

## **PRESS RELEASE on Knowles Presence on Campus on Thursday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023**

March 20, 2023

Students, Staff, Faculty, and Alumni of Purdue University:

Commentator Michael Knowles has been invited to speak on campus by the Purdue University College Republicans, a registered student organization also supported by the Young America's Foundation. Knowles' commentating history has included sensational topics rooted in sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and racism. More recently, he has garnered national attention for his remarks at the March 4 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), wherein he stated: *"For the good of society ... transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely – the whole preposterous ideology, at every level."*

Free and open inquiry is part of the foundation of Purdue University's educational mission. Our beliefs and values are refined through the natural debate and deliberation that comes from freedom of expression and opposing viewpoints. When our beliefs and values are challenged, we have an opportunity to recommit to them. It is in our recommitment to our beliefs and values that we have an opportunity to denounce Knowles' message.

Purdue Employee Pride (PEP) openly and vigorously contests the ideas being put forth by Knowles. Knowles' rhetoric has pushed forward the dangerous implication that transgender and gender nonconforming individuals must be excluded from our society, or at worst entirely eradicated. The frustration, fear, and concern expressed by our transgender students, faculty, staff, alumni, community members, and allies is valid, especially considering the national 2023 legislative session wherein over 400 anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been introduced.

We further note that Knowles' comments directly conflict with Purdue's [Statement of Values](#) and strategic plan. One of Purdue's key Statement of Values is that *"We are a unified community that respects each other by embracing diversity, promoting inclusion, and encouraging freedom of thought and speech."* Yet, although we do embrace freedom of speech, there is also a fundamental conflict of values that arises in this situation because Purdue is serving as a venue for a speaker who historically has not embraced diversity, inclusion, or freedom of thought for others.

Consequently, we stand with students that have voiced concerns about their undergraduate student activity fees being used to fund such speakers that do not fully align with all of Purdue's values or that cannot speak respectfully to the entirety of the Purdue community. We encourage a policy to be adopted that would help select speakers who are invited to Purdue that truly support all of Purdue's values, especially when compensated by undergraduate student activity fees.

Knowles' comments align with a dangerous general escalation of anti-transgender rhetoric in this country- rhetoric that unnecessarily increases the risk of both mental and physical harm to transgender and gender nonconforming people. At particularly heightened risk of physical violence are Black transgender individuals, accounting for 59% of murders of transgender individuals in 2022. Black transgender women are most affected by this violence (63% of all recorded murders of transgender individuals since 2013). [Purdue's Next Moves](#), the university's continued strategic plan launched in 2021, includes the Equity Task Force to specifically invest into the Black Boilermaker experience. A part of investing in the Black Boilermaker experience is investing in Black transgender individuals, especially women. PEP urges the Equity Task Force to ensure there is

intentional support implemented for Black transgender and gender nonconforming students, faculty, and staff that is showcased in the forthcoming updates from the task force.

Today and in the many days to come, we affirm and stand with our Purdue transgender and gender nonconforming community. PEP is here to provide a safe space and resources for Purdue faculty, staff, and graduate students. Additionally, [CAPS](#), the [LGBTQ+ Center](#), and the [Trevor Project](#) are resources we urge students to use to find support, community, and belonging. We cannot do this alone, and we do not have to.

With pride and solidarity,  
**Purdue Employee Pride**

*Purdue Employee Pride (PEP) is an academic, community organization that offers a safe space for individuals who identify as lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, questioning, polyamorous, and any queer identity within the Purdue University community. Founded with the purpose of creating a supportive and inclusive environment, PEP aims to provide resources, advocacy spaces, events, mentoring, and support to all faculty, staff, and graduate employees who primarily identify with or who are questioning their gender identity and sexual orientation. Please contact us at [employeepride@purdue.edu](mailto:employeepride@purdue.edu).*