

Student protests interrupt Reagan speech

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President Ronald Reagan's speech to a crowd of about 4000 on the Lawn was interrupted several times by members of the Lesbian and Gay Student Union chanting protests of the president's policies.

"During his first seven years in office, Ronald Reagan never once mentioned the word 'AIDS.' He didn't really care, I think. He only mentioned it a year ago when it came up among heterosexuals," LGSU President John Hackney said.

LGSU members carried signs with slogans such as "AIDS: The Reagan Vietnam — 44,071." One hung from the balcony in Old Cabell Hall during the president's speech.

Reagan responded to the chants that interrupted his speech by saying, "There have been a few voices raised here that illustrate, yes, how free America really is."

"I have a sneaking feeling that if they had the kind of government they wanted, they would not be able to do this," he added.

A shouting match between members of the LGSU and College Republicans developed after Reagan concluded his remarks and left the Rotunda.

"We want to believe in our freedom to protest in this way — that's why we did it," said Doug Chambers, chairman of the Student Council Lesbian and Gay Concerns Committee.

"They violated [Reagan's] constitutional right to free speech and violated the rights of the majority of people here who wanted to hear him," said Bernie MacNamee, president of the College Republicans.

"They had no right to come out here and disrupt" the president's speech, he added. "Ronald Reagan as an individual has some first amendment rights, too."

Hackney said, "I suppose there might have been some problem with people getting carried away — but we were determined to be heard."

"[Reagan] did set up a commission to look into AIDS, but he's not taking their advice about education. He didn't seem to want to condone [the homosexual] lifestyle," he added.

Also carrying signs protesting the president's visit were members of the Charlottesville Peace Center and the Charlottesville Latin American Support Center, who protested the Reagan administration's policies in Central America with slogans such as "Support the U.N. Not the Contras."

"We . . . object to the policies of the past eight years. We're here to show that not all of Charlottesville agrees with the causes that Reagan represents," said graduate student and protestor Matthew Crane.

"Although we are glad Reagan is leaving office, we believe his basic agenda, his basic regime — that of taxing the poor and giving privileges to the wealthy — will go on under [President-elect] Bush," he added.