

AHA Feminist



Caucus

Newsletter of the Feminist Caucus of the
American Humanist Association.

August 2005

From the Chair

Hello Feminist Caucus members!
This is our first newsletter with me as your new chair and I am planning to have three newsletters per year to keep you abreast of FC news and to help keep us in touch with each other. We are spread across the entire country and I hope this effort will help to create some cohesiveness in the Feminist Caucus.

Since this is my first newsletter I will be trying out different types of columns and articles. I WANT YOUR IDEAS. I plan on having this "From the Chair" column each newsletter as well as some other regular columns. One I am particularly eager to have for each issue is a "Feminist/Humanist Bio" column featuring at least one but preferably two feminist/humanist life stories of FC members. I anticipate these being around 150-250 words each, so you don't have to write much--but give something poignant to your ideas on why you are a feminist and a humanist, why you see these two as sister philosophies, and/or how you live both philosophies daily. Please send these in to me by the end of the month prior to the next newsletter, which would be the end of November for the December issue, the end of April for the May issue, and the end of July for the August issue. I eagerly await your feminist/humanist bios and I am sure that FC members will be very happy to read what others of us have to say about our most important philosophical perspectives.

I also want to do a "FC News From Around the Country" column. I see this as a column concerning local chapter activity and where feminism exists or doesn't in your local chapters and how your membership in the FC affects local chapter work.

In this issue we have another example of news from around the country but concerning anti-humanist and anti-feminist thought and behavior in the public policy realm. We all know that "the personal is political," so it's important to let other FC members know what our public servants are doing that impinges on our lives and our rights to freedom from patriarchy. So we will call this "The Personal is Political" column. Beverly Bowling of Houston is our first columnist and I am very pleased to have her passionate words to offer to you.

I want to do a regular feminist joke and I have a good one for this newsletter under "Feminist Funnies." Help me here all you feminist humanist humorists and send in your feminist jokes to this newsletter. All jokes must be completely harmless.

If you have any ideas for other columns or about the newsletter please tell me, as this is our newsletter and it must be what we want it to be.

- Pat Willis

Congratulations to Roy!

Former AHA Deputy Director Roy Speckhardt has succeeded Tony Hileman as executive director of the AHA. We are very pleased for Roy, for the AHA, and for the Feminist Caucus. Roy called me on August 15 to offer his support to the FC. He told me he considers himself a feminist and expressed his desires to support our feminist efforts at the AHA. Viva Roy!

Many Thanks to **Anne Lyster** and **Farhad Shakerin** for all their efforts in helping me to get situated as the new chair. They have been extremely supportive in designing our new Happy Feminist Humanist logo and making buttons, re-creating our FC link to the AHA web page, giving us extra session time for our 2006

conference, and so much more. I truly appreciate this as well as their future help.

Questionnaire Results

I would like to thank everyone who returned their questionnaires for their time and efforts involved in doing this. Your answers help to identify the actions you want to take and the direction you want to see the Feminist Caucus take. Also, and very importantly, you told me about the frustrations many of you have had with the AHA over the treatment that women members have often received, the obstacles you have faced as a member because you're a woman, and the AHA's inability to acknowledge its own institutionalized sexism. Struggling against sexism requires continuous effort and as one of our long-time FC sisters wrote in her questionnaire, "AHA is very patriarchal [this] shows in the *Humanist* magazine, *Free Mind*," but it's an organization we feel strongly for and therefore we have to work to overcome these obstacles. It seems as though we are in some ways fighting the same fight that the founders of the Feminist Caucus fought. Over the decades since the Second Wave Feminist Movement began in the 1960s, the AHA has supported women's rights and struggles with resolutions and national agendas but has sometimes fallen short on implementing practices internally and for its membership in order to fully create the AHA as a non-sexist, egalitarian organization where women members can feel just as valued as men members. We praise the AHA for its feminist efforts over the years and pledge to help it to work toward even greater egalitarianism.

I am reporting the results of the questionnaire to you in paragraph fashion instead of a graph and tally because some of the answers to the questions don't readily lend themselves to mere counting. The headings below refer to the questions you answered. I hope the results help you to see that many FC members have similar concerns and advice.

1. Type of FC membership meeting at the conference: It was almost a split vote between a timely workshop and a get acquainted session. We can do both at the next conference. The AHA and staff have been very helpful in our 2006 conference efforts and we are going to have our regular business/membership meeting as well as another time slot for an FC strategy meeting where we can talk about our agenda and our goals for the next year. I will have to think about exactly how to do this but I will work it out so that we have a

good amount of time to get to know each other better and so I can hear what you have to say and what you want from your Feminist Caucus.

2. Topics for discussion at the conference: the religious right and its anti-womanism; effective activism; making chapters more feminist friendly (when I use the term "feminist friendly" I mean feminist in their actions, philosophy, and personal behaviors); how to challenge the patriarchy of the AHA; domestic violence; Title IX; global feminism; and securing passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. The most often repeated suggestion was for discussion on how to make the AHA and chapter affiliates more gender balanced, or to use my term, feminist friendly.

3. Advice for AHA to make it more attractive to women/feminists: publish more articles by feminists in AHA publications; more awards to feminists/women; enter into coalitions with other feminist organizations; more women/feminists as leaders at the chapter level, on the AHA board, and senior staff positions; and more women doing workshops at the conference.

4. Activities for the FC to be involved in: FC members were most supportive of having a regular Feminist Caucus column in either *Free Mind* or the *Humanist* with recruitment of feminists/women to the AHA board and coalition building with other feminist organizations next. Making chapters more feminist friendly was also high on the list with charitable giving claiming the least support. (I would say that is because we have such a small treasury).

5. Attending a strategy session with the chair at the conference: Overwhelmingly you wanted a strategy session and so we will have one. See you there with your ideas!

6. Members who would consider running for the AHA Board: WELL! Not too many of you were interested in that, but a few were. I'll have to do some more research to determine why this is but there may be several explanations.

7. Advice on how to keep feminism alive at the AHA: Here we go again. The comments ranged from deeply discouraged to fighting mad about the way some AHA men often treat AHA women. Interestingly, the FC men were much more optimistic than any of the FC women about the progress that women/feminists have made at AHA. Perspective tells a great deal.

8. Humanist Heroine Award: Thank you so much for your nominations. We have one whose name came up over and over again. It's a secret for now!

***T*he Personal is Political**

Texas Governor Goes To Calvary To Keep Women in the Family Way by Beverly Bowling

During the first week of June 2005 Texas Governor Rock Perry signed a horrible abortion bill into law. Texas is known for having some of the nation's most onerous abortion laws. This new law requires young unmarried women under eighteen years of age to get written parental approval before they can get an abortion. Also, this new law "restricts doctor from performing abortions on women who have carried a child for more than twenty-six weeks unless having the baby would jeopardize the woman's life or the baby has serious brain damage."

To add insult to injury, Governor Perry signed this legislation into law at a Christian school, the Calvary Christian Academy of Forth Worth. Of course the hard right wing Christians were pleased. They weren't happy with Texas already having a regular parental notification law. They have to make it next to impossible for minors to get an abortion.

Texas has surely lost a lot of ground on abortion. Don't forget that Texas is where the case that eventually became *Roe v. Wade* began.

These awful abortion laws get passed and signed here in Texas because the Christian right controls all three branches of the Texas government. The Democratic Party is very weak here.

The last time the Democrats were in control was when Ann Richards was governor. When Ann Richards ran a re-election campaign, against George W. Bush. Bush and Karl Rove were up to their usual dirty tricks and they made sure that she would not win. Governor Rick Perry was Bush's lieutenant governor and became governor when Bush became president.

Feminist Funnies:

(A smile for the "ladies")

The Good Fairy

A married couple in their early sixties were out celebrating their thirty-fifth wedding anniversary in a quiet, romantic little restaurant. Suddenly, a tiny fairy appeared on their table and said, "For being such an exemplary married couple and for

being faithful to each other for all this time, I will grant you each a wish." Oh, I want to travel around the world with my darling husband" said the wife. The fairy moved her magic stick and abracadabra, two tickets for the new QM2 luxury liner appeared in her hands. Now it was the husband's turn. He thought for a moment and said: "Well this is all very romantic, but an opportunity like this only occurs once in a lifetime. So I'm sorry my love, but my wish is to have a wife who is thirty years younger than me." The wife and the fairy were deeply disappointed, but a wish is a wish...so the fairy made a circle with her magic stick and abracadabra! The husband became ninety-two years old. The moral of this story is some men might be ungrateful jerks but fairies are...*FEMALE!*

FC Notes

Looking for a co-chair. If anyone is interested in co-chairing the Feminist Caucus with me please let me know!

We now have Happy Feminist Humanist Buttons! And they look GREAT! I have fifty of them that AHA staff created for us and I will give them out (free) to FC members at the next conference. *If you want one and can't come to the 2006 conference, send me \$2 for each button. (The FC paid \$2.00 each.)*

Castle Rock v. Jessica Gonzales: Its Impact on Police Protection and Domestic Violence, by Anne Lyster

On June 27, 2005, the Supreme Court ruled that police don't have a constitutional obligation to protect someone from danger—even if a woman has a court-issued restraining order against a violent partner. The Court overturned a decision by a Colorado federal appeals court, which had allowed Jessica Gonzales's lawsuit to proceed against Castle Rock, Colorado, for police failure in responding to her pleas to enforce a restraining order after her estranged husband took their three young daughters, whom he killed. This decision was a shock to many; the Court enhanced police discretionary powers and seemingly made victims of domestic violence more vulnerable.

Does this mean that restraining orders are meaningless in cases of domestic violence? No. But it reinforces the need for survivors of domestic

violence and mental health professionals and advocates working to treat and prevent family violence to plan for all types of scenarios, including what to do when the police don't come.

This alarming decision can, however, be used as an advocacy tool to work toward effective legal remedies, safety planning, and domestic violence education. The tragic Gonzales case highlights the need for judicial education, especially in family court. Visitation rights (for Simon Gonzales) should have never been approved with a restraining order. The ambiguous nature of the visitation rights made it more difficult for the police to enforce the restraining order. Family courts must eliminate any possibility of confusion.

This case should also be a signal to state legislatures to take responsibility for protecting vulnerable women and children. Every day, according to the Justice Department, four women are murdered by their spouses or partners, and thousands more are hurt or severely injured. Mandatory arrest statutes (similar to the Colorado law in this case) must be more explicit, the threshold should be lowered for when governmental officers can be held liable, and police accountability in domestic violence cases must be strengthened. For instance, in most states violation of a restraining order is only a misdemeanor—changing it to a felony would automatically strengthen police response.

In the aftermath of the Gonzales decision, it's crucial for all of us to ask the question, "What can we do?" We can start by urging our representatives to support the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which expires in September 2005. VAWA puts vital resources into helping domestic violence survivors by improving the criminal justice system and strengthening community-based responses and services.

From our Beloved Annie Laurie

Highlights of My Tenure

Working with our "Heroine" awardees, my co-chair Meg Bowman, and meeting and corresponding with Feminist Caucus members always was the most rewarding part of co-chairing the Feminist Caucus. Other highlights included waving the Feminist Caucus banner at the March for Women's Lives in 1992 and again in D.C. last year. In 1991 we launched a boycott of Louisiana "Tourists who care about women should shun

Louisiana," following passage there of the country's most restrictive anti-abortion laws. It generated lots of press and action. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, which canceled four meetings, cost the state more than \$31 million alone.

A special highlight was speaking at the International Humanist and Ethical Union "Empowering Women" conference in November 2003 in London with fascinating feminist humanists from Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

Most memorable was spearheading a summer campaign in 1995 to save one of the nation's few outdoor public sculptures of, by and for women. "Forward" is a graceful, historic statue embodying Wisconsin's motto on the Madison capitol grounds. Our right wing governor, in a symbolic gesture, wanted to banish "Forward" to the Capitol basement.

The Feminist Caucus teamed up with preservationists, feminists, and indignant citizens on the street, collecting 7,000 signatures to save "Forward." My mother (Anne Gaylor, 1985 Humanist Heroine) and I stood next to "Forward" for five hours at a time until we got dizzy, collecting signatures at the Farmer's Market as people lined up to sign the petition!

We organized a lovely outdoor rally (my husband Dan's tender rendition of "Bread & Roses" brought tears to many an eye), conducted a "Forward" postcard campaign, and negotiated a deal, finally, with the Governor's office. That year, "Forward" was named one of Madison's "100 most influential people" by Madison Magazine!

To the Feminist Caucus and its new chair Pat Willis—FORWARD!

**VIVA LAS FEMINISTAS
HUMANISTAS!**

