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The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) is a nonprofit civil rights organization founded in 1971 and located in Montgomery, Alabama. We are dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of our society. Using litigation, education and other forms of advocacy, we work toward the day when the ideals of equal justice and equal opportunity will be a reality.

The August mass shooting of six people worshipping at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wis., by Wade Michael Page, who was known to the SPLC since 2000 as a racist, neo-Nazi skinhead, is a grim reminder of the wanton violence that can be waged by members of extremist groups. We commend the Subcommittee for dedicating its resources to investigating this crucial topic.

The SPLC's Intelligence Project, which I direct, monitors hate groups and other extremists throughout the United States and exposes their activities to law enforcement agencies, the media and the public. We publish our investigative findings online, on our Hatewatch blog, and in the *Intelligence Report*, our award-winning quarterly journal that is distributed to more than 55,000 law enforcement officers. The SPLC is also known for our civil lawsuits that hold hate groups accountable for murders and other violent acts committed by their members. These suits have financially crippled some of the country's most notorious hate groups, including Klan networks that terrorized the African-American community during and after the civil rights movemen

Our staff is recognized for its expertise on domestic extremism, and SPLC President J. Richard Cohen currently serves as an adviser to the Department of Homeland Security's Countering Violent Extremism Working Group. We train more than 6,000 law enforcement officers each year on the dangers of domestic terrorism and hate crimes from radical-right groups.

Each year, the SPLC releases a report – the "Year in Hate and Extremism" – that catalogs domestic hate groups and provides the public and law

enforcement with an analysis on the state of extremism within the United States. In the most recent report, released this past February, the SPLC found that the radical right grew explosively in 2011, the third such dramatic expansion in as many years. The growth was fueled by fears generated by economic dislocation; a proliferation of demonizing conspiracy theories; the changing racial and ethnic demographics in America; and the prospect of four more years under an African-American president who many on the far right view as an enemy to their country.

The number of hate groups counted by the SPLC last year reached a total of 1,018, up slightly from the year before but continuing a trend of significant growth that is now more than a decade old. The SPLC determines hate groups by their ideology, as expressed in their founding documents or by their leadership. All hate groups have beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics.

The 2011 expansion was the latest in a string of annual increases that started in 2000, when the SPLC documented 602 hate groups. An important factor in the subsequent rise was that year's announcement by the Census Bureau that the white population, due to shifting demographics brought on by Latino immigration and a growing non-white population in the U.S., would no longer be a majority by around 2050. Hate groups that had traditionally targeted African-Americans and/or Jews began to successfully exploit the issue of non-white immigration. Starting in 2008, President Obama's election and the weak economy also began to play a key role.

The most explosive growth on the radical right has come in the antigovernment "Patriot" movement — composed of conspiracy-minded groups that see the federal government as their primary enemy. Many Patriot groups are militias, heavily armed organizations that are increasingly paranoid about, and angry at, the federal government. This movement first emerged in 1994 — a response to what was seen as violent government repression of dissident groups at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, in 1992 and near Waco, Texas, in 1993, along with anger at gun control efforts and the Democratic Clinton Administration in general. It peaked in 1996, a year after the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed by antigovernment ideologue Timothy McVeigh. That year, the SPLC documented 858 groups. By the turn of the millennium, the Patriot movement was reduced to fewer than 150 relatively inactive groups.

The movement came roaring back beginning in late 2008, just as the economy began to falter with the subprime collapse and, more important, as President

Obama became the Democratic presidential nominee and, ultimately, the president-elect. Even as most of the nation cheered the election of the first black president that November, an angry backlash developed that included at least two plots by racist extremists to murder Obama. Many Americans, infused with populist fury over bank and auto bailouts and a feeling that they had lost their country, joined Patriot groups.

The swelling of the Patriot movement since that time has been extraordinary. The SPLC has documented a 755% growth in the number of Patriot groups since 2008 – from 149 groups that year, to 512 in 2009, to 824 in 2010, and, finally, to 1,274 by the end of 2011. Last year's total was more than 400 groups higher than the previous all-time high in 1996.

At the same time, a third strand of the radical right — what the SPLC designates as "nativist extremist" groups, meaning organizations that go beyond normal political activism to harass individuals they suspect of being undocumented immigrants — shrank dramatically. After five years of sustained growth, these vigilante groups plummeted by 42% last year, from 319 in 2010 to 184 in 2011. The decrease appears to be partly a product of negative publicity and internecine quarrels. But perhaps most important is the co-optation of the immigration issue by state legislatures around the country that passed draconian nativist laws like Arizona's S.B. 1070 and Alabama's H.B. 56. In many ways, the nativist movement achieved its goals of increasing anti-immigrant sentiment, which propelled the passage of harsh anti-immigrant legislation at the state level.

It's clear that other kinds of radical activity, in particular domestic terrorist plots, are also on the rise. The shooting at the Sikh temple in Wisconsin in August was just the latest in a series of violent acts and criminal plots by extremists in recent months and years. Last November, the FBI arrested four members of a Georgia militia who were accused of various crimes in a wide-ranging plot to attack cities with the deadly ricin toxin and kill federal law enforcement and IRS officials. One of the plotters reportedly said, "The first ones that need to die are the ones in the federal buildings." Their concrete actions allegedly included attempting to purchase a briefcase-size bomb, casing two buildings for bombing, and trying to manufacture the deadly toxin.

In May, members of the American Front — a California-based militia-style white supremacist group — were arrested in Florida for planning acts of violence and preparing for "an inevitable race war." The leader of the group in Florida considers himself and other American Front members "as the protectors

of the white race." He has stated that his intention "during the race war is to kill Jews, immigrants, and other minorities."

In other recent plots since January 2011: A neo-Nazi headed for the Arizona border with a dozen homemade grenades that he reportedly intended to use on undocumented migrants; a white supremacist attempted to bomb a Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade in Spokane, Wash., an attack that was averted when police dismantled a sophisticated anti-personnel weapon; and a man who officials said had a long history of antigovernment activities was arrested outside a packed mosque in Dearborn, Mich., and charged with possessing explosives with unlawful intent.

The antigovernment "sovereign citizens" movement, whose ideology first developed in white supremacist groups, also has been revitalized in the past few years. Since the murders in 2010 of two West Memphis, Ark., police officers by two members of this movement, law enforcement officers from across the country have contacted the SPLC to report what one detective in Kentucky described as a "dramatic increase" in sovereign activity. Like militias, sovereign citizens are part of the larger Patriot movement. They believe that the federal government has no right to tax or regulate them and, as a result, often come into conflict with police and tax authorities. Just this past August, two more police officers, this time in Louisiana, were gunned down by members of this movement.

The FBI agrees that the sovereign citizens movement is a major problem. In September 2011, it issued a bulletin to law enforcement officials entitled "Sovereign Citizens: A Growing Domestic Threat to Law Enforcement" that describes the movement as "domestic terrorist." The bulletin notes that sovereigns have killed six law enforcement officers since 2000 and that Terry Nichols, convicted in the Oklahoma City bombing, was a sovereign. With the addition of the officers killed in Louisiana, the law enforcement toll now stands at eight since 2000.

The growth of radical-right groups is one explanation for the rash of non-Islamic domestic terrorism that most experts agree has plagued the country since the 2008 election of President Obama. Last December, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, an academic center associated with the Department of Homeland Security, issued a study based on a sampling of the SPLC's annual lists of hate groups between 1990 and 2008. It found that 21 percent of the hate groups had members who committed at least one violent act, while 9 percent had members who had

committed six or more violent crimes. The consortium also found that "far rightists" between 1990 and 2010 had been involved in more than 345 "homicide incidents" and had killed almost 50 law enforcement officials during the same two decades.

The SPLC has documented more than 100 such domestic terrorist plots and racist rampages since the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995.

In the context of rising domestic extremism and a massive growth in radical-right groups, hate crimes are also of critical importance. The shootings in Oak Creek, Wis., were likely an act of domestic terrorism, but they were also probably driven by the racist beliefs of the shooter and thus could be characterized as hate crimes. Though the FBI has reported annually for some time that there are approximately 7,000 hate crimes in the United States each year, two reports by the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) using National Crime Victimization Survey data show that number is far lower than the actual level of hate crime. The DOJ's June 2011 study found an annual average of 195,000 hate crime victimizations between 2003 and 2009. A 2005 study by the BJS, using the same survey methodology but examining hate crimes during the 2000-2003 period, found an average of 210,000 hate crime victimizations per year.

Certain populations have suffered more than others, most recently American Muslims or those perceived to be Muslim. As the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks neared last year, a second wave of anti-Muslim hatred swept the country. The SPLC investigated the phenomenon and found a small cadre of activists was exploiting Americans' fears of Islamic extremism, reaching a fever pitch in the protests against the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque." In the wake of this hysteria, anti-Muslim hate crimes were reported across the country. At the same time, protests were launched against mosques, and lawmakers in more than a dozen states introduced legislation, based on a completely unfounded fear, to ban the use of Islamic religious law, called Shariah, in the U.S. legal system. The overheated atmosphere generated by these events helped spur a 50% rise in the FBI's count of anti-Muslim hate crimes in 2010.

Though American Muslims have seen an increase in hate crimes against their community in the past few years, other populations have also been targeted after incendiary rhetoric has been used against them by radical-right groups. Hate crimes against Latinos skyrocketed in the mid-2000s as the Minuteman movement exploded across America's southwestern border. Heavily armed

men and women intent on rounding up undocumented migrants, and rightly called "vigilantes" by President George W. Bush, demonized immigrants and Latinos. That demonization could arguably be blamed for fueling higher levels of hate crimes against Latinos during that period. Much the same can be said of anti-LGBT rhetoric and anti-Semitic rhetoric in relation to hate crimes.

In May 2011, a scholarly study published in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* found that white Americans believe that progress in race relations since the 1950s has come at their expense and that bias against whites is more of a social problem in the last decade than bias against blacks. (This comes against the backdrop of the Census Bureau's prediction that non-Hispanic whites will lose their majority, falling to less than 50% of the population, by 2050.) These kinds of feelings will certainly continue to fuel the rise in radical-right extremism. And it seems certain that President Obama, if he is reelected, will continue to be a lightning rod for many on the radical right, a man who represents both the federal government and the fact that the racial make-up of the United States is changing. And that suggests that far-right extremism could get worse before it gets better. It is for this reason that domestic hate groups need to be watched vigilantly by federal law enforcement, and the issue of hate crimes needs to be a high priority.

We commend the committee for using its resources to investigate this very serious situation.