

Wal-Mart Gives Teen's Anti-Bush Poster To Police

Secret Service Comes Calling On Student Civics Student - Or An Enemy Of America?

By Matthew Rothschild

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After a Wal-Mart employee turned in a high school student's anti-Bush poster to the police, the Secret Service came calling.

Selina Jarvis is the chair of the social studies department at Currituck County High School in North Carolina, and she is not used to having the Secret Service question her or one of her students.

But that's what happened on September 20.

Jarvis had assigned her senior civics and economics class "to take photographs to illustrate their rights in the Bill of Rights," she says. One student "had taken a photo of George Bush out of a magazine and tacked the picture to a wall with a red thumb tack through his head. Then he made a thumb's-down sign with his own hand next to the President's picture, and he had a photo taken of that, and he pasted it on a poster."

According to Jarvis, the student, who remains

anonymous, was just doing his assignment, illustrating the right to dissent. But over at the Kitty Hawk Wal-Mart, where the student took his film to be developed, this right is evidently suspect.

An employee in that Wal-Mart photo department called the Kitty Hawk police on the student. And the Kitty Hawk police turned the matter over to the Secret Service. On Tuesday, September 20, the Secret Service came to Currituck High.

"At 1:35, the student came to me and told me that the Secret Service had taken his poster," Jarvis says. "I didn't believe him at first. But they had come into my room when I wasn't there and had taken his poster, which was in a stack with all the others."

She says the student was upset. "He was nervous, he was scared, and his parents were out of town on business," says Jarvis. She, too, had to talk to the Secret Service.

"Halfway through my afternoon class, the assistant principal got me out of class and took me to the office conference room," she says. "Two men from the Secret Service were there. They asked me what I knew about the student. I told them he was a great kid, that he was in the homecoming court, and that he'd never been in any trouble."

Then they got down to his poster.

"They asked me, didn't I think that it was suspicious," she recalls. "I said no, it was a Bill of Rights project!"

At the end of the meeting, they told her the incident "would be interpreted by the U.S. attorney, who would decide whether the student could be indicted," she says.

The student was not indicted, and the Secret Service did not pursue the case further.

"I blame Wal-Mart more than anybody," she says. "I was really disgusted with them. But everyone was using poor judgment, from Wal-Mart up to the Secret Service."

When contacted, an employee in the photo department at the Wal-Mart in Kitty Hawk said, "You have to call either the home office or the authorities to get any information about that."

Jacquie Young, a spokesperson for Wal-Mart at company headquarters, did not provide comment within a 24-hour period.

Sharon Davenport of the Kitty Hawk Police Department said, "We just handed it over" to the Secret Service. "No investigative report was filed." Jonathan Scherry, spokesman for the Secret Service in Washington, D.C., said, "We certainly respect artistic freedom, but we also have the responsibility to look into incidents when necessary. In this case, it was brought to our attention from a private citizen, a photo lab employee."

Jarvis uses one word to describe the whole incident: "ridiculous."

Matthew Rothschild is the editor of The Progressive.

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