

Police attack anti-Bush demonstrators in Portland

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Black-helmeted police in riot gear attacked protesters with batons, tear gas, rubber bullets, bean-bag rounds and “pepper balls” Thursday evening in Portland, Oregon. The police assault took place outside a downtown hotel where President Bush was holding a fundraiser.

The demonstrators had assembled to protest Bush’s environmental and economic policies and the administration’s war threat against Iraq. Chanting, “Drop Bush, Not Bombs,” and carrying signs that included, “It’s the Economy, Stupid,” a crowd of about 500 marched from a downtown park to the Hilton Hotel where the president was hosting a fundraiser for Republican Senator Gordon Smith.

Police ordered protesters to move from a barricaded area, and immediately declared a state of emergency. Attorney Alan Graph told KATU TV, “Without any provocation as far as I could see, they started pushing people, using their night sticks, spraying pepper spray indiscriminately into people’s faces.” Some of the protesters fell down, and police then began firing canisters of pepper spray into the crowd. Witnesses reported snipers perched on nearby rooftops.

Participants said the attack was unprovoked. A demonstrator posted the following account on an Indymedia.org message board: “Maybe the ones in front were warned to move, but I didn’t hear any warning. It had been a peaceful protest. Suddenly the police came forward spraying pepper spray. A man nearby with an infant in a backpack got hit real good. The baby’s face was so red I thought it had quit breathing.... From the other direction came cop cars through the crowd and rubber bullets were fired at those closest to the cars. I kept retreating but the cops kept spraying.”

Witnesses reported the protesters included seniors,

people in wheel chairs, children and babies in strollers. Activist Don Joughin told KATU that he told police he needed “to get out of there with his kids.” Joughlin says police pepper-sprayed his three children. “I wasn’t in the street, I wasn’t blocking traffic. I was engaging in peaceful protest,” he said.

Protester Mike Pullman told KATU, “I was struck actually seven times” by the “non-lethal” ammunition fired into the crowd. He showed reporters welts on his arms, wrist, leg and chest from the assault.

KPTV TV reported that several of their employees were pepper sprayed, including photographer Beth English. Her tape shows a police officer taking dead-on aim at her face. A Portland Police spokesman later commented, “We’re not here to control you ... you’re here to film. But if pepper spray is deployed, I’m sorry but you’re gonna be a part of that.”

Police reported five protesters were arrested and one police officer sustained injuries. Demonstrators marched on Portland City Hall Friday morning to protest the police attack. Mayor Vera Katz refused to meet with protesters, some of whom are calling for the resignation of Police Chief Mark Kroeker.

Earlier in the day, Bush had signed his new “Healthy Forests Initiative,” which he claims will help control forest fires. Environmentalists have criticized the plan, which will make it easier for timber companies to cut wood from wilderness lands.

Rob Moitoza, a Vietnam veteran, told Associated Press, “I don’t think any American boys’ lives are worth a barrel of oil. If [Bush] starts a war against Iraq, it will be to get re-elected. All he cares about is wealth and power.”



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