

GODLESS AMERICANS MARCH ON WASHINGTON

by Jim Heldberg

President, Pacifica Democrats and Coordinator, San Francisco Atheists

It was a beautiful day to make history.

On a crystal clear cool Saturday, Nov. 2, 2002, thousands of non-religious Americans marched into a new future together. Old and young, rich and poor, healthy and frail, locals and travelers from across continents and oceans, we gathered to carry hundreds of signs and bring a single message for a better tomorrow, free from the centuries of foolishness that still threaten American freedoms.

We marched half a mile, from near George Washington's monument to our national Capitol. For the first time, the religionists were on the sidelines heckling us! It was a surprising turn of events, and we loved it.

But the historical day was just beginning.

Speakers from the major American godless organizations united to proclaim the need for unity of effort. Mike Newdow led the crowd in the original Pledge of Allegiance. Atheist veterans were recognized. Candidates past and present spoke. Bands played. Jokes were told. The heartfelt pleas for unity and action were memorable, and the crowd clapped and cheered, almost to exhaustion.

But the brilliant words were eclipsed by the more brilliant image of national godless leaders, standing in front of our Capitol, protected by our national police, speaking to our crowd on our National Mall and on our national TV. It is an image we will treasure the rest of our lives.

The gates had been opened, and the momentum had begun for organized godless activism. The crowd poured out their enthusiasm. They poured money into buckets to back up their enthusiasm with commitment. They poured cards with their names and addresses into more buckets for future actions to bring a godless America to reality.

The day's events came to an end with another surprise. Religionist hecklers, kept in check by police on horseback as they lurked on the sidelines all day, at last turned on their bullhorns, waved their massive signs, and waded into the crowd

to provoke fights with departing marchers. But the crowd ignored them and departed for home. We had already won a much more important fight.

It was a shining day of American history.

Jim Heldberg
Coordinator, San Francisco Atheists
National Affiliation Director, American Atheists