

THE COWTOWN HUMANIST FEB 2005

HUMANISTS TELL "HOW I BECAME ONE" AT JANUARY 12 MEETING

JACOBY'S "FREETHINKERS" DISCUSSION TOPIC AT FEBRUARY 9 SESSION

RECOUNTING HOW WE GOT WHERE WE ARE

Fifteen of us gathered at West Side on January 12 to relate how we were influenced to accept a humanist philosophy. Foremost, perhaps, was disillusionment with religious authorities: a mindless insistence on dogma despite scientific evidence to the contrary, indifference of the clergy toward their own clerical vows, a sometimes lack of sympathy on the part of church officialdom for personal problems such as domestic relations, the antifeminism of some religious sects. Some who were never deeply attached to a religious belief system confronted few difficulties in accepting a naturalistic system; for others, the abandonment of traditional beliefs became relatively easy when they were confronted with the superior explanatory power of science. Leaving religious faith has its costs, for some of us anyway: the comfort that comes with the absolute certainties of religious faith is lost. Intellectual honesty exacts its price.

It is that month of the year when we commemorate the birthday of Charles Darwin. He was born on February 12, 1812. Secular humanism as a philosophy of life, one may aver, became ineradicably established with the publication of his *Origin of the Species* in 1859.

Preeminent biologist Ernst Mayr died February 3 age 100. Dubbed the 20th century's Darwin, he has been called the scientist responsible for shaping the modern synthesis of genetic and evolutionary theory. Born in Germany, he had resided in the U.S. since the early 1930s and in recent decades had taught at Harvard University. Author of some dozen or so books, his most recent was published last fall on the occasion of his 100th birthday. He is said to have been working on still another book at the time of his death. Highly recommended to the layman wishing to understand evolutionary mechanisms is his book *What Evolution Is*.

HoFW NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

FEBRUARY MEETING: At our February 9 meeting, we will be discussing Susan Jacoby's *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*. "In the best of all possible Americas every college freshman would be required to take a course called 'The History of American Secularism.' The text would be Susan Jacoby's *Freethinkers*, as necessary a book as could be published in the fourth year of the ministry of George W. Bush," writes novelist Philip Roth, author of a recent highly acclaimed novel on a fictional presidency of renowned aviator and not so renowned Nazi-sympathizer Charles Lindbergh.

Jim Cheatham will carry secularist history up through the Civil War; Don Ruhs will cover the "golden age" of secularism, the last 3 1/2 decades of the 19th century; Jim Fogelman will take us down to the present.

Preferably, as many as are able to will have read Jacoby's book. It's almost obligatory for good-standing as a secular humanist. If not, we will try to be informative as possible and will hope you will join in the discussion.

PRE-MEETING DINNER: 5:30 P.M. at the Bamboo Garden, 6415 S. McCart (north of Alta Mesa)

REMINDER: Please remember to bring a can of food for the needy. Westside will arrange for its distribution. Dues for 2005 will come due in March. Dolores will be happy to accept any pre-payments.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING MINUTES:

The meeting was called to order by President , Don Ruhs, at Westside Church after the monthly meeting

Present: Dolores Ruhs, Reed Bilz, JimCheatham, Jeff Rodriguez, and Don Ruhs

Minutes: The minutes of the November 10, 2004 meeting were approved as distributed.

Treasurer: The balance in the treasury is \$728.19. Future dues will not be collected through Paypal.

Westside: The board ratified the following motion made by Dick Trice: That we donate \$150 to Westside UU Church for the use of their facilities for the year since our last donation. The motion was seconded and carried.

Meetings: Our February 9 meeting will feature a review of Susan Jacoby's book, *Freethinkers*, by Don Ruhs, Jim Cheatham and Jim Fogelman. Jeff will investigate holding the meeting at Border's on S. Hulen.

We discussed attending the Jesus Seminar as a meeting in March. This would mean moving the meeting to Tuesday. Later meetings will be determined.

Suggestions for future meetings include: Show tapes from Trinity Foundation. Mark Gilderhus on Iraq. Head of TCU philosophy department. Joe Kleehammer from 1st Jefferson on the history of Humanism.

Board meeting minutes will be published in the newsletter.

TIME TO MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD! We welcome contributions to and comments about the Newsletter. Your editor has a thick skin, so don't hold back. He will take any criticism as proof that you are actually reading it.

YOUR OFFICERS AND HOW TO REACH THEM

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MEETING: 'HISTORY AND FUTURE OF MARRIAGE' AT FIRST JEFFERSON

The Fort Worth Chapter of the ACLU is sponsoring the above in collaboration with First Jefferson Unitarian Universalist Church, 1959 Sandy Lane, Fort Worth. Co-Sponsors are: the Tarrant County Gay Alliance and Westside Unitarian Universalist Church. Date. February 17,2005, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.. Speakers: Donald W. Jackson: Same-Sex Marriage: A Comparative Perspective. Derek Robertson: Legislative Update. Amy Davis Benavides: the One-Two Punch: Lobbying and Impact Litigation in the Fight for Civil Rights..

LEGAL FRONT

MORE EVIDENCE OF SERIOUS ABUSES AT IRAQI PRISONS

The ACLU released documents on January 24 describing complaints of serious abuse of Iraqi civilians, including reports of electric shocks and forced sodomy, and accused the military of not thoroughly investigating the cases. Jamel Jaffer, an ACLU lawyer, said gaps in the files made it difficult to draw any definite conclusions about a particular case. "But overall there does seem to be a close pattern here, that it is difficult to say the government was aggressive in investigating these allegations of abuse." The documents contain allegations from detainees about being abused and statements from American contractors who say they saw the effects of the beatings. The new allegations generally concern the behavior of American Special Forces, as opposed to prison guard interrogators, who have been accused at Abu Ghraib. (NYT)

JUDGE RULES U.S. DENYING GUANTANAMO INMATES THEIR RIGHTS

A federal district judge in Washington ruled January 31 that the Bush administration has been wrongly blocking terrorism suspects held in Cuba from fighting their detention, and that the review procedure set up to determine whether they are "enemy combatants" is inherently unfair and unconstitutional. "Although this nation unquestionably must take strong action under the leadership of the commander-in-chief to protect itself against enormous and unprecedented threats, that necessity cannot negate the existence of the most fundamental rights for which the people of this country have fought and died for well over 200 years," Judge Green wrote. Her ruling clashes with one handed down on January 17 by another federal district judge who interpreted the Supreme Court's ruling more narrowly in reviewing the cases of seven other detainees. It is virtually certain that the Washington District Court of Appeals will be called on to resolve the conflict. (NYT)

GONZALES' WRITTEN RESPONSE TO SENATORS' QUESTIONS

Officers of the CIA and other nonmilitary personnel fall outside the bounds of a 2002 directive issued by President Bush that pledged humane treatment for prisoners in American custody, Alberto Gonzales, White House counsel and nominee for attorney general, said in documents released January 25. In written responses to senators' questions as part of his confirmation hearing this month, Gonzales also said a separate congressional ban on cruel, unusual and inhumane treatment has "a limited reach" and does not apply in all cases to "aliens overseas." Martin Lederman, a former Justice Department lawyer who has analyzed the administration's views on torture and the treatment of prisoners, said the documents mean that the White House has made an exemption for the CIA in interrogating terror suspects, allowing the agency to engage in conduct outside the U.S. that would be unconstitutionally abusive inside. (NYT)

HEARTS, MINDS AND SHAMEFUL PICTURES

Pictures, as has been known for thousands of years, can possess a power that mere words struggle to match. That was why, despite months of rumbling complaints from human-rights organizations, it took the photographs of abuse of prisoners at Iraq's Abu Ghraib jail to send people's blood boiling about the behaviour of American troops and, by extension, about what was going on in Guantanamo Bay. That is also why the appalling photographs that were released this week [third week of January] by a British court-

martial sent the blood to boiling point—even though the offences by British soldiers near Basra that they illustrated had also been known about for some time. The worldwide distribution of such images at least makes America and Britain a true coalition of the shameful. Yet the allies are together in another way too. Both are evading proper accountability for what has occurred.

If America dealt with its problem more openly, however, it has compounded the damage to its reputation. In essence, it ignored the findings of the Abu Ghraib enquiry conducted by Major-General Antonio Taguba, in which he spoke of “systemic” problems at Abu Ghraib, since punishment was not imposed far up the chain of command. It has also sought to ignore consistent evidence that torture has been used in Guantanamo and to avoid confronting the unjust legal limbo in which prisoners there have been kept for almost three years. And the man who commissioned memos justifying torture, Alberto Gonzales, has been punished by being nominated by George Bush as his new attorney-general. He is likely to be confirmed even with the support of Democrats. They don’t appear to care about his association with torture. They support him simply on the grounds that he is a Latino. [Only six Democrats voted his confirmation; 36 opposed.]

The worst sin, though, is the one that goes right to the top. Neither Mr. Bush nor Tony Blair is willing to accept blame for what has occurred, nor to demand accountability for it from their cabinets. That is to imply that, for all their condemnations of the abuses, they think them politically unimportant. At least in international politics, they are wrong. (Economist editorial)

BUSH BUOYS ACTIVISTS AT ANTI-ABORTION GATHERING

President Bush told demonstrators at an anti-abortion rally marking the 32nd anniversary of Roe v Wade on January 24 that he applauds their cause but sees a long road still ahead. Bush’s cautious tone contrasted with that of other speakers at the rally, where Republican members of Congress and Roman Catholic clergy members expressed confidence that the days of legal abortion will be numbered as vacancies arise on the Supreme Court for Bush to fill. (NYT)

JUSTICES DECLINE RIGHT-TO-DIE CASE

The Supreme Court refused January 17 to interfere in the politically charged case of a severely brain-damaged Florida woman nourished through a feeding tube. Florida courts had ruled unconstitutional a special law proposed by Gov. Jeb Bush that would have kept 41-year-old Terri Schiavo on life support. Mrs. Schiavo’s parents, who have opposed removal of life support, have several legal challenges still pending, including one in which they contend their daughter’s due process rights have not been upheld. Terri Schiavo’s husband’s attorney predicted that “the case is just going to keep going until state court justices say, ‘No more, we’re not going to continue this abuse of the legal system.’” (AP, NYT)

LAWS WON’T CURB UNDERAGE SEX

Laws that would require parents to be notified when teens seek birth control would do little to curb underage sex and could cause a troubling number of girls to engage in unsafe intercourse a survey of teens in 33 states suggests. Nearly one in five teen girls surveyed at federally funded family planning clinics nationwide said they would either use no birth control or unreliable methods, and only 7 percent said they would stop having sex if parental-notification laws were enacted, according to the study by The Alan Guttmacher Institute, an advocacy group that supports reproductive choice. (AP)

TEXAS TEXTBOOKS TO EMPHASIZE ABSTINENCE

Sex education in Texas will change in August when high school students open their new health textbooks. The new textbooks, after almost a decade of discussing condoms and other contraceptive devices, will

switch the focus to a resounding emphasis on abstinence. The result is a bland, politically correct textbook that shields students from the realities of the world, textbook experts say. (FWST)

MEDICAL POT LAW BACKERS HOPEFUL

Advocates of a medical marijuana bill say it has never had a better chance of passing. But in Texas, where conservative Republicans are firmly in power, legalizing any sanctioned pot use might be an uphill climb. It could easily die in committee as it did in 2001, failing in the House because nobody in the Senate dared touch it. Already, the conservative Eagle Forum is vowing to fight the legislation, warning that it could lead to outright legalization. However, a Scripps Howard Texas poll last fall showed 75 percent of respondents support allowing seriously ill Texans to use marijuana to ease suffering. The Texas Medical Association has not taken a formal position on the bill yet. However, its House of Delegates in April endorsed a policy that doctors should be free to discuss “any and all possible treatment options related to the patients’ health and clinical care, including the use of marijuana, without the threat to physician or patient of regulatory, disciplinary, or criminal sanctions.” Proponents note that 10 states, including usually conservative Montana and Colorado, have medical marijuana laws on the books. (FWST)

CHURCH AND STATE

GOD AND DARWIN

With their slick Web sites, pseudo-academic conferences and savvy public relations, the proponents of “intelligent design” –a “theory” that challenges the validity of Darwinian evolution—are far more sophisticated than the creationists of yore. Rather than attempt to prove that the world was created in six days, they operate simply by casting doubt on evolution, largely using the time-honored argument that intelligent life could not have come about by a random natural process and must have been the work of a single creator. They do no experiments and do not publish in recognized scientific journals. Nevertheless, this new generation of anti-evolutionists, arguing that children have a “right to question” scientific truths, has had widespread success in undermining evolutionary theory.

Perhaps partly as a result, a startling 55 percent of Americans—and 67 percent of those who voted for President Bush—do not, according to a recent CBS poll, believe in evolution at all. According to a recent Gallup poll, about a third of Americans believe that the Bible is literally true. Some of these believers have persuaded politicians, school boards and parents across the country to question their children’s textbooks. In states as diverse as Wisconsin, South Carolina, Kansas, Montana, Arkansas and Mississippi school boards are arguing over whether to include “intelligent design” in their curriculums. Last week, in Pennsylvania’s Dover School District, an administrator read a statement to ninth-grade biology students saying that evolution is not fact. Over the objections of ninth-grade science teachers and of parents who have filed suit, he offered “intelligent design” as an alternative. Also last week, a Georgia county school board voted to appeal a judge’s decision to remove stickers describing evolution as a “theory, not a fact” from school textbooks. In both cases, the anti-evolutionists have been very careful in their choice of language, eschewing mentions of God or the Bible. Nevertheless, their intent was clear. As the lawsuit filed by Dover parents states “intelligent design is neither scientific nor a theory in the scientific sense; it is an inherently religious argument or assertion that falls outside the realm of science.” Discussion of religion in a history or philosophy class is legitimate and appropriate. To teach intelligent design as science in public schools is a clear violation of the principle of separation of church and state.

It also violates principles of common sense. In fact, the breadth and extent of the anti-evolutionary movement that has spread almost unnoticed across the country should force American politicians to think twice about how their public expressions of religious belief are beginning to affect education and science. The deeply religious nature of the United States should not be allowed to stand in the way of the thirst for knowledge or the pursuit of science. Once it does, it won’t be long before the American scientific community—which already has trouble finding enough young Americans to fill its graduate schools—ceases to lead the world. (WP editorial)

EVOLUTION TAKES BACK SEAT IN U.S. CLASSROOMS

In school districts around the country, even when evolution is in the curriculum it may not be in the classroom, according to respondents who follow the issue. Teaching guides and textbooks are there for that purpose, but superintendents or principals discourage teachers from discussing it. Or teachers themselves avoid the topic, fearing protests from fundamentalists in their communities, or from their own predilections (one third of biology teachers are said to believe in “intelligent design”). Dr. Eugenia Scott, executive director of the National Center for Science Education, told the NYT that she heard “all the time” from teachers who did not teach evolution “because it is too much trouble.” Or their principals tell them, “We just don’t have time to teach everything so let’s leave out the things that will cause us trouble.” Sometimes, Dr. Scott said, parents will ask that their children be allowed to “opt out” of any discussion of evolution and principals lean on teachers to agree.

According to a recent CBS poll, the public is evenly split (45-45) on support for Darwinism and for creationism. In other industrialized countries 80 percent or more typically accept evolution. Most of the others are not sure and very few people reject the idea outright. (NYT)

BIBLE BREAKS AT PUBLIC SCHOOLS FACE CHALLENGES IN VIRGINIA

Lunch is over and some classes are already at recess when a group of school children at McSwain Elementary in Staunton, VA stands up, puts on coats, walks 200 feet across the playground and files in Memorial Baptist Church. Over the next half-hour, the Bible shapes the lesson-plan. After 30 minutes, they return rejoining the few classmates whose parents declined to enroll them in weekday religious classes.

This has been going on for 65 years at Staunton’s elementary schools. But now the practice is being challenged by a group of parents who have asked the school board to end or modify weekday religious education. Not only do they fear that their children are stigmatized for not attending, they also argue that interrupting class for Bible study hinders efforts to meet state and national standards for test scores. (WP)

JUST THE FACTS, PLEASE

Once a year, our State Board of Education (SBOE) erupts into silliness over which textbooks are suitable for our impressionable school-kids. Whether the academic subject is biology or economics, a reliably righteous contingent of the board stirs up controversy: Do the books adequately debunk evolution? Should they say more nice things about the free market? Do they sufficiently marginalize gays?

In 1995, Texas legislators tried to defuse the situation, restricting the board to vetting books for factual errors. Rep. Charlie Howard (R-Sugar Land), who has been recognized as a “top conservative legislator” by the Christian Coalition, has been fighting to restore the board’s lost power ever since. “The representative believes power should be in the hands of elected boards, not un-elected bureaucrats,” says his former legislative director Paul Powell. His HB 220 would allow the SBOE to add errors of “viewpoint discrimination” and “special interest advocacy” to the criterion for rejecting a book.

Opponents of the bill foresee a free-for-all if HB 220 passes. “This puts the facts in our kids’ textbooks at the whim of politics,” says Kathy Miller, President of the Texas Freedom Network, which heads the liberal and secular side of most textbook fights. “It gives board members the power to edit books based on their own personal belief.”

In 1996 the SBOE objected to history books that “over-emphasized” the cruelty of slavery. Last fall, the board blocked publishers from including basic facts about contraception in high school health textbooks. Board member Terri Leo attempted to further edit the health books to define marriage in strict heterosexual terms, and characterize homosexuality as leading to “increased rates of drug abuse, alcoholism, and

suicide.” Publishers rejected most of Leo’s last –minute proposals. Under Howard’s bill, however, Leo might have prevailed. (Texas Observer)

AU CHALLENGES TEN COMMANDMENT DISPLAY AT TEXAS CAPITOL

A Ten Commandments display on the grounds of the Texas state capitol should not be permitted to stay simply because it has been there for a long time, Americans United has argued in a legal brief at the U.S. Supreme Court. AU weighed in on the case *Van Orden v Perry*, which the high court will hear next month. The case challenges government display of a granite monument listing the full text of the Ten Commandments. In upholding the display, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held that the state need not move the monument because “it has been in place for so long.” AU attorneys responded: “It is a well-established tenet of [church-state] jurisprudence that, although the history of a practice or display may matter, its mere longevity does not. The fact that a practice or display is longstanding cannot, in and of itself, validate it under the Constitution.” Joining the brief are People for the American Way and the National Council of Jewish Women. (C&W)

RELIGION IN THE NEWS

ADVENTISTS AFFIRM CREATIONISM

Three years of special conferences on the issue of human creation have led the Seventh-day Adventist Church to reaffirm that fidelity to the Bible requires the belief that life on earth was created in six days seven to ten thousand years ago. According to a 1994 survey of 121 Adventist science teachers, only [!] 43 percent agreed with the church view. According to the new policy, the church expects “all boards and educators at Seventh-day Adventist institutions at all levels to continue upholding and advocating the Church’s position on origins.” (FI)

LUTHERAN TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS TOLERANCE

A task force of the Lutheran Church in America recommended January 13 that it retain its policy against blessing same-sex marriages and ordaining gays, but suggested that sanctions could be avoided for pastors and congregations that choose to do so. But Word Alone, a biblically orthodox Lutheran group, sharply criticized the recommendation as an attempt to hoodwink parishioners into believing that policy remained unchanged despite the fact that sanctions may not be enforced. Liberal Lutherans complained that the report did not go far enough toward full acceptance of gays in the church. (NYT)

SPANISH CHURCH REJECTS CONDOMS

Earlier reports of a relaxation of church policy against the use of condoms notwithstanding, the Spanish Roman Catholic Church has reaffirmed its absolute opposition to the use of condoms in order to fight AIDS. In their explanation of church policy, the Spanish bishops said such use must be viewed as “immoral.” The Church is of the opinion that AIDS must be contained through abstinence and adherence to marriage vows, the Bishops moralized. (De Telegraaf)

Meanwhile, the Vatican has weighed in on the issue following reports of a possible softening of church dogma. After several days of unusual public debate among senior figures in the Roman Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II on January 29 reaffirmed church teaching that urges abstinence and marital fidelity to stop the spread of AIDS and forbids condoms. “The Holy See,” he said, “believes prevention through education about the sacredness of life and the correct practice of sexuality, that is chastity and faithfulness, is necessary above all other things in order to prevent this disease responsibly.” (WP)

AS PROTESTANTISM EBBS, THE NUMBER OF THE UNCHURCHED GROWS

For the first time in two hundred years, the United States may no longer have a Protestant majority. A University of Chicago survey found that from 1972 to 1993 the Protestant proportion of the U.S. population remained stable, but between 1993 and 2002 it dropped from 63 to 52 percent. Analysts expect that the figure will fall to below 50 percent by 2005. Between 1993 and 2002 the number of people who said that they had no religion increased from 9 to 14 percent. Another study found that 16 percent of the population has no religion. Only Catholics at 24 percent and Baptists at 17 percent were greater in number. (FI)

POLL FINDS SUPPORT FOR RESTRICTIONS ON MUSLIMS

A large number of Americans would support some government restrictions on the civil liberties of Muslims, according to a Cornell University poll. Forty-four percent of respondent favored restrictions; 48 percent were against any form of curtailment of civil liberties. The poll also showed that people describing themselves as very religious were more likely to favor civil rights restrictions than those who described themselves as nonreligious. Sixty-seven percent of “highly religious” respondents favored restrictions on Muslims’ civil rights. Restrictions included requiring Muslims to register with the federal government, allowing federal agents to “closely monitor” mosques and permitting undercover agents to infiltrate Muslim civil and volunteer organizations. (C&S)

ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE ‘GET RICH’ EVANGELISTS

A new star in the evangelical firmament has risen—Houston-based Joel Osteen, known as “the Smiling Preacher.” The charismatic, nondenominational church he inherited from his late father six years ago has quadrupled in size, and today is the largest and fastest-growing in the country, welcoming upward of 30,000 visitors a week, according to Church Growth Today, a research center that follows church trends. Osteen’s television broadcast is shown in every U.S. market, reaching 95 percent of the nation’s households, and in 150 countries. This summer, he will move his church into Houston’s 16,000-seat Compaq Center. The \$92 million renovation is, Osteen says, “a leap of faith” that if he builds it, they will come. And this from a man who dropped out of Oral Roberts University after one year and never received formal theological training—although he does note that religion is the family business and he benefited greatly from on-the-job training. Osteen, 41, does not sweat or yell, or cry for sinners to repent. He preaches an energetic, New Age gospel of hope and self-help—simple motivational messages, notably devoid of politics and hot-button policy issues. Detractors criticize the style as “Christian-lite”—all show and platitudes and no theological depth.

During his few forays outside Houston last year, he filled New York’s Madison Square Garden twice, and had to turn 4,000 people away in Atlanta. The pitch for money is quick and low-key, usually made by his wife, Victoria. Osteen does not solicit offerings on television. He is unapologetic that he lives well in a \$1 million house in an upscale neighborhood and that he is pouring the church’s offerings into the Compaq Center these days, not into charities. His Lakewood Church was founded in 1959 in an abandoned feed store in Houston, after John Osteen, Joel’s father, was booted out of the Baptist Church for speaking in tongues and advocating God’s healing powers. It had a congregation of about 6,000, televised services and a \$10 million budget when he died in 1999. (NYT)

TOP OF THE NEWS

The man who likes to speak, as he did in this speech, of America’s great “compassion” and who has been holding forth loudly of late on the sanctity of freedom apparently believes both compassion and freedom should have their limits.

--Tom Shales, WP writer, on Bush’s State of the Union speech

GAY MARRIAGE BAN BACKERS PRESSURE BUSH

A coalition of major conservative Christian groups is threatening to withhold support for Bush's plans to remake social security unless he vigorously champions a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. [Bush dutifully complied in his State of the Union address.] In a confidential letter to Karl Rove, the Arlington Group said it was disappointed with the White House's decision to put social security and other economic issues ahead of its paramount interest: opposition to same-sex marriage. "When the administration adopts a defeatist attitude on an issue that is at the top of our agenda, it becomes impossible for us to unite our movement on an issue such as social security privatization where there are already deep misgivings." (WP)

KANSAS AND SOUTH DAKOTA VOTERS TO DECIDE ON GAYMARRIAGE BAN

The Kansas state House on February 2 approved an amendment to the Kansas Constitution banning gay marriage and civil unions, placing the measure on the April 5 ballot. The proposed amendment declares that only couples in a traditional marriage of one man and one woman are entitled to the benefits associated with marriage. South Dakota is likewise sending a proposal to voters for a constitutional ban. Thirteen states adopted such amendments last year. Also Wednesday, a similar constitutional change failed in the Idaho Senate. (AP, De Telegraaf)

BUSH SEEKS \$50 MILLION FOR LAWYERS (!)

President Bush is calling for more training for lawyers who represent accused killers, in a tacit recognition that not all suspects receive an adequate defense. "People on trial for their lives must have competent lawyers by their side," Bush said in his State of the Union address. As governor, Bush commuted one death sentence but allowed 152 executions.

"Even referring to wrongful convictions is rather amazing," said Rob Warden, executive director of Northwestern University's Center on Wrongful Convictions. "He had every opportunity to deal with this issue as governor of Texas."

Bush's request for \$50 million for lawyer training over three years is far short of what Congress suggested in changes passed last fall and signed by Bush. "It is scaling back," said John Terzano, head of The Justice Project's Campaign for Criminal Justice Reform. Terzano said the White House fought last year's legislation guaranteeing states money if they show that they have an effective system to defend people facing the death penalty.

Under the president's plan \$236 million--\$1 billion over five years—would be spent for DNA testing, tacit acknowledgement that all is not well in the capital punishment system of this country. (AP)

ANCIENT HOMINID FOUND HAVING TEETH LIKE APES

Paleontologists working in Ethiopia have discovered bones and teeth up to 4.5 million years old from at least nine members of a little-known hominid species that was a primitive ancestor of humans. The specimens are from *Ardipithecus ramidus*, a transitional creature with significant ape-like characteristics. The fossils are mostly teeth and jaw fragments, with some hand and foot bones, according to nine researchers from universities in the U.S. and Spain. A few skeletal fragments suggest that it was even smaller than *Australopithecus*, the 3.6 million year-old "Lucy" fossil, which is about four feet tall. (NYT)

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

EXTREME CLIMATE COULD TURN AMAZONIA INTO DRY SAVANNAS

According to recent analyses, large parts of the Amazon rain forest, which sprawls across an area about as large as western Europe, could end up turning into dry savannas—a state from which there may be no turning back even if the climate returned to normal. This somber prediction comes out of the latest findings of the Large Scale Biosphere/Atmosphere Experiment in Amazonia, the most ambitious field project ever done in a tropical ecosystem. Since 1999 the experiment, sponsored by the Brazilian government, NASA and the European Union, has brought together 800 scientists, who have been probing the six-million-square-kilometer jungle with instrument-laden towers, airplanes and satellites in a quest to understand how the forest works. They think they now know enough to begin to assess how the complex Amazon ecosystem will react to global warming, increased carbon dioxide and other changes. Two studies in the project suggest a trend toward the formation of savannas at the eastern and southern parts of the forest. In one scenario up to 60 percent of the forest will turn into savanna, the dominant type of landscape in central Brazil. (Scientific American)

ARCTIC REFUGE AT RISK IN THIS CONGRESSIONAL SESSION

America's Serengeti, Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, is again the focus of a major battle in the nation's capital. This year, drilling proponents have vowed that they will stop at nothing to pass legislation in Congress to mandate oil and gas development in the refuge. Among their tactics: pushing lawmakers to include revenues from Arctic drilling in this year's budget bill—a scheme that enables proponents to usher the controversial legislation through without full congressional debate. At risk: polar bears, caribou, musk oxen, and dozens of species of birds and other wildlife, which depend on habitat in the refuge's coastal plain where drilling would take place. (National Wildlife Federation)

CONTROLLING MERCURY COSTS NO MORE THAN A CUP OF COFFEE

Installing equipment to reduce mercury emissions at coal-burning power plants would up the average consumer's utility bill by only \$1 to \$3 a month. In a new report, "Getting the Job Done," the National Wildlife Federation analyzes the cost of installing mercury controls on coal-burning power plants in Illinois, Michigan, North Dakota, Ohio and Pennsylvania. "We found that even in states that rely most heavily on coal for electricity generation, we can significantly reduce mercury emissions for about the cost of a cup of coffee," says Felice Stadler, an NWF policy specialist. "If it works in those states, we can make it work across the nation." (NWF)

BOOK CORNER

No Place to Hide, by Robert O'Harrow. (2005)

Here's one your editor has not read, but, from the review in the New York Times, sounds like a must-read for all profoundly concerned about the steady erosion of privacy and civil liberties. The following is excerpted from the Times review:

The surveillance state is not a futuristic place conjured in a Phillip K. Dick novel or "Matrix"-esque sci-fi thriller. It is post-9/11 America as described in Washington Post reporter Robert O'Harrow's book—an America where citizens' "rights to be left alone," as Justice Louis Brandeis once put it, is increasingly imperiled, where more and more of our daily lives are routinely monitored, recorded and analyzed.

O'Harrow provides an authoritative and vivid account of the emergence of a "security-industrial complex" and the far-reaching consequences for ordinary American, who must cope not only with the uneasy sense of

being watched (leading, defenders of civil liberties have argued, to a stifling of debate and dissent) but also with the very palpable danger of having personal information (and in some cases inaccurate information) passed from one outfit to another.

The Privacy Act of 1974, enacted in the wake of revelations about covert domestic spying by the F.B.I., the Army and other agencies, gave individuals new rights to know and to correct information that the government was collecting about them, but the government's current predilection for outsourcing data-gathering to private companies has changed the rules of the game. "By outsourcing the collection of records, the government doesn't have to ensure the data is accurate, or have any provisions to correct it in the same way it would under the Privacy Act. There are no limits on how the information can be interpreted, all this at a time when law enforcement, domestic intelligence and foreign intelligence are becoming more interlinked. Total Information Awareness [Admiral Poindexter's project at the Pentagon] may be gone, but it's not forgotten. Other kinds of Matrix systems are already in the works.

Mr. O'Harrow writes that radio frequency identification tags will be attached soon to credit cards, bank passbooks and "anything else that enable businesses to automatically 'know you' when you arrive," and that several organizations are working on a "standard that would enable every manufactured item in the world to be given a unique ID, at least theoretically. ...Before long our phones, laptop computers, Palm Pilots, watches, pagers and much more will play parts in the most efficient surveillance network ever made. ...The most simple, anonymous transactions are now becoming datapoints on the vast and growing matrix of our lives."

As Orwell wrote in 1984, one would live in a world where "you had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and except in darkness, every moment scrutinized."

Ironic, isn't it, that "1984" might first come to pass, not in a communist totalitarian state, but in the "land of the free"?