

No 'burden of religion' for us, say suburban activist atheists

Step out and speak up. That was the message from Medina Murray O'Hair, America's high priestess of atheism, who urged atheists to step out of the closet and fight against what she dubbed "the monster called religion."

The occasion was a banquet at the Sheraton-Southfield last week, celebrating the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. The ancient pagan celebration of this event is regarded by some scholars as the inspiration for the Christmas celebration, given that the actual birthdate of Jesus is in January.

Mrs. O'Hair was the guest of the Michigan chapter of American Atheists, Inc., which is affiliated with the Society of Separationists, Inc., founded by Mrs. O'Hair.

Blunt in speech and uncompromising in her view, Mrs. O'Hair maintains, "I cannot respect a person who holds a religious idea. I try to insult him."

Road bonds seen if gas tax stalled

The Board of Oakland County Road Commissioners has adopted a \$7.4 million budget for 1979 as proposed by Managing Director John L. Grubba.

The budget includes four road construction projects sought by members of the audience during a public hearing Nov. 15 as part of the \$12.5 million construction program.

Another major change from the previous year's budget substitutes \$4 million of bond revenue for \$4 million that had been anticipated from proceeds of the two-cent state fuel tax increase and vehicle weight tax increases adopted by the Michigan Legislature.

"It appears that petitions to repeal the rate increases will be filed and certified, meaning the tax won't be collected until at least a state-wide referendum in 1980," said Road Commissioner John R. Gnat Jr.

He said bonding would therefore be necessary to meet county needs as budgeted. "However, bonds will not be

She has been the country's leading proponent of atheism since the early 1960s, when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld her lawsuit to stop public schools from conducting prayers in the classroom.

FROM THE AMERICAN Atheist Center, which she established in Austin, Tex., Mrs. O'Hair criticizes the nation, speaking out against discrimination, religious programs in public schools and phrases such as "In God We Trust" on coins and government buildings.

"America is the only country founded on separation of church and state," she told her audience of about 150 persons. "We have to stand up for our heritage."

She describes atheism as a philosophy of persons who are "free from religion," basing their life on experience, with no faith in or dependence on a "supernatural" being.

As outlined in "The American Atheist," Mrs. O'Hair's magazine, the purpose of the American atheist movement is to promote the complete separation of church and state and to maintain a secular educational system. And while Mrs. O'Hair feels contempt for religious persons, she said her organization doesn't aim to suppress religious activities.

MRS. O'HAIR maintains that fear of losing one's job and social pressure keeps persons who embrace the atheistic philosophy from speaking out. The Michigan Chapter has just 32 members.

She praised a 24-year-old police officer from the Lansing area, who admitted to having the "heebie-jeebies" about openly coming to a meeting of this monster called religion.

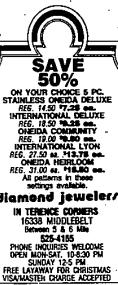
"Simply come out and help," urged Mrs. O'Hair, who was dressed in a flowing black and gold robe. "Everybody has to do his part to get rid of this monster called religion."

She said if the gas and weight tax petition failed, we decided to budget from bonding because of the time necessary to complete arrangements should bonding be necessary," said Gnat.

INCLUDED IN the budget are an \$8.5 million construction program; \$9.8 million for maintenance, which includes winter snow and ice removal; \$2 million for traffic services; \$2 million for engineering; \$1.5 million of fixed costs and \$1.9 million for administration.

Revenue anticipated include: \$18.5 million of state-collected gas and weight taxes; \$3.5 million of other state and federal funds; \$4.8 million of local (project matching) funds; and \$1.5 million of fees and other revenues.

"Without the two-cent gas tax increase and weight tax increases averaging 10 per cent, revenues from the state-collected taxes are expected to be only \$1 million greater than we budgeted for 1978," said Grubba.



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