
PANViews



*Newsletter of PA Nonbelievers, Inc., affiliated with American Atheists,
Atheist Alliance International and the Council for Secular Humanism.*

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President's Report

Josh CruverKibi

I am excited to announce that PA Nonbelievers will be having a winter solstice party this weekend, Saturday 12/2 starting at 3PM. This will be a potluck. There will also be a white elephant gift exchange, children's activities, and presents for children from a non-mythical being. To participate in the white elephant gift exchange, bring a wrapped gift valued at \$15 or less.

If you are going, please let us know via the 'Punchbowl' invite we emailed earlier this month. We would like to have a good headcount for parking and so we know what people are bringing. The list of potluck foods can be found with your invitation confirmation link. There will be additional parking next door at the storage facility. If you did not receive an invite and would like to go, send me an email at cruverkibipan@gmail.com and I will send you a link.

Also, if anyone is interested in helping with the set up, I will be decorating and setting up for the party this Thursday afternoon. Email me and let me know!

PA Nonbelievers Membership Drive

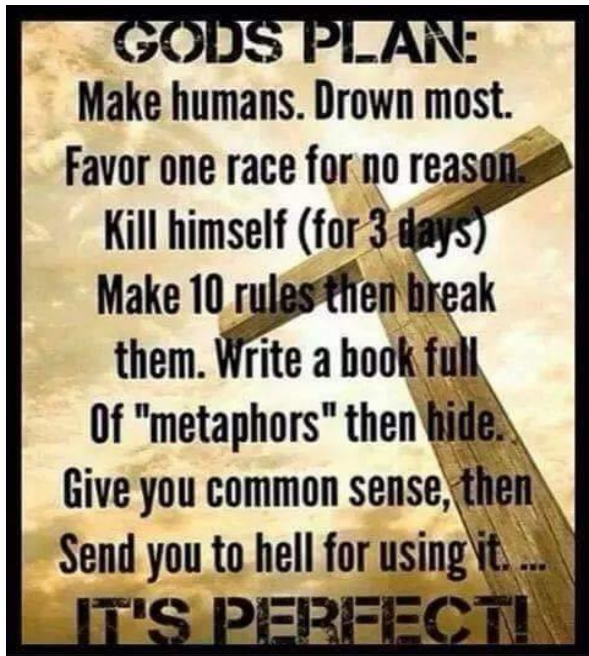
It is also that time of year for the PAN Membership Drive. PAN membership runs on the calendar year, so all current memberships expire on January 1, 2024. If you would like to continue or become a member of PA Nonbelievers, we can take your membership applications online. You can start or renew your membership on our website: <http://www.panonbelievers.org/>. You can also use the printable form and send your membership in through the postal service if you prefer. We will count anyone who has signed up or renewed their membership since September, for 2024 memberships.

Your membership helps PA Nonbelievers continue our mission to create a sense of community for Atheists, Agnostics, and Humanists in Pennsylvania, continue to engage in educational outreach, raise secular awareness, and increase rational and critical thinking skills in our Pennsylvanian communities.

I hope that you will continue to volunteer and support our community through PAN membership and participation events next year. Membership also gives you the right to vote and run in PA Nonbelievers elections in March at our annual meeting.

If anyone is waiting for the final installment in my 12 months of cognitive and philosophical health for atheists and nonbelievers, it will be released in the new year's *PANViews*. This would be more apropos considering the topic and date.

Atheist News in Pennsylvania– The Nation – The World!



The Satanic Temple in York County

The Northern York County School District has the distinction of being the first school district in the country to offer HAIL, the Satanic Temple’s Hellions Academy of Independent Learning.

A little background. According to the York *Dispatch*, yorkdispatch.com, since 1967 Joy El Ministries has offered Released Time Bible Program in the district. Students are transported off school grounds for a period for Bible study sessions. In spring 2021 a parent requested the Satanic Temple be allowed to offer an After School Satan Club. The district turned down the request, stating that clubs are established based on student interest, not by parental request. The district and the Temple went back and forth; eventually the board voted against the Satan Club, and the Temple warned the district to be ready for a lawsuit.

A lawsuit was avoided when the Satanic Temple introduced HAIL. Parents sign a permission slip to allow kindergarteners through sixth graders to be transferred, during the school day, once a month to the Dillsburg Area Public Library. June Everett, campaign director for HAIL, explains that HAIL is an alternative for students who aren’t interested in what Joy El has to offer. The program focuses on science or community service projects. It does not have anything to do with religion, but it was inspired by the Temple’s seven tenets, concentrating on respect for human life, compassion and empathy.

The first class was taught by Deana and Mark Weaver, who teach archaeology and evolution. They showed the kids a Neanderthal skull, which lead them to ask how jaws work. (Gee, no wonder the religious people are worried!)

Interested parents can find the permission slip online.

West Shore School District Reaches Settlement on Empathy Lawsuit

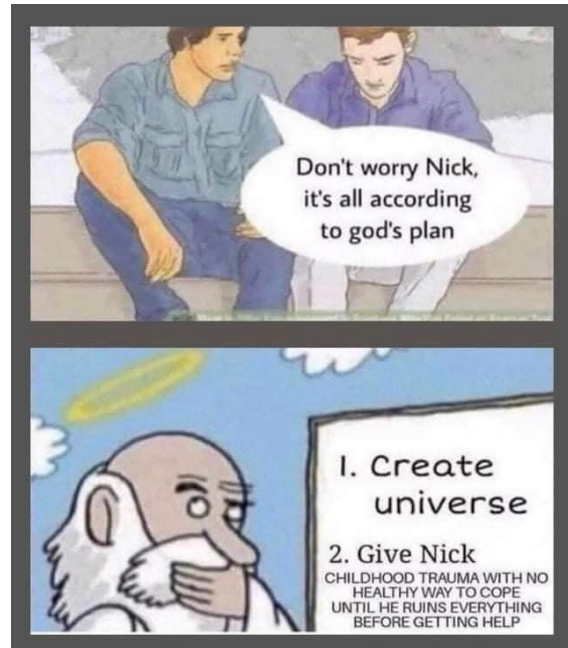
Colleen Dzwonczyk

West Shore School district reached a settlement with four parents who filed a lawsuit over the district’s CharacterStrong curriculum which is a social-emotional learning program designed to teach empathy. The parents’ children would not be mandated to attend the program and the district agreed to pay \$40,000 in legal fees. According to the district, the Washington state-based company’s program was designed to “help our children learn the value of empathy, service and connection.” As part of the curriculum, teachers spotlighted the importance of empathy in understanding different perspectives. The parents argued that this curriculum conflicted with their religious beliefs.

One of the parents, Kristi Alwine, wrote in an Aug. 25 email the program “does not reflect our values, morals and beliefs in our religion” and added “not everyone requires” her children’s empathy and

respect, according to court documents. She also asked the district staff to confirm the children will not be taught one race is more dominant or privileged than others and did not want her children to be taught to empathize with transgender individuals or be exposed to pro-choice teachings.

When the parents first asked that their children be exempt the school principal agreed to the request. However, then-Assistant Superintendent Jamie Whye later replied the children could not be exempt because Alwine did not identify any specific instruction that conflicted with the family’s beliefs. The parents filed the lawsuit — with the help of America First Legal Foundation and Moms for Liberty — after the district declined their request to exempt their children from the curriculum. America First Legal Foundation is a right-wing political nonprofit founded by Stephen Miller, former senior White House adviser for then-President Donald Trump.



The settlement states that since the school district was not consistent in their responses to exemption from the curriculum that the students can now be excused.

The district still backs their decision to use the curriculum. “Since its implementation, we have seen evidence of its positive impact on the climate and culture of our elementary and middle schools,” Stoltz wrote in a statement. “However, some families have indicated their religious beliefs conflict with the key concepts of the CharacterStrong curriculum, which include responsibility, gratitude, empathy, perseverance and creativity.”

America First Legal, the co-counsel of the parents’ attorney Walter Zimolong, released a statement saying the settlement “provides a clear, consistent standard” for parents in the state. While claiming the program is similar to a “Trojan horse,” the law firm also said this program allows “dangerous ideologies to secretly enter public school curriculums.”

More From the Moms of Liberty

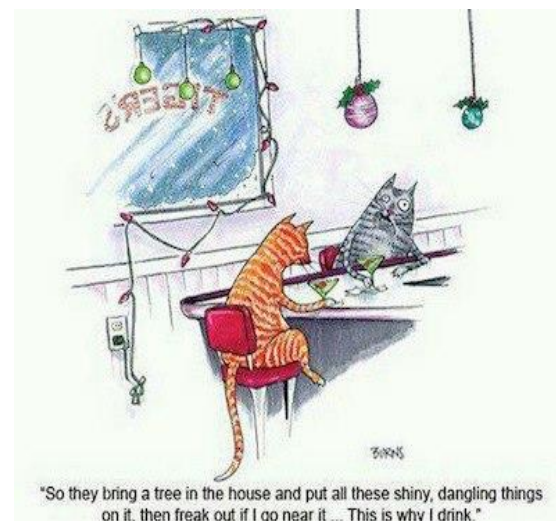
Moms for Liberty is a conservative “parental rights” group that, among other things, fights against any LGBTQ discussions or information in schools. One of their reasons for this fight is that they are afraid teachers will “groom” students to become gay.

Guess what? The Philadelphia Inquirer, inquirer.com, reports that Philip Fisher, Jr., a pastor, Republican ward leader and “faith coordinator” for Moms for Liberty in Philadelphia is a registered sex offender.

Fisher was convicted in 2012 of aggravated sexual abuse of a 14-year-old boy in Illinois. Fisher, then age 25, pleaded guilty, and served three years. When questioned by the *Inquirer*, Fisher gave a convoluted explanation. It was a “railroad job,” he said, by a PAC affiliated with Lyndon LaRouche (a nutty conspiracy theorist who ran for president several times). Fisher, it seems, worked for LaRouche. “It was a political situation that happened between me and Lyndon LaRouche,” Fisher said. “It was a member of his camp, his party, that made the accusation. They pushed it through.” The Republican party relieved him of his role with the party.

According to The Guardian, theguardian.com, Sheila Armstrong, chair of Philadelphia's Moms for Liberty Chapter, worked with Fisher because she had received a "child abuse history certification" from Pennsylvania's department of human services that did not note any record of child abuse. She confirmed that Fisher was still scheduled to volunteer at her autism non-profit's Christmas party.

Moms for Liberty posted a copy of Fisher's certification on its X (formerly Twitter) site and complained that the media is making the story about them, and not about the state departments that appear to have not accurately reported Fisher's criminal history. Tina Descovich, Moms for Liberty co-founder, pointed out that Fisher "is certified by the state as ALL CLEAR. It's remarkable how much time is spent trying to destroy us. The story should be about the [state] system certifying this guy."



Church Assets

As *PANViews* has reported, the archdiocese of Baltimore filed for bankruptcy one day before a change in the law would have allowed many more victims of sexual abuse to sue it.

According to court filings, per wypr.com, the archdiocese has more than \$200 million in assets. What's fun, though, is the list of stuff included. Among other things, there's a Tiffany tea set, a diamond-encrusted crucifix, a sapphire-studded locket, and dozens of solid gold rings. Obviously, all of these items are crucial to running a religious organization.

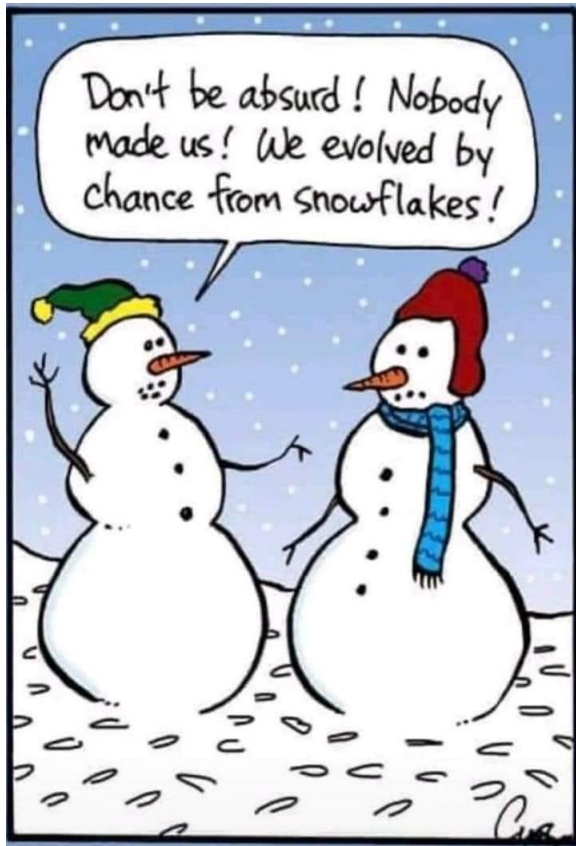
A federal bankruptcy court will decide if the expected lawsuits would result in catastrophic financial liability. If it appears that it will, the court will work with the archdiocese to see how it can restructure so that it can pay victims what they are owed while continuing to exist.

Archbishop William Lori explained the archdiocese's poor position: "Chapter 11 reorganization is the best path forward to compensate equitably all victim-survivors, given the Archdiocese's limited financial resources, which would have otherwise been exhausted on litigation. Staggering legal fees and large settlements or jury awards for a few victim-survivors would have depleted our financial resources, leaving the vast majority of victim-survivors without compensation, while ending ministries that families across Maryland rely on for material and spiritual support."

Legal filings show the archdiocese has already paid about a quarter of a million dollars for legal help on the bankruptcy filing. Victims' rights activists point out that the asset totals do not include the real estate value of individual parishes.

David Lorenz, director of the Maryland Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests notes that exclusion not only protects the parishes, but it gives the archdiocese a way to hide assets.

Filing for bankruptcy protects the archdiocese in another way: claimants in a bankruptcy proceeding have a limited time to file claims. Win-win!



The New Covenant

Here's more information about House Speaker Mike Johnson's extreme Christianity. The word "covenant" has come up a couple of times. Johnson has a covenant marriage and participates in a program called Covenant Eyes.

A covenant marriage is a distinct form of marriage, enacted into law in three states, Arizona, Arkansas and Louisiana. In a covenant marriage, the spouses agree to go through pre-marital counseling, and accept more limited grounds for divorce. Wikipedia notes few couples actually marry under the law – and gay couples can seek a covenant marriage, if they want, which is probably not at all what the people who support the law intended.

Although the laws are written in a religiously neutral way, there is no doubt the intent was to foster religion. Katherine Spaht, a founder of the Louisiana Family Forum, claims that one "less obvious objective" is "inviting religion back 'into the public square'" to "revitalize and reinvigorate the 'community' known as the church". For example, the laws stipulate that the mandatory pre-marital counseling has to be performed by "a minister, priest, rabbi, or other clergyman of a religious sect".

The rules under which a covenant marriage can be dissolved are standard: commission of a felony, substance abuse, physical or sexual abuse of a spouse or child. The laws also specify that divorce is allowed if the couple has lived separately for a certain period of time, one or two years, depending on the state.

It is hard for *PANViews* to believe that a state would really refuse to grant a divorce to a couple in a covenant marriage whose reason for the divorce didn't match one on the above list. In any event, commentators point out that the partner wanting the divorce could file in another state.

There has been more publicity about Johnson's participation in Covenant Eyes, probably because of its titillating program. According to the *New Republic*, newrepublic.com, Covenant Eyes is software that churches or employers can install on all devices to keep people (by which they apparently mean men) from viewing unacceptable content (by which they definitely mean pornography.) The software doesn't delete the offending content; it captures approximately one screenshot per minute, blurs them, and stores them on a server. They can then be viewed by the participant's "accountability partner," who is regularly prompted to check their partner's activity.

Covenant Eyes is promoted as a way to end sex trafficking. The thinking goes that people who traffic women make money by having them perform in porn. If people stop watching porn, the profit margin for exploiting women drops. This program was developed and promoted by Christian organizations, such as Promise Keepers; Johnson says he first heard of it at a Promise Keepers conference. In the 1990s Promise Keepers was a prominent exponent of militant male Christianity.

What people find creepy about Johnson's participation in Covenant Eyes is that his accountability partner is his teenaged son. So, have either of them found the other looking at porn? Johnson has said one image

from his son's phone appeared problematic, but it turned out just to be women talking. Given Johnson's right-wing religious beliefs, he might actually find women talking without men around pretty disturbing.

Third Party Liability

The case started in Kentucky. In 2020 a police officer was convicted of abusing his daughter when she was a child, years earlier. The woman then sued several parties, including the Louisville Police Department, claiming they knew about the abuse and had a duty to report it. The case is on its way to the Kentucky Supreme Court.

Now the New York *Times*, [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com), reports that the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has filed a brief in the case. Why? Because the issue before the Kentucky Supreme Court is whether victims of sexual abuse can have more time to sue non-perpetrators, such as institutions, or their leaders. The Southern Baptists' brief opposed any extension.

According to the *Times*, the brief "landed like a bombshell in Southern Baptist circles." Church critics joined abuse survivors in saying the brief exposes how the church really feels about accepting responsibility.

SBC leaders continue to avoid responsibility by blaming lawyers for the filing. The brief claims the church has a "strong interest in the statute-of-limitations issue" and that a 2021 state law "allowing abuse victims to sue third-party 'non-perpetrators' was not intended to be applied retroactively."

The SBC had begun to make reforms in how it handled abuse cases (motivated by investigations by *The Houston Chronicle* and *The San Antonio Express-News* in 2019.) The church has passed a resolution calling abuse both a sin and a crime, published a third-party investigation into how it handled abuse cases and promised to set up a searchable database of people accused of abuse in SBC settings.



SBC president Bart Barber, who previously supported reforms, says he takes full responsibility for the denomination's support of the brief. He claims he did not pay sufficient attention to what the brief was about. He appears ambivalent about the brief, though. "I am not sure exactly what I think about statutes of limitation. I think they are a mixed bag," he wrote. "I am uncomfortable with the harm statutes of limitations can do, but I also think that they play a valid role in the law sometimes." Glad he cleared that up.

Several states have expanded the statute of limitations for filing civil suits in abuse cases which has resulted in, among other things, about a dozen US Catholic dioceses filing for bankruptcy.

Members of the SBC note that the church's annual meeting has supported reforms for years. The Executive Committee, the top leadership body, apparently were not told the SBC would be joining the brief. Survivors point out that for years it has seemed the church's private actions did not match its public statements, and this is just another example.

**YOU KNOW WHAT ALCOHOL
HAS THAT YOUR GOD DOESNT ?**



Swear to God

New Jersey no longer requires candidates for office to swear an oath to God, according to nj.com.

James Tosone, who hopes to run for Congress, had filed a federal lawsuit against NJ Secretary of State Tahesah Way, opposing the religious oath. His lawsuit explained: “By requiring plaintiff to swear ‘so help me God,’ in order to run for public office, without a secular option, the secretary of state has inflicted, and will continue to inflict, irreparable harm upon (Tosone).”

Lauren Zyriek, acting director of NJ's Division of Elections, sent a memo to all county clerks which stated: “The petitioner has the option to make a solemn affirmation or declaration in lieu of an oath...In addition, in the affirmation or declaration, the words ‘so help me God’ shall be omitted.” Toscone subsequently withdrew his lawsuit.

Many states had religious requirements in their original constitutions. The Supreme Court ruled religious requirements unconstitutional in 1961. The requirements vary; eight states have not bothered to remove them: Arkansas, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas – and Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania’s constitution protected people of various religions, but assumed that everybody was, in fact, religious:

Religion, Section 4: No person who acknowledges the being of a God and a future state of rewards and punishments shall, on account of his religious sentiments, be disqualified to hold any office or place of trust or profit under this Commonwealth.

Sacrilege

Sabrina Carpenter is a pop singer and former Disney child star with more than 31 million followers on Instagram. She recently uploaded a new music video on YouTube, “Feather.” And now the New York Times, nytimes.com, reports a Catholic priest has been stripped of his administrative duties.

What happened? It seems that she filmed herself dancing down the center aisle of Our Lady of Mount-Carmel Annunciation Parish, in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn. She is wearing a short black tulle dress and veil as she ascends the church’s altar, which is lined with pastel-colored coffins. In another scene from the video she is shown, apparently covered in blood, after a fight scene in a gym, and in another, two young men are reading a book called “Tampons Should Be Free.” The video has been viewed more than 9.7 million times.

The diocese of Brooklyn was not happy, describing itself as “appalled.” The church pastor, Msgr. Jamie J. Gigantiello, had given permission for the filming. The diocese said that Gigantiello had not followed the diocesan policy of reviewing the scenes and script before allowing the filming to take place.



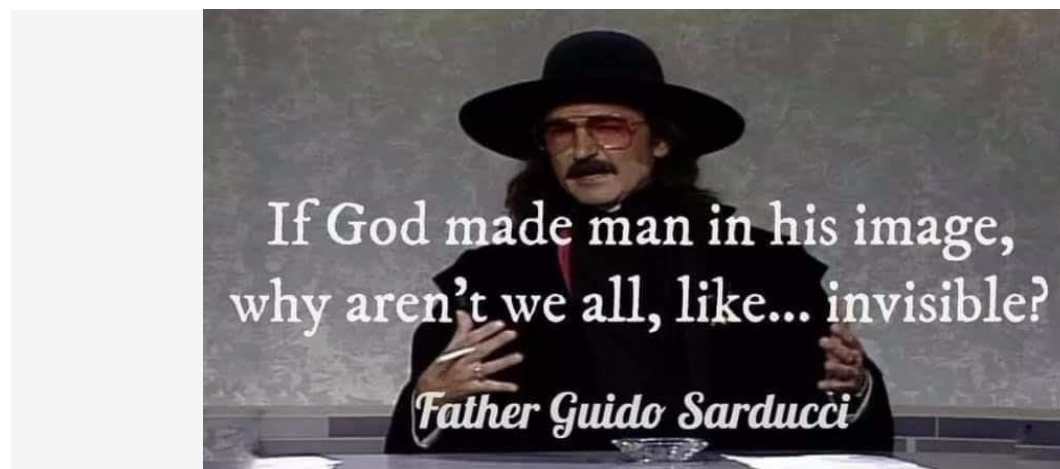
Bishop Robert J. Brennan celebrated a Mass of Reparation, which, according to the diocese, "restored the sanctity of this church and repaired the harm." He then relieved Gigantiello of his administrative duties. The priest apologized to his parishioners on Facebook. He explained that the video crew had requested permission to film the video. An online search about the singer "did not reveal anything questionable," he said. He approved the filming, he said, in an "effort to further strengthen the bonds between the young creative artists who make up a large part of this community." Gigantiello said that he had been told there would be a funeral scene, but the final version was "not what was initially presented to me." He apologized to the diocese and his parishioners. Carpenter hasn't apologized to anybody.

The diocese estimated about 50 people attended the Mass of Reparation and described them as "visibly upset by what had been filmed inside their church."

Not all parishioners were that upset. "The church ought to have been monitored, but Monsignor is a good man," said Thomas Casale, a former parishioner. "I'm sure the majority of people will forgive him or don't blame him."

Catholic imagery has been part of pop culture for years. Kathryn Reklis, an associate professor of theology at Fordham University, explains that Catholic imagery is more popular than other Christian sects because Catholic churches have a more recognizable visual style. According to Reklis, "An unadorned Methodist church or a storefront Pentecostal church just don't."

The diocese says it is still investigating what the approval process was for this particular video.



FUN!



Find and circle all of the animals that are hidden in the grid.

The remaining letters spell the name of an additional animal. Solution at the end of *PANViews*.

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| ALLIGATOR | DOVE | JACKAL | PANTHER | SLOTH |
| BABOON | EAGLE | JELLYFISH | PARROT | SWAN |
| BARRACUDA | ELK | KIWI | PEACOCK | SWORDFISH |
| BEAR | FERRET | LEOPARD | PELICAN | TIGER |
| BISON | FOX | LION | PIG | TORTOISE |
| CAMEL | GECKO | LLAMA | PORCUPINE | TROUT |
| CHIMPANZEE | GOAT | MACAW | QUAIL | TURKEY |
| CHINCHILLA | GOPHER | MEADOWLARK | RACCOON | VULTURE |
| COBRA | HAMSTER | MINK | RAVEN | WOLVERINE |
| COUGAR | HAWK | MOOSE | REINDEER | WOODPECKER |
| CROW | HERON | NIGHTINGALE | ROADRUNNER | WREN |

PAN News & Updates

It's time to renew your PAN Membership! Go to panonbelievers.com to make yourself official.

Meetings – PAN holds in-person and online meetings. Locations, times, and dates below.

Online meeting: Fourth Thursday of the month at 6:00 pm. We hope to split the meeting into an hour of chat and an hour of presentation or more structured discussion. Anyone with a book/movie review, discussion topic, or potential guest speaker should contact Dietrich

Dellinger @ guyinnagorillasuit@gmail.com

Chambersburg – Second Thursday of the month, 6:30 pm, Volcano Japanese Restaurant
955 Wayne Ave, Chambersburg

Cumberland/Mechanicsburg - Third Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Lovedraft's Brewery, 165
Gateway Drive, Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

Harrisburg– First Wednesday of the month, 6:30 pm, Zeroday Brewing Company Taproom, 923 North 3rd
Street.

Lancaster – Fourth Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Centerville Diner, 100 S. Centerville Rd.

Lebanon - Second Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Plaza Azteca in Myerstown.

Reading – Third Thursdays at 7:15pm, 3rd & Spruce Drafthaus, 238 S 3rd Ave, Reading, PA 19611

York Meeting – First Sunday at noon, Mexitaly Brick Oven Brewhouse, 2440 East Market St.

How to Contribute to PAN

Giant Cards - We will have Giant grocery store cards available for purchase at PAN meetings. You pay face value for the card and use the face value at the store, but Giant lets PAN have 5% of that face value. If you shop at Giant, anyway, use the cards in lieu of cash and help PAN. What could be easier?

Pennies for PAN - Finally, we are happy to take money the old-fashioned way. You can give your tax-deductible contribution to a Board Member at one of our meetings or events, you can donate via PayPal on our website, www.panonbelievers.org, or you can mail a check to us at PA Nonbelievers, Inc. PO Box 702, York, PA 17405. Remember when you donate you can indicate what fund you want your donation to go to, you can find the list of our funds on the PAN website in the Donate section.

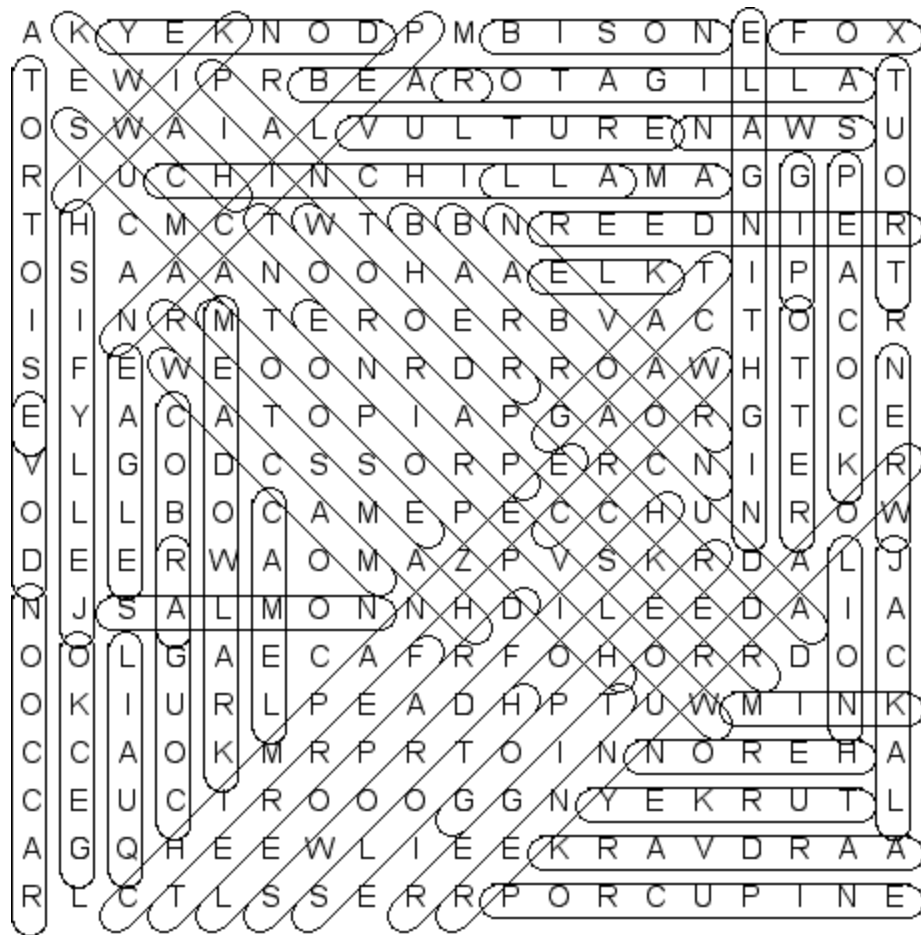
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The hidden animal is: AMERICAN CROCODILE