

# W's Proposed Visit to Canada: Anti-Bush protests

Ex-president's visit to Saskatoon sparks opposition group

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Don't expect Saskatoon residents to arm themselves with shoes when they protest George W. Bush's appearance in the city next month: That's old hat.

Bush, the former U.S. president, speaks in Saskatoon Oct. 21 at TCU Place. A group of city residents has already organized a movement against one of the most divisive figures in recent history.

But there won't be a repeat of the infamous incident in Iraq where a furious local journalist threw a shoe at Bush during a news conference.

"That's definitely been mentioned," said Peter Garden, owner of Turning the Tide Bookstore. "The shoe collection hasn't started yet. Really, it's not that original."

Garden created a Facebook group organizing people for a protest during Bush's talk. With more than 400 members as of Thursday afternoon, the ironically titled George W. Bush Welcoming Committee will do anything but welcome Bush.

"I can't in good conscience sit by and not mobilize against a war criminal coming to town," said Garden.

A worldwide movement to put Bush on trial for war crimes emerged following the end of his second term earlier this year, he added.

With a trillion-dollar war in Iraq started on false pretences, the many thousands of civilian and military deaths, lack of due process for Guantanamo Bay detainees and the Abu Ghraib torture fiasco, Bush should be tried in international courts, said Garden.

"If there was any justice in this world, he'd land at the Saskatoon airport and be placed in handcuffs," he said.

Then there's the issue of what Bush's visit to Saskatoon will cost taxpayers.

"Are the people of Saskatoon willing to pay from our coffers for George W. Bush to come here?" said Garden.

"Why should we foot the bill to protect a war criminal?" he said.

The RCMP spent almost \$125,000 to protect Bush when he spoke in Calgary last spring, according to a Calgary Sun report.

About 2,600 service hours were used to protect the former president, who spent less than 24 hours in the city.

The RCMP is the main liaison with the U.S. Secret Service, said RCMP acting spokesperson Sgt. Darren Simons.

"We can't say we are or we aren't (providing security), but you can assume we will be involved in some way," said Simons.

He declined to provide the number of RCMP members involved with protecting Bush or the cost of the protection, citing security reasons.

Garden won't be attending Bush's talk. "You'd have to tie me up and force me to watch," he said. "He is a charismatic man. I think he's trying to bolster his public image and alter the historical record."

Former president Bill Clinton, who spoke in Saskatoon in 2006, would have received the same treatment had Garden been more organized.

"Had I been more together, I probably would have organized something against Bill Clinton," said Garden. "The sanctions in Iraq (during Clinton's terms) killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and he should be held accountable for that."

For a man who runs a bookstore filled with political ideas and philosophical tracts, free speech is not something Garden wants to ignore.

"I'm not going to stop him from speaking, but I'll voice my concerns," he said.

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