



The legislative voice of the
Arizona Nontheistic Community

June 30, 2011

Secular Coalition for Arizona

2011 General Activities and 50th Legislature 1st Session Wrap-Up

This wrap-up of the first full year of operation highlights the events, activities, and happenings of Secular Coalition for Arizona since its formation in June 2010.

Legislative Affairs

Overview

The 50th Arizona Legislature convened on the second week of January 2011 and adjourned early Tuesday morning, April 19, 2011.

The Secular Coalition for Arizona made history during the 50th Arizona Legislative Session as the first nontheistic political advocacy organization representing Arizona's atheists, agnostics, Humanists and freethinkers to actively lobby the State Government. SC Arizona's historic advocacy activities included testifying in committee at the legislature, sending position letters and other correspondence to individual legislators, and submitting written comment to the public record.

Unfortunately, it was a wildly successful session for the Religious Right – driven almost exclusively by Center for Arizona Policy, the main instigator of Religious Right policy in Arizona, and mostly detrimental to separation of church and state and to secular government.

Secular Coalition for Arizona's Comments to Committee

Comments regarding legislation were submitted to various legislative committees for the following bills (SB = Senate Bill, HB = House Bill):

SB 1188 Adoption; marital preference - Opposed
SB 1187 Dissolution of marriage; legal separation - Opposed
HB 2416 Abortion - Opposed
SB 1246 Abortion - Opposed
SB 1265 Abortion - Opposed
HB 2384 Abortion - Opposed

Secular Coalition for Arizona's Testimony to Committee

Testifying in person in committee conveys more weight than submitting written comments. Testimony in opposition to SB1553 "Empowerment Scholarship Accounts" was submitted to the House Committee on Ways and Means on March 21, 2011. [Watch video here.](#)

Action Alerts

Issued [SB 1553 Empowerment Accounts Action Alert.](#)

Lobby Visits/Elected Official Contact

The Secular Coalition for Arizona had in person and/or written contact with many Arizona legislators and/or their assistants, both state and national.

- Lobbied the office of Arizona Senator Rick Murphy, bill sponsor of SB1553 Empowerment Accounts.
- Lobbied Arizona Senator Olivia Cajero Bedford.
- Lobbied Senator Kyrsten Sinema.
- Position letter in opposition to SB 1188 submitted to House Committee on Ways and Means members during committee phase. [View letter here.](#)
- Position letter in opposition to SB 1188 submitted to each member of the Senate and House during floor phase. [View letter here.](#)
- Position letter in opposition to Texas Governor Rick Perry's religious event invitation to Governor Brewer submitted to Governor Brewer. [View letter here.](#)

Lobby Efforts in Washington, D.C.

SC Arizona represented the Arizona nontheistic community in Washington, D.C. at Secular Coalition for America's first Biennial Strategy Summit. We also introduced the AZ nontheistic constituency to our federal elected officials and lobbied in the offices of:

- Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ)
- Representative Ben Quayle (R-AZ, District 3)
- Representative Paul Gosar (R-AZ, District 1)

The specific issues on which SC Arizona lobbied included:

- [HR 1179](#), the so-called "Respect for the Rights of Conscience Act of 2011," which gives healthcare workers sanction to refuse to provide legal and safe health care agreed upon by patients and their doctors or in emergency situations. We oppose this bill.
- Military chaplains and proselytizing in the military. We addressed the need for Humanist chaplains in the military so that nontheistic service members have access to the many services provided by religious chaplains (including: confidential counseling services, access to facilities and advertising, and advocacy to commanders, etc).

Governor Brewer Vetoes

Governor Brewer vetoed three bills of concern to Secular Coalition for Arizona that would have had the effect of preferencing religion in law: SB 1288, SB 1186, HB 2581.

Although SC Arizona commends the Governor for her right-actions, we are disappointed that in each case the Governor failed to offer in her veto letters a rationale that, at least in part, cites concern for separation of church and state and for the preservation of a secular government.

Vetoed Bills:

- [SB1288](#), a so-called "Religious Liberty" bill that would have certain professional exemptions for individuals based on religion.
- [HB2581](#), which would have increased the allowed tax credit for donation to a Student Tuition Organization. The majority of educational institutions receiving scholarships from STOs are religious schools.
- [SB1186](#), which would have increased the allowed tax credit for donation to a Student Tuition Organization. The majority of educational institutions receiving scholarships from STOs are religious schools.

Center for Arizona Policy (CAP)

The [Center for Arizona Policy's](#) success this legislative session was mainly due to a majority of legislators, many of them being elected in the 2011 election cycle, being aligned with socially and religiously conservative agendas. Many CAP bills that in previous sessions may not have had the votes or were vetoed by the previous Governor Napolitano were now relatively easily passed.

CAP has claimed that the 2010 election results mandated a socially religiously conservative agenda for the legislature—a claim which fails to consider the many fiscal conservative voters in Arizona. No matter the interpretation of the election, virtually all Republicans (and no Democrats), that we are aware of, showed a willingness to support CAP's agenda.

[See CAP-supported legislation here.](#)

Secular Coalition for Arizona formally opposed many of the CAP supported bills.

General Business

Affiliations

On October 12, 2011, SC Arizona became the first State Affiliate of [Secular Coalition for America](#) based in Washington D.C.

SC Arizona proudly became a Member Organization of the [Arizona Coalition of Reason](#).

Coalition Building with Allies

We have forged professional and working relationships with several Arizona advocacy organizations whose interests often overlap those of SC Arizona.

Voter Guide - 2010 General Election

Candidates running for Arizona State Senate, State House of Representatives, and all candidates for major state-wide offices (Governor, Secretary of State, etc.) in the November 2010 general election received a "Candidate Questionnaire" from Secular Coalition for Arizona in collaboration with the Center for Inquiry of Southern Arizona. The questionnaire consisted of six questions addressing subjects important to the Arizona nontheistic community.

View [2010 Voter Guide here](#).

Letter to Editors Submitted and Published

[Brewer veto is for wrong reason](#) - Matt Schoenley, published in Easy Valley Tribune, April 16, 2011

Public Appearances by Matt Schoenley

- Presented at [Secular Coalition for Arizona Kick Off Event on Oct 12, 2010](#).
- Presented to the [Humanist Society of Greater Phoenix on July 25, 2010](#).
- Presented to the [Phoenix Atheist Meetup Group Aug 29, 2010](#).
- Served on a [panel discussion at the "Fostering a Secular Society"](#) sponsored by Center for Inquiry of Southern Arizona in Tucson on March 12, 2011. [See videos here](#).

Public Appearances by Sean Faircloth in Arizona

Sean Faircloth, Executive Director of Secular Coalition for America, made two visits and three public appearances in Arizona.

- Presented to the [Secular Coalition for Arizona Kick Off Event on Oct 12, 2010](#) in Scottsdale.
- Presented to a joint event between [Prescott Freethinkers and Secular Student Alliance of Prescott College on March 9, 2011](#) in Prescott.
- Presented and served on a panel discussion at the "Fostering a Secular Society" sponsored by Center for Inquiry of Southern Arizona in Tucson on March 12.

Media Coverage

[Examiner.com, Sep 23, 2010](#)

[Los Angeles Examiner, Sep 25, 2010](#)

[Orlando Sentinel, Sep 29, 2010](#)

[Friendly Atheist Blog, Sep 16, 2010](#)

[Humanist Network News, American Humanist Association, Sep 29, 2010](#)

[Richard Dawkins.net, Oct 2010](#)

[Oryoki Bowl Blog, Oct 13, 2010](#)

[Across the Rubicon Blog, Oct 13, 2010](#)

Action Alert/Email List

The Action Alert/email list continues to grow our communication and efficacy with our constituents. Individuals may visit www.secularAZ.org to sign up for Action Alerts/emails.

Website

The www.secularAZ.org website is live.

U.S. Supreme Court rules on Arizona Student Tuition Organization (STO) scheme

The US Supreme Court ruled that Arizona's STO tax credit scheme is constitutional, but on lack of standing grounds not on merit grounds.

Day of Prayer Lawsuit Filed Against Governor Brewer

On behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Richard Morris and Marc Victor file Day of Prayer lawsuit against Governor Brewer. Secular Coalition for Arizona is not associated with this ongoing lawsuit.

A Growing Coalition

The general Arizona nontheistic community is well represented in our Coalition. Initially, SC Arizona began with the following eight Liaised organizations: Phoenix Atheist Meetup Group, Center for Inquiry of Southern Arizona (CFISAZ), Prescott Freethinkers, Tucson Atheists, East Valley Non-Believers Association, Americans United for Separation of Church and State Phoenix Chapter, Humanist Society of Greater Phoenix, and Or Adam Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, but over the past year, three additional organizations have since joined our processes; the Secular Student Alliance at Prescott College - the first group that specifically represents college students, the Freedom From Religion Foundation Valley of the Sun Chapter, and the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers Arizona Delegation. One group has left our processes: East Valley Non Believers Association (they merged into the Phoenix Atheist Meetup Group).

We now have ten vibrant and committed nontheistic and nontheistic friendly Liaised organizations involved with our Coalition. It is this broad nontheistic representation from around Arizona that gives us our mandate and authority to speak for Arizona's nontheists.

Summary

The Secular Coalition for Arizona was inaugurated into an Arizona political climate highly volatile to the interests of nontheists and secular minded people, but has nonetheless in its first year laid essential groundwork for effectively advocating for Arizona's nontheists and for secular government. By introducing our organization to the legislature, building relationships and establishing alliances with like-minded groups, SC Arizona has positioned itself well for lobbying next year's legislators. We look forward to continuing to represent Arizona's atheists, agnostics, Humanists and freethinkers in the next legislative session!