

Hundreds protest Trump appearance in Huntington, West Virginia

Naomi Spencer
7 August 2017

A campaign-style rally was held for President Donald Trump August 3 at Huntington, West Virginia's downtown arena. Local reports estimated the 9,000-seat arena was "nearly full," and an overflow crowd of supporters occupied a space immediately outside the doors, ringed by police.

Across the intersection, a separate area was filled with approximately 400 protesters, many of them members of Democratic Party-oriented groups. Among the crowd were a number of curious bystanders, unaffiliated individuals opposed to Trump, along with a variety of activist groups. Also present were anarchists, and counter-protesters sporting guns and signs declaring "socialism kills."

Signs defending Planned Parenthood, science funding, and the environment commingled with patriotic-themed and belligerently anti-Russian signs. Many of the protesters were repeating anti-Putin slogans, reflecting the impact of the Democratic Party's effort to portray Trump as a stooge of the Russian president.

Trump's appearance in Huntington marked the second time in as many weeks that the president has traveled to West Virginia. It is part of a series of conspicuous visits by high-profile politicians including Bernie Sanders over the past several months, as both the Democratic and Republican parties seek to posture as the defenders of the "white working class" of West Virginia and the wider Midwest industrial rust-belt.

Reporters for the *World Socialist Web Sites* spoke to a number of demonstrators about Trump's visit to Huntington.

Amanda Smythers, a 27-year-old graduate student of chemistry at Marshall University in Huntington, explained why she came to the protest. "I'm a scientist, and I think that the proposed cuts to science will hurt

the US for generations. We're at the brink of truly solving some of America's greatest medical problems."

Cuts to funding, she said, are "creating a much worse America for our children. I have a child, and I want my child to grow up and have clean air, clean water, and I want her to, no matter what her life choices are and who she wants to love, to feel like she's part of the United States."

"We have in West Virginia this huge economic decline," Amanda explained, "and I think it makes the citizens of West Virginia prey to some not-so-ethical political practices."

"You usually see the worst of people in the news, and I wouldn't be surprised if West Virginia weren't a bit of a joke, both nationally and internationally, and there are really great people in this state who are trying very hard to improve the lives of our citizens," she said.

"Even though there is some ignorance, West Virginians overall tend to be hardworking and neighborly people. That's one of the reasons I've stayed here." The large turnout for Bernie Sanders in the West Virginia primary, Amanda said, "shows that West Virginia isn't one-dimensional at all."

Rebecca, a resident of Huntington, said she was protesting over a large number of issues, not a single issue. "The way health care was handled," she said, "is not acceptable. There's separation of powers for a reason. The way Trump interacts with world leaders, not just Putin but all world leaders, is not acceptable and should not be normalized."

Stephanie, also a Huntington resident, said, "There is a lot of hate he's spreading and people are beginning to think it's acceptable to act on some of the things he's saying."

WSWS reporters asked Rebecca what she thought of

the Democratic Party's charges that Russia meddled in the 2016 election. She defended the Democrats and said that the Republicans would be equally vocal if a Democrat had benefited from Russian support.

Cautioning that the sanctions against Russia just approved by Congress were a step closer to war, WSWS reporters asked what Rebecca and Stephanie thought of the wars the US had launched all over the world. Rebecca stated that in countries where ISIS was active, "it is really tempting to say 'we're going to take a hard line and bomb them all,' but all you're doing is creating another generation of terrorists, from my viewpoint. All you're doing is creating another generation of orphaned children, who may grow up justifiably hating the United States because you just killed their family. We don't solve violence with violence, we really don't."

Rebecca and Stephanie also opposed the Trump administration's xenophobic policies on immigration and advocated accepting more Syrian refugees into the US. "Other than an accident of birth, that could have been you over there. There's nothing that makes us different than them, except that their country's being ripped apart."

An employee at Cabell-Huntington Hospital told WSWS reporters that she opposed the attempt to repeal the Affordable Care Act, which has expanded Medicaid reimbursements to hospitals and clinics serving primarily poor areas. "Cabell-Huntington Hospital is alive and well because of the Medicaid bridge. Unfortunately, we have a lot of opioid patients, and now they have insurance for the first time. A little something for the hospital is better than nothing, and especially for people who have no insurance."

Before the ACA, she explained, "In West Virginia, if you made more than \$7,000, you could not qualify for Medicaid." With the so-called "bridge" provided by the ACA to the state, "It's now up to \$24,000. Could you imagine that gap of people that now have some form of insurance? We are a level-2 trauma center. We see overdoses every single day." She added, "We saw those patients before, but we are getting reimbursed now for it."

"It would be devastating if we lost that," she said. "All these little hospitals all over in the counties would close up shop."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact