

# Massive police buildup in preparation for protests at Bush inauguration

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A massive police presence will greet the demonstrators who plan to come to Washington this Saturday to protest during George W. Bush's presidential inauguration ceremonies. Coordinated by Republican Party officials and law enforcement agencies, the well-publicized police buildup provides a preview of the undemocratic measures the Bush administration will use to suppress public dissent.

Police from 16 federal, state and local agencies will line the parade route. In addition, police in helicopters, sharpshooters on rooftops, and police on horseback will watch over the protests. Plainclothes officers will be circulating among the crowds.

For the first time in history, people participating in the protests as well as the inauguration in general must pass through checkpoints. All bags and purses will be searched and individuals frisked. Two stops of the capital city's subway system will be closed, along with large sections of the city's mall from the Washington Monument to the Capitol.

A dozen organizations representing a broad range of views—from those opposed to the violation of voting rights in Florida, to opponents of the death penalty and continued sanctions against Iraq, to the National Organization of Women—have obtained permits along the parade route. Representatives from several of these groups have denounced the police build up as an effort to restrict their freedom of expression.

“This is intentionally being done to try and scare people from coming,” said Louis Posner, chairman of VotersMarch.org, one of the groups that has obtained a permit to protest. “It took us forever to get a permit and now they are trying to scare people away,” he said.

The police buildup is the largest ever undertaken for a presidential inauguration. The number of police on duty will be more than twice the number as were present

when Bill Clinton took the oath of office in 1997. For the first time an inauguration has been declared a “national special security event,” which means that the US Secret Service is in overall charge of security arrangements and will direct the activities of the other police agencies involved.

No special security concerns have been cited to justify this high level of security other than the fact that the largest number of protesters are expected since the 1973 inauguration of Richard Nixon, which took place during the Vietnam War. Instead authorities have claimed the measures are necessary because of so-called violence during protests at the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle in late 1999 and the World Bank meeting in Washington DC last spring, as well as the national conventions of the Democratic Party in Los Angeles and Republican Party in Philadelphia last summer.

In most cases, the incidents of violence at the previous demonstrations were carried out by police against peaceful protesters and those practicing civil disobedience. Moreover, several organizations reported that police spies and provocateurs had infiltrated their groups in order to create a pretext for police action.

Last week the Secret Service invited the press to witness a mock attack on a motorcade designed to reconstruct the type of limousines that Bush and his entourage will be riding in during the inauguration parade. The protesters attacking the vehicles in the demonstration used rockets and automatic rifles.

The press and police have mounted a concerted campaign to depict the protesters as violent in order to justify a police crackdown. The same rationale was given for the conduct of police at the WTO protests as well as at the Democratic and Republican conventions. Police provoked and attacked demonstrators outside the

Democratic National Convention last August, and earlier at the Republican National Convention hundreds of peaceful protesters were arrested and many were held in prison for several weeks.

In preparation for Saturday's protests, the Secret Service has stated that it has plans in place for mass arrests, including the transportation of large numbers of people to detention and judicial centers.

Police will set up 16 checkpoints that all people attending the inauguration will have to pass through, where bags, signs and other materials will be inspected. Six of these checkpoints will be used for the 42,000 people with tickets given out by the Republican inauguration committee. Everyone else taking part in the protests or watching the inauguration will be required to pass through the other 10 checkpoints, creating the potential for a huge jam of people entering the event.

“This is a coordinated police-media campaign to make us out as outsiders,” said Shara Sloan, a staff organizer with the International Action Center, which is protesting for the freedom of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal and against militarism. Sloan continued, “They are definitely trying to scare people away, from expressing their right to dissent. They want a new day in Washington DC; they want four years without protest.”

Police have stated that only handmade signs no larger than 3 x 20 feet will be allowed. Signs can only be carried with wooden sticks no larger than 3/4 x 3/4 of an inch thick. Large puppets and people on stilts, a popular form of expression at recent protests, will not be allowed because police say they can be used to conceal weapons. Organizations will be prohibited from setting up platforms for speakers, even though they have been granted permits to protest.

Ben Balbey of the Justice Action Movement commented: “It is an attempt to intimidate people from coming with signs to the parade routes.... It is people's constitutional right to assembly and right to protest and this is being done to effectively limit that right.”

The number of police, agents and plainclothesmen that will be present is not being made public. What is known is that all 3,600 officers of the Washington DC Metropolitan Police Department will be on duty. In addition, about 1,250 officers from the surrounding states of Maryland and Virginia will be deputized and

brought in to assist. The DC police will line the entire 13-block parade route with officers spaced at arms reach apart.

The Secret Service will not say how many of its 2,800 agents and 1,100 uniformed officers will be on duty. All of the 1,200 Capitol Police and all 650 officers of the Park Service police will be activated. In addition, officers from the Capitol police, the Supreme Court police, the National Park police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms will be taking part.

In addition to the police presence, a number of right-wing organizations encouraged by the Republican Party are planning counter-demonstrations. The Loud Citizens, a group organized to oppose the recount effort in Florida, plans to protest and the Christian Defense Coalition will rally at the Supreme Court, opposite the rally organized by Al Sharpton.



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