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By IKE MGBATOGU

Contributing Writer

COLUMBUS – The Ohio State University is a sprawling institution of nearly 50,000 students. And it is a “place” for a lot of people and a lot of things.

But “hate” is not one of them.

That was the message sent loud and clear by the university involving its recent effort to address the problem of hate and intolerance on campus. The effort was implemented under the theme

“No Place for Hate.”

While efforts against ‘hate’ is not novel for the university, it picked up intensity after the Feb. 26 killing of an unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida by a 28-year old neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman who is claiming that he acted in self-defense under that state’s “Stand Your Ground” law.

Apparently, for that reason, Zimmerman was not immediately arrested and charged with murder. The decision not to arrest Zimmerman stoked an outrage that sparked marches and rallies across the country that eventually led to his arrest and being charged with second degree murder.

Racial incidents, especially the kind involving violence, would ordinarily stoke spirited debate among students whose opinions often run the entire gamut. But the debate over Trayvon shooting on OSU campus was particularly fuelled by the April 5 incident involving someone spray-painting “Long Live Zimmerman” on the walls of the Frank W. Hale Jr. Black Cultural Center at The Ohio State University.

While that incident simmered, a rash of racially-charged incidents, including swastikas and racial slurs were found on a mural of President Barack Obama located at Weinland Park. Also, religious and racial slurs were discovered in a dormitory room and on a trash can near the Ohio Union student center.

That was when OSU President E. Gordon Gee decided it was time to take action.

With help from U.S. District Judge Algenon Marbley, who is also a university trustee, he formed the “No Place for Hate” task force to address the rising tide of ‘hateful’ indulgencies on campus. The panel of 31 students, faculties and others was chaired by Javaune Adams-Gaston, vice president of Student Life and Valerie Lee, vice provost for Diversity and Inclusion.

“We want to be a leader, not a follower,” said Gee, who last week received the panel’s report containing 24 recommendations for how to promote racial tolerance and inclusion on campus.

The panel’s recommendations, which fall into three main categories – diversity awareness, identity-based harassment, and diversity and inclusion – called for addressing short and long terms goals, to be accomplished within one year and two to five years, respectively, starting with establishing a student helpline to handle the eruption of racial incidents on campus.

A director at the Hale Center Larry Williamson applauded the idea.

“A lot of times when things happen, you don’t have a place that you feel that you can go, and the helpline and hate crime alerts were put in place to make sure the students, faculty and staff have something tangible that they can actually dialogue with and try to get some action,” said Williamson.

Also on the panel’s list of recommendation is the need to create five committees to address parts of the overall goal of this endeavor, which according to Adams-Gaston, “is to ensure that the university continues to expand in its engagement and its breadth of inclusion, and the sense of welcoming, and the sense of voice for all individuals in the community.”

That need for achieving a “sense of voice” was precisely the moxie that galvanized students into action which was instrumental in the panel’s work, including marches and protests that initially helped veer the university into action.

Gee praised the positive attitude of the students and all involved in this orb.

“Having served as a university president for more than three decades, I will say that never before have I seen a more constructive, positive and forward-thinking response to something that could all-too easily divide a campus community,” he said.

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