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Hundreds protest transphobe Michael Knowles in Buffalo

Buffalo, New York

Hundreds of people turned out to demonstrate against Michael Knowles' speaking engagement at the University of Buffalo (UB) on March 9, greatly outnumbering those who attended the event, which included some who went inside to disrupt it.



Credit: Buffalo WW bureau

Knowles, a right-wing pundit for the Daily Wire, made headlines after recently calling for the eradication of “transgenderism” at the Conservative Political Action Conference. He was invited to speak by the UB chapter of Young Americans for Freedom, a right-wing

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student organization, which has previously hosted Islamophobic demagogue Robert Spencer.

In response to the outrage surrounding the administration's allowing Knowles to speak at the university, UB President Satish Tripathi issued an open letter citing the importance of the "responsibility to uphold free speech," despite the "hateful and dehumanizing rhetoric" which would be espoused.

Dr. Tripathi further claimed that "so long as a student group abides by university guidelines and state laws concerning public events on campus, we cannot disallow the student group from inviting the speaker of its choosing to campus." The response was no doubt spurred by YAF's long history of suing colleges for "free speech violations," when the bigoted group doesn't get its way.

Knowles weaseled his way around the fact that his comments on "eradicating transgenderism" are a clear incitement to genocide. He claimed "no even mildly reasonable person could have interpreted my words as insinuating any sort of violence" — because he had identified an "ideology" rather than a group of people. However, as noted by one of the speakers at the demonstration outside, you cannot "eradicate transgenderism from public life" without eradicating transgender people.

The demonstration, jointly organized by Workers World Party, Buffalo; UB Young Democratic Socialists of America; DSA; Buffalo DSA; the Graduate Student Association of the UB School of Social Work; and No Hate at UB, drew support from both university students and members of the community. Speakers called for the maintenance of an atmosphere of inclusivity on campus at UB and in Buffalo at large and denounced Knowles' and YAF's hateful rhetoric.

Demonstrators drew a large trans pride flag in chalk, with the slogan, "you cannot eradicate us," in front of the concert hall where the event was held. They loudly chanted "transphobes are not welcome here!" and shouted "shame!" and "fascists go home!" at attendees as they entered and exited the event.

Less than a year ago, Payton S. Gendron came to Buffalo after posting a white-supremacist screed online, which denounced, among other things, "transgenderism." Gendron opened fire at a grocery store, killing 10 Black Buffalonians. People of this city, especially trans people and people of color, have reason to be alarmed by hatemongers like Knowles.

Amidst a rising tide of transphobia in the U.S., with a wave of anti-trans legislation by several states, ubiquitous anti-trans rhetoric from the right and threats, demonstrations and

attacks against LGBTQ2S+ events around the country, we must remain vigilant and ready to show solidarity with our trans siblings — and defend them by any means necessary.

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