

Atheist Group Erects 'Good Without God' Billboards in California

With the Christmas season upon us in the United States, a group of nonbelievers in the California capital are erecting billboards explaining why they are atheists in hopes of bringing broader visibility to their lack of religious faith.

The 55 billboards that will soon dot the Sacramento landscape will feature pictures of local residents and slogans such as "Good without God," and follow similar campaigns in other major U.S. cities in recent years.

"Those of us who are free from religion, who work to keep dogma out of government, science, medicine and education, have a lot to offer society," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Wisconsin-based Freedom from Religion Foundation, which sponsored the ads.

The billboards that went up in Sacramento on the day after Thanksgiving are part of the increasingly loud arguments between many deeply religious Christians whose faith has informed U.S. conservative politics for a generation, and a vocal cohort of secular, often younger voters who want to keep religion out of public life.

The foundation also plans to place a large version of the letter "A," for atheism, in Chicago's Daley Plaza, the site of an annual Christmas display.

The aim of the campaign is to show people who are not religious that they don't have to hide their views in a polarized nation where atheists and agnostics often feel isolated, Gaylor said.

The Sacramento billboards show smiling capital-area residents against softly colored backgrounds, listing their names and the communities in which they live.

“Doing good is my religion,” says a sign featuring Mashariki Lawson, who identifies herself on the billboard as a “humanist.”

“Believe in yourself,” says another sign, featuring Sacramento resident Julia Verdugo.

Monsieur James Murphy of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Sacramento said he found it ironic that the billboards were planned to go up the day after Thanksgiving, a holiday he said showed that U.S. culture was deeply rooted in religion.

Murphy said he agreed that people can do good without being religious, and said that atheists have a right to express their opinions—on billboards and elsewhere.

“I wish they weren’t up there ... but I’m not going to fight their rights,” Murphy said.

Reporting by Sharon Bernstein; Editing by Cynthia Johnston and Doina Chiacu

© 2013 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.