

Builders lead county political parties

By Taylor Forrest
Staff reporter

Both under the age of 22. Both still in hot-pursuit of a bachelor's degree, yet these two men are leading the charge for their political party in Cowley County.

Nathan Bales, chemistry senior, and Jay Buffum, business sophomore, each took it upon themselves to create campus organizations in which students could vocally and actively engage their peers in political discourse. Bales created the Southwestern Young College Democrats in the fall semester of 2015. Buffum, on the other hand, helped found the Southwestern College Republicans during the same semester. Although, this wasn't enough to appease their ambitious aspirations. Each of them was elected as county chair

for their respective parties in the last year as well.

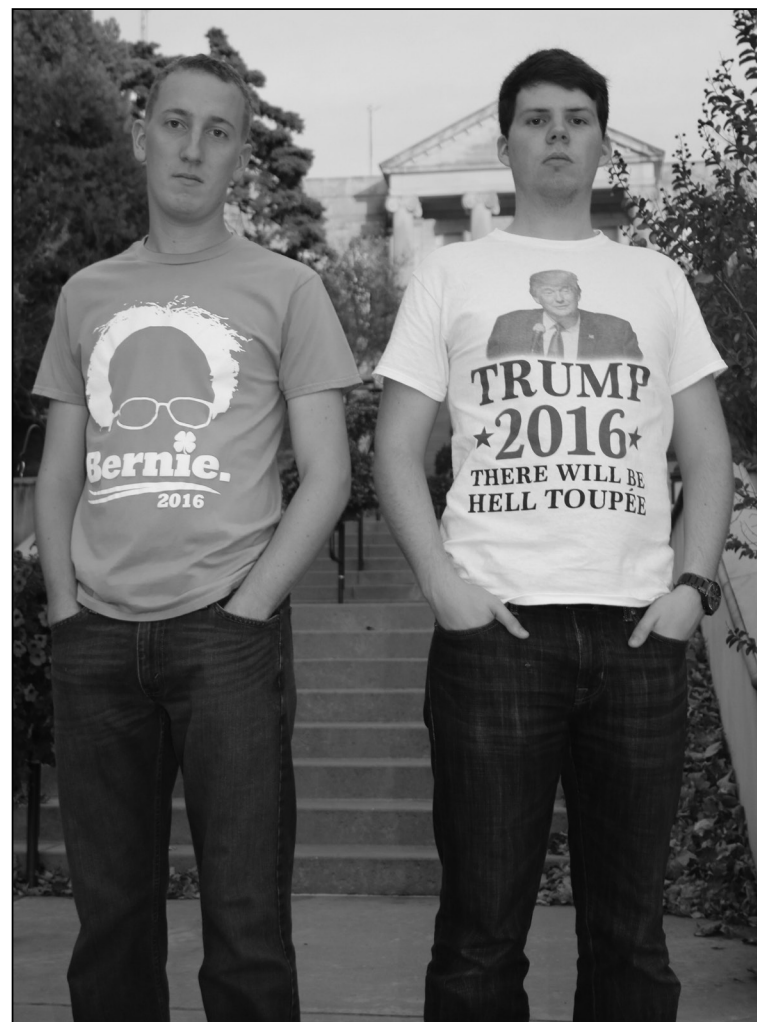
Jay Buffum

Buffum grew up in the Republican party, but only started becoming really active in the party in the past couple of years. What started out as volunteering for local and state campaigns quickly escalated into internships and real positions in campaigns.

Although, Buffum said that it was only after he helped found the Southwestern Republicans that opportunities really started to arise, "After founding the campus organization, opportunities became more and more frequent," said Buffum. "It was after that when I was hired as David Faletti's campaign strategist and joined Congressman Mike Pompeo's campaign as the



Nathan Bales, chemistry senior, shakes hands with Jay Buffum, business sophomore, at the bottom of the 77 Steps. Both students took initiative and started their own group on campus to help students engage with each other about political matters. (Taylor Forrest/Staff photographer)



Nathan Bales, chemistry senior, and Jay Buffum, business sophomore, are both becoming known in the world of politics. Bales is the Democratic County Chair while Buffum is the chair of the Cowley County Republicans Central Committee. (Taylor Forrest/Staff photographer)

head intern for Cowley County. On top of that, I headed up Kasha Kelley's write-in effort as her campaign manager."

Buffum was elected as the chair of the Cowley County Republican Central Committee on November 11 and immediately inherited numerous responsibilities. Buffum said that the party is now focusing on sending delegates to the state convention and filling the congressional seat of Mike Pompeo after he was nominated by president-elect, Donald Trump, as the next director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Buffum also said that he wants to reinvigorate the party and draw in younger people to the Republican base. This passion to grow the Republican party is what drew Buffum to run for County Chair.

"The main thing that really got me to consider this position was my strong love for my party on all levels, from state to national," said Buffum.

"I also wanted my party to grow and I knew that someone needed to step up at every single level in the Cowley County Republican Committee and push the party where it needed to be. And I thought to myself, I am that somebody. I wanted to take the time and effort to help our party grow"

Nathan Bales

In the midst of the 2016 presidential election, Bales felt like students deserved an outlet to discuss and engage with other students about political matters. It was this determination that prompted Bales to bring a branch of the Young College Democrats to Southwestern. Bales sought out a sponsor and advertised events and then simply waited to see who would show up.

While he initially encountered interest in the first few months, Bales said the excitement slowly tapered off after a few months. Despite having about five or six active members of the Southwestern Young College Democrats, the group eventually disbanded.

This bump in the road didn't dampen Bales' spirits, and after the group disbanded, he focused most of his attention on the Kansas Young Democrats and on the county and state Democratic party. Bales also attended the Democratic National Convention as a Kansas delegate in July 2016.

Bales was also elected as Democratic County Chair in July as well. Bales said that he was nominated by one of his peers for the position, but that he was ready for the greater responsibility,

"I had specific things that I was wanting to do for the county.

For example, I wanted to draw in greater numbers for the party and register people to vote," said Bales. "I wanted to have more of a leadership role and to achieve my priorities through the democratic platform"

Bales said from day one, his largest role as County Chair was to be volunteer No. 1 during the election, now that it has concluded, he is focused on recruiting new Democrats. He also said that he hopes to bring a better perspective to voters in Cowley County. Despite being on opposite sides of the aisle, Bales and Buffum both acknowledge that it is imperative that the Republican and Democratic party not resort to demonizing one another.

While they don't line up ideologically, these two energetic and determined individuals hold a lot in common. Not only are they both County Chairs and very active in their parties, but they both also have similar personal aspirations. Both Bales and Buffum said that they want to run for public office in the future, although they are satisfied with their current trajectory for the moment.

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