

# The Frederick News-Post

## Republican forum highlights free speech

Cameron Dodd

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Freedom of speech for U.S. conservatives is under attack. That was the overarching theme Tuesday evening at a forum at Flying Dog Brewery hosted by the Frederick County Republican Central Committee.

More than 20 area residents attended the forum, the second of such events organized by the committee, at the brewery. The event was intended to celebrate and help protect the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, said Brooke Winn, committee treasurer.

“Free speech should be a bipartisan issue,” Winn said. “We think people in both parties should appreciate that.”

Threats to freedom of speech are prevalent on college campuses, guest speaker Chandler Thornton said. Thornton was recently elected national chairman of the College Republican National Committee. He graduated from a master’s degree program at American University, which he described as one of the most left-wing universities, earlier this year.

“There has been a rise in intolerance of conservative speakers on college campus,” Thornton said.

As a student at American University, Thornton organized a speaker series that brought speakers from both major political parties to campus, he said. Among the speakers he helped bring to campus was former Vice President Dick Cheney.

People attending the speech stood and shouted during Cheney’s speech, said Thornton, who blames liberal students, off-campus organizations and paid protesters for disrupting the event.

“We’ve seen a lot of these incidents where students are shouting down speakers they disagree with, protesting events and causing property damage, such as at [the University of California at Berkeley],” Thornton said. In February, hundreds of students protested a scheduled UC Berkeley speech by Milo Yiannopoulos, a British conservative media personality known for being banned from Twitter after instigating online harassment against the actress Leslie Jones. The university ultimately canceled the speech.

“The point of college is to be challenged by new ideas,” Thornton said. “That’s how you decide what you believe in.”

The Supreme Court has strengthened free-speech protections, according to Walter Olson, a legal scholar with the Cato Institute who was in attendance Tuesday. Practical understanding of the freedom of speech, however, has changed, he said.

“Some people mistakenly think that hate speech is not protected, which is wrong,” Olson said. “This raises the feeling that speech someone finds insulting doesn’t belong in the marketplace of ideas.”

Restricting speech risks becoming more similar to countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom which have tighter restrictions on speech and where citizens have been arrested in connection with their social media posts, Olson said.

“It’s easy to lose what we take for granted,” Olson said.

There should be no limit on the freedom of speech unless the rights of others are being restricted, Thornton said. He told the forum his organization fights for the rights of everyone to express their views freely.

“We stand for a respectful discourse,” Thornton said. “Everywhere on campus should be a free-speech zone.”