

message from the president

Looking back on 2020 brings to mind the Dickensian cliché: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." The havoc a pandemic can wreak, even as we see the very best of the human spirit engaged in fighting it. Tens of millions voting decisively against a wannabe dictator, even as the peaceful transition of power is disrupted. Millions demonstrating across the country for months against racism, while millions of others seem very comfortable voting for a vision that casually enables Christian White supremacy.

Dickens was writing in the 1850's about events at the end of the 1700's. My fervent hope is that future writers will be able to say that this period in our history did not merit more superlatives than any other: that this was not the beginning of the end in this republic for liberal democracy or the separation between religion and government.

In 2020, our hardworking staff and committed volunteers adapted superbly to the pandemic. The AHA's Education Center was able to increase their virtual offerings tenfold, and adapt to feature humanist perspectives on coping with the pandemic. In August, more than 1,300 humanists attended our virtual 79th Annual Conference, one of our most successful ever.

Advancing antiracism was front and center at the AHA, as the Board of Directors, maybe the most diverse in the nonreligious movement, said that "humanism and social justice go hand in hand," in its statement made a few days after the killing of George Floyd.

The advocacy work of the AHA continued to advance in 2020 in all aspects, particularly on the legal and the legislative fronts. In a first for any nontheist organization, Congress heard testimony from the AHA. As a result of our leading efforts with help

from our allies, both houses of Congress passed resolutions requiring the U.S. Government to support the repeal of blasphemy laws around the world, repeals that could quite literally save lives in many countries. The U.S. District Court in South Carolina ruled in favor of the AHA in its longstanding lawsuit against Greenville County School District over school-sponsored prayers.

We were also looking ahead and planning for the future as we adopted the AHA Strategic Plan for 2021-2023. This positions the AHA to better promote public awareness of humanism, embrace the full population of American humanists, and advocate for humanist positions.

In 2021 the AHA will be saying *au revoir* to one of the most effective leaders in American nontheism, Executive Director Roy Speckhardt. In fifteen years at the helm, Roy guided the transformation of the AHA from an organization focused on the philosophical aspects of humanism to a grassroots and advocacy organization that punches above its weight. Some of the recent milestones he oversaw include catalyzing the formation of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, naming of humanists in federal legislation for the first time, and our staff attorney arguing a case at the U.S. Supreme Court. While we are grateful for all his contributions, and that he has committed to continue to be involved as a volunteer chairing the Board Committee on Advancement, his leadership of the staff will be sorely missed. His successor will be chosen through a nationwide search currently underway involving all stakeholders at the organization.

As we all work our way through what will hopefully be a less challenging year in 2021, I hope you continue to live our humanist values, showing that you would rather be good than godly any day.



Sunil Panikkath