

## Press Clippings 2/5/2018

**NOTE:** There were no U46-related news stories in the February 5, 2018 newspapers.

## Press Clippings 2/4/2018

---Courier News--- 2/4/18

### **Essay author ‘surprised’ by reaction to U46 assignment**

History professor’s assertion 3 religions ‘worship same God’ fueled controversy

BY MIKE DANAHEY

The college professor whose work became the center of a Facebook-fueled controversy in Elgin-area School District U46 said he was startled by the reaction some had after it was used in a classroom.

Philip Almond is emeritus professor in the history of religious thought at the University of Queensland in Australia. A 600-word conversation piece he wrote, [“Despite differences, Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God,”](#) was used in December as a reading comprehension assignment in a sixth-grade English language arts class.

The assignment drew attention after U46 board member Jeanette Ward wrote a critical Facebook post after her daughter’s class received the assignment. She called the piece “utterly incorrect and false on many levels.”

Ward’s post led to heated exchanges on Facebook about the appropriateness of the assignment being made in a public school.

At a school board meeting in late December, four faith leaders spoke, noting that while they had some critiques of their own of Almond’s piece, they felt it important to raise awareness of other cultures and faiths. A month later, dozens of people came to the school board meeting to express objections to the assignment.

“I was surprised, coming as I do from a much more ‘secular society’ than the USA, at the amount of heat generated,” Almond said via email.

In a recent weekly newsletter, which is posted on Facebook, U46 CEO Tony Sanders said the teacher told him she assigned the article “because students had been raising questions about the different religions that exist and the implications that had on what students would do over winter break, whether the student is Christian, Muslim, Jewish or agnostic.”

Sanders said the teacher added that the article “was not discussed previously nor did I plan to discuss it after. It was simply assigned as practice as are most of the articles I assign using Newsela.”

U46 spokesperson Mary Fergus explained that Newsela articles are assigned to students by the teacher based on student questions and discussion related to all content areas. The purpose of using the articles is to support nonfiction reading in order to develop

background knowledge and to support development of reading, writing, listening, speaking and critical thinking skills, she said.

“It is a resource to support our curriculum. Teachers can select from textbooks, books and online resources such as Newsela to support learning,” Fergus said.

Almond said there seem to be two key issues at play in the Elgin debate.

The first issue is the general place of religion in the schools, Almond said.

“A fairly simple distinction can be made between instruction in religion and teaching about religion,” Almond said.

Instruction in religion is about teaching from within the faith to those of the faith or teaching from within the faith to those outside the faith to persuade them to join it, he said. Teaching about religion would argue that since religion is such an important part of many people’s lives and since religions have played such an important part in human history, knowing about them is an important part of any student’s education, Almond noted.

“Social studies should involve teaching about religion and/or the religions and the similarity and differences between them. There really isn’t — or shouldn’t be — anything very controversial about that,” Almond said.

Another issue relates to the actual debate over the religious question in the essay.

“It argues that the attributes of God are the same in all three religions. Each of the religions tries to find a balance between a God who is both merciful and compassionate on the one hand and judging and wrathful on the other. In short, the attributes of God in each of these three religions are pretty much the same,” he said.

The essay notes that the Gods of Judaism, Islam and Christianity are the same since each go back to the God of Abraham and each have deep historical connections with each other.

“The God of Christianity comes out of the Jewish tradition, and the God of Islam out of both,” Almond said.

From a philosophical perspective, the argument would say it is the same immutable, omnipotent, omniscient creator God, but the three religions differ in their understanding of how these different attributes play out in the world, according to Almond.

“Putting it another way, you could say that they all worship the same God even though they believe they are different, rather like blind men holding onto different parts of the same elephant without realizing it and thinking their part is the only true part,” Almond said. “As you know, this is not always the way the religions themselves see it, preferring to view the others as wrong at best or Satanic at worst. That, I think, is an unfortunate position to hold.”

Almond added, “The more you think that it is the same God in all the religions, the less you are inclined to fight about the differences; and the more you think it is a different God, the more you are likely to fight over those differences. So I guess the former way is perhaps the way to peace between the religions and mutual tolerance, and the latter the way to violence between religions.”

Almond said he hopes the sort of work he does is helpful to those who want to be able to discuss religion rationally and dispassionately.

“I am grateful to the teacher for using my material in this educational way. The apparently angry response to her use of my little article is itself indicative of the importance of religion in the modern world, of the passions that it can still evoke and of the necessity for educators to bring a balanced, rational and educative approach to issues around religion,” Almond said.

And in the newsletter, Sanders reminded parents that they are encouraged to keep up to date on what their student is learning.

“If a parent has a concern about a specific assignment, contacting the teacher is the first step to remedy the concern. It is always best to assume positive intent. Teachers are professionals. They know our process to ensure that students are provided an alternate assignment if a parent has an objection to something they’ve assigned,” Sanders said.

---Courier News--- 2/4/18

## **Elgin’s Black History Family Festival features theme of ‘freedom and justice for all’**

Cook County state’s attorney speaks at Gail Borden Library

BY GLORIA CASAS



Tremeisha Gray, from left, Jayven Johnson and Aiyanna Duarte, all members of Larkin High School’s Black History Club, work Saturday on a project that asks people to write phrases on paper fists as part of the Black History Month celebration at the Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin. Cook County State’s Attorney Kim Foxx spoke about her childhood and her career at the annual event focused on the theme of “freedom and justice for all.” Story, Page 4

Cook County State's Attorney Kimberly Foxx told the crowd at the 13th Annual Black History Family Festival in [Elgin](#) that she often finds she has more in common with the youth coming through the county's juvenile justice system than she has with the prosecutors who work for her.

"I am very much like the young people I see every day," said Foxx, who grew up in Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing project. "The number one question I get is, 'How did you make it out?' It is asked with such earnest intention. People want to know."

But Foxx said she often turns the question on its head. If we recognize conditions in housing projects and in society that can push people of color to fail, she said, "we ought

not to celebrate one escapee. We ought to go back and save the rest. I am not exceptional by any means."

Foxx talked about both her childhood and her career at the festival, which was held at the Gail Borden Public Library on Saturday. This year's theme was "freedom and justice for all."

Saturday's celebration included the presentation of the Future African American Leaders award to Alden Williams, Ava Brock, Isabella Carter, Colette Jones and Deandra Dickens, who each received a \$500 scholarship. The event also included performances by Jalen Little of OBS3RVE Music and the Chicago West Community Music Center, as well as arts, crafts, a community organization fair and recognition of School District U46 Board member Traci O'Neal Ellis.

The Black History Family Festival helped kick off National Black History Month, recognized throughout the month of February.

The festival is part of a monthlong celebration in Elgin, said Mayor Dave Kaptain, who read a proclamation for the day. The library will show the award-winning documentary "Project 2-3-1," chronicling the African-American experience in Elgin.

Many African-Americans came to Elgin as former slaves, Kaptain said.

"The end result is they came to Elgin, set down roots and started families. I think that is the key of what the celebration is about," he said.

In her speech, Foxx said her path had many obstacles. She was a child of public housing, was born to a teenage mother and was raised in a single-parent household. She went to school that was under-funded and lacked resources, she said.

Foxx, elected to the post in December 2016, went on to obtain a law degree from [Southern Illinois University](#) and worked as chief of staff for Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle.

"There were no lawyers in our projects, not ones that lived there," Foxx said. "There was not this notion of the ability that this young black child born in poverty could attain a spot in the second largest prosecutor's office in the country."

It is difficult to overcome those barriers and survive, she said. And the path continues to be difficult for young people today, she said.

Foxx said her background helps give her a different view of the justice system and what needs to be changed. She said policy decisions must be made with the knowledge that parts of the legal system was based on racist ideology. It may be uncomfortable to discuss it, but it should not be ignored, she said.

Foxx said the historic significance of being the first African-American woman to hold her current post is not lost on her, but she added that she recently thought about a Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., quote, "We are not makers of history; we are made by history."

---Courier News--- 2/4/18

**Laptops may boost U46 special ed program**

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO

School District U46 may purchase 2,000 Chromebook computers to bolster its special education program.

District officials said what is currently available for its specialized student services programs is “limited” when it comes to technology. The hope is the purchase will give students with specialized needs greater accessibility to computer programs that can help them receive individual instruction.

Under the proposal, Chromebooks would be purchased for 100 special education classrooms at a cost of just under \$678,000. An additional \$76,000 would be spent on 125 charging carts.

Leatrice Satterwhite, district director of specialized student services, said the notebook computers will allow teachers and students to use a multitude of programs and applications that better cater to each student’s needs. If, for example, a student is struggling in how to write, the computer’s touch-screen functionality makes it possible for the student to get hands-on help in handwriting.

“It’s about accessibility. They need the tools to be able to communicate, help them be independent and help them learn,” she said. “Some of our students need these devices to communicate.”

The computers will use “badges” to log students on to their accounts. For those with certain disabilities, using passwords is a challenge, Satterwhite said.

U46 board members are expected to vote on the purchase at Monday’s board meeting. The expense will be funded with an Individuals with Disabilities Education Act grant.

While the purchase of 2,000 laptops is significant, the district is not a one-device-per-student district. The current ratio is about one per three students, district spokeswoman Mary Fergus said.