

Fort Worth Bus Ads Boycotted and Stalked!

In an unbelievable series of developments, the Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason scored a public relations coup at minimal expense. It all started on November 30 with a press release announcing that the following ad would appear December 1 on Fort Worth, Texas, buses.



The 238 faces that make up the patriotic stars and stripes background are photos of real atheists and agnostics taken at the annual Texas Freethought Convention. DFW CoR designed and paid for the ad itself because UnitedCoR had already sprung for the coalition's original billboard during its successful launch back in March 2009. So this was a follow-up effort using only four such king-size ads at a cost of just \$2,528. Moreover, due to a bus company printing delay, the ads didn't actually roll out until Monday, December 6.

But the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, *Dallas Morning News*, and area TV and radio stations covered the story immediately, before a single ad appeared. And with that, the Calvary (yes, that's the intended spelling) arrived to further aid this campaign in the form of an incredible overreaction by a portion of the Fort Worth Christian community. On December 2, a group of Baptist pastors met with transit officials and threatened a bus boycott by their church members if the ads actually went up. But the Fort Worth Transportation Authority stood firm. And soon wire services were covering the story. Then, when the ads hit the streets, the boycott took effect.

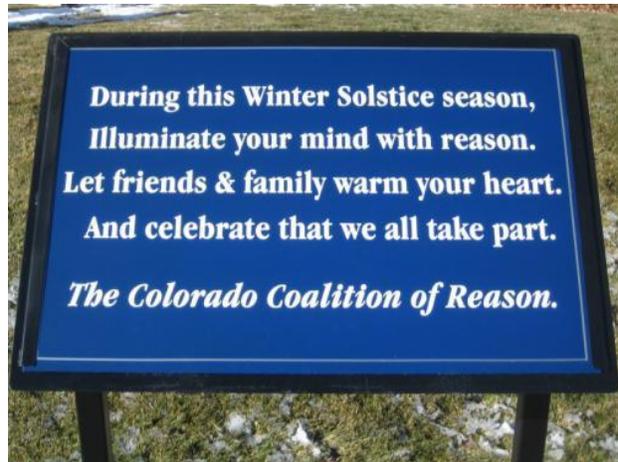
The Fort Worth transit system, however, is known for having the lowest ridership for any major city in the country. Moreover, there are 180 buses in the fleet, making those sporting the good-without-God ads on one side represent a mere 2.2 percent. And the ads were booked to run for only 30 days. No wonder the *Star-Telegram* ran a headline on December 7 reading, "Threatened boycott of Fort Worth buses has no noticeable impact."

But the controversy didn't end there. Two Christian groups immediately purchased ad space aboard the buses to counter the DFW CoR ads. And one anonymous consortium of out-of-town

pastors and businesspeople acquired the services of a billboard truck to actually stalk one of the DFW CoR buses to proclaim: “I still love you. – God” and “2.1 billion people are good with God.” Naturally, all of this fuss has kept the news stories and blog posts flowing, bus company revenues rising, and interest in the fifteen groups of the now reenergized DFW CoR growing.

Colorado Coalition Challenges Christmas Displays

Every year in December Larimer County Sheriff Jim Alderden holds a nontaxpayer-funded, public “politically incorrect” Christmas tree-trimming party at his headquarters in Fort Collins, Colorado—a city about sixty miles north of Denver. The event features carolers, horse-drawn carriage rides, jail inmate crafts, prayer, and refreshments. It also includes—together with a nearby public park—Christmas trees, a nativity scene, a menorah, Frosty the Snowman, and, since 2009, the following sign by the Colorado Coalition of Reason.



The sheriff’s event was first held in 2007 in reaction to efforts in Fort Collins to avoid religious holiday decorations on public property. But Marvin Straus, a leader in the Colorado coalition, objects to the party’s name, saying: “One of the phrases that we in COCOR hear too often is ‘politically correct.’ Those people who have fought for women’s rights, the rights of people of color, the rights of gays and lesbians, and the rights of secular humanists would suggest that phrase is inappropriate.”

In Denver, however, Straus didn’t even get an acknowledgement when he sought permission to put up a similar sign as part of that city’s diverse holiday display at City Hall. So there, amid a nativity scene, Santa Claus, twelve life-sized reindeer, elves, penguins, and thousands of holiday lights, not a trace of the solstice could be found.

But Straus didn’t take the rebuff lying down. He set his coalition to work purchasing three small billboards, strategically placed on streets near the nativity scene, in protest. Then he notified the press. As a result, major stories began running in the leading Colorado print and broadcast media starting November 30—stirring up controversy, providing a civics lesson, and publicizing COCOR. The first billboard went up December 8. The total cost of the campaign is \$1,000.



Marvin Straus poses next to one of three COCORE billboards in Denver, Colorado

UnitedCoR Unveils New National Website

Fast on the heels of its new Facebook page, UnitedCoR unveiled a new national website on December 3. The site not only features an attractive new design but better organized information, a graphic map page showing the locations of all local coalitions, and a mailing list that interested people can join so as to receive news and information. Improvements are still being made.

And more is coming. There will be new materials added to the Resources page along with a password-protected forum where local CoR leaders can meet, compare notes, and talk shop so as to enhance the effectiveness of their coalitions. Next will come newly designed local sites that will allow for greater local-national connectivity and interaction, including shared news feeds. The new local sites will also offer greater flexibility, new options, and ease of use for both administrators and end users.

After the Holidays . . .

Think ahead to February 2011 and Darwin Day! Charles Darwin's birthday, February 12, falls on a Saturday next year. That's perfect for planning a unified local CoR event. For more details about Darwin day, along with event ideas, visit <http://www.darwinday.org/events/howto.php> .

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