

Conservative Campus Crusader

Grant Strobl Wants to Challenge Liberal Groupthink on College Campuses

BY ANNALIES WINNY, PORTRAIT BY CHRISTOPHER LEAMAN

As Donald Trump, Steve Bannon, Wayne LaPierre, and Nigel Farage shuffled on and off the main stage at the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC) this past February, Grant Strobl was down the hall, straightening his tie for a panel discussion on how to galvanize young conservatives. At 21 years old, he's the national chairman of Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), a conservative youth movement that has its roots, like many other youth movements, in the Swinging 60s. Now close to 300 chapters strong, YAF aims to challenge what it calls the "liberal agenda" from its core breeding grounds: high school and college campuses. It has made Strobl an undeniable figurehead for millennial conservatism. He is no alt-right firebrand, but the University of Michigan junior is determined to make the conservative voice heard at the famously liberal institution he loves dearly. When UM backed off of an on-campus screening of the film *American Sniper* after students complained that the movie was anti-Muslim, he and others cried censorship and won. And when the university allowed students to choose their own pronouns, he protested by re-labeling himself too: as His Majesty. I talked with Strobl about becoming an outspoken member of his community and the state of conservative youth activism in America.

VICE: What's your story as an activist?

Grant Strobl: In high school, there were many instances where, instead of learning history, I was taught to apologize for America. I was determined to change how conservative ideas were represented, so I started a Young Americans for Freedom chapter, one of the first high school chapters in the country.

When deciding on a college, why did you choose University of Michigan?

As a school of more than 40,000 students, I was confident that there would be a diverse set of viewpoints to learn from. I then quickly found that conservative ideas were not being

represented fairly and in many cases *at all* in the classroom. I am yet to have a conservative professor, which should *not* matter but does matter in a world where personal viewpoints seep into the classroom.

On a panel at CPAC, you said: "Conservatives need to stop whining and start doing things."

What did you mean by that?

Conservatives are against the leftist culture of victimhood and thus should not succumb to it. Too often there are pundits and young leaders in the conservative movement who complain about the condition of our college campuses and have not actually advanced conservative ideas on campus themselves.

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What's your strategy?

Going to a school where you feel like the entire student body, faculty, and administration is against you makes it difficult for many students to gain the confidence needed to be an activist. Our activism trainings teach students the tactics they need to advance their ideas on campus.

How do you view your image as a public figure?

Being in the public eye is not easy; everything you say is under close scrutiny. It takes a while to build a thick skin for personal attacks, and when you feel the heat, you find out who your real friends are. But I can sleep every night knowing that I am making a difference for the better.

You're an advocate of free speech and debate, and conservative-news outlets like FOX News have interviewed you. What's your view on the liberal and conservative divide in media? Conservative-news outlets became necessary after an environment dominated by primarily left-of-center news outlets. The free market of ideas is important, and one of the vehicles for it is the news media.

What does conservative youth activism look like from the inside?

When we have our first meeting of the year, I always ask our new members why they are conservative. The answers I receive are humbling and range from families escaping Communist regimes to wanting to break the cycle of poverty in their family.

What mistakes have been made in the conservative movement?

Too often conservatives create a self-imposed ghetto by only reaching out to conservatives and not communicating with all of society. This is what makes YAF unique. We cast a wide net to reach as many students as possible.

How do you rate the Trump administration so far?

So far President Trump has been exceeding expectations through his efforts to reduce the regulatory state, reduce bureaucracy, and enforce the rule of law. These are all conservative policies—hopefully when he strays from them, conservatives will hold him accountable.

How do you define a "conservative"?

Someone who believes in individual liberty and preserving the conditions that secure it. This is why conservatives believe in free enterprise, limited government, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.

Is Trump a true conservative?

The jury is out. *WES*

