

The AFCON Sentinel

Newsletter of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska

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From the President

Vicki Wood

Despite being out of school for many years, I still mentally live on an academic year. Reflecting back on our last semester, much of our AFCON energy went into fighting several legislative bills, most notably LB1213, which failed to pass thanks to the good work of Rod Wagner and other school and library affiliated groups. Much of the legislation around schools, libraries, books, and curriculum seems to be a solution in search of a problem. We have learned that fighting back stymies bad bills, but doesn't always kill them. Some version of LB1213 and similar bills will be back. Preparing ahead for the next legislative session is important so we aren't always in reaction mode.

Academic and intellectual freedom challenges are coming from every direction and we need more people in our corner. To that end we are amping up efforts to recruit new members to our board. I hope to make this the focus of my tenure as President. I'd love to see more teachers, school librarians, and concerned parents join our group and engage in this important work.

Having set this ambitious agenda, I close wishing you all a relaxing and joyful summer break.



**107th Legislature
Final Report on AFCON-related Bills**

Peggy Adair
legislative liaison



AFCON’s board of directors voted on 2/12/2022 to officially oppose the following three bills: LR278CA, which would eliminate the state board of education; LB1077, a bill to prohibit the teaching of concepts related to race and sex; and LB1213, a bill to make “obscene and harmful materials” unavailable to K-12 students. AFCON’s written testimony in opposition to LR278CA and LB1077 can be found in the April *Sentinel*.

All three of these bills failed to pass during this legislative session. Special commendation goes to the Nebraska Library Association and Nebraska Center for the Book, two AFCON member organizations who worked with state senators and other stakeholders to defeat these bills.

All bills that remain in the legislative process at the end of this session automatically die. The next

session begins on January 4, 2023, and senators will have 10 legislative days to introduce new bills. The three senators who introduced the education bills opposed by AFCON this year are all returning to the legislature in 2023, so we can expect to see new versions of their bills that did not pass this year.

The Nebraska Unicameral Legislature’s official website is user-friendly and contains a wealth of information about senators, legislative bills, and the legislative process. To access the website go to <https://nebraskalegislature.gov>



AFCON

www.academicfreedomnebraska.org

The Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska was founded in 1988 to promote intellectual freedom in Nebraska education and research, including freedoms of belief and expression and access to information and ideas.

Board of Directors

- Vicki Wood, President*
- Todd Schlechte, Immediate Past President and Webmaster*
- Peggy Adair, Secretary and Legislative Liaison*
- Rod Wagner, Treasurer*
- David Moshman, Policy Coordinator and Newsletter Editor*
- Shee Covarrubias, Communications Coordinator*
- John Bender*
- Kari Bulgrin*
- Nancy Comer*
- Robert Haller*
- Laurie Thomas Lee*
- Wyatt Packard*
- Regina Werum*

Nebraska Links

“Freedom Writers” face censorship in Crete. AFCON is monitoring the situation.

https://journalstar.com/news/local/education/from-the-classroom-freedom-writers-diary-faces-backlash-in-crete-younger-joel-coming-home/article_a1c855ea-ed9a-58c7-8c39-e4a326139b86.html

Diverse groups seek to influence school board elections across Nebraska. AFCON does not support or oppose particular candidates but is planning a candidate questionnaire to focus attention on academic freedom and inform voters about candidate positions.

https://omaha.com/news/local/education/officially-nonpartisan-school-board-races-get-political-as-new-groups-aim-to-influence-voters/article_868f0d28-bab1-11ec-9c96-c32c1677ad62.html

A Nebraska columnist provides an overview of schoolbook censorship, locally and nationally <https://nebraskaexaminer.com/2022/04/04/required-reading-for-parents-and-students/>

National Links

America Library Association and other organizations issue a major statement denouncing book banning

<https://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2022/05/organizations-join-ala-unite-against-book-bans>

An important (but unsurprising) First Amendment decision from the 11th Circuit regarding University of Central Florida speech code and bias response team policies

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/04/25/us-appeals-court-slams-speech-policy-central-florida>

To sum it all up, the opinion suggests, maybe we should all pull up our big boy and big girl pants, but government is the biggest boy of all:

<https://reason.com/volokh/2022/04/21/snowflakes-all-around/>

From the AFCON Constitution, Article I:

The purpose of AFCON shall be to promote academic freedom in Nebraska, defined as intellectual freedom in educational and research contexts. This includes freedoms of belief and expression and access to information and ideas. In pursuit of this general goal, AFCON shall:

1. support application of the First Amendment in academic contexts, including schools, colleges, universities, and libraries.
2. educate Nebraskans in and out of academic settings, citizens and professionals, parents and students about the meaning and value of intellectual freedom, intellectual diversity, mutual respect, open communication, and uninhibited pursuit of knowledge, including the role of these ideals in academic contexts and in democratic self-government.
3. assist students, teachers, librarians, researchers, and others confronted with censorship, indoctrination, or suppression of information or ideas in academic settings.
4. act as liaison among groups in the State of Nebraska that support academic freedom.

JOIN OR RENEW

Rod Wagner, Treasurer

AFCON now accepts PayPal! Use PayPal to join or renew. We offer two ways to pay: you can use the PayPal button on our website <https://www.academicfreedomnebraska.org/join-afcon.html> or send us a check payable to AFCON at 3901 S. 27th St., #47, Lincoln, NE 68502. Memberships are \$120 for organizations and \$15 for individuals.

The AFCON Sentinel is the newsletter of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska, published bimonthly in February, April, June, August, October, and December. Unless otherwise indicated, articles represent the views of the authors.

Editor: David Moshman dmoshman1@unl.edu

**Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska
Board of Directors Meeting**
Via Videoconference
April 9, 2022

Present:

Peggy Adair, secretary, legislative liaison
John Bender, representing UNL Faculty Senate
Nancy Comer, representing Nebraska State Literacy Association
Shee Covarrubias, communications coordinator, director at large
Bob Haller, chief baker, director at large
Laurie Thomas Lee, representing ACLU Nebraska
Dave Moshman, newsletter editor, policy coordinator
Wyatt Packard, representing Nebraska Library Association
Todd Schlechte, immediate past president, director at large
Rod Wagner, treasurer, representing Nebraska Center for the Book
Vicki Wood, president, director at large

MINUTES

President Vicki Wood called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m.

MINUTES: A motion was made by Moshman, second by Wagner, to approve minutes of the AFCON board meeting held on March 12, 2022. Motion carried on a voice vote.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Wagner reported balance on hand as of April 8, 2022, is \$3,3647.67. Treasurer's report will be filed for audit.

NEWSLETTER: Articles for the June issue of the *Sentinel* are due by May 24, 2022.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: Adair presented a legislative report to the board via email. Wagner updated the board on the current status of LB1213. Discussion followed.

COMMUNICATION COORDINATOR'S REPORT: Covarrubias reported the AFCON Facebook page is averaging 3-7 new "likes" daily. Covarrubias and Wood are working on an email letter inviting former organizational members to renew membership and appoint representatives to attend AFCON board meetings via Zoom.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: Wood and Covarrubias presented draft questions to the board via email to submit to candidates for elective office after the May 10, 2022 primary election.

CANDIDATE QUESTIONS: Moshman made a motion to approve the candidate questions as edited. Second by Adair. Motion carried on a voice vote.

The board agreed by consensus to decide at the June AFCON meeting which political races to cover for requesting answers to AFCON candidate questions.

AFCON MEMBERSHIP: A motion was made by Haller, second by Covarrubias, to approve the letter inviting former organizational members to renew membership, with minor revisions. Motion carried on a voice vote.

AFCON ARCHIVES: Moshman contacted an archivist at UNO and confirmed AFCON materials are in their collection.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS:

Nebraska Library Association: Packard reported the theme for NLA annual meeting will be "Up for the Challenge."

ACLU: Lee reported Danielle Conrad has resigned as executive director to run for the office of state legislator.

There being no further business, the AFCON board meeting adjourned at 10:51 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Peggy Adair, secretary

**Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska
Board of Directors Meeting**

Via Videoconference
May 14, 2022

Present:

Peggy Adair, secretary, legislative liaison
Shee Covarrubias, communications coordinator,
director at large
Bob Haller, chief baker, director at large
Laurie Thomas Lee, representing ACLU Nebraska
Dave Moshman, newsletter editor, policy
coordinator
Todd Schlechte, immediate past president, director
at large
Rod Wagner, treasurer, representing Nebraska
Center for the Book
Regina Werum, representing American Association
of University Professors, UNL
Vicki Wood, president, director at large

MINUTES

President Vicki Wood called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. Members welcomed new board member Regina Werum and introduced themselves.

MINUTES: A motion was made by Moshman, second by Schlechte, to approve corrected minutes of the AFCON board meeting held on April 9, 2022. Motion carried on a voice vote.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Wagner reported balance on hand as of May 14, 2022, is \$3,3767.67. Treasurer's report will be filed for audit.

NEWSLETTER: Articles for the June issue of the *Sentinel* are due by May 24, 2022.

COMMUNICATION COORDINATOR'S REPORT: Covarrubias and Wood have prepared an email letter inviting organizations to become members of AFCON and appoint representatives to attend AFCON board

meetings via Zoom. They will prepare an additional letter to reach out to organizations again in the fall.

POLICY COORDINATOR'S REPORT: Moshman suggested using the 100-year anniversary (2023) of Meyer v. Nebraska as a possible theme for the 2022 AFCON annual meeting. Moshman suggested joining with ACLU if they are interested in a similar theme. Moshman will contact ACLU for feedback and will report to the board.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS:

Nebraska Library Association: Wood and Schlechte reported the theme for NLA annual meeting will be "Up for the Challenge."

Nebraska Center for the Book: Wagner reported June 15 is the deadline for nominations for the 2023 One Book One Nebraska selection.

American Association of University Professors: Werum reported AAUP has issued a call to action regarding a new Information Technology plan to install "snoopers" in all UNL devices. AFCON directors will review the AAUP letter that expresses specific concerns about the proposed IT plan and will discuss possible action at the June AFCON meeting.

OLD BUSINESS: Wood reported she has communicated with Paul Smith, the Crete teacher who is being challenged for teaching about "Freedom Writers." Smith reported the issue is still grinding through the gristmill of local school politics.

There being no further business, the AFCON board meeting adjourned at 11:39 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Peggy Adair, secretary