

November 9, 2015

Mr. Gary B. Pruitt
President and CEO
The Associated Press
450 West 33rd Street
New York, NY 10001

Dear Mr. Pruitt:

On October 4, 2015, the Associated Press published an article by Claire Galofaro derisively entitled, “Law Firm Labeled Hate Group Leading Kim Davis’ Crusade.” The article had wide national circulation. Unfortunately, rather than presenting a piece of fair journalism, the article was the vehicle for launching an outrageous attack on a fine attorney, Mat Staver, and a significant public interest law firm, Liberty Counsel.

We the undersigned groups and individuals write to express our deep concern that a national news organization of AP’s stature could release a profile that is more denigrating to the conservative movement than anything we’ve observed the AP publish in recent memory. We note that 38% of the American people self-identify as “conservative” according to a recent Gallup poll conducted in January 2015.¹ Thus, a considerable proportion of your readership would be deeply offended by that story based on the insulting worldview it incorporates.

It is clear that there are significant divisions in the country about important political and cultural issues. Disagreements over religious and sexual matters can be intense. That said, the mere fact that Liberty Counsel adheres to an orthodox Christian ethic of sexual morality centered on the unique marital relationship of one man and one woman does not make it a “hate group.” What is most disturbing about the article is AP’s reliance on the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) as the source for the “hate group” label it pinned on Liberty Counsel.

Given the subjectivity of such assessments, one should make such determinations with tremendous precision and care. The need for caution is increased exponentially given the damage that can be done to the reputations and safety of innocent people. Yet, AP has done no analysis of its own. Rather, it parrots the judgements of a radical activist organization engaged in these debates—the SPLC.

Please consider a brief but insightful article published online by *Foreign Policy* magazine’s J.M. Berger after the release of SPLC’s “Hate List” in March 2013. Berger questioned the validity of the list based on his work on political extremist organizations. He noted:

Many news organizations, from wire services to TV networks, covered the new figures uncritically. The SPLC looms large in most discussions of American extremism, in large part because they have little or no competition. Very few

¹ “U.S. Liberals at Record 24%, but Still Trail Conservatives,” Gallup (January 15, 2015) (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/180452/liberals-record-trail-conservatives.aspx>) (“conservatives remain the largest ideological group, at 38%”).

journalists cover domestic extremism on a regular basis, and those who do tend to work for publications that have an overt political slant.²

Berger notes that SPLC hate statistics remain a “go-to media source,” but he continues, “[t]he problem is that the SPLC [and the ADL] are not objective purveyors of data. They’re anti-hate activists.” As activists, however, “their research needs to be weighed more carefully by media outlets that cover their pronouncements.” Nearing the conclusion of his article, Berger observes that “the study of domestic extremism shouldn’t be the exclusive province of activists.”

Make no mistake, the SPLC is aligned politically and legally with LGBT causes. It has filed numerous amicus curiae (“friend of the court”) briefs on behalf of same-sex marriage, in addition to litigating actual cases. Thus, there is nothing approaching neutrality or objectivity when the SPLC assesses differences of opinion regarding LGBT issues: three thousand years of Judeo-Christian teaching are simply bigotry and hatred to be replaced by a new sexual order.

One of America’s foremost experts on political extremism, Laird Wilcox,³ has observed that the SPLC does “a kind of bullying and stalking.” He adds that it has “specialized a highly developed and ritualized form of defamation...” Wilcox has even provided an extended critique of the SPLC’s “hate group” data and argues, based on his efforts to duplicate SPLC data, that it is unreliable—if not fictional, in large part.⁴

Wilcox has argued that “watchdog groups,” like the SPLC, may exhibit alarming traits:

While they may give lip service to civil liberties, freedom of expression and other constitutional guarantees, watchdog groups often operate just on the edge of those protections, often advocating formal censorship or government reprisals against their ideological opponents simply because of their values, opinions and beliefs.⁵

The SPLC’s name-calling is absolutely intentional. It is, as Wilcox has noted, “a way of harming and isolating people by denying their humanity and trying to convert them into something that deserves to be hated and eliminated.” Their methodology is simple, effective, and vicious.

² J.M. Berger, “The Hate List” *Foreign Policy* website (Mar. 3, 2013) (link: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/12/the_hate_list) (“Academics and journalists – a lot of them – need to turn their skills and objectivity toward this problem and start collecting evidence that can be published and rigorously reviewed.”).

³ Laird Wilcox, Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laird_Wilcox); “Exhibiting Free Speech: The Wilcox Collection at 50,” Kenneth Spencer Research Library, “Inside Spencer: the KSRL Blog,” Kansas University Libraries, University of Kansas (March 30, 2015) (<http://blogs.lib.ku.edu/spencer/tag/laird-wilcox/>); for one of his published works, see John George and Laird Wilcox, *American Extremists: Militias, Supremacists, Klansmen, Communists, and Others* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1996).

⁴ Laird Wilcox, *The Guardians: A Close Look at Anti-Racist “Watchdog” Groups* (Olathe, KS: Editorial Research Services, 2nd ed., 1999) (self-published): ch. 2 (“Southern Poverty Law Center”), 49-58.

⁵ Laird, Wilcox, “Who Watches the Watchmen?” in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, eds. Jeffrey Kaplan and Helene Loow (Alta Mira Press, 2002), 290-343, 290. The section on the SPLC is located on pages 307-314.

Unfortunately for the SPLC, their “bread and butter,” their “Hate Map,” is a very poor piece of work. Wilcox analyzed a 1992 *USA Today* article which described SPLC’s method for padding its “Hate List” totals.⁶ From this he concluded, “Dees is the classic example of an apparently unprincipled opportunist waging a holy war against an unpopular foe and profiting from it, both financially and ideologically.”⁷ This decades-long effort has been very good for the SPLC ideologically, as it now has an endowment fund that exceeds \$300 million.

Galofaro’s article went far beyond the standard bias conservatives typically encounter from the mainstream media. As with many SPLC efforts, this article has had the effect of defaming, dehumanizing, and destroying. As you must be aware, violence is possible when this sort of damaging rhetoric is used.

On August 15, 2012, Floyd Lee Corkins II, entered the lobby of the Family Research Council (FRC) armed with a loaded semi-automatic pistol and 100 rounds of ammunition, intending to slaughter as many FRC staffers as he could because FRC does not recognize same-sex marriage. Fortunately, it never came to that, because FRC’s building manager, Mr. Leo Johnson, heroically stopped Corkins though he was shot and grievously wounded with a bone-shattering injury to his left arm.

Corkins pleaded guilty to three charges in federal court on February 6, 2013, including committing an act of domestic terrorism while armed. Corkins is the only person to have been convicted under the 2002 D.C. terrorism statute enacted in the wake of 9-11.⁸ In a chilling interrogation video released by the FBI and played in court, Corkins said he picked his targets by relying on the SPLC website’s “Hate Map.”⁹

In the months following the revelation of the SPLC’s link to this domestic terrorism attack, both the FBI and the U.S. Army distanced themselves from the discredited organization.

⁶ Anomalies in SPLC data abound. The SPLC findings are *not* consistent with trends in the F.B.I. statistics on hate crimes. For example, FBI data indicates that there has been a decrease in total annual hate crime incidents of 32.3% from 1996 to 2013. In that period *racial* hate crime incidents decreased by 46.8%. However, SPLC claims that from 2000-2014, the number of SPLC hate groups increased by 30.2%. Professor George Yancey argues that the SPLC applies its “hate” criteria inconsistently. George Yancey, “Watching the Watchers: The Neglect of Academic Analysis of Progressive Groups,” *Academic Questions* (published online: Jan. 28, 2014)(comparing SPLC’s treatment of the Family Research Council and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation). Yancey is professor of sociology at the University of North Texas, Denton, TX.

⁷ *Id.* at 307-308. Morris Dees is co-founder (1971) and chief trial counsel of the SPLC.

⁸ In fact, this horrific terrorist act is now part of an exhibit at the National Museum of Crime and Punishment in Washington, D.C., entitled “Domestic Terrorism and Hate Crimes.” For more on the exhibit, see this March 20, 2015 story by Penny Starr of CNSNews.com (<http://cnsnews.com/news/article/penny-starr/domestic-terror-attack-family-research-council-new-exhibit-national-crime>).

⁹ Corkins also had alternate targets selected from the SPLC website: the offices of the Traditional Values Coalition (Washington, D.C.), and the Public Advocate of the United States (Falls Church, VA) where Corkins was seen before the FRC shooting.

In closing, we wish to reiterate several points. First, AP's characterizations of Liberty Counsel and Mat Staver were grossly inaccurate. Second, AP's use of the SPLC "hate group" designation revealed a highly inappropriate use of this highly charged term, even though the SPLC's work in this area has been criticized for years. And third, as the AP has taken this step, it has joined the activist far Left and smeared the entire cultural conservative movement which represents millions of people.

We ask the Associated Press to take significant strides to correct the wrongs done to Liberty Counsel and Mat Staver by Ms. Galofaro's article, by issuing a formal apology. Furthermore, the AP should never cite to the SPLC's inaccurate lists in the future.

Please send your reply within two weeks of receipt of this letter to: Lt. Gen. Jerry Boykin (USA-retired), Executive Vice-President, Family Research Council, 801 G Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001.

Respectfully,



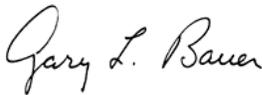
Lt. General (Ret.) William G. Boykin
Executive Vice President
Family Research Council



Bill Donohue, Ph.D.
President
Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights



Tim Wildmon
President
American Family Association



Gary L. Bauer
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American Values



William J. Becker, Jr.
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Gary McCaleb, Chief Solicitor
Exec. VP for Strategy Implementation
Alliance Defending Freedom



Richard Thompson
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Thomas More Law Center



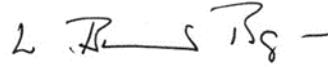
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Martin Mawyer
President
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John B. Wells, Commander, USN (Ret.)
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Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc.



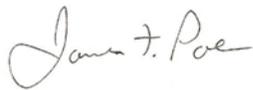
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Cathie Adams
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Peggy Dau
International Civil Rights Activist