



NEWSLETTER

of the

FEMINIST CAUCUS

of the American Humanist Association

AUGUST 2006

FROM THE CHAIR

Hello Feminist Caucus Members! Welcome to the August newsletter!

I hope you are all having Happy Feminist Humanist summers in this incredible heat that has simmered much of the country.

First, just a short report on the conference. We awarded Kim Gandy our 26th Humanist Heroine Award and Kim also received the AHA's Distinguished Service Award, which is not an annual award but only presented when there is a special honoree. It was a wonderful banquet and awards evening with Kim meeting and greeting so many people that we finally had to scoop her away so that she could eat her dinner. Earlier, an enthusiastic delegation of Feminist Caucus members met her at the airport on Friday afternoon with a rousing cheer and a sampling of the chocolates she was to find in her hotel room. Kim, in true 'Kim form', gave everyone in the delegation warm cozy hugs as if she had known us all her life. It was a joy for us and I think it made our Humanist Heroine 2006 recognize that she is special to us. I hope to be able to put some of these pictures on the FC link from the AHA website.

At the FC's annual Business Meeting I gave a report on our treasury which now stands at \$2995.97 with all bills (from the conference, brochures) paid. We have a new FC brochure which my partner Scotty formatted into brochure form after I had written it. we passed out about 50 or so of these brochures at the National Organization Conference in Albany (more on this below). I thought we could also have these available at our conferences and if anyone wants some to pass out at their venues please let me know and I will send them to you. I think the brochure will be a good device for a quick and concise read about the Feminist Caucus and could help us to increase our membership.

Out fearless feminist leader Roy Speckhardt attended the FC Business Meeting and addressed the members present. As always, he was very supportive and had some ideas to help promote the FC within the AHA, such as allowing the FC to establish a Paypal link to the FC link so that new and renewing members can pay over the internet. We are working on getting this accomplished. The FC now has a Paypal account and we will have this feature operating soon. Roy was very receptive to all of our ideas. He also felt it was a great idea for the FC to partner with the SSA in order to help us in

HUMANIST HEROINES

2006 Kim Gandy 2005 Amy Goodman 2004 Aileen Hernandez 2003 Kate Michelman 2002 Samantha Smoot 2001 Diana Russell 2000 Molly MacGregor
1999 Lorrie Williams 1998 Loretta F. Ross 1997 Dottie Lamm 1996 Annette Van Howe 1995 Rosemary Matson 1994 Kristin Lems 1993 Barbara G. Walker
1992 Sally Roesch Wagner 1991 Sherry Matulis 1990 Carolyn McDade 1989 Ann Simonton 1988 Cleo Kocol 1987 Fran Hosken 1986 Patricia Maginnis
1986 Ben Munson, MD 1985 Anne Nicol Gaylor 1984 Tish Sommers 1983 Christine Craft 1982 Sonia Johnson

Patricia K. Willis, CHAIR

our efforts to make Humanism more woman friendly. Paula Rochelle had the idea to subsidize new female college students in the AHA and the FC through the SSA. People were very excited about this and we decided to charge \$5 for these new women student memberships which will include full membership for a year in the AHA (at a reduced rate of \$20) and the FC. The FC will essentially lose the \$20 and the \$15 for FC membership but we considered it worth this as we see a great need to help the AHA to make Humanism more appealing to women, especially young women. We had thought at first to offer both memberships entirely gratis but Martha Williamson, a psychologist, said we should charge at least a nominal membership fee as people will feel more invested in the organization if they have to pay something. This was sage advice and we voted accordingly.

The FC had a Strategy Session in addition to our regular business meeting. Someone, I believe Martha Knox, suggested the FC create its own website and Sena Havasy suggested that the FC try to link this to other like-minded organization's sites. We will be working on doing this. It was a very sisterly meeting as we tried to allow everyone to speak as they saw fit and all decisions were made by consensus. One of the pictures that I would like to put on our upcoming website is of Paula Rochelle holding yarn for Amanda Metskas as she was knitting. It was a symbolic as well as an actual act of the sisterhood we created and felt.

The FC, the AHA, and the Secular Student Alliance, had a joint table at the NOW conference in July in Albany, NY. Alison Bates, Campus Coordinator for the SSA asked Jes Constantine to sit in for her at the conference as she was not able to make it. Jes was very helpful and she, Scotty, and I shared the tabling duties. Unfortunately, the information tables like ours were out of the high traffic zone so we were not as visible as I had hoped. But that was the nature of the \$200 tables. As to my conclusions on this experiment, I think it was a good idea even though we received no material rewards (ie., memberships at the conference) but it did seem to be a good PR, ally-building, recognition-building experiment. I think it is a good thing for NOW, Feminist Majority, and other national feminist orgs to see AHA-(FC) as a friend that will work with them on national issues that AHA sees as commensurate with our principles and goals. So even though we have no apparent results to show I do think it was \$200 well spent. I think it was a good thing to partner with our three entities, and this can help to build solidarity, etc. amongst us. The FC can evaluate this type of outreach for future events and I would like people to discuss this with each other and myself so that we can decide if it is or is not a good way to spend our money.

The Personal is Political

A Woman President and "the Red Button"

The "Woman for President" campaign is off the ground and can be found at www.womanforpresident2008.org. I was prompted by this very much needed website and campaign to write the following.

One of the main responsibilities of a president of the United States is defending US citizens, residents, and visitors to this country against a foreign aggressor. This is the reality that has evolved over the two centuries of this nation's existence, but which has become even more a condition of life in the US as this country has become a much more militarized nation. The threat is no longer a soviet one, but one where numerous foreign states openly express great hostility to US foreign policies. During the soviet era there was a great deal of attention and discussion around the "red button" and briefcase housing the device that the president would use in case of a nuclear attack on the US.

As the situation stands today, the first woman president of the United States will have inherited such a device along with the decision-making power to use it if she deems it prudent. While it may seem less vital to discuss this responsibility in light of today's global political environment, it is relevant to a broader discussion on women's ability to think strategically. Let me recall a little incident to you.

In 1999 a New York public school psychologist expressed to me his great reservations about woman's capability to be president of the US because he believed that women lacked the ability to think in the manner required to make the decision quickly enough if a nuclear attack on the US was imminent. He based his statement on psychological research that he said proved that women's brains were not constructed in such a way as to allow them to think in the complex ways that this kind of decision making required. He used his "knowledge" of psychological research experiments to make that determination. In other words, he said that scientific data proved that women were incapable of being president.

Former Harvard University President Lawrence Summers last year claimed that the reason women were underrepresented in the science fields was because of the "intrinsic aptitude" differences between women and men. He was talking about brain power. This argument is an old one that has been used to keep women out of positions of power for a long time. In Victorian times women were cautioned against thinking too much, especially about complex issues, that is, 'men's issues' (politics, philosophy, social problems, business, etc. etc. etc) as this would take

energy away from their uteri and create biologically inferior children. This was backed by the brain 'science' of the period. This ideology actually went beyond that far back to Aristotle who professed that women were "deformed men" and that scientific experiments proved this.

What is so appalling and discouraging about this is that these attitudes persist and that the name of science is invoked to prove women's inferiority yet again by people in positions of authority and power over women and men, girls and boys. Here, science is in the direct employ of false, manipulative, atavistic beliefs that belie science but prove gender discrimination. We as Humanists who have abiding beliefs in science and scientific inquiry, need to critique androcentric 'science'. Feminist theorists such as Sandra Harding, in her now classic treatise *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, clearly showed us that cultural [scientific] knowledge is created by the dominant group's ideological positions. Science makes the claim to be objective and truthful but often cultural bias easily permeates it. We can see this in another arena where the cultural bias of religious fundamentalists inheres in their Intelligent Design model. Good science does not allow itself to be influenced by ideology. Not only does patriarchal scientific practice need overhauling but, getting back to the nuclear button, we need to completely rethink which gender, women or men, and which philosophy, that of peace or that of war, might be better at keeping the US, and all the earth's inhabitants safe and sound.



FC Notes

Sena Havesy wrote an article and read it at the Humanist of Silicon Valley meeting in July. She reported to the membership that our Humanist Heroine for 2006 was NOW president Kim Gandy and that the FC plans to be at the US Social Forum in Atlanta in June 2007. Giving reports to local Humanist bodies about the FC helps us to become more relevant to the overall Humanist community and we have to thank Sena for helping to do this.

Marilyn Fitterman sent a note concerning a movie she thinks is very good and relates to some of our issues. "A feminist director produced a film of a true story about how censorship adversely affected a family. I have seen the film and it's really quite wonderful for making a very important point about our first amendment rights. The Director is Darlene Lieblich and the name of the film is *Heart of the Beholder*. This is the first independent movie to win 5 back-to-back Best Feature Film Awards at the Indie Film Festival. You can order a Special Collector's Edition DVD www.Beholder.com."

Arthur Jackson reports that he wrote an article on the

Feminist Caucus for the Humanist Community of Silicon Valley. Arthur highlighted the efforts we are implementing with the Secular Student Alliance and the workshop that Allison Bates presented at the conference discussing the research she conducted concerning reasons why female students are not drawn to Humanism when we know that as many women as men are Humanists in thought but not in membership. Arthur also mentioned that the AHA and the FC are working closely together to assure that women AHA members feel secure in their memberships as full Humanists.

I have recently signed the Feminist Caucus onto several national actions. These actions generally take the form of letters to political actors such as government agencies, shadow reports (to United Nations bodies), and other types of reports relating to feminist issues. I think it is important for the Feminist Caucus to support our sister organizations' efforts that coincide with our feminist Humanist ideals. Also, by signing on to these efforts the FC becomes known nationally for its activist efforts. I have signed on to the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health's letter in support of women's reproductive rights and immigration reform which addresses immigrant women's needs for reproductive health services; a UN reform measure entitled "Submission to the Coherence Panel: Gender Architecture and UN Reform", which is an effort designed to ensure that women's issues and UN divisions working on these will be given strong UN support; a coalition to defeat the Child Custody Protection Act (S.403)/Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act (H.R.748) which prevents anyone other than a parent from accompanying a minor across state borders for abortion care; the Gender Shadow Report to the UN Human Rights Committee on the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) presented in Geneva this past July for the US Second and Third periodic reports. This report addressed, *inter alia*, protecting women in US prisons from rape by male guards and disfranchisement of felons, amongst whom women of color are becoming a growing population. The FC also signed on to the shadow report prepared by the International Women's Human Rights Law Clinic (IWHRLC) at the City University of New York Law School on the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), which addresses violence against women and the failure of the federal government due to its lack of political will to protect women despite the VAWA legislation. The CAT shadow report also addressed the sexualized use of women interrogators and women's underclothing to humiliate Arab male detainees held in US prisons. This aspect of the report is of particular importance to feminists because we are concerned not only about the US's use of torture, but also because by using women and women's clothing

as sexualized devices the US government and military are officially claiming that the use of women as sexually objectified instruments is legitimate. This is very disconcerting since we as female citizens want to be able to rely on our government to uphold its pledges of equality to us but we cannot do this when it speaks contradictory messages out of both sides of its mouth.

Maggie Ardiente has been promoted to the editorship of *Free Mind* and I have already sent her a short article for publication. Fred Edwards had told me at the Spring Board Meeting that there was always room in *Free Mind* for me to write an article and Maggie has reiterated this so I intend to be sending one in for each issue. If anyone has an idea for joint authorship I would love to do so this please let me know.

As most of you probably know both Anne Lyster and Farhad Shakerin have left the AHA for other noble endeavors although their sentiments still remain with us. Anne and Farhad both worked with the FC to help me with many efforts, including the newsletter formatting and mailing. The AHA is still supporting the FC in both these newsletter needs and we have decided to proceed with this arrangement on an *ad hoc* basis, which I must say is very helpful to the FC. If anyone has any comments please let me know.

Heidi Bruggink is our new FC-AHA liaison and she is superb. Heidi is a Women's Studies major from Harvard University and her feminist knowledge is greatly helping the FC to remain on top of the many issues that are pertinent to us coming out of Washington, DC both from government entities and from other feminist organizations that are headquartered in DC or have initiatives to promote via the federal government. I am so pleased with Heidi. It was such a loss to have Anne and Farhad gone but we

could not have asked for a better liaison than Heidi. We also have to thank Roy for assigning her to us. He felt she would be a good fit and he is absolutely right. We would like to officially welcome Heidi to the AHA from all the Feminist Caucus.



Feminist Funnies

“God and Eve”

“Lord, I have a problem.” “What’s the problem. Eve?” “Well lord, I know that you created me and provided this beautiful garden and all of these wonderful animals, as well as that hilarious comedic snake, but I’m just not happy.” “And why is that Eve?” “Lord, I am lonely, and I’m sick to death of apples” “Well, Eve, in that case, I have a solution. I shall create a man for you.” “Man? What is that Lord?” “A flawed creature, with many bad traits. He’ll lie, cheat and be vain; all in all, he’ll give you a hard time. But he’ll be bigger, faster and will like to hunt and kill things. I’ll create him in such a way that he will satisfy your physical needs. He will be witless and will revel in childish things like fighting and kicking a ball about. He won’t be as smart as you, so he will also need your advice to think properly.” “Sounds great,” says Eve, with ironically raised eyebrows, “but what’s the catch, Lord?” “Well,.....you can have him on one condition.” “And what’s that Lord?” “As I said, he’ll be proud, arrogant and self-admiring,..... so you’ll have to let him believe that I made him first. And it will have to be our little secret..... you know, woman to woman.”

Thank you for supporting The Feminist Caucus!

Dues : \$15 individual; \$25 chapter

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Send to: The American Humanist Association - Feminist Caucus - 1777 T Street NW - Washington, DC 20009-7125
T. : 800.837.3792 - F.: 202.238.9003 e-mail: FemCaucus@AmericanHumanist.org