

California's 25th Annual Freethought Day



October 11, 2026
California State Capitol

FreethoughtDay.org

Our Theme

In our **twenty-fifth year**, we highlight the vital role that reliable information, critical thinking, and media literacy play in a healthy, democratic society.

As technology makes it easier than ever to create, spread, and consume information, it has also become easier for misinformation and disinformation to shape public opinion, influence elections, and deepen social divisions.



We're seeing it happen every day and, now, with an **election** less than a month away. Claims can go viral before they are verified, misinformation can reach millions within hours, and many people lack the tools needed to evaluate what they see and hear.

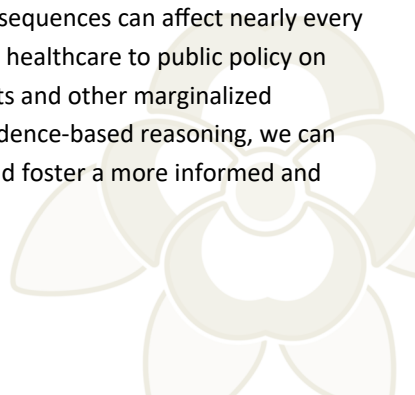
Secular values encourage us to evaluate claims based on evidence rather than authority, tradition, or ideology alone. By strengthening our ability to distinguish fact from fiction, we reinforce the foundations of informed citizenship, freedom of thought, scientific inquiry, and constructive public dialogue, all of which are central to California Freethought Day's mission and core values.

At the same time, **we face a growing challenge**: many people have only a limited understanding of how science works and why the scientific process remains one of humanity's most powerful tools for discovering truth. Science does not offer certainty, but it provides a reliable framework for testing ideas, correcting errors, and improving our understanding of the world and the people around us.

We can use the scientific method to test claims beyond what was traditionally considered science. We can apply it to questions and claims about immigrants, the transgender community, housing affordability, economic inequality, gun violence, voter access, and healthcare. And, perhaps most pertinent for the next four weeks, **we can use it before completing our ballot on November 3rd**.

When evidence is ignored or misunderstood, the consequences can affect nearly every aspect of civic life, from decisions about vaccines and healthcare to public policy on government funding, and the treatment of immigrants and other marginalized communities. By promoting scientific literacy and evidence-based reasoning, we can make better decisions, strengthen our democracy, and foster a more informed and compassionate society.

David Diskin, President



The History of Freethought Day

Freethought Day dates back to 1692, during the time of the Salem Witch Trials. Massachusetts Governor William Phips, on October 12, wrote about the quagmire that the trials had become – in part by a reliance on “evidence” of a non-objective nature and especially “spectral evidence” in which the accusers claimed to see devils and other phantasms consorting with the accused.

This year marks the 334th celebration of Freethought Day, and the 25th celebration of California Freethought Day.



The Freethought Day Board and Committee

- **David Diskin**, President
- **Becky Mark**, Treasurer
- **Marie Bain**, Secretary
- **Nick Gray**
- **Luisa Morco**
- *Amelia Lewis*
- *Jamie Snyder-Hernandez*
- *Jessica Gray*
- *Kelly Amodeo*
- *Ken Nahigian*
- *Liz Jodry*
- *Nancy Sneed*
- *Ryan Drew*
- *Tom Ikelman*

*Our thanks go out to every volunteer, speaker, donor, sponsor, and past committee member... especially our founders, **Mynga Futrell** and the late **Jerry Sloan**.*

-The CFD Planning Committee



The first Freethought Day at the Sacramento County Courthouse Plaza in 2002.

It starts as a **story.**



**Start questioning
the **storytellers.****

Join the fight at americanhumanist.org



Speakers



Jared Huffman

Jared has represented California's North Coast since 2013, following service in the California State Assembly, where he championed environmental protection, wildlife conservation, and public interest causes. He has built a reputation as a strong advocate for science-based policymaking, civil liberties, and the separation of church and state.

In 2018, he co-founded and now co-chairs the Congressional Freethought Caucus. Jared, who openly identifies as a secular humanist, was named Humanist of the Year by the American Humanist Association in 2020.

His book, *No Prophets: The Fight to Save Democracy from Christian Nationalism*, was just released

Follow him on Instagram, Facebook, Bluesky ([rephuffman.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/rephuffman.bsky.social)), or at his website (huffman.house.gov).



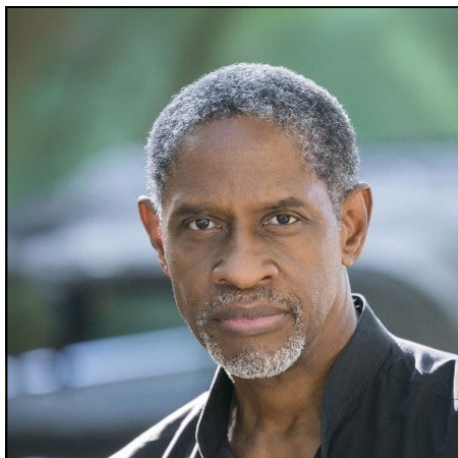
Alex Lee

Alex (李天明) represents California's 24th Assembly District which includes the Alameda County communities of Fremont, Newark, and Sunol, and the Santa Clara County communities of Milpitas and San Jose.

Assemblymember Lee was elected in 2020, and became the youngest Asian American legislator ever elected and the first openly bisexual state legislator in California history. He currently serves as Chair of the Committee on Human Services, the Select Committee on Social Housing, and the Legislative Progressive Caucus.

Follow him on his Instagram ([Alex_lee](https://www.instagram.com/Alex_lee)), Facebook ([assembly.alex.lee](https://www.facebook.com/assembly.alex.lee)), Bluesky ([votealexlee.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/votealexlee.bsky.social)), or on his website (lee.asmdc.org).

Speakers (continued)



Tim Russ

Tim is an actor, director, musician, and writer best known to science fiction fans as Tuvok, the Vulcan security chief on *Star Trek: Voyager*. He has appeared in a wide range of films and television series, including *Spaceballs*, *Roots: The Gift*, *iCarly*, and *Samantha Who?*.

Beyond acting, Tim is an accomplished filmmaker who has directed numerous TV episodes, films, and indie productions, including the fantasy adventure series *12 Sided Die*. He is also a musician, voice actor, and screenwriter.

A lifelong advocate for science, Tim is an avid amateur astronomer. Combining curiosity, creativity, and a passion for discovery, he continues to inspire audiences both on screen and off.

Follow him on Instagram (Trvulcan) or Facebook (Tim Russ), or on his website (timrusswebpage.com)



Bertha Vazquez

Bertha is a retired middle school science teacher and the Education Director at The Center for Inquiry.

She leads a network of 100 teachers who have delivered over 475 professional development sessions across all 50 US States. Her innovative approach to teaching climate science has been featured in the New York Times and NPR.

She is the editor and coauthor of *On Teaching Evolution* (2021) and a recipient of the 2023 Friend of Darwin Award.

Bertha is a regular conference speaker and a Fellow of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry.

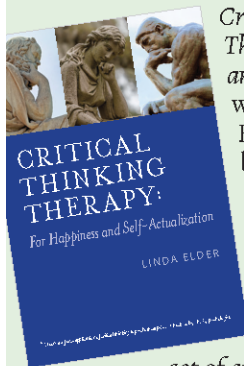
Follow her on Instagram (lucretiaborgia1519), Bluesky (bvazquezcfi.bsky.social), and on her website (centerforinquiry.org/education-department).

THE FOUNDATION FOR CRITICAL THINKING PRESS

Sustainable Publishing That Protects The Planet

FCT Press provides a service to self-publishing authors who are advancing and employing ethical critical thinking in their writings, implicitly or explicitly, and who seek the earth-friendly print and dissemination options for their books. All paper used in our printing processes comes from recycled paper; in the process, we protect the lives of trees and of the many species dependent upon them.

We invite self-publishing authors who are advancing and employing ethical critical thinking in their writings, implicitly or explicitly, to publish with us. Find out more about our self-publishing services at FCTPress.org.



Critical Thinking Therapy: For Happiness and Self-Actualization, written by Linda Elder and published by FCT Press, introduces a substantive theory of critical thinking to the field of mental health therapy and details

a broad, integrated set of critical thinking tools for use in self-therapy and therapy. It is for the individual seeking a more enlightened, more fulfilled, less fearful, and less self-defeating orientation to the world. It is also for those who are aware that they are not now reaching their potential and who seek a self-actualizing frame of mind. This book, and others, are available at FCTPress.org.

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CriticalThinkingCommunity.Org

The World's Largest Critical Thinking Resource and Activity Center

The Center for Critical Thinking Community Online houses the world's largest critical thinking digital library, along with self-paced activities designed to help you further advance your critical thinking abilities. We also host webinars and study groups and offer a host of other resources, as well as providing exclusive access to hundreds



The
Critical
Thinking
Community

of recordings, publications, interactive exercises, forums, and more.

THE FOUNDATION FOR CRITICAL THINKING

The Foundation for Critical Thinking and the Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique — two sister educational non-profit organizations — work closely together to promote educational reform. We seek to promote essential change in education and society through the cultivation of fairminded critical thinking.

Critical thinking is essential if we are to get to the root of our problems and develop reasonable solutions. After all, the quality of everything we do is determined by the quality of our thinking.



The
Foundation
for
Critical Thinking

PO Box 31080 • Santa Barbara, CA 93130
Toll Free 800.833.3645 • Fax 707.878.9111
cct@criticalthinking.org • www.criticalthinking.org

Speakers (continued)



Jovan Bradley

Jovan is a media creator, political commentator, and debate host focused on politics, social issues, religion, science, and philosophy. Through livestreams, debates, interviews, and educational content, he breaks down complicated subjects into accessible arguments grounded in research and evidence.

His work centers on working-class liberation, LGBTQIA+ rights, racial justice, and broader questions of political and economic power. His content combines advocacy, research, and debate with the goal of giving people better tools to understand the arguments shaping the world around them.

Follow him on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube ([jovan_bradley](#)) and Facebook ([jovanbradleydebates](#)), and Bluesky ([jovanbradely.bsky.social](#)).

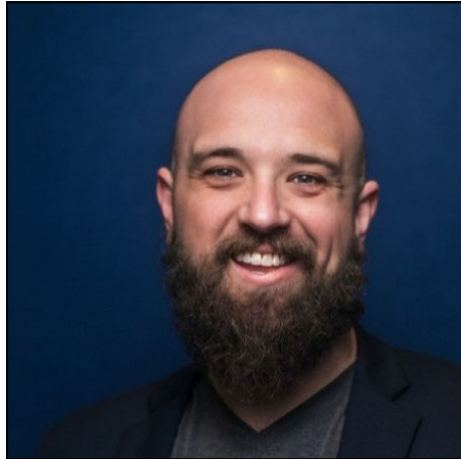


Forrest Valkai

Forrest is a biologist and science communicator known for his infectious enthusiasm and boundless love for life. He holds master's degrees in biomedical sciences and anthropology, four undergraduate degrees in biology and education, is currently a PhD student studying biochemistry and molecular biology, and teaches at the prestigious university of the internet.

Renowned for his engaging presence on social media, heartfelt advocacy for social progress, and hosting shows like SkepTalk and The Atheist Experience, Forrest champions science and reason, raises hundreds of thousands of dollars for charity, and teaches audiences of all ages to love science and each other.

Follow him on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube ([valkailabs](#)), or at his website ([valkailabs.com](#))



Jake Via

Jake is the Organizing Director for the American Humanist Association and brings nearly two decades of experience in nonprofit leadership, community-building, and youth development. His work has focused on creating meaningful connections and helping communities thrive.

Through travel, learning, and engagement with people from diverse backgrounds, he found a worldview grounded in reason, compassion, and human dignity.

Today, Jake is passionate about building strong humanist communities and helping people find purpose through service, empathy, and civic engagement.

You can read more about Jake on the American Humanist website (americanhumanist.org/team/via/).



"It is very nearly impossible...to become an educated person in a country so distrustful of the independent mind."

— James A. Baldwin

"I prayed for twenty years, but received no answer until I prayed with my legs."

— Frederick Douglass

"Mama...it's all a matter of ideas and God is just one idea I don't accept...I get so tired of Him getting credit for all the things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort."

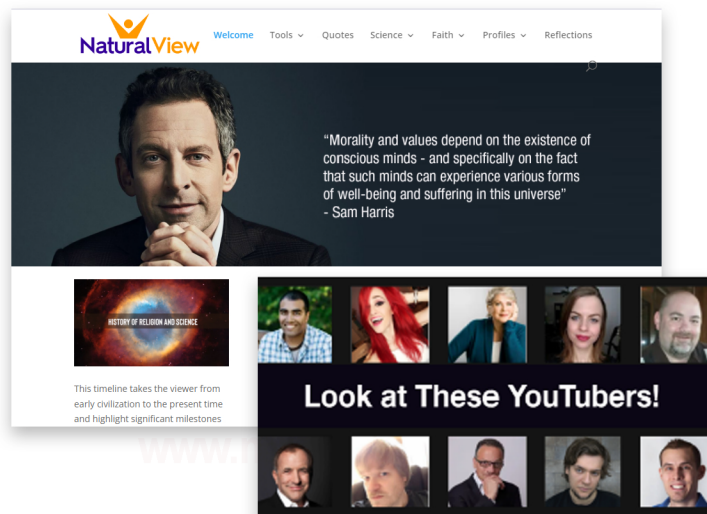
—From "A Raisin in the Sun," by Lorraine Hansberry



RESOURCES

FOR RE-EVALUATING FAITH

AND RECOVERING FROM RELIGIOUS TRAUMA



EDUCATION



INSPIRATION



SUPPORT


NaturalView
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Hellen Heels

Hellen is from Stockton, CA. During the day Jonathan works for the betterment of LGBT+ communities.

At night, Hellen comes out to perform in every major city in the central valley and beyond. She is a member of a burlesque troupe and comedy group, and dabbles in variety showcases, bingo nights, many brunches and dinners, charity shows, movie nights, and her favorite is Drag Queen Storytime!

She only hopes that one day, when she hangs up her heels, that she made an impact on the drag scene, created opportunities, and made everyone smile on the way.

Follow her on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (@Hellenheels) or Facebook (Hellen Heels), or at her website (hellenheels.threadless.com).

Reason Center

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Reason Center is a **community venue** for gatherings and educational activities that promote scientific awareness, critical thinking and civic responsibility – via a naturalistic worldview and secular values.

LearnHaus AI



**Go boldly
where no
mind has
gone before**





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Enter to Win!

If you're registered and with us in person, you can **win any of our Door Prizes!** (Registered guests watching the livestream can win another prize via a survey we'll send out *after* the event.)



To win, collect stickers from participating groups. Fill up all the spots below and take our survey, then rip this page out and turn it in to our Registration area **before 4:00 PM.**

Name: _____

Note: if we can't read your writing, we can't tell you that you've won!

Phone: _____ ☐ It's okay to text me periodically about news and events.

Email: _____

To help us apply for grants, please check the terms that describe you (optional):

- | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|---|--|
| ☐ African American | ☐ Asian | ☐ Hispanic / Latino | ☐ Native American |
| ☐ Pacific Islander | ☐ White | ☐ Military / Veteran | ☐ LGBTQIA+ |
| ☐ Low-Income Family | ☐ Student | ☐ Other: | |

What was the best part about today?

How can we make next year even better?

Your Age?

How'd you hear about today?

ZIP Code?

Place organizations' stickers here:

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Authors and Podcasters Panelists



Thomas Smith

Thomas is a professional podcaster, hosting Opening Arguments, Gavel Gavel, Where There's Woke, and Serious Inquiries Only. He also co-hosts the parenting podcast Dear Old Dads with Tom Curry and Eli Bosnick.

No matter the show, Thomas's goal is always the same: to apply the tools of skepticism consistently and comprehensively, while keeping it entertaining along the way.

Follow Thomas on Instagram and X (@seriouspod).



Lydia Smith

Lydia transitioned from a state leadership position to join the podcasting industry and apply her research skillset to debunking right-wing "woke controversies" alongside her husband on Where There's Woke.

Lydia is known for going deep on the claims, corporations, and people. She also co-hosts Gavel Gavel and produces the Serious Pod Network.

Follow Lydia on her Patreon (patreon.com/wherethereswoke) and on Instagram (@seriouslydiaonly).

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#BXCHANGESLIVES



Art and Entertainment



Candi Carpenter

Candi (they/them) is a queer, autistic singer-songwriter, producer, and multidisciplinary artist whose music explores identity, healing, freedom, and the lasting impact of religious culture. Raised as the child of a pastor and immersed in church music from an early age, Carpenter's journey has taken them from gospel stages and the Grand Ole Opry to becoming an acclaimed alternative artist known for their fearless storytelling. Praised by artists including

Dolly Parton and Brandi Carlile, they have built a devoted following through music that is both deeply personal and broadly resonant.

Their work confronts questions of belief, belonging, and self-discovery with honesty, creativity, and compassion. Blending elements of rock, alternative, and pop, Candi creates music for those rebuilding community and meaning after difficult experiences.

Follow Candi on Instagram, YouTube, Facebook (candicarpenter), TikTok (candi_carpenter) and Bluesky (candicarpenter.bsky.social), and on their website (candicarpenter.com).

What do **atheists** believe in?

REASON
EQUALITY
kindness
peace
celebration

facts
LOVE
education
Empathy
freedom

HOPE
cuddling
CHOCOLATE
art
gratitude
VOTING



Stockton Area Atheists and Freethinkers
stocktonAAF.org



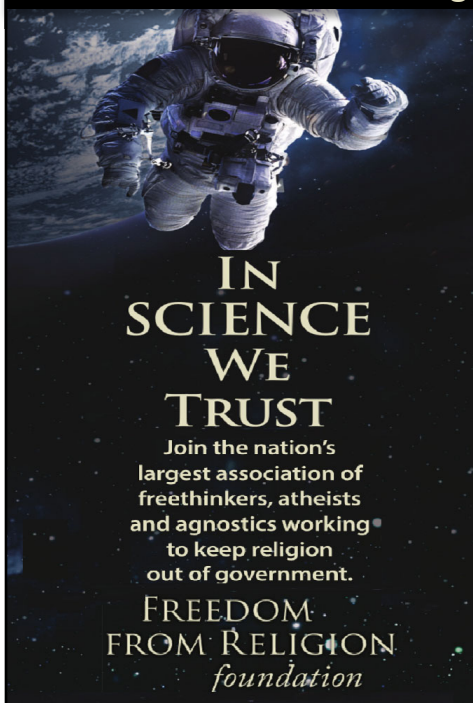
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Thank you for your
extremely generous gift of
\$15,000.

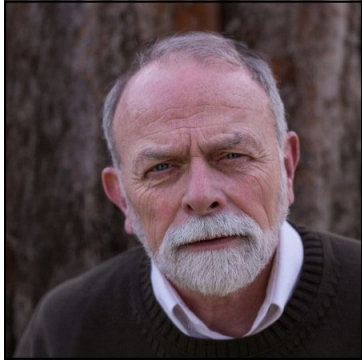
Nickelson Family

Thank you for creating the
Nickelson Family Essay
Scholarship program.

Jessica Gray

Thank you for contributing to
our Silent Auction!

Art and Entertainment (continued)



Sean O'Brien

Sean has for many years been performing, directing and teaching the art of acting in professional, community and educational theaters across the country.

Upon retiring from teaching, he began Every Corner Productions which boasts two one-man shows: "The Portable Poe Show" in which Sean performs dramatizations of Poe's poetry and short stories, and

"Bob: The Words of Col. Robert Green Ingersoll" which is a composite of passages taken from Ingersoll's most memorable speeches.



Rina Wakefield

Rina is a spoken word poet, activist, and librarian who holds a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science. She is a collaborating member of Myrtle Tree Arts and facilitates community events that highlight environmental awareness, humanitarian efforts, and promote equity for underrepresented groups. She was a member of the Sacramento Poetry Week Committee in 2024 and served on the International Human Rights Day Committee from 2022 to 2025. She

has been the featured Spoken Word Performer for El Dorado County's Poet Laureate program, a featured poet at Placerville's Human Rights Day, and was featured at Chateau Duvall in 2023.

Rina was published in the GTFO Poetry Anthology (2024) and in Art and Culture El Dorado's chapbook Poets of the Firehouse Sessions (2023). As a journalist, her work has appeared in The Mountain Democrat, the California Business Journal, dametraveler.com, and Performer Magazine. She is currently working on a prose-poetry chapbook and a creative nonfiction novel based on the female lineage of her Indigenous heritage — the Purépecha people of northwestern Michoacán, Mexico. As a culture keeper and literary event coordinator, she served as a creative designer for the Sugar Skull Art Walk project in 2023 and produced its poetry performances in 2024.

Follow her on Instagram ([_rinawrite](#)) and her website ([rinawrites.com](#))



Andy Swan

It all began when Andy's oldest brother, George, taught him how to juggle back in 1966. At first Andy would visit the circuses just to see the jugglers, and once he saw what else the circus had to offer he fell in love. After high school he went off to join the DeWayne Bros. Circus in Oregon. During his year with them he learned just about everything there was to learn about circus life.

Learn more about Andy at SBCircus.com.

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- ✓ Rock Climbing
- ✓ Astronomy
- ✓ Arts & Crafts
- ✓ Story Telling
- ✓ Team Sports
- ✓ Song Writing
- ✓ Performing
- ✓ And so much more...



**Registration is opening soon,
space is limited!**



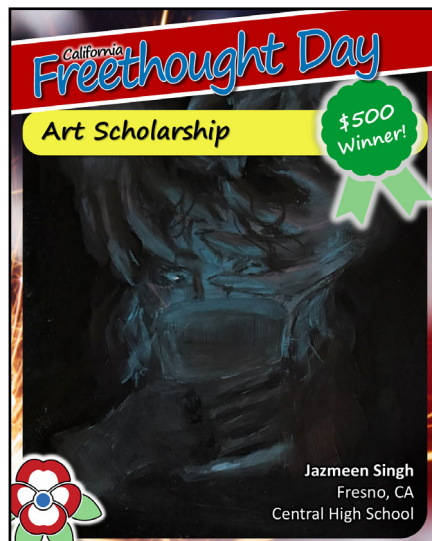
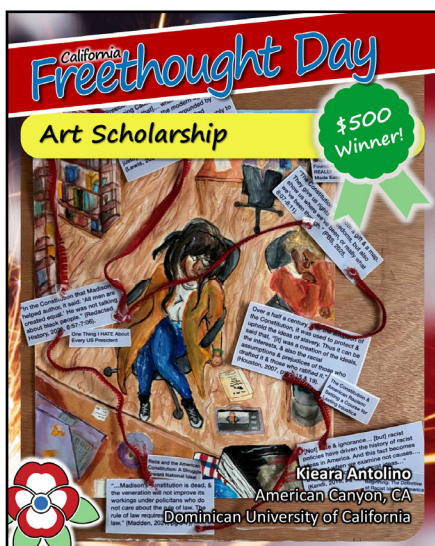
Scan to sign up to our newsletter to be the first in line when dates are announced.

learn more at www.campomni.org

Steve comes with a background of many years in gospel music. Twenty years ago, he left that scene to engage life without a belief in God and has returned to his original musical passion for the music of 60's and 70's. He will be providing the background sounds of those rock and folk-rock classics during Saturday evening's reception.



Born in Tijuana and raised in San Diego, Lourdes Ayón draws on Mexican culture, family dynamics, and the realities of aging for her energetic and deeply personal stand-up. Now based in Sacramento, she has appeared at the Latina Comedy Festival, placed among the Top 40 comics at the 2025 World Series of Comedy, and performed at venues including the Laugh Factory, Cobb's, Punch Line, and Laughs Unlimited.



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Thanks and Acknowledgments

For their support of Freethought Day, we would like to especially thank:

- **Jessica Gray** for generously donating to our silent auction,
- **Sacramento's Big Day of Giving** for supporting non-profits like ours, and
- **Courtyard Marriott** for their discounted lodging.

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NaturalView helps believers who are contemplating moving from their religious perspective into the natural world of scientific understanding and critical thinking.

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| • Atheists and Other Freethinkers | • Center for Inquiry |
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- **Stockton Area Atheists and Freethinkers**
- **Sunday Assembly Sacramento**

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- Rick Thomas
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- Mark Woodson
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- Charles Villa

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- Ellen Sweeney
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- Wendy Ikelman
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- Linda Paul

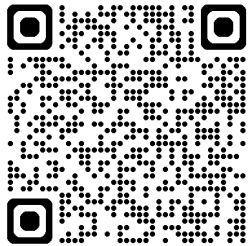
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Ahmad Cox

Dennis Sweeney
Ellen Sweeney
Craig Wilson
Richard Tonsing

**And everyone who
supported us after our
program was printed.**



Support California Freethought Day

Scan the QR code and donate to any of our ongoing funds to make an impact next year, including:

- Freethinker Gallery
- Secular Art
- Secular Action Day
- Secular Advocacy
- Secular Scholarships
- General Donation

Other ways you can support our mission:

- Send a text to **53-555** with either of these phrases:
CFD, CFDART, CFDACTION, or CFDSTUDENTS
- Visit givebutter.com/CFD

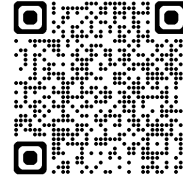
Event Schedule

All times are approximate.

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 11:00 | Registration Opens
Visit with community tables, special exhibits,
and our sponsors. |
| Noon | Livestream Begins
Welcome by Hellen Heels |
| 12:10 | Opening Remarks by David Diskin |
| 12:15 | Assemblymember Alex Lee |
| 12:25 | Bertha Vazquez |
| 12:45 | Representative Jared Huffman |
| 1:05 | <i>Break</i> |
| 1:20 | Tim Russ |
| 1:30 | Thomas and Lydia Smith |
| 2:00 | Sean O'Brien |
| 2:10 | Scholarship Winners |
| 2:25 | <i>Break</i> |
| 2:45 | Candi Carpenter |
| 3:10 | Community Awards |
| 3:30 | Community Panel |
| 3:50 | <i>Break</i> |
| 4:05 | Group Photo |
| 4:10 | Jovan Bradley |
| 4:25 | Jake Via |
| 4:35 | Freethought Day Committee |
| 4:55 | Forrest Valkai |
| 5:15 | Rina Wakefield |
| 5:25 | Closing Words |

Participation Policies

These policies govern the relationship between California Freethought Day and our attendees, donors, speakers, volunteers, scholarship applicants, committee members, and board members.



Thanks to our Sponsors



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