



THE

# AFCON

SENTINEL



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December 19, 2003

## AFCON OFFICERS

Laurie Lee  
President

Peggy Adair  
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Linda Beckstead  
Past President

Dwayne Ball  
Secretary

Cathi McMurtry  
Treasurer

David Moshman  
Policy Coordinator

Peggy Adair  
Legislative Liaison

Barbara Cornelius  
Webmaster

Tom Black  
Newsletter Editor

### Purpose:

To promote academic freedom, defined as intellectual freedom in educational and research contexts. This includes freedoms of belief and expression and access to information and ideas.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT—Laurie Lee

We've recently been hearing about how the USA Patriot Act is infringing on the privacy rights of library patrons and making some teachers and students—particularly international students—more cautious about speaking out on political matters. But does the Patriot Act affect academic freedom in other ways?

AFCON recently provided a position statement to the Lincoln Bill of Rights Defense Coalition, which is seeking to have Lincoln declared a Patriot Act-Free Zone. We expressed our concerns about library patron records being subject to secret searches, and researchers potentially being placed on "watch lists." We also expressed concern about provisions of the Act that make it possible for federal agents to seize books, records, papers, and other documents, and to secretly search homes and offices.

But when you consider that the Patriot Act is 342 pages of oftentimes confusing and truncated provisions, you can be sure the threats to academic freedom don't stop there. There are many aspects that affect our schools and universities.

In the first place, the ability to conduct research is hindered by the Act. One troubling provision allows federal agencies to deem unclassified university research as "sensitive." This new classification can then be used to prevent people from gaining access to certain research projects. New limits on the Freedom of Information Act now jeopardize our rights as students and scholars to have access to government information previously open to the public. Indeed, books and CD-ROMs have since been removed from Federal depository libraries.

Collaborative research may also be thwarted. Country-code restrictions have been placed on some government-funded research grants, limiting involvement to people of approved nationali-

ties. In some cases, grantees must submit "employment eligibility documentation," even when working on unclassified projects. In particular, foreign students from about 25 nations must now be denied access to scientific research labs using "select agents." If a faculty member lets a prohibited student into a lab, the faculty member may be prosecuted.

The Patriot Act can also restrict publication. So far, this has only concerned military-connected research projects, funded by the Department of Defense. But there is fear that other federally funded research designated as "sensitive" could face prepublication review and censorship. Thankfully, a number of research universities such as MIT have refused to accept government contracts labeled "sensitive but unclassified."

The privacy of student records is in jeopardy. The Patriot Act modifies the Family and Educational Rights Privacy Act, requiring educational institutions to disclose educational records to federal law enforcement agents without notifying students that they are doing so and without the students' consent. Already, Attorney General John Ashcroft and his office have been employing what are known as "national security letters" that authorize government officials to compel production of substantial amounts of information—all without judicial approval.

The freedom of association and assembly on our campuses is also at risk. The Patriot Act permits the FBI to employ campus police to monitor political and religious activities on campus and to investigate students, faculty, and staff background and activities. The Act also broadly expands the definition of terrorism so that student groups that engage in certain types of civil disobedience could be labeled as terrorists.

(Continued to Page 3.)

## Upcoming Events

AFCON Board Meetings, January 10, February 14, and March 13, 2004  
Loren Eiseley Library, 1530 Superior, Lincoln, Nebraska; 10 AM

## Summaries of AFCON Board of Directors' Meetings—Duane Ball

### September 13, 2003—

Minutes. The minutes were approved without dissent, after which there were introductions by all present, including Jane Neal, who will be representing the Lincoln Education Association.

Treasurer's Report. The Treasurer's report showed a July 11 balance of \$1,454.98, income since then of \$515.24, expenses during that period of \$334.12, and a current balance of \$1,636.10. Dues have been received this year from 14 organizational members and 23 individual members. The report was approved without dissent.

Membership reports. Dave reported on ACLU efforts to counter the Patriot Act. Krutz reported that the NCB survey on Nebraska's book discussion and writing groups, which she is working on, has identified about 350 groups throughout the state, 8 of which have continued since before 1900. The upcoming NE-LAC conference will recognize AFCON's 15th anniversary.

Policy. Moshman distributed copies of AFCON's Principles of Academic Freedom to those who did not have them.

Banned Book Week. Krutz distributed flyers with panel member information for the September 25 event at Anderson Hall, UNL. Refreshments and other details were discussed.

Annual Meeting. Plans for the November 22 annual meeting were discussed and a draft flyer was distributed.

Nominations. The nominating committee presented a slate consisting of Dave Moshman (President-Elect/President), Dwayne Ball (Secretary), and Cathi McMurtry (Treasurer). The slate was accepted without dissent.

Constitutional Amendments. Laurie distributed materials from Dwayne concerning AFCON's tax exempt status and a proposed amendment to the AFCON Constitution protecting that status. Some minor corrections were noted. Laurie also distributed constitutional amendments adding a webmaster position and correcting a minor problem of wording. Krutz moved that the proposed change adding a webmaster be modified to officially add a legislative liaison as well. McMurtry seconded and the motion passed without dissent (but with one abstention). Buckley then moved to approve all the proposed constitutional amendments (as corrected or amended). Ritter seconded and the motion passed

without dissent.

Other business. Lee circulated a letter from Dave Kubicek thanking the Board for its recent certificate of appreciation for his service and indicating that he planned to maintain his membership in AFCON. It was reported that a revised AFCON brochure is now available and additional copies will be made.

### October 11, 2003—

Minutes. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Treasurer's report. Balance in account of \$1,523.01. Fourteen organization dues received so far this year, 24 individual members. The report was approved unanimously.

Annual Meeting. Adair announced that the panel at the annual meeting will include State Senator Deb Suttle, LPS Superintendent Phil Schoo, someone from the ACLU, and a student. The 2003 Annual Meeting will be at the Lincoln Downtown Holiday Inn, 10 am to 1 pm, Saturday, November 22. The Academic Freedom Award will be presented at the NEMA business luncheon Oct. 30. She also shared the new AFCON brochure and announcements regarding two non-AFCON community events.

Lincoln Bill of Rights Defense Coalition (LBRDC). Dr. Phil Hugly discussed threats posed by the Patriot Act to the privacy of library users and to the work of researchers. Primary academic freedom implications of the act are that libraries must surrender copies of patron records to Federal agents with very weak court oversight, and librarians may not reveal that the records have been surrendered. Additionally, research materials, some previously available to the public, can be denied to researchers and other members of the public on the grounds of national security, and researchers' activities can be tracked. Ball/McMurtry moved that AFCON write a letter supporting the LBRDC in specific academic freedom contexts, expressing our concern over these threats, and urging the Lincoln City Council, as well as other Nebraska municipalities, to find legal ways to maintain the privacy of library patron records and the availability of research materials without intimidation. Moshman volunteered to draft the letter. Passed unanimously.

Policy. Moshman reported that Planned Parenthood of Lincoln/Council Bluffs has filed a lawsuit in Federal District Court against officials of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services,

seeking to prevent them from terminating the PPL/CB Nebraska Health Care Cash Fund Grant of \$100,000. The grant provides for peer educators to help teens reduce unplanned pregnancies and sexually-transmitted infections. The State HHS, acting under advice of state Attorney General Bruning, terminated the grants on grounds that agencies receiving certain Federal funds called "Title X" funds (which can include abortion counseling) are ineligible for these Nebraska-based grants, because the Nebraska grants cannot be used for advising abortion as an option. PPL/CB argues that this restriction is incorrect, since the state grant is never used for advising abortion, and further, to restrict the funds on the basis that other parts of the organization are engaged in abortion counseling is an unconstitutional restriction on free speech.

Kurtz reported about the Nebraska Book Festival, October 24-25, at Creighton University in Omaha. Peg Adair and Cathi McMurtry volunteered to help staff an AFCON table.

Old Business. Lee announced a very successful Banned Book Week event, with a good panel discussion and good attendance. AFCON sold \$65 worth of banned books (including "Captain Underpants") on behalf of Lee Booksellers and garnered \$13 in donations from same.

AFCON Constitutional Amendments. Ball/Herman moved to set aside the amendment approved in September to add a formal Legislative Liaison position. Approved unanimously. Lee and Ball will send a complete set of proposed AFCON to Adair for distribution with the annual meeting announcements.

New Business. AFCON will have a booth at the NLA/NEMA conference in Omaha October 30-31.

### November 8, 2003—

Minutes: The October 11, 2003, minutes were approved unanimously.

Treasurer's report: Balance of \$1,239.82. 15 organizations, 24 individuals paid for 2003. Report approved unanimously.

Membership: Lee reported on restructuring and budget cuts at University of Nebraska-Lincoln that may affect academic freedom. Ball reported he made a short speech at the Lincoln Public Library Board hearing regarding censoring software on Library computers for the ACLU, in opposition to the censoring software.

Policy: Moshman reported that students  
(Continued to Page 4.)

AFCON BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MINUTES (Continued from Page 2.)

speaking Spanish (or being prohibited from doing so) in the classroom was becoming an issue in some states, citing an article in *Education Week*. Krutz reported our own policy coordinator, Dave Moshman, was prominently mentioned by a Harold Anderson editorial in the *Omaha World-Herald* of Oct. 30<sup>th</sup> regarding the censoring of a student newspaper at Millard South High School in Omaha. Mr. Anderson disagreed with Dr. Moshman's assessment of the actions of the school administration. Adair reported on an article citing that certain research, such as fetal tissue research, was being controlled out of existence at some universities.

Newsletter: The deadline for material for the December *Sentinel* is November 17<sup>th</sup>..

2003 Annual Meeting: Adair reported that an announcement of the annual meeting's public forum was on the front

Page of the *Neighborhood Extra*, a *Lincoln Journal-Star* publication. The annual meeting will be held November 22 at the Lincoln Downtown Holiday Inn.

Old Business: Nebraska Book Festival: Mel Krutz and Cathi McMurtry were there on October 24-25 at Creighton University in Omaha. They reported a lot of AFCON material was given out.

NLA/NEMA conference: attended by Laurie Lee, Karen Buckley, Peggy Adair, Barbara Cornelius, and Jane Neal from AFCON. Kurtz directed sessions on book and writing groups and read poetry. Cathi reported a lot of AFCON material was handed out.

Lee reported that she delivered a statement on behalf of AFCON explaining the negative academic freedom implications of the Patriot Act for libraries on Oct. 24 at the State Capitol.

Moshman and Herman reported that AFCON's Moshman delivered a statement in opposition to filters on Library computers. Ball reported that the IRS had agreed to an extension of the deadline for AFCON's 501 c 3 application to November 10, which is insufficient time to amend the AFCON constitution as desired by the IRS. He is trying to get another one-month extension to avoid another \$150 filing fee.

New Business: Lee reported that the NLA Intellectual Freedom Committee emailed to "verify a new or continuing representative from AFCON. Herman "volunteered" that Krutz remain as the representative.

Lee suggested that the December 13 AFCON board meeting be used, as usual, as a planning meeting; the board agreed.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT—Laurie Lee

(Continued from Page 1.)

"Sneak and peak" searches made possible by the Act seem even sneakier on college campuses. Under the guise of "terrorism investigation," campus police may search student dorm rooms and faculty offices without notifying the occupants or even the college administration. Campus police cooperating with FBI agents are even prohibited from reporting about their activities to their own head of campus police.

In the same vein, "trap and trace" devices may be placed on phones in dorm rooms and offices to track telephone calls, and other devices may be

installed on dorm and office computers to track Internet traffic. All of this tracking may take place even after the targeted user has moved on, exposing any subsequent users to unwarranted surveillance.

Another provision of the Patriot Act allows campus computer network operators the opportunity to secure FBI help in rooting out intruders on the network. Unfortunately, this opens the door to full-fledged snooping without a warrant. And if campuses don't have protective policies in place, this opens the door to student and faculty lawsuits against the institution.

In the face of these assaults on academic freedom, a few universities such as Berkeley, Cornell, and the University of Oregon, have organized efforts to address these issues created by the Patriot Act. Like them, AFCON members can be instrumental in gathering support at their institutions, working proactively with administrators, forming committees to monitor the effects of the Act, finding ways to effectively address these concerns, counseling students, faculty, and staff, and urging everyone to lawfully resist those provisions of the Patriot Act that curtail academic freedom.

FOR SALE BY AFCON

Send orders to Mel Krutz, 2625 Bluff Road, Seward, NE 68434-9801

T-shirts with a Paul Fell "banned books" design; Sizes M, L, XL, XXL, XXXL; \$15.00. Packaging and postage: \$2.00 each.

Note cards with a Paul Fell design; \$1.50; four for \$5.00. Packaging and postage: \$0.75 per packet.

Reader's Theatre Script of a TANGLED ISSUE: Student Freedom of Expression. \$10.00 buys the book with rights to duplicate the script and produce the play. Packaging and postage: \$2.00 each.

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## MINUTES OF THE AFCON ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING, NOVEMBER 22, 2003

The membership meeting followed (1) the presentation of the 2003 Academic Freedom Award to Matt Wynn, former Omaha Central High School student newspaper editor, who stood up against the school principal for the right of his paper to present an unflattering story about the failure of his high school to discipline a football player accused of assault, (2) a panel discussion titled, "Is it Okay to say 'God Bless You?'... and other questions about academic freedom of students and teachers in Nebraska," (3) a discussion by the panel and audience, and (4) lunch. The panel was composed of Johnny Perez, an articulate student journalist and musician from Lincoln East High School, Lincoln Public Schools Superintendent Phil Schoo, and Tim Butz, Executive Director of the Nebraska chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. (See page 7 of the *Sentinel* for the *Lincoln Star Journal* article on the annual meeting.)

Minutes: Minutes of the November 23, 2002 membership meeting were distributed and approved unanimously.

Vote on Constitutional Amendments: Proposed constitutional amendments were distributed (as they were to the membership by mail in early November). A motion to approve all amendments *except* the change to Article I, section B, part 4 (which was to change the word "among" to "for") was unanimously approved.

Treasurer's annual report: AFCON has 25 paid individual and 15 paid organizational members. With a carryover of \$1422.76 from 2002, a 2003 income of \$2,388.17 and expenses of \$2631.13, AFCON currently has a \$1079.80 balance.

Nominations: The nominations committee nominated David Moshman for President-Elect in 2004 (taking office as President in 2005,) Dwayne Ball for Secretary for 2004, and Cathi McMurtry for Treasurer for 2004. Approved unanimously. Ballots will go out to the membership by mail shortly, with completed ballots due back to Laurie Lee by December 30, 2003.

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## AFCON ACHIEVEMENTS—2003 ! ! ! ! !

By AFCON President Laurie Lee

Testimony on several legislative bills. These included bills on fetal tissue research, library Internet filters, and statewide assessment. Many thanks to Peggy Adair for monitoring these bills and to Bob Halter for testifying on behalf of AFCON.

Banned Book week recognition and panel presentation. Thanks to Mel Krutz for organizing this, Dave Moshman for moderating, and to many others for their help in pulling off a successful event.

Position statements. AFCON created a position statement regarding LB602, Human Cloning. We also presented a position statement at the Capitol building to the Lincoln Bill of Rights Defense Coalition regarding the USA PATRIOT Act and making Lincoln a Patriot Act-free zone. A position statement was also made to the Lincoln Library Board regarding library Internet filters (thanks Dave Moshman). An op-ed piece was published in the Lincoln Journal Star regarding the firing of tenured faculty at UNL (thanks Dwayne Ball for drafting this).

Tables and presentations at various conferences. Many thanks to all who helped with tables and presentations at events sponsored by our representative organizations, such as AAUP, Nebraska Center for the Book, Nebraska Library Association, Nebraska Educa-

tional Media Association, Nebraska Reading Association, and the Nebraska Summer Writers' Conference at UNL.

Website and Webmaster. We added the new position of Webmaster, with Barbara Cornelius serving in that position. Barbara helped us get our new domain name, [www.AFCONebr.org](http://www.AFCONebr.org).

New brochure. Barbara Cornelius created a new brochure for AFCON.

New Members. We created a new "At-Large" position and invited Jane Holt to serve. Dick Herman joined us, representing the Nebraska Press Association. We also welcomed Karen Buckley, representing NEMA, Jane Neal, representing the Lincoln Education Association, and Nancy Comer, representing the Nebraska State Reading Association.

Annual Meeting. Our annual meeting in November was a big success. Thanks to Peggy Adair for pulling together an excellent panel and for coordinating a fine event at the Lincoln Holiday Inn.

Publicity. In addition to the op-ed piece, stories appeared in the Lincoln Journal Star publicizing our annual meeting and later covering the event, quoting panelists and recognizing Matt Wynn as our 2003 AFCON Academic Freedom Award winner.

**AFCON SPEAKER'S BUREAU (As of December 2001)**

Dwayne Ball: "Threats to Academic Freedom at Universities"  
3120 Jasper Ct., Lincoln, NE 68516  
adball@alltel.net

Linda Beckstead: "Freedom of Student Press Issues"  
611 North 42nd Street, Omaha, NE 68131  
BecksteadL@aol.com

Bob Haller: "Money Talks: Ideas in the Political Process" and "Religion, Intellectual Freedom, and the University"  
4000 S. 56th St., Lincoln, NE 68506  
rhaller1@unl.edu

John Bender: "The Nebraska Student Freedom of Expression Bill"  
3609 S. 20 St., Lincoln, NE 68508  
jrbender@unl.edu

David Moshman: "Principles of Academic Freedom" and "Student Rights"  
1901 Pepper Ave., Lincoln, NE 68502  
dmoshman1@unl.edu

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Presentation of the Readers' Theatre production of A Tangled Web: Student Freedom of Expression (a cast of adults and students)

**ADDRESS FOR THE AFCON WEB SITE**

**<http://www.AFCONebr.org>**

**Check it out and learn Who We Are and about Our Activities; read our Constitution; learn how to Join Us; see the where and when of our Meetings; meet our Members and Officers; Study our Publications, Principles, and Statements**

**The ACADEMIC FREEDOM COALITION OF NEBRASKA**

Since its organization in 1988, AFCON has:

supported those whose academic freedoms have been threatened or sanctioned,

developed policies and procedures for institutions to respond to challenges to free expression,

bestowed the AFCON Academic Freedom Award upon Nebraskans who have shown outstanding acts of support for academic freedom,

Co-sponsored conferences and presentations,

held annual meetings on topics

such as censorship, and freedom on the Internet,

and provided speakers, panelists, workshops, and resources when needed.

**WHY SHOULD YOU JOIN ? ?**

Because AFCON supports applications of the First Amendment in schools, colleges, and libraries.

Because AFCON educates Nebraskans about the value of intellectual freedom, intellectual diversity, open communica-

tion, mutual respect, and the uninhibited pursuit of knowledge.

Because AFCON assists students, teachers, librarians, and researchers confronted with censorship, indoctrination, or the suppression of information and ideas.

Because AFCON acts as a liaison among groups in Nebraska that support academic freedom

(See page 8 of the *Sentinel* for membership information.)

**REQUEST FOR NEWS FOR FUTURE ISSUES**

The editor of the AFCON SENTINEL invites all AFCON individual and organizational members to send news about academic freedom issues in Nebraska or editorial comments for inclusion in this newsletter and/or announcements of organizational meetings for the UPCOMING EVENTS column.

Due date for submissions to the **March 19, 2004**, issue is **February 23, 2004**.

## UNIVERSITY REPORTS

By Dwayne Ball

Rutgers, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University cancelled the Third National Student Conference of the Palestine Solidarity Movement (PSM), scheduled for October 10-12, 2003 at Rutgers University. The University cited "logistics" as the reason. Richard McCormick, Rutgers president, has supported pro-Israel events sponsored by similar campus organizations like Hillel. In a letter to AFCON's David Moshman (a Rutgers graduate and long-time donor), McCormick said, "I assure you that the NJ Solidarity conference was cancelled because the organization did not meet university requirements for hosting a large-scale event, not because of the students' viewpoints." He did not elaborate as to what those requirements were nor how the PSM failed to meet them. To express your thoughts on this, write to: Richard L. McCormick, President, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 83 Somerset Street, New Brunswick New Jersey 08901, 732/932-7454, [president@rutgers.edu](mailto:president@rutgers.edu). Additional details may be posted at the New Jersey PSM website, [www.njsolidarity.org/confdonate.html](http://www.njsolidarity.org/confdonate.html)

California Polytech, San Luis Obispo: Steve Hinkle, the student who was subjected to a 7-hour hearing and ordered to "apologize" or face expulsion for posting a flyer announcing a controversial speech, now has filed lawsuits against every administrator involved in the proceedings against him. His flyers advertised a speech by African-American author Mason Weaver, author of *It's OK to Leave the Plantation*, a book that argues that African-Americans have become so addicted to government programs that their dependent condition has parallels to slavery. The Washington D.C.-based Center for Individual Rights and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education have joined together to help Hinkle with the lawsuits. [www.thefire.org](http://www.thefire.org).

Shippensburg State University, Pennsylvania: Quoting from a Foundation for

Individual Rights e-mail newsletter: "A federal court issued a preliminary injunction on September 4, 2003, ordering Shippensburg University President Anthony F. Ceddia not to enforce provisions of Shippensburg's speech code... Shippensburg University's vague and overbroad speech code mandates that student speech should not 'provoke, harass, intimidate, or harm another.' The code also outlaws certain thoughts by requiring that 'every member of the community' mirror the official views of the university administration 'in their attitudes and behaviors.' U. S. District Judge John E. Jones III held that 'these provisions could certainly be used to truncate debate and free expression by students.'" The lawsuit against Shippensburg State was filed by two attorneys on behalf of the F.I.R.E. Legal Network on behalf of two Shippensburg students.

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.: From the F.I.R.E. website: "Anthony Dick, a courageous University of Virginia (UVA) undergraduate and a FIRE summer intern, is taking his fight for freedom of thought directly to campus. This fall, along with other concerned students, he formed the Individual Rights Coalition (IRC) at UVA in order to oppose Orwellian thought reform on his campus...UVA is developing a diversity training program that appeared well on its way to becoming mandatory for all students until the IRC took the matter public, forcing a dialogue on the issue. The group has collected more than 500 signatures from UVA students who strongly oppose any policy that would coercively intrude upon private conscience and belief." [www.thefire.org](http://www.thefire.org)

University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa: Under public pressure from organizations such as F.I.R.E., the University has tabled its proposal to ban all window displays in student dormitories. UA's desire for such a ban came after the University's residential officer, Kate Etheredge, instructed Rush White, faculty-member-in-residence at a dorm, to remove a student dorm hall

display of a Confederate flag for being "offensive." White refused. Realizing that it could not censor Confederate flags alone, because of the First Amendment, UA chose to ban *all* window displays of *anything* by students! Students responded by displaying all sorts of things – like American flags – and by holding vigils. The Alabama chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and the League of the South both weighed in against the University publicly. The UA Dean of Students has now declared his support for the First Amendment (how kind of him). [www.thefire.org](http://www.thefire.org).

The United States Senate, Washington, D.C. From the F.I.R.E. newsletter: "The U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions has invited Greg Lukianoff, director of legal and public advocacy for the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), to testify on Wednesday, October 29, 2003. Senator Judd Gregg of New Hampshire, chairman of the Committee, is holding the hearing as part of an effort to provide oversight on the critical topic of intellectual diversity in higher education.... Lukianoff will alert the Committee to a number of ways in which the freedom of speech of college and university students is curtailed on so many campuses. Speech codes are, unfortunately, the rule rather than the exception in higher education, and they include bans on "offensive speech" and "intolerant expression." Often, they are inserted into "verbal conduct" sections of "harassment policies," with the goal of suppressing "hostile" viewpoints and words. Because these codes are so overbroad that even mildly controversial speech can be punished under them, they have frequently been used to silence students and faculty on all parts of the political spectrum... FIRE has compiled policies from nearly two hundred leading schools across America at a new website, [www.speechcodes.org](http://www.speechcodes.org), where students and the public can find crucial information on whether and how a particular school restricts freedom of speech."

## PANELISTS ADDRESS SCHOOL HOT TOPICS

By Margaret Reist—*Lincoln Journal Star*

### AFCON ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

When it comes to religion, public schoolteachers walk a line between teaching and advocating that they must be careful not to cross, said panelists in an academic freedom forum Saturday.

One cannot, for instance, talk about the Crusades without discussing the tension between Christianity and Islam, said Tim Butz, executive director of the Nebraska Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. "There is room to talk about religion when it comes to history, art and literature," Butz said after the panel discussion. "Teachers are responsible for presenting the information neutrally, not as advocates."

Lincoln Public Schools Superintendent Phil Schoo, interviewed after the panel discussion, agreed. "It's important that our children understand the different points held by people of different persuasions," he said. "We need to make sure we don't try to convert people to our way of thinking. That's the responsibility of the parents, the church, the synagogue."

Schoo, Butz and Lincoln East senior Johnny Perez sat on a panel at the annual meeting of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska at the downtown Holiday Inn. The discussion included issues such as censorship and the separation of church and state in schools.

At the heart of Saturday's discussion is a conflict between the

different responsibilities of schools: nurturing intellectual growth, maintaining a safe and free learning environment and supporting community ideals, said Perez, who works for the student newspaper. As a student, he said, he's seen the best and worst that schools have to offer when it comes to creative and intellectual freedom.

"We all wonder who are the people responsible for dictating what is 'appropriate' for students to learn, and while some of us may think that the teachers have the final say, or perhaps the administration, the truth is that, more often than not, the parents and community probably have the biggest say." As a result, he said, schools often take a more conservative approach to what should or shouldn't be taught or read.

Schoo said it is important that schools have clear policies when dealing with what books or other materials schools should make available to students. LPS officials have never removed a book from the school system but at times have deemed some books appropriate for only older children, he said.

Community sentiment often comes into play in smaller towns with the issue of school prayer, Butz said. In small communities, people bothered by the fact that prayers are said at school don't object publicly because of the opposition they face from others in the town. "We get complaints, and the first thing out of their mouth is you can't identify me as the person complaining," Butz said after the discussion. "It takes a

tremendous amount of courage in small towns to stand up against school prayer."

Also Saturday, the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska, which presented the forum, gave its 2003 Academic Freedom Award to Matt Wynn, a graduate of Omaha Central High School and now a journalism student at the University of Missouri. Wynn, who graduated from Omaha Central last year, received the award for his actions as editor of his school newspaper, which came under fire from school administrators, teachers and parents who thought its articles were too controversial.

Wynn wrote an article about a football player who had been arrested for assault but not sidelined by administrators despite school policy, according to coalition president Laurie Lee.

Despite pressure by school officials, he ran the article. The controversy received attention from professional journalists across the country, who supported the paper's stand.

"We, too, find Mr. Wynn worthy of our attention and our academic freedom award," Lee said.

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# AFCON

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## ACADEMIC FREEDOM COALITION OF NEBRASKA

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### HELP AFCON PROMOTE ACADEMIC FREEDOM

As a member of AFCON, you can help us

- ◆ support applications of the First Amendment in academic contexts, including elementary and secondary schools, colleges, universities, and libraries.
- ◆ educate Nebraskans 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.
- ◆ assist students, teachers, librarians, and researchers confronted with censorship, indoctrination, or suppression of ideas.
- ◆ act as liaison among groups in Nebraska that support academic freedom.

**MEMBERSHIP** (To become a member, send dues, organization or individual name, address, and phone number to Cathi McMurtry, 515 N. Thomas Avenue, Oakland, NE 68045)

**Organizational Membership** (\$100) entitles the organization to one seat on the AFCON Board and one vote in the election of officers and at the annual meeting, and eligibility for office and chairing standing committees and provides newsletter subscription for the board member to share with the organization's information director and reduced rates to AFCON conferences for its members.

**Individual Membership** (\$10) provides newsletter subscription, eligibility for office and for chairing standing committees, reduced rates for AFCON conferences, and one vote at annual meetings.

**Student Membership** (\$5) entitles full-time students to the same privileges as provided by the Individual Membership.

**AFCON ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS, PLEASE DUPLICATE THIS NEWSLETTER FOR YOUR MEMBERS.  
INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS, PLEASE PASS THIS NEWSLETTER TO A FRIEND AFTER YOU HAVE READ IT.  
ENCOURAGE HIM OR HER TO JOIN AFCON**