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Briefing Paper

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Family Foundation Features Speaker Comparing Obama to Hitler: Group Spirals Down the Rabbit Hole of Extremist Conspiracies

The Montana Family Foundation is featuring a speaker at fundraising events in Bozeman and Billings this week who is popular with Tea Partiers, because she compares Adolph Hitler's Third Reich to President Barack Obama's policies. Kitty Werthmann has claimed President Obama is seeking to finish what Hitler started, and she has admitted that many people think she's "a wacko."¹

"This is the latest indication that the Montana Family Foundation is going beyond the Religious Right's traditional 'culture war' issues," says the Montana Human Rights Network's Travis McAdam. "In recent years, they've also promoted the absurd notions that President Obama is not an American citizen and that socialism is taking over the country. Kitty Werthmann headlining their fundraising events just demonstrates the Family Foundation's extremism."

The Montana Human Rights Network issued a briefing paper today (see below) outlining the Family Foundation's formation and its work under the leadership of Jeff Laszloffy. It also details their promotion of extreme right-wing beliefs that mesh with the Tea Party Movement. The briefing outlines how Laszloffy and the Family Foundation supported efforts during the 2011 Montana Legislature to make President Obama prove he is an American citizen. It also discusses the Family Foundation's increased paranoia about socialism taking over the country and contains an overview of Kitty Werthmann.

"Jeff Laszloffy and the Family Foundation have tried to position themselves as a credible organization since forming in 2004," says McAdam. "Featuring activists like Werthmann and

trumpeting conspiracy theories related to President Obama’s citizenship erode any sense of legitimacy they may have accumulated.”

Jeff Laszloffy and the Montana Family Foundation: Promoting “Birthers” and Hitler-Obama Comparisons

Montana Family Foundation

The Montana Family Foundation, a state-level affiliate of the Religious Right powerhouse Focus on the Family, started in 2004. At that time, some board members from an entity that was originally the Christian Coalition of Montana broke away from that organization to start the Family Foundation. At the time, the Montana Human Rights Network noted that this tactical shift by Religious Rights activists in Montana mirrored what was happening at the national level.²

Following his run for the Republican presidential nomination in 1988, Pat Robertson formed the Christian Coalition of America. It was the major player at the nexus of Religious Right organizations and Republican politics over the next decade. Its annual “Road to Victory” conferences served both as Republican rallies and trainings about the nuts-and-bolts of political organizing.³ The Christian Coalition of Montana brought this fusion of right-wing theology and conservative political activism to the state when it formed in 1992.⁴

As [offensive comments](#) by Pat Robertson increased the amount of political baggage associated with the Christian Coalition at the national level, the centers of Religious Right power shifted. As Robertson continued to lose credibility and the Christian Coalition of America lost its tax-exempt status due to its overt GOP politicking, Dr. James Dobson and his Focus on the Family were more than capable of stepping in to fill the void. The switch in national power to Focus on the Family was smooth, as Dobson and his group already engaged in conservative politics.⁵

This transition in Religious Right power played out in Montana as well with the creation of the Montana Family Foundation. The Christian Coalition of Montana transformed into the Montana Family Coalition in 2001. Board members of the Family Coalition left to form the Montana Family Foundation in 2004. When the Montana Secretary of State [dissolved](#) the Montana Family Coalition in 2005, the Montana Family Foundation grew into the leading Religious Right organization in Montana.⁶

Those involved with the Montana Family Foundation may need to, once again, create a new entity if the organization continues to stray from its stated mission. On its website, the Family Foundation says it is “dedicated to supporting, protecting and strengthening Montana families.”⁷ However, the group increasingly engages in issues that appear to fall outside of its stated purpose. These include: promoting conspiracy theories about President Obama not being a US citizen; featuring speakers who equate President Obama with Adolph Hitler; and claiming that America is embracing socialism.

Jeff Laszloffy, President of the Montana Family Foundation

Upon its formation in 2004, the Montana Family Foundation announced that its leader would be state Rep. Jeff Laszloffy (R-Laurel). The group said he would retire from state politics to take over leadership of the organization. For much of the group's existence, most of the public activism by Laszloffy and the Family Foundation has followed what is expected of Religious Right organizations. They're a consistent presence at the Montana Legislature opposing reproductive freedom, equality for the LGBT community, comprehensive sex education, and other favorite issues of the Religious Right. They can be found regularly on the opinion pages of local newspapers, and they occasionally engage in community-level campaigns.⁸

Laszloffy and the Montana Family Foundation are probably best known as the catalyst behind the 2004 campaign that successfully banned gay marriage in Montana.⁹ Their opposition to equality runs deep. They aggressively oppose any attempt at fairness and equal protection under the law for Montana's LGBT community. In 2009, when the Montana Supreme Court upheld a lesbian's parental rights in the [Kulstad](#) case, Laszloffy said the decision would "go down in history as a black day for Montana's parents and children." He said the verdict would "threaten the traditional definition of family for generations to come."¹⁰

It's readily apparent that Laszloffy and the Family Foundation don't view debates over public policy as just differences of opinion. Instead, these debates take on the religious overtones of good versus evil. A prime example of this comes from a legislative update by Laszloffy for the Family Foundation during the 2011 session. Laszloffy said that, while in a committee hearing, he looked around the room and God revealed to him:

"Those with depraved minds are trying to change the very fabric of our society so that we look more like Sodom than Montana...Not only do these people live lives steeped in sin, they rise every day to proclaim the virtue of their sin in a very public setting...As Paul says, they've been taken captive, they are truly prisoners of Satan...."¹¹

In recent years, however, Laszloffy and the Family Foundation have increasingly strayed from the Religious Right's standard "culture war" issues. This isn't too surprising given Laszloffy's views before assuming control of the group. A piece written in June 1999 by Laszloffy provides an example. He echoed right-wing themes that would become hallmarks of the Tea Party Movement. He claimed the federal government was promoting socialism and invoked the 10th Amendment as a remedy. He complained about the national debt and warned that people shouldn't be fooled by those who "tout more power at the federal level as the answer to all of our problems." The short piece could be used as a primer for today's Tea Partiers.¹²

Also like the Tea Parties, Laszloffy and the Montana Family Foundation opposed national healthcare reform with fear mongering about how the federal government was pushing socialism. They promoted a webcast that Laszloffy stated would address the "government

takeover of healthcare” that was “taking us down the path to socialism.” Additionally, Laszloffy and the Family Foundation opposed the Troubled Asset Relief Program and cap and trade legislation. Laszloffy stated that all three issues were part of a “race towards socialism...[that] scares me.” He complained that the country was heading towards a “national welfare state” that would “destroy what we used to call the American dream.” Laszloffy promised that the Montana Family Foundation would battle this “march toward socialism.”¹³

Laszloffy, in his personal and professional capacities, and the Family Foundation have echoed the calls of the Tea Party Movement. This was never more apparent than when Laszloffy and his group supported the “Birther Bill” during the 2011 Montana Legislature.¹⁴

Promoting the “Birther” Conspiracy

The “[Birther](#)” conspiracy takes many forms. However, central to every version is that President Barack Obama is not the legitimate president of the United States, because “Birthers” believe he is not an American citizen. One of the more common conspiracies claims Obama is a Kenyan-born Muslim, and that his birth documentation from Hawaii has been faked. Numerous [news agencies](#) and [organizations](#) have discredited the “Birther” conspiracy. In April 2011, President Obama even released [his long form birth certificate](#) to try to end the controversy. However, many “Birthers” believe that document is also a fake. The “Birther” conspiracy originates from a core belief that an African-American could only be elected president as part of a sinister plan, which has taken decades to implement and includes faking birth records and birth notices in local newspapers.

During the 2011 Montana Legislature, Rep. Bob Wagner (R-Harrison) sponsored [a bill](#) that would have required presidential candidates to file an affidavit with the Montana Secretary of State declaring they met citizenship requirements, in addition to filing a certified copy of the candidate’s birth certificate. Laszloffy testified in favor of the bill. He stated there was a “question as to whether President Obama was born in the United States.” He repeated the “Birther” conspiracy talking point about how a certificate of live birth was supposedly not a valid form of documentation.¹⁵

At the hearing, Laszloffy said he was not representing the Family Foundation. However, he devoted a January 2011 update from the Family Foundation to the “Birther” topic. He started off the segment by saying he had tried to avoid the topic. However, he said there were persistent “rumors” that President Obama was born in Kenya, which raised questions about his eligibility to be president. He complained that Obama “disparages” anyone questioning his legitimacy by calling them “Birthers.” He noted that Montana legislators would consider this issue and try to make the president provide the “proof” that Obama was “unwilling or unable to provide.” Wagner’s bill failed to make it out of committee, probably due both to its basis in outlandish conspiracy theory and Wagner’s embarrassing performance on a [CNN news program](#).¹⁶

Working with Missoula Patriots

In addition to ideological crossover with the Tea Parties, Laszloffy and the Family Foundation are working with a Tea Party group while bringing Kitty Werthmann to Montana for fundraising events in Bozeman and Billings. The Missoula Patriots were set to feature Werthmann at an event in Missoula before she headed to Bozeman and Billings. In an e-mail promoting it, Missoula Patriots thanked Laszloffy and the Family Foundation for bringing Werthmann to Montana. The group said Laszloffy was paying for “her air fare to **Missoula for us...the Missoula Patriots** [emphasis in original].”¹⁷

Gloria Roark and Nancy Engebretson started the Missoula Patriots in June 2009. Saying they were “disenchanted with what the Republicans were doing,” they patterned their group after the Bitterroot-based Celebrating Conservatism.¹⁸ Celebrating Conservatism, an anti-government “patriot” group which currently appears dormant, was very active for about two years.¹⁹ It brought a long list of anti-government extremists into Ravalli County and western Montana starting in 2009. These speakers included: militia favorite [Richard Mack](#); anti-Semitic tax protestor [Red Beckman](#); [Oath Keepers](#) founder Steward Rhodes; and failed [Constitution Party](#) presidential candidate [Chuck Baldwin](#).

Similar to Celebrating Conservatism, Missoula Patriots likes to portray itself as a group dedicated to preserving the Constitution. “People are afraid of losing their freedom,” Roark has told the press. “We want to preserve the Constitution.” The Missoula Patriots is active in Tea Party circles. It’s listed as a member of the Montana Tea Party Coalition. Additionally, representatives from the Missoula Patriots participated in the Montana Tea Party State Convention held in February 2011.²⁰

Kitty Werthmann, Leader of South Dakota Eagle Forum

Following her presentation for the Missoula Patriots, Kitty Werthmann is headlining two fundraising events for the Montana Family Foundation. The group has “Friends of the Family Fall Banquets” scheduled in Bozeman and Billings this week.²¹

Werthmann is a native of Austria and the [South Dakota state leader](#) for the Religious Right’s Eagle Forum. She’s experienced a spike in her right-wing popularity over the past few years because of her comparisons between current events and Adolph Hitler’s Third Reich. Her credibility rests on her living for seven years under Nazi rule in Austria as a child.²² She draws parallels between Austria under Nazi occupation and the United States under President Barack Obama. The Family Foundation encourages people to attend its fundraising events to hear Werthmann’s “stern warning as America drifts towards socialism.”²³

Werthmann gives an almost identical presentation wherever she goes. Advertisements for a *Freedom to Dictatorship* video featuring Werthmann stated she helps people “see we are walking the same path as the Nazis.” The video cites as proof such things as women in the workplace, euthanasia, and rising unemployment. On the Eagle Forum website, Werthmann

claims that liberals in America are promoting national identification cards and gun control, which she identifies as Nazi programs.²⁴

At the “How to Take Back America Conference” in September 2009, Werthmann claimed that universal healthcare, the Equal Rights Amendment, and increased taxes were signs of Nazism. An attendee asked her what people should do to stop America’s drift toward Nazism. She exhorted people to not give up their guns and to buy more guns and ammunition. “Don’t you dare give up your guns,” she said. “Never, never, never!” This response was greeted by an audience member saying, “Give them [guns] back one bullet at a time.”²⁵

Werthmann’s last visit to Montana came in May 2010. Celebrating Conservatism featured her as a speaker at its [“Liberty Convention 2010”](#) in Missoula. Werthmann shared the speakers’ podium with a slate of presenters that included an anti-Semitic tax protestor, heroes of the militia movement, and an [Alaskan “patriot”](#) who is currently on trial for allegedly plotting to kill law enforcement officials.²⁶

At the Liberty Convention, Werthmann used many of her standard talking points. She discussed how the Third Reich promoted equality for women, which she said undermined the family. She warned that the national healthcare system instituted by Hitler decimated a thriving Austrian one. She compared that dynamic to what she said will happen under national healthcare reform in America. She claimed President Obama established a “snitch program patterned after the Gestapo.”²⁷

She also told a bizarre story that linked Soviet communism during the Cold War to current issues of immigration. She claimed she attended the summit held in 1985 between President Ronald Reagan and Premier Mikhail Gorbachev in Geneva, Switzerland. Werthmann claimed she infiltrated the peace movement at the summit. She claimed she met members of the German Communist Party who had a private meeting scheduled with Gorbachev. These women, according to Werthmann, said the Communist Party’s plan was to take over Latin American countries and establish a beachhead in Mexico to undermine America. Werthmann said she came to the conclusion that pro-immigration forces were part of this communist plot. She claimed one of the German women told her everything hinged on who was president, saying it would most likely culminate in 2008.²⁸

As she routinely does, she told attendees of the Liberty Convention that, when people fear the government, that’s tyranny. However, when the government fears the people, it means liberty. She said she had travelled all around the country and knew that thousands of patriots were working hard to take the country back.²⁹

The events for the Montana Family Foundation aren’t the first time she’s teamed up with Focus on the Family. At a South Dakota presentation for that state’s Focus on the Family affiliate, she said that welfare became a “huge apparatus” under Hitler, where everyone had access to subsidized housing, food stamps, and other benefits. “That’s called socialism,” she told the

crowd. She said that President Obama's remarks about "spreading the wealth" during his campaign were a sign that America was drifting towards Nazism and socialism.³⁰

Werthmann and the Tea Parties

Her comparisons of America under President Obama and Austria under Hitler have made her a favorite on the Tea Party speaking circuit over the past few years. She's been featured at Tea Party rallies in her home state and was the keynote speaker at the 2010 South Dakota Tea Party Summit. A recap of the event stated she described "the parallels between the step by step loss of freedom in Austria and developments that have been in motion in the United States for years." She's even been featured at Tea Party rallies on the East Coast, including in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.³¹

At one such New Jersey event in June 2011, Werthmann stuck mostly to her normal script, but did add a few new things. She talked about how Hitler was a great orator, adding "we've heard that here, too, haven't we." As a youth in Austria, she said she was part of the Hitler Youth, because it was compulsory. She discussed how, under Hitler, schools engaged in "political indoctrination," promoted single teen mothers, and "drove a wedge" between children and parents. Throughout her remarks, she ended segments by saying, "That's socialism." She told attendees they needed to "take our country back as we know it" by regaining control of the US Senate and the White House.³² Toward the end of her speech, she echoed something she said in Missoula at the Liberty Convention, telling the Tea Partiers:

"When the people fear the government, that's tyranny, but when the government fears the people, that's you, the Tea Party. That's liberty. Keep your guns. Keep your guns, and buy more guns."³³

National and regional Tea Party luminaries embrace Werthmann. She's appeared on [Glenn Beck's](#) show on Fox News where she gave her standard stump speech and encouraged people to vote to take back the US House and US Senate. When Beck spoke in South Dakota in 2010, Werthmann said she was glad Beck also preached about the dangers of socialism in America. "I have been preaching for 30 years what socialism is all about. And now we are seeing it very clear," she said. "I remember when people always thought I was a wacko -- too far out, you know. But now, I'm being vindicated."³⁴

Werthmann has also appeared on the "Shad Olson Show." Shad Olson became a player in Tea Party circles after KOTA TV suspended him from his news anchor position for speaking at a 2010 Tea Party rally in South Dakota. Olson voluntarily resigned and started his "Shad Olson Show." By August 2010, he had helped start the South Dakota Tea Party Alliance.³⁵

On the "Shad Olson Show," Werthmann has compared what she views as favorable media coverage of President Obama to how Joseph Goebbels, the Third Reich Minister of Propaganda, ran the German media. "History is coming back," she warned. "To me, it's frightful, frightful seeing things coming back." On another program, Olson and Werthmann criticized comments

President Obama made regarding Israel. Olson said Obama was abandoning Israel and that it was important for America to keep Muslim countries in the region from annihilating the country. Werthmann chimed in that Arabs and the Third Reich worked together to kill Jews. “What Hitler couldn’t finish,” she said, “that is what Barack Obama is doing now.” Olson agreed, saying that both were focused on “exterminating the Jewish race.”³⁶

Conclusion

As Kitty Werthmann told the press in her home state, people have historically viewed her as a “wacko.” She’s claimed vindication by finding people, especially in the Tea Party Movement, who are open to any conspiracy theories that perpetuate their hatred and distrust of President Obama. Jeff Laszloffy and the Montana Family Foundation are promoting this same anti-government strain of thought and injecting a heavy dose of fear mongering about socialism supposedly taking over the country. Additionally, they are adding racist conspiracy theories about President Obama to the mix and elevating speakers who compare Obama to Adolph Hitler.

It would be bad enough if the Family Foundation was just putting this type of extremist propaganda out into the community. However, this week it is using Kitty Werthmann to raise money to support its work. Her last appearance in Montana was at an anti-government convention where she shared the podium with the likes of an anti-Semitic tax protestor and other extremists. Werthmann is the type of person to which the Family Foundation is hitching its cart.

The Family Foundation continues to gravitate towards and promote extreme right-wing conspiracies and the activists and organizations that promote them. If it continues to do this, its political legitimacy as the main mouthpiece for Montana’s Religious Right could diminish. Pat Robertson’s promotion of one-world-government conspiracy theories, and his use of anti-Semitic sources in doing so, played a part in the Christian Coalition of America’s diminishing power at the national level.³⁷ The Montana Family Foundation partnering with people like Werthmann and the “Birthers” could have a similar impact in Montana.

¹ Shad Olson Show, May 25, 2011; *Rapid City Journal*, Oct. 27, 2010.

² *Billings Gazette*, Feb. 2, 2004.

³ Rob Boston, *Close Encounters with the Religious Right*, Prometheus Books (2000), pp. 65-104.

⁴ *Great Falls Tribune*, April 15, 1992; *Missoulian*, Jan. 18, 1992; *Great Falls Tribune*, April 15, 1992. The Christian Coalition of Montana held a conference, titled “God’s Building an Army,” to launch the new organization in 1992. A number of leading Republicans spoke at the conference, including Attorney General Marc Racicot (who would become Montana Governor and later chairman of the Republican National Committee), State GOP Chairman Rick Hill (who would be elected to the U.S. House), and various state legislators. Ralph Reed of the national Christian Coalition was a featured speaker, and he urged the Montana group to operate secretly and deceptively as it mobilized for its political work in the state.

⁵ Rob Boston, *Close Encounters with the Religious Right*, Prometheus Books (2000), pp. 68-74 and 180-197.

⁶ Montana Human Rights Network, *Network News*, [October 2003](#); *Billings Gazette*, Feb. 2, 2004.

⁷ Montana Family Foundation, website, [“Mission Statement,”](#) Oct. 26, 2011.

⁸ *Billings Gazette*, Feb. 2, 2004; For an example of the Montana Family Foundation engaging in a local campaign, see: Montana Human Rights Network, *Network News*, [January 2011](#), p. 6.

⁹ Montana Human Rights Network, *Network News*, [November 2004](#), p. 6.

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- ¹⁰ Montana Family Foundation, e-mail, Oct. 6, 2009.
- ¹¹ Montana Family Foundation, "A Depraved Mind is a Sad Thing," Feb. 4, 2011.
- ¹² *Laurel Outlook*, June 13, 1999.
- ¹³ Montana Family Foundation, e-mail, July 24, 2009; Montana Family Foundation, "The March Toward Socialism," July 24, 2009.
- ¹⁴ For more on the Tea Party Movement and the "Birther" Conspiracy, please see: Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights, [Tea Party Nationalism](#), Fall 2010.
- ¹⁵ Montana Legislative Services, audio, hearing on House Bill 205, House State Administration Committee, Feb. 2, 2011.
- ¹⁶ Montana Family Foundation, "The Birth of a President," Jan. 26, 2011.
- ¹⁷ Missoula Patriots, e-mail, Oct. 14, 2011.
- ¹⁸ *Missoulian*, Jan. 23, 2010; *Missoula Independent*, Oct. 29, 2009.
- ¹⁹ For more on Celebrating Conservatism, please see: Montana Human Rights Network, *Network News*, [April 2010](#), p. 5; Montana Human Rights Network, *Network News*, [December 2009](#), p. 8.
- ²⁰ *Missoulian*, Jan. 23, 2010; *Missoula Independent*, Oct. 29, 2009; Montana Human Rights Network, archives, notes from Montana Tea Party State Convention, Feb. 18-19, 2011.
- ²¹ Montana Family Foundation, e-mail, Sept. 16, 2011.
- ²² *Worldnet Daily*, Sept. 22, 2009; *Dakota Voice*, Nov. 12, 2009.
- ²³ Montana Family Foundation, e-mail, Sept. 16, 2011.
- ²⁴ The Prophecy Club, "Freedom to Dictatorship in 5 Years," May 12, 2010; Eagle Forum, "Freedoms Can Disappear in a Hurry if We Aren't Careful," 2003.
- ²⁵ Anti-Defamation League, *Rage Grows in America* (2009), p. 11; *The Washington Independent*, Sept. 28, 2009; Think Progress, "Right-Wing Conference Tells Activists to Get Their Guns Ready for 'Bloody Battle' with Obama the Nazi," Sept. 28, 2009.
- ²⁶ For a recap of the Liberty Convention, please see: Montana Human Rights Network, *Network News*, [August 2010](#), p. 10.
- ²⁷ Montana Human Rights Network, archives, notes from Liberty Convention, May 21, 2010.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ *Dakota Voice*, Nov. 12, 2009.
- ³¹ *Dakota Voice*, Feb. 27, 2010; *Capital Journal*, Dec. 6, 2009; Shad Olson Show, June 29, 2011.
- ³² You Tube, "Let Freedom Ring June 28 2011 Kitty Werthmann," June 28, 2011.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Glenn Beck Show, Sept. 24, 2010; *Rapid City Journal*, Oct. 27, 2010.
- ³⁵ *Rapid City Journal*, May 12, 2010; *Rapid City Journal*, Aug. 14, 2010.
- ³⁶ Shad Olson Show, June 29, 2011; Shad Olson Show, May 25, 2011.
- ³⁷ For examples, see: Pat Robertson, *The New World Order*, Word Publishing (1991); Right-Wing Watch, ["The Perils of Wooing Pat Robertson,"](#) Nov. 7, 2007.