Former president Bush ignites protest with visit

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While over 200 protesters greeted George W. Bush’s arrival at the Shaw Conference Centre on Tuesday, a few University of Alberta students took the chance to make a similar statement down the side of one of campus’ most prominent buildings. The words “Aren’t Bush” hung visibly from the side of the Tory building’s upper facade throughout the day. And although the students who hung the sign were not directly affiliated with the groups that gathered at the Shaw, they too protested against the taxpayer expense resulting from Bush’s visit, and human rights violations they claim the former president is guilty of.

“One of the reasons we’re rallying against him and doing this initiative against him is that Canadian taxpayers are paying half a million dollars for the security for his four or five engagements in Calgary, Montreal, Edmonton, and Saskatoon,” said Sarmish Saffari, a political science PhD student. Not forgotten in the fiscal worries, Bush was also under fire yesterday from protesting groups such as the Winnipeg Coalition Against War and Racism and the Palestine Solidarity Network for his human rights record, predominantly for his government’s involvement in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, which began in 2004.

“We have a standard for war crimes and we apply it to some people. For example, we apply it to Augusto Pinochet from Chile, Omar al-Bashir from Sudan, or Vladimir Milosevic from Yugoslavia,” Saffari said. “We’re saying we should apply the same principle consistently, which would apply to anyone who commits war crimes under international law.”

Saffari backed up his claims with the accusations of various human rights organizations against Bush.

“By all accounts, if you look at the definition of war crime, he definitely fits that definition,” Saffari continued. “Amnesty International thinks he has committed war crimes, Human Rights Watch thinks he’s committed war crimes, Lawyers Against the War think he’s committed war crimes. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch singled out Abu Ghraib as an egregious human rights violations on the part of the Bush government in 2005, and Lawyers Against the War went so far as to ask the Canadian government to an open letter to the prime minister that Bush be barred from Canada, and have also requested the RCMP carry out a war crimes program to investigate Bush.”

Bush’s final visit will be in Montreal this afternoon, after stopping over Saskatoon on October 21.

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