to advance them.

As secularists, we are thrilled that social conservatives affirm that "the public square" should be a robust and free marketplace of ideas. Yes, the hallmark of a free society is where there are no impediments to vigorous and frank discussions of all issues. How refreshing! We're with you!

We await a communication from Santorum and social conservative groups such as the Center for Arizona Policy to initiate those dialogues.

Gil Shapiro is spokesman for FreeThought Arizona (formerly the Center for Inquiry of Southern Arizona). Reach him through www.freethoughtarizona.org or gdshapiro@comcast.net

He may also be reached at gshapiro@freethoughtaz.org.

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