

# atheists United A RATIONAL ALTERNATIVE

## The Korean Olympic Team, Joe Lieberman, and Me

*Co-President's Message*



When the Korean Olympic team came marching across my television screen, I stood alone in my living room and applauded, fostering a fantasy that I was somehow a part of this event. It didn't make any sense, really. I knew the telecast was on tape delay, and I'd heard hours before that North and South Korea would march into the opening ceremonies as one team.

a moment, applauding the Koreans, I understood the senator's confusion.

As I stood saluting people I do not know for something they had done without my involvement, I felt as if I were somehow supporting them. I wanted to be part of their struggle, part of their triumph.

I don't know anyone in Korea. I have no special insight into the pain of their half-century separation, but I rejoiced, as I'm sure, did many of you, to see an athlete from the North and one from the South together holding a flag of a Korea, united for one glorious moment.

*“Religion, that great wish-granter...gives us the illusion that we have the power to affect such distant and difficult things...”*

This made me think of Joe Lieberman, who has been telling us that religion brings us together. We'd imagine that most people would know better by now, what with Northern Ireland, Palestine, Punjab and all. I would expect virtually all American Jews to be smarter than that, especially Lieberman, whose wife Hadassah is the child of Holocaust survivors. But for

I felt the way my boss must have when I was undergoing chemotherapy. He was relatively new and didn't know I was an atheist. Every time we talked, he said, “I'll be praying for you.” I didn't correct

him. I knew that he meant, “I wish I could help.” Eventually, (someone must have told him) he changed the message to, “I'll be thinking about you.”

Religion, that great wish-granter, of course, gives us the illusion that we have the power to affect such distant and difficult things as cancer treatments or national reunification. So Joe Lieberman, a religious man, thinks that it's the religion

*Continued on page 2*

### October General Meeting

Sunday, October 22, 2000

### Jesus as a False Prophet

Mark Smith grew up with his nose buried in the Bible. He had been a fundamentalist Christian for 20 years when, through intense Bible study, he came to the conclusion that Jesus had lied about his second coming. He discovered that Jesus had prophesied to return and commence “judgment day” within the lifetime of his 1st century audience. Needless to say, this did not take place. In light of this failure, Mark gave up his Christianity. It is Mark's hope that this same knowledge which set him free, will set others free as well from the bonds of religion.

In this hope he has developed a slide show detailing the false prophecies of the New Testament.

Mark has written two books (yet to be published) and many articles and pamphlets, dismantling the Christian religion. In a 1998 debate on “Was Jesus A False Prophet?” in Costa Mesa, at The Academy of Christian Apologetics (affiliated

with Calvary Chapel), in front of a crowd of about 300, he so overwhelmingly won the debate, that Christians in Orange County are to this day still conducting damage control sessions.

The meeting will be in the Center for Inquiry West, 5519 Grosvenor Blvd., in the Marina area of Los Angeles.

The board meeting will start at 10:00 a.m., with members' concerns an item on the agenda.

The social period will begin at 12:30.

The meeting will begin at 1:00 p.m. with announcements and the speaker, followed by a break. Questions and answers will follow the break. We'll have discussion and reports, then sound-off before adjourning. Those who wish will reconvene for after-meeting eating at Dinah's, 6521 S. Sepulveda Blvd., L.A.

# Taking it to the Bank

*(Editor's note: Atheists United members may join our e-group, the electronic version of sound-off, where members speak their minds on any issue. There are 29 members. and so far 2320 messages have been sent back and forth.*

*As with sound-off, opinions are personal and do not represent the organization. E-group manager Rachel Sene chooses one "best post" each month for the newsletter; to share with our members who are not on line.)*

All:

I just sent this letter to Bank of America. I suggest that others who saw the ad let them know what you think.

"Ladies and Gentlemen:

"I just saw your new commercial, beginning "There will always be skeptics." The rest of the ad describes, not skeptics whose critical thinking skills are responsible for many of the advances touted in the commercial, but cynics.

"This is more than a simple word misuse. It is a slander to many Americans, whether we belong to the Skeptics' Society or not, who value critical thinking. It is, in that sense, similar to an ad which used the word Jew to mean miser.

"I am, in short, outraged."

Bobbie Kirkhart

## Co-President's Message

*Continued from page 1*

that unifies us. His error is as easy to understand as it is difficult to accept from someone in such a powerful position.

Religion, like athletic competition, is more likely to divide people into small warring tribes than it is to bring them together, and an occasional anecdote or a commonly-held fantasy can't change the fact that religion and athletics serve best to strengthen bonds which already exist, often increasing hostility toward a real or perceived enemy.

The truth, however, is more beautiful than the product of anyone's imagination. The truth is that our genes bring us together, that we are a social animal which best survives in a nurturing group. Evolution has mostly rewarded cooperation, so that offering a hand to a stranger is as natural as smiling when we see a baby. Ours is not a simple history, and there are competing drives. Some wariness is indeed necessary to our survival; religions and political philosophies have often exploited this to our detriment.

Religion certainly didn't bring the young Koreans together. South Korea is about fifty percent Christian, and the North is predominately atheist. Humanity united the team, as it unites all of us. And this is something we all know, just as we know that we must look toward a sudden sound. So the young Koreans knew that billions of us applauded their holding hands. We did, indeed, support their triumph.

Understanding reality, Senator Lieberman, brings us together. For when we look at it clearly, we all see the same thing. We may interpret it differently, but we have a common vision, a basis for dialogue.

And reality is, more often than not, beautiful.

*(Note: Please don't take the above as a comment on the upcoming elections in this difficult year for freethinkers. For what it's worth, I don't know how I'm going to vote next month, so I certainly don't have any opinion about how you should.)*

*Bobbie Kirkhart*

### Atheists United, Inc.

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Co-presidents: Jon Nelson & Bobbie Kirkhart  
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ATHEISTS UNITED is a 501 (C)(3) not-for-profit educational organization with two purposes: 1. Preserving the separation of church and state; and 2. Promoting atheism, primarily through education.

The *Atheists United Newsletter* is published monthly for members and is also available by subscription. Deadline for submissions is the first day of the month prior to publication, otherwise at the discretion of the editor. Submissions should be no more than 500 words long and are subject to editorial revisions, at the discretion of the editor, for reasons of clarity or space. Send all material to Editor's attention by mail to AU, P.O. Box 57435, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413-2435, or by email to [bkirkhart@aol.com](mailto:bkirkhart@aol.com), or by fax to 818-785-1743. Opinions and statements made by authors may not reflect the positions of Atheists United and are therefore not the responsibility of Atheists United, its officers, directors, nor editor. All material © 2000 by Atheists United. All rights reserved. Permission to use articles is explicitly granted to the editorial staffs of member organizations of the Atheist Alliance and of the Alliance of Freethought Organizations of Southern California. Credit should be given, and a copy is requested for our files. U.S. Postal Bulk Rate Permit No. 888, Van Nuys, California.

Atheists United

P. O. Box 57435 • Sherman Oaks, CA 91413-2435

Atheist Information Line: (818) 785 - 1743

Calls are machine-answered with a short message about our next open meeting. Messages may be left and will be relayed to the appropriate officer.

## Letters

(Last month, we printed Barbara Rowland's letter to Senator Joe Lieberman. Their correspondence has continued.)

Dear Ms. Rowland:

Thank you for contacting me. As you know, faith is an important part of my life and, indeed, an important part of our nation's history that cannot be ignored or cast aside. After thoughtful consideration, you have come to your own conclusions on faith, which differ from mine. I would not ask you to accept my vision, just as previous elected officials have not attempted to bring you into their faith. I believe that there are many obstacles left to overcome and-- despite our differences-- we can overcome those obstacles together. And whether that success is ultimately attributed to divine assistance or the hard work of citizens, the important thing to me is that we take the necessary steps.

Senator Joe Lieberman

...

Dear Senator Lieberman:

You are indeed forcing me to vote for a third party. I was hoping you would honor the principle of separation of church and state. But you don't. How dare you go against the constitution?!

I thought the Democratic party was supposed to be the inclusive party. I thought you cared about minorities. Well, I was so terribly disappointed. You don't seem to care about us atheists. We vote.

Why are you continually breaking down the barrier, the separation of church and state? Why are you thanking god for events that have nothing to do with anything other than man-caused events? I'm sure I'm not the only atheist who feels angered by your wanting to turn our nation into a theocracy. We care about this country and the direction it is taking.

I implore you to keep your reliance on your god to yourself. With your attitude we may revert back to a time when two sides are arguing that god is on each's side. Please stick to the things a political party can address without divine intervention.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Barbara L. Rowland

...

This brought a second letter, which began in much the same way as the first, but which added this paragraph:

"As I stated when I stood in support of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, our nation and our party have had a strong and proud history of protecting the civil rights of those who are subject to racial, religious, gender-based, or disability-based discrimination. The Constitution protects the rights of everyone to choose their faith or reject any faith. This protection applies to you, me, and every American, and will continue to apply in any Gore-Lieberman administration.

Joe Lieberman

## Book Review

by Margie Farber

*Rage the Veil*, by Parvin Darabi and Romen P. Thomson; ISBN 1-57392-682-5; 272 pages

This is a true story about the life of one woman, named Homa and what lead to her ultimate death by fire. It also has a historical significance that influenced her final decision. The historical background in this book is from the time of the Shah to the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Life for a girl or woman was not considered of much value even in the time of the Shah. The young woman's mother, when she was only 13 years old, had been forced to marry a man 33 old.

Homa became a doctor and married the man of her choice, who was also a student doctor. She eventually became a child psychiatrist.

When the Shah was overthrown by the Ayatollah Khomeini, the people of Iran thought that they would finally have democracy in their country. They would soon find out, especially the women, that the Shah was a humanist compared to the Ayatollah.

This book also tells about a young girl, nine years old, who was executed because she wrote an essay criticizing the wearing of the Veil. When asked, why the young girl was executed, the Ayatollah said that at nine the girl was considered an adult, ready to marry and fast on the holy month of Ramadan; therefore, she was old enough to pay for her crime.

To know more about Hama you have to read the book. I Would recommend this book to all Atheists and Humanists, also to women, especially those who would like to marry a Muslim man.

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In response to **Proposition 38**, the school voucher initiative, the AU Board of Directors has taken two actions which, thought opposite, are not contradictory.

First, the board has voted to oppose the initiative, which would give public money to private schools, including religious schools, on the grounds of church/state separation.

However, in the event the initiative passes, AU is investigating the possibility of opening a school. Enthusiasm for this project is great, with a number of professionals volunteering for faculty and administrators. Such school would have to be set up with donated funds and run with the \$4,000 per-child-per-year given by the state, supplemented by a modest tuition paid by the family.

Curriculum would stress science and critical thinking, but would include a rigorous humanities department, including comparative religion.

# Payback Time

*Jon Nelson*

Some of you may remember my participating, along with Bobbie Kirkhart, Srinilakshmanan, Ken Bonnell, and Hanan and Mansour Jammal, in a radio program entitled "Spiritual Seeker," hosted by a conservative believer named Michael Levine. Being my own worst critic, I felt that I didn't do as well as I might have, although I felt that everyone else came off well. The host, as you might well expect, is really nothing more than another "shock jock" of the Howard Stern variety. We were yelled at and called just about every conceivable name in the dictionary. While I did make some salient points, I have been wanting to go back and have another shot at Mr. Levine. I got my wish when a representative of the program invited me to participate in a program about restoring "spirituality" in our schools as a "solution" to the teen violence we hear so much about in the media.

Levine had two guests, one in the studio and the other a call-in guest. Both of these guests have written books about the subject matter, and Levine hoped they would be able to team up and make the poor atheist look pathetic. However, that is not quite how things turned out. On point after point, both guests agreed with me. Levine suddenly began to realize that he was in the minority. Consequently, he became more and more hysterical and shrill as the two hour program progressed.

Interestingly, most of the people who called in with questions were on our side as well, and the majority of them came from the deep South. There goes another stereotype!

As usual, Levine began harping on the Ten Commandments, insisting that they served as the foundation for a moral society and that, because of this, they should be posted in our schools, courtrooms, etc. He got one supporter, a lady who as I recall hailed from Tennessee. She said that she went to a Catholic school and her school never had anything like the awful things that are happening in our public schools nowadays. Levine was almost ecstatic that he had finally found someone who agreed with him. However, I pointed out the facts of life to him and the lady. I said that private schools can pick and choose the students that will attend, while the public schools have to accept every student. I then asked both of them which type of school is more likely to have problem kids in their midst. Hearing Michael Levine hem and haw and then quickly move to a commercial break was one of the high points of the evening!

After the commercial break, Levine reverted to his "Ten Commandments" argument. I stopped him and asked which Ten Commandments he was referring to. I pointed out that the Ten Commandments appear three times in the Old Testament. Two of them are rather similar, but the third is quite different, and has the invaluable moral injunction that "thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk." Which version did he advocate?

Surprisingly, we didn't hear anything more about the Ten Commandments after this.

When Levine pointed out that today's kids need to learn how to respect their elders (now that's "original"), I mentioned that the rise of child killings has taken place during the same generation that saw widespread corruption in the political arena, pointless wars and a general inability on the part of our leaders to behave morally or even to tell the truth. Given this, and the general lack of outrage on the part of John Q. Public (meaning the kid's parents), what is there for these kids to respect? Where are our national heroes? Where are our role models? Is it any surprise that so many kids seem to be against everything their parents stand for?

One caller was from Alabama, and was quite friendly to the views I was discussing. Alabama recently had a governor named Forrest "Fob" James who advocated posting the Ten Commandments in the schools, courts of law, and just about everywhere else. I was familiar with this kook, and mentioned him by name to the caller. Levine, however, had never heard of him. I couldn't resist jumping on the opportunity. I asked Levine how he felt about James' stand, knowing he would wax poetically on the "courageous" ex-governor. I then pointed out that James, disgusted that the Alabama state Supreme Court, in a much-celebrated case, ruled against James. James' reaction was to say that the Bill of Rights doesn't apply to the state of Alabama (!). What do you think about that, Mr. Levine?

Levine responded by going to another commercial.

Finally, in my closing argument, I refuted two of Levine's favorite "sacred cows." The first was his insistence that without an absolute standard of morality, meaning of course God, there is no basis for morality. I asked him, Which god? The Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Aztec, or Zoroastrian? Until all the world religions can agree on just what "god" is and what he/she/it/ or they wants from us (and then be able to convince everyone else), there can never be any such thing as an "absolute" moral standard. Religion is, by its very nature, subjective; everyone interprets and understands their god differently.

My second closing argument was on school vouchers, which Levine supports. I gave him a hypothetical situation: Atheists United is planning to start an atheist school, which will teach kids about the values of atheism. This projected school will teach atheist philosophy, principles and values. Would Mr. Levine mind paying, out of his own pocket, to support such a school? Mr. Levine's response:

"That's a stupid question. Tune in again next week, blah blah blah..."

Methinks I won't be asked back a third time!

# AU Honors its Own



*Don Latimer receives the Spencer Blackwelder Atheist Pioneer Award to a standing ovation.*

*Presenter Liz Blackwelder looks on.*

AU honored its own on September 9, with the annual awards banquet.

The crowd of sixty members and guests rose to their feet when Don Latimer was announced the winner of the Spencer Blackwelder Atheist Pioneer Award. Among his many contributions to AU, Don this year has begun to tithe and has challenged other members to do so. He has made the point that if we are to compete with religion, we must emulate their fund-raising success.

Ed Tabash, the only openly atheist candidate for state assembly, received the Queen Silver Courage Award. Harvey Tippit, whose inspiration and work brought about the revival last December and who has begun the lending library, accepted the Prime Mover Award. Matt Waggoner, founder of AyoUth, got the Energizer Award. Sam Popowski, long-time moderator of the San Fernando Valley Discussion Group, who has moved to Northern California for health reasons, was sent a special plaque in recognition of his achievement and service.

Speaker Ray Romano, producer and star of *Religiously Incorrect* entertained and

informed. Dinner and cocktail hour music was provided by the talented duo of Hanan and Mansour Jammal. Al Griffin and Jon Nelson led the group in song to close the program.

Certificates of appreciation were awarded to some of the members who have made outstanding contributions in the past year. Recipients are: Fran Prevas, Stuart Bechman, Jack Grooms, Fran Troy, Don Malvin, Mike Jordan, Sue Huntzinger, Jay Johnson, Helen Kropp, Monica Davis, Jerry Brown, Betty Fulford, Liliana Dishman and Stan Unger.

*Ed Tabash accepts the Queen Silver Courage Award.*



*Harvey Tippit accepts the Prime Mover Award.*



*Speaker Ray Romano shows off his plaque, which reads "Friend of Atheists United."*

## Information Please

*By Henry Farber*

Lately our office received a call from a gay person. He said that he found Atheists United on the web. His first question was, "Do you accept gay people, like me, in your organization, and do you also have lesbians?"

I answered him that yes we do have gays among us, but so far have not encountered any lesbians to my knowledge, but they are certainly welcome. Being different is not a crime; personally I say that it is all in the genes, and "Vive, la difference!"

Speaking of diversity, our members come in all persuasions on the spectrum, but our goal is to maintain the separation between the church and state. We also educate society about atheism in order to live a better, happier life, since this is the

only chance we have.

The other question was, "What to you atheists talk about in your meetings?" I told him that we invite interesting speakers, dealing with a wide range of topics from education, science, psychology to action concerning the separation of church and state but we also have picnics, banquets get-togethers with other friends.

He then asked about the age range and he was told that the majority of our membership was over 50, but we have also started a youth group.

The only real thing we atheists have in common is atheism, because of our inquiring minds.

# My Conversion

By Don Latimer

It is reasonable to ask what will happen if the religious right wins in the coming election. Even if there is no certainty, we can assume that if something they are doing now is illegal it will become legal if they win. Of course, abortion will become illegal and it may become a capital crime. Religious messages will be posted in all public buildings. Prayer will become legal in all public schools and it is likely that the schools will become indoctrination centers for religion. That has already happened in some places in the South, on a small scale.

Let me talk for a minute about me. When I was about ten or eleven I was in a private school. The teacher told us to bow our heads. Then she asked us to raise our hands if we accept Jesus into our hearts. I did not. She walked away to work on some other students, but she soon came back to me and asked again. Again the tap on the shoulder to make sure that I knew who she was talking to. She kept walking away and coming back again and again. Finally, I did crack; it was becoming apparent that she wasn't going to stop until I did

accept. Would it surprise you to hear that she was one hundred percent successful? If religious people had kept it up I would be a different person today.

When these revivals occur in the public schools, the students get up and tell how great it is to have Jesus in their hearts. Peer pressure makes kids who don't want to, to join in. If this keeps up dissonance will force them to change their beliefs to match their behavior. You may think that you can withstand that. If you think so, you will be wrong if it goes on indefinitely. You may have children that could withstand such an ordeal, but would you put them through that?

People can be broken just like horses can be broken to the saddle. A recent issue of Scientific American tells about how children are kidnapped in Africa by opposing factions and taught how to be soldiers. You may think that as soon as they are given guns, they will kill their oppressors. That is not what happens, they fight for their oppressors, and kill for them, and die for them.

If you think that you can vote them out later you are wrong again. Do you think Iranians can vote the Moslems out, or Israelis vote out Jews, or Northern Irish vote out Christians?



**HumCon is Back!** Sponsored by the **LA Freethought Federation** (formerly the Alliance of Atheists, Humanists and Ethical Culturists)  
February 16-18, 2001 at  
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## Meetings of Allied Freethought Organizations

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### Meeting Dates, Times, Phone Numbers

AUGen - Atheists United General Meeting: Fourth Sunday, except December. 11:00 AM, board meeting, 12:15PM, social hour; 1:00PM, meeting. Center for Inquiry West, 5519 Grosvenor. Info: (818) 785-1743.

AUOC - Atheists United Orange County: Brunch. Second Sunday, 10:30AM, Irvine Ranch House Restaurant (formerly Jolly Roger's), 1727 E. Dyer Rd., Irvine, one block east of 55 Freeway. Info: David (714) 220-1777 or e-mail: ocau@thinkdontpanic.com.

AUSFV - Atheists United San Fernando Valley: Discussion Group. Third Wednesday, 7PM IHOP Restaurant, 6429 Van Nuys Blvd., Van Nuys, one block N. of Victory Blvd. Info: Henry (818) 988-2806.

AUSLO - Atheists United San Luis Obispo: 3rd Saturday, 3PM. County/City Library. Info: Peggy (805) 544-1580.

AyoUth - Young Atheists Coffee Night, Mondays 8:00 p.m. Lulu's Alibi, 1640 Sawtelle (just south of Santa Monica Bl.) Info: Matt (310) 993-4876 or Monica (310) 383-8409.

ECLA - Ethical Culture Society of Los Angeles: First and Third Sundays, 11:00 AM, Children's Community School Auditorium, 14702 Sylvan Street, Van Nuys. Info: (310) 470-2873.

FTM - Freethinkers Toastmasters: Second and Fourth Saturdays, 2PM. CFIW, 5519 Grosvenor. Info: David: (310) 479-6318.

GALAH - Gay and Lesbian Atheists and Humanists: First Sunday, 1:00 p.m., The Village Gay and Lesbian Center; Room 135; N. Mc Cadden Place Los Angeles, Info: Ken: (818) 500-9858

HALA - Humanist Association of Los Angeles: Third Sunday, 2:30PM, MGM Center, Colorado & Cloverfield, Santa Monica. Info: (310) 456-6642.

SHJ - Society for Humanistic Judaism, Third Friday Info: (213) 891-4303.

SHOLA - Secular Humanists of Los Angeles: First Sundays, 11:00AM, Center for Inquiry West, 5519 Grosvenor. Info: (310) 371-8469.

### Membership Form

I support the aims and purposes of Atheists United which are to keep state and church separate, and to promote atheism. I apply for membership in Atheists United including a monthly Newsletter at the Level indicated:

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) of other family members: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Signature X \_\_\_\_\_

Payment Method ☐ Cash or Check ☐ Visa/Mastercard number \_\_\_\_\_ expiration \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Life Member @ \$500

☐ Regular Member @ \$30 per year

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(requires two signatures)

☐ Sustaining Member @ \$100 per year

☐ Limited Income Membership – call or write for details

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Newsletter Subscription Only @ \$12.50 per year/\$20.00 outside the U.S. (does not include membership, no signature required.)

Send Check or Money Order To: Atheists United, P.O. Box 57435, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413-2435

### Freethought "Links"

For those of you who are connected to the Internet, check out the following websites!

au.atheism.org

AU's Website

www.atheistalliance.org

Atheist Alliance

www.slonet.org/~ipauslo

AU San Luis Obispo

www.egroups.com

Join the atheistsunitedinc eGroup discussion

#### Board member email addresses:

Bobbie Kirkhart: Bkirkhart@aol.com

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Steve Gage: steven.s.gage@boeing.com

Mark Rockoff: mark1377@juno.com

Rachel Sene: nontheist@email.com

Newsletter contribution: Bkirkhart@aol.com

## AU Cable TV Listings

*AU is currently reorganizing our Public Access Outreach effort. During this time there may be some interruption in programming. Please bear with us.*

Media One, Hollywood	Ch.37	Sunday	1:30 P.M.
Media One, Verdugo Hills	Ch.19	Monday	8:30 P.M.
Adelphia, Beverly Hills	Ch.37	Sunday	Between 9-11:30 A.M.
Adelphia, Marina	Ch.3	Sunday	Between 9-11:30 A.M.
Adelphia, West Hollywood	Ch.3	Sunday	Between 9-11:30 A.M.
Adelphia, All Others	Ch.77	Sunday	Between 9-11:30 A.M.

### Out of State- Greater Seattle Area

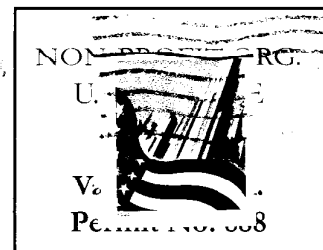
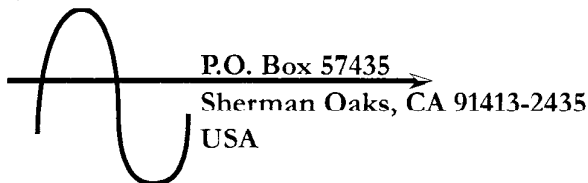
Washington	Ch.29	1st Monday	1 P.M.
(Through March 2001)			

*STUN (Superstition, Talking Snakes, Unjust Taxes & Nonsense) Program*

Charter Cable, Long Beach	Ch. 65	Tuesday	4:30 p.m.
		Friday	8:30 p.m.

*Would you like to see our programming on your local cable public access? Call the office to help! We need local residents in areas in order to get our*

OCTOBER 2000



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U.S. Constitution, First Amendment:

***"Congress Shall Make No Law Respecting an Establishment of Religion..."***