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Anti-war protesters spray paint Capitol building

By Jackie Kucinich

Anti-war protesters were allowed to spray paint on part of the west front steps of the United States Capitol building after police were ordered to break their security line by their leadership, two sources told The Hill.

According to the sources, police officers were livid when they were told to fall back by U.S. Capitol Police (USCP) Chief Phillip Morse and Deputy Chief Daniel Nichols. "They were the commanders on the scene," one source said, who requested anonymity. "It was disgusting."

After police ceded the stairs, located on the lower west front of the Capitol, the building was locked down, the source added.

A second source who witnessed the incident said that the police had the crowd stopped at Third Street, but were told to bring the police line in front of the Capitol.

Approximately 300 protesters were allowed to take the steps and began to spray paint "anarchist symbols" and phrase such as "Our capitol building" and "you can't stop us" around the area, the source said.

Morse responded to these claims in an e-mail Sunday afternoon explaining that the protesters were seeking confrontation with the police.

"While there were minor instances of spray painting of pavement by a splinter group of Anarchists who were seeking a confrontation with the police, their attempts to breach into secure areas and rush the doors of the Capitol were thwarted," Morse said. "The graffiti was easily removed by the dedicated [Architect of the Capitol] staff, some of whom responded on their day off to quickly clean the area."

He added, "It is the USCP's duty and responsibility to protect the Capitol complex, staff and public while allowing the public to exercise their First Amendment rights ... at the end of the day, both occurred without injury to protestors or officers."

Yet, the sources who talked to The Hill were furious that protesters were not stopped before reaching the Capitol.

"To get that close to the Capitol building, that is ridiculous," the second source said. "[Police] were told not to arrest anyone."

The second source added that police had to stand by and watch as protesters posed in front of their graffiti.

Tens of thousands of people rallied on the Mall and the Capitol complex Saturday in protest of the increased troop deployments and the war in Iraq.



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