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Salt Lake sounds off in protest and support

Utahns show their protest and support

By Heather May
and Christopher Smart
The Salt Lake Tribune



Maria, an undocumented immigrant, speaks on immigration issues during a rally at Liberty Park in Salt Lake City on Wednesday. (Francisco Kjolseth/The Salt Lake Tribune)

A crowd of thousands cheered Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson for calling President Bush a "dishonest, war-mongering, human-rights violating president" whose time in office would "rank as the worst presidency our nation has ever had to endure."

The group - including children and elderly and some hailing from throughout Utah - then marched to the federal building Wednesday to deliver a copy of a symbolic indictment against the president and Congress for abuse of power and failure to uphold the U.S. Constitution.

With their signs labeling Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld the "axis of evil," calling the Iraq war a "mission of lies" or comparing the invasion of Iraq after Sept. 11, 2001, to invading Mexico after Pearl Harbor, the estimated 1,500 to 4,000 protesters hoped their demonstration at the Salt Lake City-County Building sent a message about the reddest state in the country.

"If they [the Bush administration] lack support in Utah, my God they're in trouble," the Rev. Tom Goldsmith of the First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City told the lively gathering between protest songs and banner waving.

For those who didn't get enough, organizers held a "Rock Against Rumsfeld" concert at Pioneer Park in the evening. Between songs, Salt Lake City singer Colin Robison challenged Rumsfeld's Tuesday speech to the American Legion.

"Critics of the war were equated with Nazi sympathizers. How dare he?" Robison asked the crowd of over 300. "What about Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay? Who's the Nazi?"

A mother of an Iraqi war veteran on his second tour, Debbie Johnson, told the crowd they need not heed the "Orwellian double-speak" of the administration.

"This war is illegal. You don't have to support the war to support our troops."

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Earlier in the day, Anderson started going hoarse while speaking - often yelling - to the anti-Bush throng for 35 minutes. At times his message strayed from an anti-war theme to criticism of federal policies on illicit drugs, global warming, tax cuts and Hurricane Katrina.

Anti-war expressions were one of many messages



Hundreds of anti-Bush, anti-war protesters led by Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson and other political activists rally at Washington Square on Wednesday. (Ryan Galbraith/The Salt Lake Tribune)

during an eruption of free speech Wednesday in Salt Lake City. Seven

official rallies took place - most of them aimed at praising or pelting Rumsfeld, Rice and Bush's visit to Utah this week to speak to the American Legion national convention. The trio are on a campaign to bolster sagging public support for the three-year-old war in Iraq.

Hours after the anti-Bush demonstration, the Republican Party held a smaller counter rally with about 400 people in support of the president. But a far larger crowd - expected to be several thousand strong - was gathering late Wednesday to greet the president at the Utah Air National Guard Base.

At Liberty Park, uniformed military veterans and civilians spoke in support of the U.S. troops - and against Anderson - at a 300-strong Freedom Rally.

They clasped hands and sang "God Bless the USA." Yellow ribbons printed with the phrase "Support Our Troops," hung from shirt pockets, baseball caps and American flags.

Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff addressed the group saying: "I have to support the right of Rocky to be stupid. But I will not support his right to hurt people. What he is doing is hurting those people whose loved ones gave the ultimate sacrifice."

But protesters at the anti-Bush rally vehemently defended their patriotism.

"I love America as much as anybody else," said Brenda Durant, 52, who traveled to the protest from Vernal. "I support the troops and I want to bring them home alive."

Former Marine Capt. Eric Martineau was in his dress blues to protest the war in Iraq and the Bush administration policies. "I want to let Utah know that pre-emptive war is not LDS doctrine," he said, noting he is Mormon. "We'll look back at this [war] and see it as a turning point." Big-headed papier-maché likenesses of Bush, Rumsfeld and Rice - dressed in jailbird shirts and led through the crowd in handcuffs - added to the carnival atmosphere. A band played the flower-power anthem "Get Together."

Police, who said the crowd was peaceful and reported no arrests, estimated the gathering at 1,500 to 2,000. Rally organizers and reporters put the numbers at

double that, making Wednesday's rally bigger than last year's anti-Bush demonstration when the president visited to speak at a different veterans' conference.

Anderson has been attacked by the GOP in radio ads for headlining in the

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rally, but he didn't soft-pedal his condemnation of Bush. He led the crowd to chant, "Give us the truth," throughout his speech and lambasted the president, Congress and the media for leading the country into an "unjustified and illegal" war.

"The truth has been established. Iraq had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks on the United States," Anderson said. "There is no evidence of any operational ties between Iraq and al-Qaida. And there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. . . . We are fed lie after lie, our media reinforces those lies, and we are a nation that has been led to a tragic, illegal, unprovoked war."

Anderson, the two-term Democratic mayor whose name was chanted by demonstrators during his speech, had invited national

anti-war protester Cindy Sheehan to speak, but she canceled because of poor health.

At the federal building, protesters had to wait outside as organizers delivered the petition. The lingering pack, observed by five armed federal guards, chanted "No more war" and "We are the people."

Looking around the spectacle, Ruth Dunn, of Tooele, summed up the day: "This is what democracy looks like."

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Tribune reporter Jeremiah Stettler contributed to this story.

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