

Bush speech here draws 300 protesters

Tuesday, March 21, 2006

Michael Sangiacomo

Plain Dealer Reporter

As President Bush addressed the City Club in the Renaissance Hotel on Monday, about 300 people stood outside in the cold to protest the president and his administration.

Singing, chanting and carrying signs that read "Bush Step Down" and "Leave No Billionaire Behind," some protesters simply stood, while others marched. No problems arose.

A Cleveland police officer asked a protester to put away a sign displaying a vulgar term for sexual intercourse. The protester hid the word, which satisfied the police.

Another protester, M.J. Muser, 51, of Cleveland, said the Bush administration is offended by the word but has "no problem with Iraqi children being killed and our own soldiers dying." Muser's own sign read, "Wake Up and Smell The Fascism."

Rich Matanowitsch, 46, of Wickliffe, carried a battered sign that read "2,318 soldiers dead," a number he said he updated hours before the protest.

"I keep having to change the number," he said. "When I started carrying this sign at the Republican National Convention, it read 971."

Many of the people present said they came on their own, while others were members of groups such as the Northeast Ohio Anti-War Coalition, Peace Action and World Can't Wait: Drive Out The Bush Regime.

Four Cleveland Heights High School students left school to protest.

"I was in middle school when I started protesting," said B. Jenkins, 16, a senior. "We went to the first two periods, then cut to come here. We will go back for the last periods of the day. We just felt that it was important for us to be here."

Four Bush supporters stood in a corner of Public Square with signs that included "Democracy Isn't For Sissies" and "Grow Up, Hippies." Protesters shouted: "Yay for hippies. Peace, love and flowers, that's right."

Mare Leber, 56, of Akron said her group was there to support the administration and its policies.

"We represent people who could not be here today because they are working," Leber said.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:

msangiacomo@plaind.com, 216-999-4890