



# OaklandNorth

## Protests accompany President Obama's campaign visit to Oakland

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From Occupy Oakland activists and anti-war protestors to medical cannabis advocates and people using polar bear mascots to protest against oil drilling in the Arctic, President Barack Obama's fundraising stop in Oakland on Monday night drew vocal dissent and equally vocal support from different local groups.



Medical cannabis activists outside the Fox Theater

As Obama arrived at the Fox Theatre across the street for his campaign visit, the pale grey smoke of cannabis filled the air outside Oakland's Oakland University under the shadow of towering green flags, used to show



Anti-war protestors on Broadway street in Oakland during president Obama's visit.

local businesses' support for the protection of medical cannabis dispensaries. Oakland University was raided by federal agents in April, and the United States Attorney's Office recently filed a property forfeiture notice against Oakland's Harborside Health Center.

"Obama has the power to stop the raids on dispensaries in Oakland," said medical marijuana activist Martin Garrison. Garrison suffers a kidney condition for which he said he has been using medical cannabis. "My dispensary is a model dispensary. They test the cannabis before they sell it and if they get shut down I will have to buy from the street, which means it won't be tested. This medicine is the difference between bearable and unbearable."

While medical cannabis activists took much of the limelight, antiwar protestors carried large pictures of drone aircraft, satirical posters of Obama, and "hero" posters of Bradley Manning, a U.S. servicemen accused of allegedly leaking classified documents to

WikiLeaks. Meanwhile, “Frostyfoot,” a six-foot-tall Arctic polar bear mascot, was worn by protesters who oppose oil giant Shell’s drilling operations in the Arctic.

Patrick Sullivan, a media specialist with the San Francisco based Center for Biological Diversity, said there was no indication that Shell would be capable of preventing an environmental catastrophe in the Arctic. “They had an accident before their rig event left the harbor, so how are they going to fare in the Arctic?” Sullivan said. “We think the president needs to keep Shell from drilling in the Arctic.”

Others protested in support of the DREAM Act, which would provide residency to children of undocumented immigrants who have a record of good citizenship and are pursuing their educations. “No papers, no fear, the immigrants are marching in! Up up with education, down with deportations!” they chanted, as they advanced towards the center of the protests.

At a starting price of \$100 per ticket, Obama’s campaign event at the Fox was out of the price range of many of his supporters, but at the same time attracted a capacity crowd that took hours to fill the venue. As people gathered outside, many shared their expectations for the president’s speech and offered thoughts about what they would like Obama to know about Oakland.

Vietnam veteran Charles Chapman, who has played an active role as a campaign worker for the Democratic Party in California and Nevada since Obama’s election in 2008, said that during his campaign visit to Oakland, Obama should have embraced the poor people who got him elected first by ensuring that his campaign events would not exclude groups that formed the base of his 2008 campaign.

“When he first got elected, he was taking \$5 donations, what about those people? What about those poor people that got him elected?” Chapman asked. “He’s got to tap in not just the big deep pockets; he’s got to embrace the people that got him there first.”

Chapman, 63, said although some people are not happy with Obama’s efforts to fix the economy, his election was symbolic for minority groups in Oakland. “I have heard that the people are disillusioned about how the economy is or that he didn’t fix it fast enough, but he’s

the first African American to be elected, and that was spiritual for me,” Chapman said.

N’kola Traylor, a Democrat who could not get into the Fox Theatre, said she expected Obama to reaffirm his commitment to helping struggling communities. “I expect for him to tell us that he’s going to stay the course and to encourage others to stay the course. I want him to know that here in Oakland we need schools to stay open and that we need opportunities for our young people. Lakeview needs to stay open,” Traylor said. “We need education for our children so that they don’t give themselves up to a life of crime.”

Juliet Torome, a Kenyan who lives in Oakland, said she hoped Obama would speak about gun control in the aftermath of the Colorado theater shootings. “I’d like him to address the gun issue and detail the steps they will take after the Colorado tragedy,” Torome said. “We want to see what the government will do, not only here in Oakland where there are a lot of gun crimes, but in the nation the nation as a whole. In Oakland, we never know who has guns, and as parents we are worried because kids often fall victim to shootings.”

Documentary artist Jean Paul Marcelo, who painted the G8 and NATO summits in Chicago, had begun making an oil on canvas painting of the Fox Theatre when preparations for president Obama’s arrival began Sunday. He returned Monday as the crowd gathered and painted the theater as it lay surrounded by barricades, outside broadcast vans and men in black suits.

“We are becoming more aware that the two party system is an illusion of democracy,” Marcelo said. “I think the American public is beginning to understand that the only valid vote is that which they pay for. Oakland is one of the small pockets in America that is becoming aware of that.”

The day before the president’s arrival, local businesses and residents had already begun preparing for his visit.

Manuel Pacuno, who works for a small carpet installation company in El Cerrito, was one of the workers who installed the new carpet at the Fox Theater as it underwent renovations during recent years. On Monday, he said he was more excited about his work than the president’s visit. Nevertheless, said Pacuno, speaking outside of the barricades that had been set up

for the Obama visit, “I’m glad that he supports the DREAM Act. I know it’s hard for him to do so many of the things we expect, but he tried.”

Mario Benton, who runs a business opposite the Fox on Telegraph, said the president’s visit would bring much-needed attention to Oakland, a city that has become known for violent crime. “We are really excited about having Obama come here to the new Fox,” Benton said. “The visit means a lot for me as an African American business owner. I think that it will make a difference across Oakland and bring attention to our efforts to eradicate violence, homicides. Someone needs to show our youths that they can still move forward with their lives.” Benton’s business, Uptown Studios, works with at-risk kids in Oakland, giving them a chance to develop their skills in music, modeling, dance and acting.

Barthlomew Mustafa, a 22-year-old Oakland resident, said Obama’s stop in Oakland was not just a visit, but an opportunity to meet with local decision makers. “I just want Obama to recognize the historical significance of the city,” he said, “and to encourage the people he is meeting with to put Oakland back on the map as a city that can be rebuilt all over again.”