

**Freedom Watch  
October 2001  
Volume 10, Number 8**

### **El Paso County tries mail-in ballot**

In the middle of October, registered El Paso County voters will be receiving blue envelopes in the mail. These envelopes will contain the ballots for this fall's coordinated election.

The county commissioners, who voted for an all-mail ballot, are hoping that this vote-by-mail process will improve voter participation during this off-year election. Two years ago, 11,000 voters requested absentee ballots; 10,000 of those were returned, accounting for over 12% of all ballots. In last year's general election, 35% of active voters voted early by mail, with a total of over 69,000 ballots cast by mail. According to Marguerite Duncan in the County Clerk's office, the percent of votes cast either early or by mail increases every year.

Several other Colorado counties have experimented with mail ballots. Arapahoe County, for example, has been using mail ballots since 1995, and receives more votes by mail than otherwise.

There are two items worth noting. First, only active voters will be receiving ballots. "Active voter" means that, as far as the Clerk's office knows, the registration address is current. If the Clerk tries to send a voter any correspondence, such as voter-info cards, and the Post Office returns it as undeliverable, that voter is then placed on the inactive list. Any registered voter who does not receive a card can go to the Clerk's office, sign an affidavit, and receive a ballot. If a voter has changed addresses, the new address must be registered with the county; ballots cannot be forwarded. Also, if a voter receives mail at a P.O. Box, that mailing address must be registered, rather than the home address.

Second, the county has taken some steps to protect from voter fraud, the biggest drawback of mail ballots. All ballots must have a valid signature and date of birth, or they will not be counted. The county will be running signature-verification tests on each ballot. Any ballots determined to have a false signature will be discounted and turned over to the District Attorney's office. Incases such as these, the possibility of prosecution does exist.

### **Religion in public schools forum**

On January 26, 2001 approximately 40 clergy members and educators from a cross-section of education areas and faith traditions came together for a forum on religion in public schools. Forum participants explored ways to work together to support a public school environment that upholds individual freedom of religious expression while respecting the broad range of religious perspectives represented in our schools.

After a follow-up meeting in April, the group decided to endorse and promote a common document in order to help carry the positive outcomes of this civil discourse beyond forum

participants and enable clergy and educators to all work from the same principles while addressing religion in public schools.

The document they endorsed is "Religious Expression in Public Schools: A Statement of Principles," prepared by the U.S. Department of Education. In the endorsement letter, the group said, "We acknowledge that it is difficult to define the line that distinguishes the establishment clause and the free exercise clause of the First Amendment. We believe these principles, while not addressing every circumstance that may arise in schools, provide a resource that accurately reflects current law, and helps distinguish the religious liberties and limits of educators and students alike.

"It is our hope that the common principles as well as the consensus among representatives from a cross section of clergy and educators will help prevent future animosity and divisions over this contentious issue. The principles provide guidance for schools, legislators, clergy who work with youth, and youth faith groups."

The endorsed document was published by the Department of Education in September of 1999. It explores what the law is, as set by the Constitution and subsequent Supreme Court decisions, in regards to such topics as "Student prayer and religious discussion," "Teaching about religion," "Religious literature," and other aspects of religion in public schools. It also explores the applications of the Equal Access Act.

In the section called "Student assignments," the document strikes a balance between religious freedom and the separation of church and state. It says, "Students may express their beliefs about religion in the form of homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free of discrimination based on religious content of their submissions." But, the statement warns, "Such home and classroom work should be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance, and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the school." This balance is the reason why the following people have all endorsed the document as a valid resource for addressing religion in public schools.

### **Signatories**

Rev. Dr. Ellen Johnson-Fay, All Souls Unitarian Church  
Ms. Velma O. Ferguson, Baha'i World Faith  
Sister Rose Ann Barmann, Benet Hill Monastery  
Janet Carlson Powell, Associate Director, Biological Sciences Curriculum Study  
Dr. Harlan Else, Superintendent, Cheyenne Mountain District 12  
Linda Page, Lead Teacher, CIVA Charter School  
Mike Miles, Principal Fountain, Middle School - District 8  
LuAnn Paddock, Teacher, U.S. History, Fountain Middle School - District 8  
Pastor Brad Parsley, Junior High Pastor, New Life Church  
Pastor Brent Parsley, High School Pastor, New Life Church  
Misty Hart, Director, Pikes Peak Education Association  
Allyn J. Kratz, Executive Director, Pikes Peak Education Association  
Leesa Waliszewski, Dean of Instructional Philosophy, The Classical Academy  
Rodger Bybee, Executive Director, Biological Sciences Curriculum Study  
Rev. Robert Hewitt, Retired from Grace Episcopal Church, Citizens Project Board of Directors  
Richard Conway, Chair, Citizens Project Board of Directors  
Rev. Dr. Gaylord Hatle, Senior Pastor, First Christian Church  
Dr. Richard Van Scotter, Vice President, Educational Policy Junior Achievement  
Pastor Rob Brendle, Associate Youth Pastor, New Life Church  
Pastor Calvin Johnson, Solid Rock, Christian Church  
Greg Borom, Executive Director, Citizens Project  
Dr. Gerald Trigg, Senior Minister, First United Methodist Church  
Pastor Ted Haggard, New Life Church

Pastor Jesse Brown Jr., Payne Chapel AME Church

*(organizations listed for identification purposes only; not to imply organizations' endorsement of the document.)*

## **November elections will shape this community's future**

*A word from board chair, Richard Conway*

Elections will be held this November that will more directly influence the values embraced by this community than the national, state, and city elections in which most people vote. The outcome of these elections will determine how the residents of the Pikes Peak region will publicly address issues relating to human diversity, individual religious beliefs, and the separation of church and state. I am referring to, of course, the local school board elections. The ballots for which will be mailed to registered voters throughout the area starting October 12, 2001.

Sounds like a sleeper, you say? Admittedly, school board candidates do not normally engage in the highly visible, mud-slinging, media blitzes that we have come to expect from those running for government office...which might be one reason why these elections seem to slip by almost unnoticed by most people. The outcome of these modestly funded neighborhood campaigns, however, will play a major role in defining the city's intellectual landscape and ultimately affect how well today's youth will be prepared for the challenges of the future and their roles as tomorrow's leaders.

Individuals who serve on school boards wield tremendous influence over the community because they set the tone for shaping our public school system; i.e., they determine what is necessary and acceptable for our children to learn. School board members preside over issues such as religious expression in schools, vouchers, criteria for and the implementation of standardized testing, and bilingual education.

Citizens Project believes that a strong public education system benefits our community as well as our entire society. Toward that end, CP believes that the general public should demand that school board members provide our children with the well-rounded learning experiences that will help our community produce engaged citizens, productive workers, dedicated leaders, and ultimately a society committed to achieving its full potential. If you share this belief, regardless of whether or not you have children, Citizens Project urges you to familiarize yourself with the school board candidates in your district and to vote by November 6, 2001.

To assist you in this effort, Citizens Project will host two school board candidate forums in October that will be open to the general public. The first debate will be among School District 2 candidates and will be held Tuesday, October 16, 2001, 7PM at Sierra High School. The second debate will be among School District 11 candidates and will be held Thursday, October 18, 2001, 7PM at Helen Hunt Elementary. These forums will provide you with the opportunity to meet and ask questions of those who want to set the educational tone of this community.

What if you don't live in School Districts 2 or 11, you ask? In addition to the two debates, Citizens Project will publish a comprehensive candidate survey that will compare and contrast the views of those running for all local school boards. The survey will be distributed in the Colorado Springs Independent and available at several additional locations around the city on Thursday, October 11th.

Please watch for your school board election ballots in the mail and be prepared to vote. For more information on mail-in ballot procedures, see El Paso County tries mail in ballot.

## **Renew your commitment to pluralism and religious freedom**

*A message from Greg Borom, Executive Director*

Citizens Project shares in the grief and mourning that citizens in this country and around the world have felt since the terrible loss of life on September 11 in New York City, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania. We send our deepest sympathies to those who have lost loved ones and family. We commend the inspiring acts of courage and unity we have witnessed from firefighters, police, rescue workers, and ordinary citizens in the aftermath.

In a world where countless people experience suffering, oppression, and conflict daily, we find ourselves face to face with the anger and hate that festers beneath all violence. We must not allow it to fester here. The massive loss of life, the fear, and the pain we have experienced test our nation and our local community. This test presents tremendous opportunity to renew our commitment to build pluralistic, peaceful, democratic communities.

At the time of my writing, Colorado Springs' only mosque has received numerous threats, including arson. A Sikh family's home in the Woodmoor neighborhood was vandalized by someone who spray-painted "terrorist" on their property. We condemn these acts. We call on our local law enforcement, political leaders, and all members of the community to unite and ensure the safety and freedom of all members of our community.

We will be vigilant in our community against those that exploit this situation in order to demonize, scapegoat, and target any religion, ethnicity, or race. We will embrace the diversity in our community and initiate honest dialogue about prejudice and discrimination. We will stand firmly against racism, homophobia, and hate that undermine liberty and justice for all.

We will reinvigorate our commitment to religious freedom and separation of church and state during this time. We stand united with those from many religions and faiths, and those who claim none, to call for compassion and healing amidst our grief. We remind our leaders to remain sensitive to the diversity of religions in this country. Efforts by elected leaders to cloak the government and military in religious rhetoric will harm the American traditions of religious liberty and separation of church and state. We will promote every individual's right, including our elected leaders', to practice their faith, but will speak against those that use the podium of government to preach and endorse religious views.

These acts of terrorism test our resolve to uphold the freedoms and pluralism that our democracy promises. Building a pluralistic democracy is a work in progress that takes vigilance, involvement, and vision from all citizens. This work is far from complete. We must not let the progress made before September 11 erode in the wake of these trying times. To plummet into xenophobia, state-endorsed religious rhetoric, and lose the freedoms we cherish would concede defeat to those who executed these horrible attacks.

Citizens Project calls upon all citizens to address these internal threats to our communities—threats born of fear and hatred. Stand together and renew your commitment to a pluralistic, peaceful, democratic community.

I ask you to support efforts to develop and pursue peaceful solutions to violence in our local community and our world. Don't let anger blind your compassion. Seek wisdom and understanding. Violence is a cycle that must be stopped in order to build a secure future. Let's use our collective creativity to restore hope for tomorrow.

## **Newsbriefs**

### **CU Regents deny same-sex health benefits**

The Christian Coalition of Colorado successfully lobbied to kill a proposal to extend health care benefits to the same-sex domestic partners of the University's faculty and staff. The resolution, sponsored by Regent Bob Sievers, was voted a 4-4 tie, with chairwoman Maureen Ediger refusing to cast the tiebreaker and effectively killing the proposal. Ediger was the prime target of the CCC's \$35,000 campaign against the measure.

CU Regent Tom Lucero led the campaign for the CCC. According to The Denver Post, he "said he wasn't biased but voted 'no' because he doesn't advocate employee health-care benefits for anyone." He also claims to have been "raised in a household of tolerance." However, in a letter he contributed to the CCC's direct mail campaign, he refers to "the extreme homosexual-agenda" that is seeking "special benefits to gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transsexual partners."

In a letter that accompanied Lucero's, Chuck Gosnell, President of the CCC, wrote, "Please help me and CU Regent Tom Lucero send a clear message to the radical homosexual lobby that our communities, families, students, and tax dollars are off limits." Also in that letter, Gosnell declares that "...liberal Regent Bob Sievers has sponsored the resolution that will force all Coloradans to pay for the extreme homosexual lifestyle," which he says, "has been proven to drastically shorten a person's life."

Citizens Project spoke to the regents before the last meeting. We also posted an activist alert on our website and emailed members of our Activist Network providing people to contact about this issue. You can be a part of our Activist Network-contact Citizens Project for details.

### **Focus on the Family denounces children's rights conference**

Citing the decision by the U.S. to walk out on the United Nations conference on racism as encouraging, Focus on the Family's Citizen Issues Alert newsletter advocated for a U.S. boycott of the United Nation's Special Session on Children. According to Thomas Jacobson, U.N. analyst for Focus on the Family, "(Some) very liberal, pro-abortion people are trying to push through language that would declare that all have a 'right' to an abortion and have a 'right' to 'reproductive health services.' That includes contraceptives, the pill-everything they need to become as sexually active as possible as early as possible."

The conference is intended to highlight the plight of children across the world, and to push for human rights agreements. It will be among the largest conferences this year the U.N. holds, and the first conference on children's rights since 1990. Originally scheduled for September 19-21, it has been postponed due to the attacks on the United States.

Between the racism conference and this one, Jacobson points to this one as "far more dangerous." The publication stated that "maybe [the United States] will have the courage later

this month to bolt an anti-family world summit on children that aims to impose abortion and 'children's rights' on children."

### **Florida Boy Scouts compromise on gay rights**

In July, the South Florida Council of Boy Scouts reached an agreement on a training program for its leaders, to help them deal positively with gay scouts. The agreement came after months of discussion with Safeguarding American Values for Everyone (SAVE) and the United Way. Speaking of last year's Supreme Court decision to uphold the Boy Scouts of America's right to ban gays, Jorge Mursuli, executive director of Dade County's SAVE chapter, says, "We acknowledge the court's decision and wish it were different, but our strategy was to figure out how to take care of all kids in our community, not fight over something we couldn't change."

This agreement is on a list of six steps agreed upon by the Boy Scout council and the two other groups. According to Mursuli, "We have found a way to honor the Boy Scout Policy and at the same time respect the dignity of gay people." As part of the decision, the council has agreed to give up \$125,000 in funding from Dade County, to stop recruiting during school hours, and to acknowledge that the school system no longer sponsors the Boy Scout troops.