



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

FEBRUARY 2025

Please join us in person or on Zoom for our February speaker presentation...

Religion in Schools: The Battle Over After-School Proselytization



Kevin Bolling,
Exec. Dir. – Secular Student Alliance

Our Program: Religious conservatives have long sought to use in-school time and after-school programs, such as the *Good News Club*, to proselytize to students under the guise of extracurricular activities. In addition to SSA student chapters, the Secular Student Alliance and The Satanic Temple have partnered to offer an alternative: *After School Satan Club*.

This discussion will explore the legal and ethical implications of religious programming in public schools, and the role of secular activism in protecting church-state separation.

Our Speaker: Since 2017, Kevin Bolling has been the Executive Director of the Secular Student Alliance, a national organization dedicated to atheist, humanist, and other non-theist students. The Secular Student Alliance empowers secular students to proudly express their identity, build welcoming communities, promote secular values, and set a course for lifelong activism. With over 20 years of nonprofit leadership experience, Kevin's career has included 15 years of student association management and on-campus program development from Los Angeles to Boston.

For 10 years, Kevin served as the Executive Director of the California Thoroughbred Horsemen's Foundation, a charitable trust serving the healthcare needs of the industry's largely immigrant workforce. Most recently, Kevin served as the Director of Philanthropy at the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles, a major LGBTQ arts advocacy organization, whose youth outreach work has moved thousands of hearts and minds across the U.S. towards embracing LGBTQ equality.

Saturday February 15, 3:00–4:30 pm Pacific.

On Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>



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Deepa Willingham One Woman's Dream: Bring Hope to a Seemingly Hopeless Situation

By Judy Flattery

Deepa Biswas Willingham was the featured speaker at the January 18 meeting of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara, held in the sanctuary room at the Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation site in Goleta. Marian Shapiro introduced Deepa, who is an active Rotarian widely recognized for her humanitarian work.

Deepa spoke about growing up in India and how her mother would not say, "Finish what's on your plate because there are starving children in Africa" but instead would say, "Finish your plate because there are starving children outside the window." When Deepa would go to her 'fancy' school (where Mother Teresa taught when she was just Sister Teresa) and see the impoverished children along the way, she would say to herself, "When I grow up I'm going to take care of children like that!" Then she grew up and did not take action for many years.



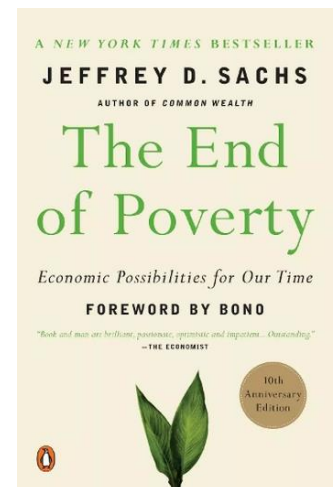
Then, when she turned 60, she decided it was time to take action and place service above self.

She referenced a quote by Aristotle, "Poverty is the parent of revolution and crime." She said that poverty, injustice, hopelessness, and unhealthy living conditions leads to frustration and has people be susceptible to the promises of charismatic demagogues. There can be no peace with such inequities.



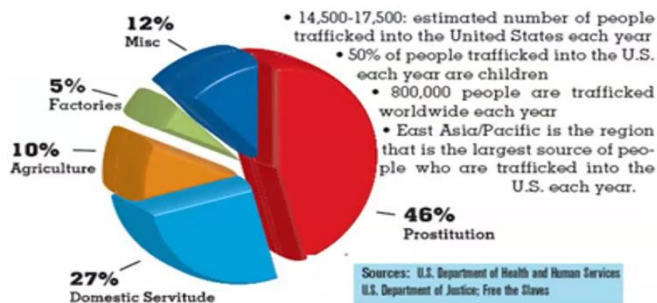
She made the point that governments spend much more on military and weapons systems than on alleviating human suffering. She referenced a graphic (dated 2000) she saw hanging in the U.N. that depicts \$800 billion per year spent on weapons and military vs. just \$34 billion per year spent on humanity and alleviating human suffering. Her message reinforces the message of Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Oscar Arias (former president of Costa Rica) that in order to have peace we must first declare war on war.

People have asked her why she works on poverty in India when we have poverty here. She says that poverty here is not the same as poverty elsewhere. She referred to levels of poverty as defined by Jeffrey Sachs in his book, *The End of Poverty*.



Deepa depicted the levels of poverty like the floors in a multi-story building. The lower levels are depicted as large and separated from the next level up by a very long and narrow ladder. Few succeed in climbing it. The higher levels are connected by shorter and wider ladders making it much easier for an individual already at a higher level to further improve their circumstances.

Deepa said that one of the 'solutions' within the desperation of extreme poverty is getting caught up in human trafficking, whether by selling a child, or by being manipulated by unscrupulous people with promises of a better life. In this realm, human beings are seen as a renewable resource to be used in prostitution, domestic servitude, agriculture, factory work, etc.



Deepa attended a human trafficking conference in San Diego as an invited panelist. A speaker from the FBI shared the following image of a young woman with a barcode tattoo, symbolic of seeing human beings as commodities.



Deepa said that human trafficking is a significant issue in the U.S. particularly along routes of major highways.

Deepa quoted Geoff Rodgers, co-founder of the U.S. Institute Against Human Trafficking: "The United States is the number one consumer of sex worldwide. So, we are driving the demand as a society." They report that California is the U.S. state with the most trafficking activity.



Deepa saw the sign below posted on a telephone pole in San Luis Obispo on her way to a Human Trafficking Task Force Meeting. It seems to be some sort of sick joke. The area code and phone number do not appear to be real (550 is not a real area code). Deepa reported it to the task force; the SLO police had been alerted and were following up.

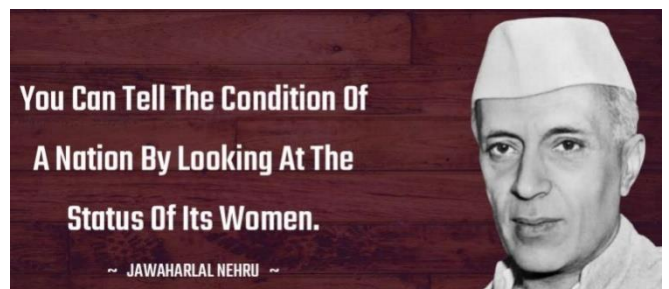
The FBI lists four keys to ending trafficking:

- Awareness
- Prevention
- Intervention
- Restoration.

The national human trafficking hotline is 888-373-7888. I've often seen this number posted on the stalls in women's restrooms in major airports. Deepa urges parents to monitor their children's on-line activity. Teens who feel disconnected or unloved are ripe to fall victim to on-line predators who profess to love and care for them.

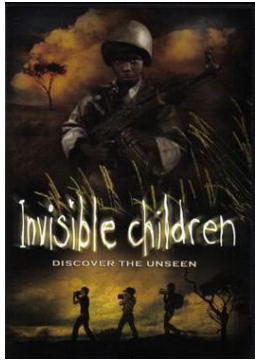


According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), two thirds of the world's illiterates are women and girls (vs. being just under half of the global population). Every year 60 million girls ages 6-11 are out of school, 38% of girls in



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developing countries are child brides, and of those, 1 in 7 are married before the age of 15. UNDP estimates that 150 million girls experience sexual abuse each year.



Deepa also mentioned that young boys are sometimes taken and forced to serve in armed conflicts. She recommended a 'must see' 2006 documentary, *Invisible Children*, which depicts the abduction of children to be used as soldiers in the war in northern Uganda by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

Educating girls is a strategic lever within a society. Educated women have less chance of dying in childbirth, get better work opportunities with higher pay, are more likely to provide their children with health care and nutrition, and more often decide to send their children to school expanding a beneficial generational cycle. Deepa says the World Economic Forum estimates that educating women could add \$12 trillion to the global economy.

With this background, Deepa founded a non-profit in 2003: PACE, an acronym which stands for **P**romise of **A**ssurance to **C**hildren **E**verywhere. PACE started with two elements in its mission statement:

1. Nurture the educational, health, nutritional, social, and cultural development of girls and women in multiple areas of the planet.
2. Build the first prototype service center in Piyali Junction to oversee the creation of a sustainable rehabilitation model.

Deepa noted that when rural males are educated they tend to migrate to the cities for higher paying jobs. When rural girls are educated (particularly beyond the 6th grade), they tend to remain in the rural area, marry later, have fewer children and ensure their children are literate. Plus, as their circumstances improve, they tend to invest in improving their communities.

She founded her first PACE Center in a rented 2-room shack in Piyali Junction, a deeply impoverished area outside of Calcutta, known as a hub for human trafficking.



She started with 25 girls. Within 6 months, she had 80 girls in the program. Today the school is described as an oasis, developed and supported with partners in Rotary clubs among others.



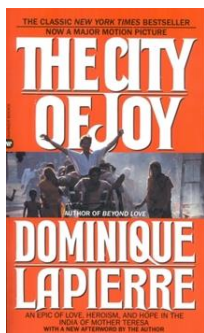
Deepa emphasized that this type of work is not successful unless you have a honorable and honest partner at the other end. She has turned down an offer of funding and land to start a school in Honduras because she could not find an honest and honorable partner. She is fortunate to have such a partner in Mr. Jayanta Chatterji, who has been the President of PACE Learning Center for the past 18 years.



Deepa noted that most of these girl students have experienced trauma, and the PACE school provides therapeutic activities in addition to the academics, including sports, music therapy, yoga, and theater arts therapy (writing and performing plays). Sometimes the girls even perform the plays in front of the perpetrator, showing enormous courage.

Deepa noted that the girls were provided with clean water at school 5 days a week, but drank unhealthy water at home frustrating the school efforts to keep the girls worm free. PACE partnered with the Rotary Foundation and others for grants to improve the infrastructure of the community (e.g. sewage treatment plant, 400 village toilets, 40 water wells, commercial kitchen, adult literacy program, generator, library, playground, etc.). Sylvia Whitlock, the woman whose court case resulted in Rotary dropping their 'men only' requirement, is deeply involved with this work in Piyali Junction and responsible for the development of its commercial kitchen. Programs were established to teach the mothers marketable skills. PACE planted 10,000 fruit trees for food and extra household income. PACE also addresses health care needs with programs such as health care camps for vaccinations. Deepa, as a biologist, is very proud that her campus is environmentally responsible (solar panels, plastic-free, sewage treatment, recycled water, organic gardening, etc.).

In 2006, Deepa held a contest for our local high school students to read a novel about life in the slums of Calcutta, *City of Joy*, and then to write an essay about how they viewed poverty before and after reading the book. The six contest winners visited Piyali Junction and worked there for two weeks,



making an indelible impression on these local Santa Barbara county students.



Deepa presented some of the bold artwork created by the girls at the PACE school showing their value for education, their grappling with surviving abuse, and their awareness of climate change.

Deepa is proud of her students' academic achievement. In India there are two public exams to take, one at the end of 10th grade and the other at the end of 12th grade. Rural schools fare poorly at these exams yet the PACE girls have been achieving A and A+ cumulative grades on the exam which, she claims, is unheard of in rural communities.

The graduates of the school are now welcomed to work at the local ISPAT Cooperative Hospital. Another capable PACE graduate, Rai Mondal, has received a 6 year scholarship funded by the Rotary Club of San Luis Obispo, to realize her dream of becoming a doctor. PACE has also started a program to train young men to be security guards.

There are currently 250 students (pre-K through 12th grade) and 100 mothers at the school in Piyali Junction.

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When people ask Deepa what she has achieved, she replies that she gave the girls of Piyali Junction hope, she gave them laughter. Where there were tears, they are now smiling, they feel empowered, and feel that they can do anything they put their minds to. Deepa reports that their work has fulfilled on the steps the FBI laid out of Awareness, Prevention, Intervention, and Restoration. Trafficking has stopped in that village.

To support PACE, Deepa invites us to sponsor a girl or a woman at the school. This can be done at their website: www.paceuniversal.org. All donations make a difference and are welcomed and appreciated.

Congressman Carbajal: Please Join the Congressional Freethought Caucus

by Marian Shapiro

The American Humanist Association is asking its members to write to their congressional representatives and urge them to join the Congressional Freethought Caucus.

The Humanist Society of Santa Barbara (HSSB) is an affiliate of the American Humanist Association (AHA). Many HSSB members are also members of the AHA.

I wrote a letter to Salud Carbajal and I invite all of you to write a similar request.

Your letter can be much shorter since I've explained to him what the Freethought Caucus is, and why it's important. Please let him know that you're his constituent and that the Separation of Church and State is important to you, and that you'd like your Congressman to be part of the Freethought Caucus.

Here is what I wrote. You can use your own wording; it's better if you express your opinion in your own way.

Here's the [website](#) where you can write to Salud.

Dear Congressman Carbajal,

I'm writing to urge you to join the Congressional Freethought Caucus (CFC) lead by Representatives Jared Huffman (D-CA) and Jamie Raskin (D-MD). Let me explain why.

When the founding fathers gathered to write our Constitution, they knew that many people were fleeing European countries, because each country required its citizens to follow that country's religion, and many who came to the U.S. came for the freedom to follow whatever religion they chose, and not have one imposed by the government.

Today, the Christian Nationalist movement, supported by President Trump, wants our government to impose their choice of views on this country. This may include no abortion, no acceptance of LGBTQ kids, banning of books on topics they don't want people to read about such as our country's Black history, possibly no contraception for sexually active teens or single people, no help for transgendered kids to grow up, and other extreme measures. If we want a society which respects the freedom of choice for Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and non-believers alike, we'll need to protect what the framers of our Constitution made sure to address: that our government protects the freedom of religion by separating government from religion. Americans are free to choose their own religion or no religion and not be forced to follow the rules of a state religion. The American government policies are based on science and reason and shared values. We can't afford to lose that, or a lot of Americans would feel robbed of the freedoms we've had since our founding, and how a majority of Americans feel about the loss of Roe v. Wade.

As your constituent and a Jewish humanist, I would like to invite you to join the Congressional Freethought Caucus, co-chaired by Representatives Jared Huffman (D-CA) and Jamie Raskin (D-MD).

Membership is FREE and does not require commitments of sponsorship or endorsement from members. The Caucus welcomes members from a diverse array of religious and non-religious backgrounds and seeks to unite members in defense of secular governance and science's place in policy-making. I invite you to join your colleagues in the effort to protect the values that form the foundation of this country.

The Caucus has four main goals: 1) to protect the character of our government by adhering to the strict Constitutional principle of the separation of church and state; 2) to promote public policy formed on the basis of reason, science, and moral values; 3) to oppose discrimination against religious and nonreligious persons and to champion the value of freedom of thought and conscience worldwide; and 4) to provide a forum for members of Congress to discuss their moral frameworks, ethical values, and personal religious journeys.

To learn more or join, please reach out to Representative Huffman's office, and let me know what you think.

Sincerely, Marian Shapiro

HSSB Signs on to Statement Affirming Commitment to Protecting LGBTQ+ Rights

Sam McGuire, the Director of Grassroots Organizing & Advocacy for American Atheists invited HSSB to join a coalition of 16 national atheist, humanist, freethought, and other secular groups in a joint statement pledging to protect the rights of LGBTQ+ Americans.

On January 15, the HSSB Board of Directors approved HSSB signing on to this statement as it is consistent with our humanist values. Individuals can also sign onto this letter at [this link](#).

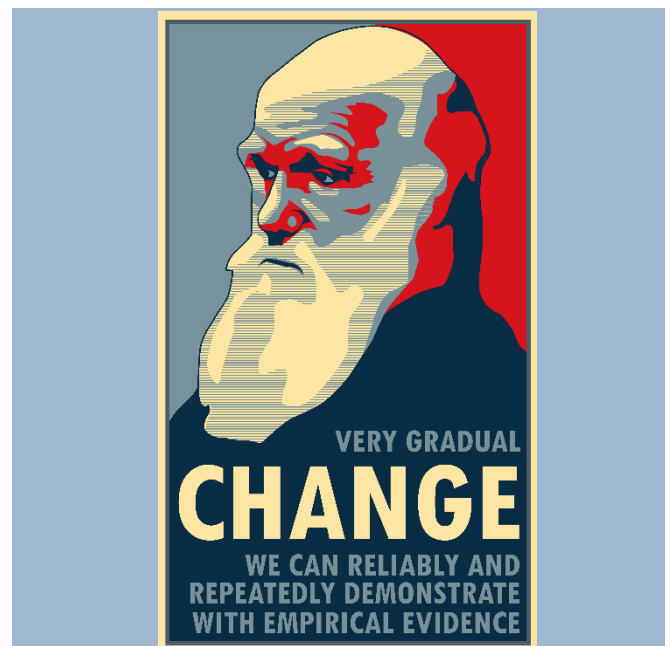
Here is the text of the statement:

“As the 119th Congress and state legislative sessions begin across the nation—and the incoming Trump-Vance Administration

prepares to take office on January 20—the extreme White Christian Nationalist movement and their politician enablers have made it clear that LGBTQ+ Americans, particularly trans people, will be singled out for discrimination, exclusion, and attacks in 2025. Indeed, this dangerous movement has made anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and policies a cornerstone of their agenda.

“As organizations and individuals committed to protecting the separation of government and religion, as well as universal human and civil rights threatened by the White Christian Nationalist ideology, the undersigned reaffirm our commitment to forcefully advocate for the rights of LGBTQ+ Americans, create inclusive and welcoming communities, represent the interests of our diverse members, and act in accordance with our values.

“We will not permit religious extremists to foment a moral panic, encourage harassment or violence, and enact dangerous policies that seek to force LGBTQ+ Americans generally—and trans Americans in particular—out of public life and out of existence. Nor will we sit silently or ignore when the talking points, misinformation,



and outright fabrications of anti-LGBTQ+ extremists are laundered and given a veneer of legitimacy or acceptability by those who hold themselves out as voices of reason or science.

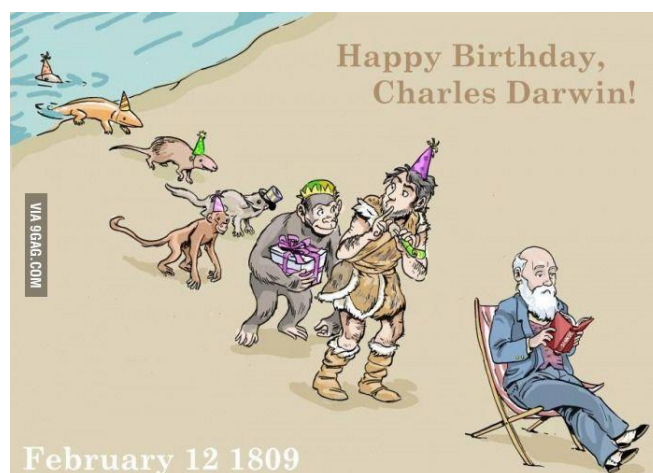
“In just the past year, we have seen book bans forcing libraries and schools to remove materials that even mention LGBTQ+ characters; bathroom bans and ‘bounty’ laws that threaten harassing lawsuits or even criminal prosecution against trans Americans simply for using the restroom; religious refusal laws allowing medical providers to deny treatment; outright bans on a range of medical care for gender dysphoria, substituting the judgement of state governments for that of patients, parents, and physicians; and even investigations threatening to remove trans and gender non-conforming children from their families. More of the same is coming in 2025.

“For the more than 1.5 million trans Americans, this is the reality they are forced to live every day. It is not merely some academic debate.

“These unworkable, ill-conceived, and plainly discriminatory laws and policies are about one thing: forcing a regressive, largely religious view of gender norms onto the American people. They are ‘solutions’ in search of a problem that simply doesn’t exist. Instead, the extremists advocating for these actions intend to send a clear message that trans Americans are not worthy of dignity or respect—and their cruel and dehumanizing rhetoric only confirms that intention. We cannot and will not ignore such bigotry, no matter its source.

“Instead, we stand with our trans community members. We will continue to advocate for policies that protect the civil and human rights of every community that comes under threat from the White Christian Nationalist ideology. And we will ensure that the inherent dignity and

worth of all people is respected within our community and beyond.”



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To Join or Donate to HSSB: Annual Membership dues - \$36 for an individual, \$60 for a couple, \$100 for a Society Supporter, and \$300 (or more) for a Society Patron. Dues payments and other donations can be made via PayPal (Paypal.me/SBHumanists), check or credit card. Include your name and contact information when submitting payments. Make checks out to *Humanist Society of Santa Barbara* and mail to Mary Wilk, P.O. Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130. mwilk722@gmail.com. Dues, donations, & payments can be remitted via this PayPal QR code. At the PayPal site, select ‘Send’ then log into your PayPal account to complete the transaction. Watch our speaker videos on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com). Subscribe to our [Meetup](#) page to be notified of upcoming events.

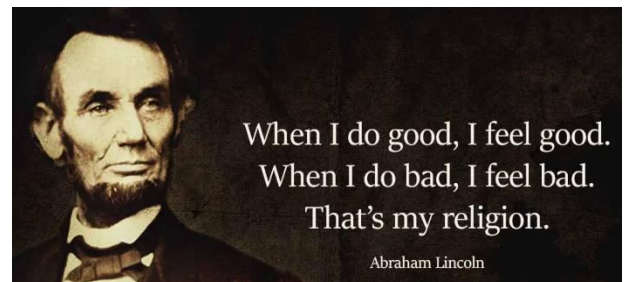
meetup



Upcoming Events of Interest to Humanists

Submitted by Diane Krohn & Melanie Jacobsen

- February 9 at 10 am. Jonathan Young: *Love Abounds*. In honor of Valentine's Day, we will look at how romantic movies, such as *Casablanca* reflect the profound mystery of the Beloved. Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 820 N. Fairview Ave., Goleta, CA.
- February 12. Kristine McDivitt Tompkins: *Rewilding on a Continental Scale*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Kristine McDivitt Tompkins](#)
- February 16 at 10 am. Peter Haslund: *Why Can't We All Just Get Along?* Peter Haslund remembers watching Rodney King utter these words on TV as his world was coming apart. He wondered the same, and now wonders if we have learned anything since then, or are we destined to keep tilting at windmills and searching for signs of encouragement? Is ongoing conflict really our manifest destiny? Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 820 N Fairview Ave., Goleta, CA
- February 16: Stuart Vyse: *The Latest in Autism Claptrap*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles. [Stuart Vyse](#)
- February 18: *Hope in the Water*, Episode 1: Screening and Q & A. Fishers, aquafarmers and scientists explore sustainable fishing in open waters. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Hope in the Water](#)
- February 20: Jonathan Haidt: *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Jonathan Haidt](#)
- February 23 at 10 am. Jonathan Young: *On Being Unique*. In keeping with Live Oak's congregational read of *Mad Honey*, we celebrate every person for who they are. Let us stand in solidarity with our transgender siblings as they navigate their lives with courage and authenticity. Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 820 N. Fairview Ave., Goleta, CA.
- February 27: Baratunde Thurston. *Climate Justice and Environmental Stewardship*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Baratunde Thurston](#)
- March 1: Andrew Ross Sorkin: *Inside the Minds of Today's Changemakers*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Andrew Ross Sorkin](#)
- March 16: Joe Horine: *Evidence, Interpretation and 'Truth' in Cinema Classics*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles. [Joe Horine](#)
- April 5-7: Summit for Religious Freedom, convened by Americans United for Separation of Church and State. The conference is in Washington, D.C. and virtual. [Summit for Religious Freedom 2025](#)
- April 17-20: American Atheists 2025 National Convention, Minneapolis, MN. [American Atheists 2025 Convention](#)
- April 20: Katherine Stewart: *Inside the Movement to Destroy American Democracy*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles. [Katherine Stewart](#)





Humanist Society of Santa Barbara
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HSSB Calendar

Tuesday February 11. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting. Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

Saturday February 15. 3:00 pm. Kevin Bolling, Exec. Dir. Secular Student Alliance. *Religion in Schools: The Battle Over After-School Proselytization.*

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Tuesday March 11. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting. Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

Saturday March 15. Dr. Roger Freedman. *New Discoveries by the James Webb Space Telescope.*

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.