

Between **THE** Lines™

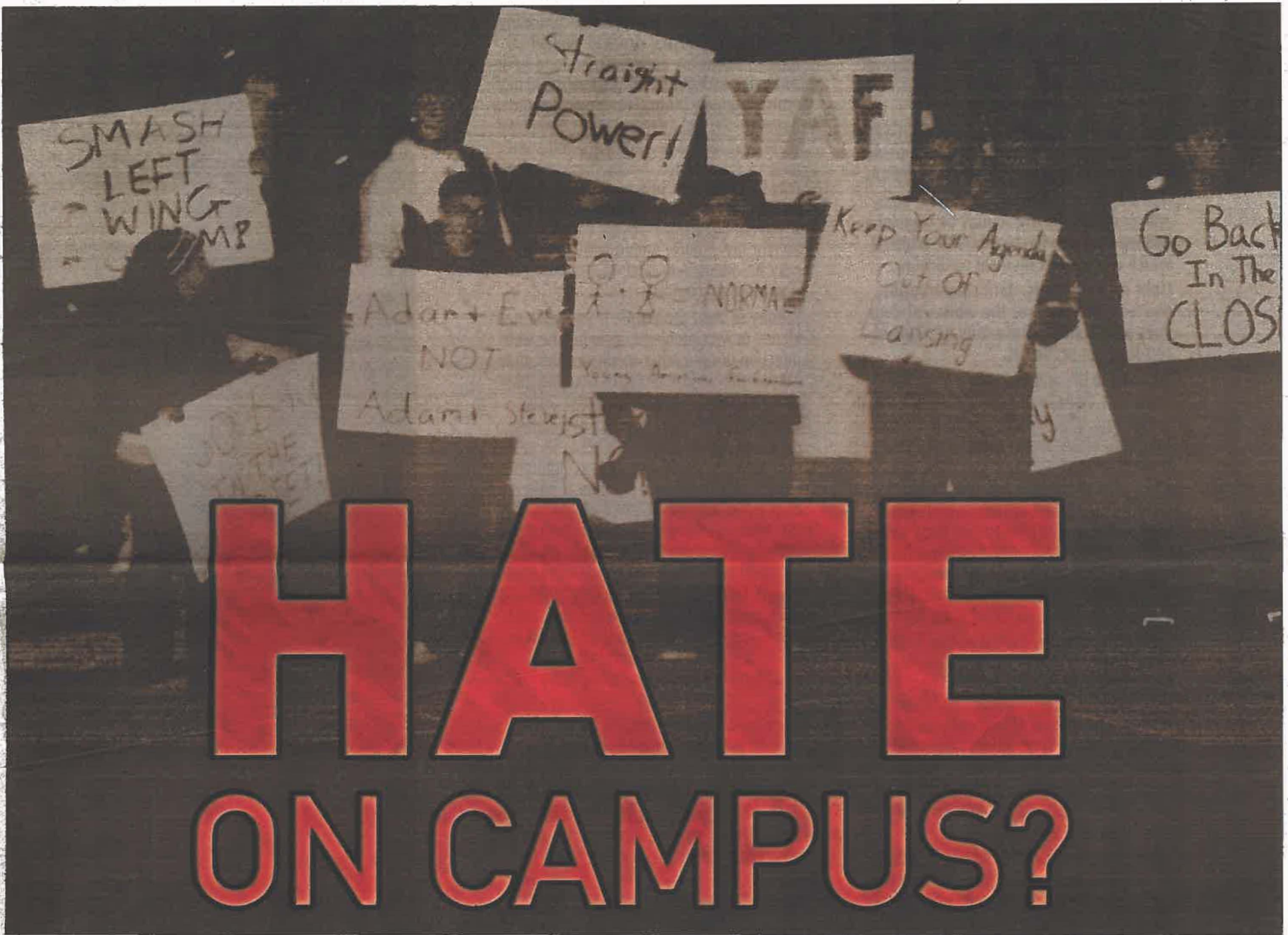
MICHIGAN'S WEEKLY NEWS FOR LESBIANS, GAYS, BISEXUALS, TRANSGENDERS AND FRIENDS

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National watchdog group investigates MSU student organization. See 6



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MSU student club likely **HATE** group



Kyle Bristow (center) leads the Michigan State University branch of Young Americans for Freedom. BTL photo: Katie La Londe

Young Americans for Freedom spokeswoman Joanna Varnavas quit working with the organization over the weekend. She says the organization is no longer the group she thought it was, and did not want to be associated with it anymore.

EAST LANSING – Young Americans for Freedom, a student group that is eligible to receive money from Michigan State University, qualifies as a hate group based on a recent series of anti-minority and anti-gay actions the group has made, according to a national tracking organization.

YAF is under investigation as a hate group, said Heidi Beirich, assistant director of the Intelligence Project for the Southern Poverty Law Center in Alabama.

“They will probably be listed next year,” Beirich said. Also included in the likely listing is 20-year-old international relations major Kyle Bristow, the group’s chairman.

If YAF is listed, it will be the first university-recognized student hate group in the nation that Beirich is aware of.

YAF has been involved in a series of minority bashing events this fall, most notably its attempt to organize a campus-wide “Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day.”

And on Nov. 20, about a dozen members came to downtown Lansing to protest the Lansing City Council’s proposed civil rights ordinance, which would protect gays, lesbians

Kyle Bristow
In his own words

“I believe abortion is absolutely despicable. It hurts women ... It raises the chance of breast cancer. It allows men to abuse women.”

“It’s sad all these groups exist to advocate for all these different groups based on their ethnicity or skin color. Personally I would like to see these groups go away.”

“Homosexuality kills people almost to a degree worse than cigarettes. It’s sad these groups are complicit in murder.”

“Planned Parenthood ... They’re pretty much an advocacy group for infanticide. It’s a blight on the MSU community. It’s a slap in the face.”

– From video interview, Spartansedge.com

and transgender persons from discrimination. Outside of City Hall, protesters held up signs with slogans like “Straight Power” and “End Faggotry.”

The group was joined by students who said they were members of the YAF branch at Olivet College. However, Jerry Rashid, assistant vice president for college relations at Olivet, said while the group has submitted paperwork to become an official student group, the college has not been approved its application. Rashid also expressed concern that the Olivet YAF group may be affiliated with the MSU organization.

YAF spokeswoman Joanna Varnavas, 23,

a professional writing major at MSU, laughed when told her group was being investigated by the SPLC.

“We’ll see,” she said. Varnavas was featured prominently in Lansing area media holding a “Straight Power” sign at the Nov. 20 protest. And she readily admits the sign was her making.

YAF’s local branch has about 30 active members, with a mailing list between 100 and 150, Varnavas said. She said the members meet regularly at the MSU Union, but declined to give a day or time when the group met. She declined to list the names of any executive

board members, except for the group’s leader Kyle Bristow.

Varnavas said the group is affiliated with the National Young Americans for Freedom organization. However, YAF’s national Web site does not list an active chapter at MSU, and Varnavas was unable to produce any documentation to support her assertion. “I was told we were a registered student group with the national,” she said. “We are a nonpartisan group about freedom. We support our leader when he makes decisions for the group.”

Leader with hate agenda

Kyle Bristow, a 20-year-old graduate of Chippewa Valley High School in Macomb County, leads YAF. While there, according to his online resume, he was involved in the marching band, International Club, National Honor Society, and he helped to form the Young Republicans club at his school.

In addition to listing his employment history – McDonald’s for more than three years – his online resume lists numerous volunteer positions with prominent Republicans including Dick De Vos, Mike Bouchard and Mike Rogers.

He also lists his former position on ASMSU, the student governing body of MSU, as well as serving as the former secretary of the College Republicans club at MSU. He also states that he is the Vice Chair of the Macomb

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12th District Republican party, as well as a precinct delegate for the Republican Party for the 12th District, 29th precinct.

He claims in a video interview to have been declared the “new face of the Republican Party” by a county Republican Party Chair in Macomb County.

On top of being a local media darling, he has appeared on the Fox News Network’s “The O’Reilly Factor.” This past Friday, he was mentioned by name in an interview on “Hannity and Colmes” by Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo.

But his love of the media only goes so far. Bristow failed to return several e-mails and electronic instant messages for comment on this story. In fact, when he was approached by BTL at a Tancredo event at MSU, he walked away.

Bristow told an interviewer on a conservative news Web site for MSU students that homosexuality was almost a worse killer than cigarettes, abortion caused men to abuse women and caused breast cancer and said minority student groups’ existence makes him sad.

In addition, a conservative blog run by the leader of the Olivet College YAF group said Bristow put out a press release on the Lansing ordinance. The blog reads: “If homosexuals are given special rights, then the institution of the family will be at risk. How long will it be before transgenders, animal-lovers and pedophiles are given special rights, too? Society needs to be protected from gay activists.”

Bristow goes on to say, “YAF members find homosexuality and other forms of sexual deviancy to be disgusting. The Boy Scouts, military and the American public need to be protected from these degenerates.”

Cyber space is an active location for Bristow and his buddies. On top of blogs, YAF has at least three recruiting videos on YouTube, as well as numerous videos of Bristow spewing his hate ideology in interviews and debates. “The O’Reilly Factor” interview is also available on YouTube. A Google search of his name yields numerous citations in the news and on blogs, from people who quote him as a news item, to those wishing him dead and everything in between.

On one of his blogs, Bristow has an essay declaring Joseph McCarthy an American hero, who has been much maligned by the left. And his Facebook account has a picture of him posing with an assault weapon.

Bristow has at least two blog names, one using the word Soldier; the other set up to support Tancredo for president. Tancredo has not formally announced his candidacy, although he did tell a crowd at MSU that if immigration were not made a major issue in the 2008 presidential race, he would run and make it an issue.

As a representative for James Madison College on ASMSU, Bristow posted a 13-point memo on the group’s Web site laying out his plans for MSU in the 2006-2007 year.

ASMSU officials made him remove the document shortly after it was posted.

Among the items listed were de-funding of all minority organizations, the creation of a men’s council, a seat for a Christian organization on ASMSU, a Caucasian caucus, as well as forcing the Planned Parenthood in East Lansing to leave, and hunting down illegal immigrants in Lansing and having them deported.

In a media interview, Bristow confirmed the 13-point memo was the agenda of YAF. When asked if YAF agreed with his memo, Bristow replied “Absolutely.”

Bristow’s extremism resulted in his being

recalled by voters of James Madison College in October. He was elected in spring 2006 with 133 votes, but recalled in October, 225 votes to 18. He was the first student government representative recalled in the history of ASMSU.

What’s in a name?

Groups listed on the SPLC’s monitoring list are there because of their ideology, not necessarily because of violence, Beirich said. SPLC’s list includes such organizations as Christian Identity churches, neo-Nazi organizations, Ku Klux Klan groups, the Nation of Islam, the militia movement and Black Panther organizations.

The lists include 25 active extremist organizations and hate groups in Michigan. Neither YAF nor its chair Kyle Bristow is listed currently in the organization’s database of groups and leaders.

Varnavas said the SPLC list is not a good idea. “It infringes on the law.”

“There is nothing with making a list,” said Henry Silverman of ACLU Lansing Branch. “They are hate groups. There is nothing wrong with calling them what they are.” He hastened to add that the hate groups are not illegal until or when they do something illegal.

Beirich said the SPLC is aware of many tenured professors who are openly racist, sexist and anti-Semitic, but they are listed as individuals, not a group. “It’s actually unique,” he said.

As a recognized student organization, YAF is eligible for funding through the Associated Students of Michigan State University, the undergraduate student government. ASMSU levies a \$16.75 tax on every student that enrolls at MSU, which is then used to fund student groups and bring in speakers.

Registered student groups are also eligible for accounts with the university and discounts on food and others services provided by MSU.

The ACLU’s Silverman said even if the group is listed, there is not much the university can do about it. He said so long as the organization meets all the requirements that all other student groups on campus are required to meet, the organization is shielded from action by the university.

However, if a group can be shown to be dangerous or to be violating the rules and policies of the university, Silverman said the group can be disbanded.

Whether YAF is conducting itself under the policies, rules and ordinances of MSU, as required, is another question altogether. Bristow is quoted in an online video interview claiming the group had done all of its work last spring, “without meeting once. We just used e-mail.”

Rules governing student groups at MSU stipulate the organization must meet.

The group may have also violated its advisor agreement when it failed to inform the advisor, W.B. Allen, of its Nov. 20 protest in Lansing. Allen is currently on leave as a visiting fellow at Princeton.

“I’m sure he contacted him,” Varnavas said, referring to Bristow contacting Allen.

“I didn’t know they did,” Allen said about the event when asked by phone the day after the protest.

Allen did say that he was in “frequent” contact with Bristow, but refused to elaborate about how or how often the two communicated.

Some argue the organization’s actions, from Catch an Illegal Immigrant to protesting at Lansing City Hall, violated the Universities non-discrimination policy, which has been

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interpreted to mean not only discrimination, but also creation of a hostile or harassing environment.

The group's agenda is despicable, Beirich said.

"It definitely violates that," said SPLC's Beirich, "and someone has to do an investigation. It's obvious, right?"

MSU administration officials said they know of no complaints that YAF has violated the university's policies. The university declined to comment specifically about YAF.

Fred Watson, director of student life at MSU, said he has not been contacted by the SPLC about YAF. "They haven't told me about that, so I am not concerned," Watson said.

Paulette Grandberry Russell, special adviser to MSU President Lou Anna Simon for minority issues and director of affirmative action at MSU, said she too was not aware of any investigation. She declined further comment.

This past fall, the university president published a letter to the entire MSU community condemning the Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day event. Bristow told the media he was disappointed the president would try to coerce the group into stopping the event.

The letter contained no such coercion, and in fact said the group had a right to do what it was doing because of free speech.

"That's a touchy one – YAF. That organization," said an administration source who wished not to be named in this story.

Beirich said the lack of response from MSU administrators is "ridiculous."

"You should be concerned," she said.