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HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

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For Immediate Release: 20 Montana Extremist Groups Identified by National Monitoring Organization; State Experts Echo Concerns

The Montana Human Rights Network is echoing national concerns about the rise in hate activity in the United States by radical right organizations. The Southern Poverty Law Center released today its map of hate group activity around the United States, noting a rise for the second year in a row. The [annual census of hate groups](#) and other extremist organizations, includes 20 Montana groups.

Montana followed the national trend in that that the greatest growth in hate activity was in anti-Muslim hate groups—from 34 in 2015 to 101 last year, of which 5 new groups were identified in Montana. This increase in anti-Muslim hate activity has been coupled with a dramatic increase in crimes targeting Muslim people, public demonstrations against Muslim people and attempts to pass official government policies that target Muslim people. Recent FBI statistics indicate that anti-Muslim hate crimes [grew by 67 percent in 2015](#). Montana's anti-Muslim activity centered around the chapters of Act For America in the state. The activists in these chapters have peddled Islamophobia by bringing in out-of-state speakers falsely claiming to be security experts and by proposing local and state level policy furthering their negative and hateful view of Muslim people. While Act for America is part of a national network, the American Security Rally was a state group listed without national affiliation. Its leadership includes Gina Shetterfield of Helena, who also promotes a local groups called Citizens for a Better Helena and has erroneously said "Islam is not a race, it is a cult ..." during her protest speeches.

Both the Montana Human Rights Network and the Southern Poverty Law Center tie this increase in hate activity to the candidacy of Donald Trump. In response to this increased hate activity in the weeks around the election, the Montana Human Rights Network launched an online hate incident reporting form. The marked increase correlated with the final days of the Presidential election and the weeks following the election. In Montana anti-Semitic activity was particularly visible as white supremacists were emboldened by Donald Trump's candidacy and election.

"2016 was an unprecedented year for hate," said Mark Potok, senior fellow and editor of the *Intelligence Report*. "The country saw a resurgence of white nationalism that imperils the racial progress we've made, along with the rise of a president whose policies reflect the values of white nationalists. In Steve Bannon, these extremists think they finally have an ally who has the president's ear."

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Montana was the center of national news because of the mainstreaming of white supremacist ideas by Trump supporters. This includes Richard Spencer, the most well know of the white supremacist “alt-right” movement, who incited a crowd in D.C. after the election of Donald Trump with “Hail Trump” chants and Nazi hand salutes. Spencer and his mother then help precipitate and perpetuated an online troll storm against Jewish women and human rights activists in Whitefish. The overwhelming response supporting the Jewish women and human rights supporters by Love Lives Here, the local Human Rights Network affiliate, has been reported as a national model for how to respond and counter white supremacy.

The effects of this hate activity has disproportionately effected youth and schools in the states, according reports received by the Montana Human Rights Network and in a recent survey by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Montana received reports of hate activity in the schools that targeted gay people, immigrants, American Indian, and Jewish people.

Montana has long been a target of the white supremacist movement, but also the antigovernment “Patriot” movement. While this militant militia movement saw a 38 percent decline nationally, the number of groups in Montana stayed relatively stable. Once again, Montana’s faction of this radical right movement made national headline in 2016 as the state exported a number of extremist activists central to the standoff at the Bundy Ranch in Nevada and at the occupation of the Malheur Refuge in Oregon. The Montana groups listed include The Oath Keepers, who received attention for calling on armed election day monitoring in November. Montana’s antigovernment movement has historically included the Militia of Montana and Freeman Standoff that made Montana known for this movement.

The Southern Poverty Law Center’s report did not include the Anti-Indian movement, and specifically Citizen’s Equal Rights Alliance, which is active in opposing tribal sovereignty in Montana, as well as other states in the region, and is considered a hate group by the Montana Human Rights Network.

Current Montana Groups on the SPLC Hate Map for 2016:

National Policy Institute
Pioneer Little Europe Kalispell Montana
Radix Journal
Washington Summit Publishers
American Freedom Party
American Security Rally of Montana
ACT for America
ACT for America
ACT for America
ACT for America

III% United Patriots
American Patriots III%
Eagle Forum (Billings)
John Birch Society (Great Falls)
Oath Keepers (Ennis, Euruka and Statewide)
Stand Up America U.S. (Bigfork)
SteveQuayle.com (Bozeman)
The Three Percenters- III%ers (Fergus County)