

# Furious protest stops Tancredo's UNC speech

By JESSE JAMES DECONTO  
STAFF WRITER

CHAPEL HILL - UNC-CH police released pepper spray and threatened to use a Taser on student protesters Tuesday evening when a crowd disrupted a speech by former Colorado congressman Tom Tancredo opposing in-state tuition benefits to unauthorized immigrants.

Hundreds of protesters converged on Bingham Hall, shout-

ing profanities and accusations of racism while Tancredo and the student who introduced him tried to speak. Minutes into the speech, a protester pounded a window of the classroom until the glass shattered, prompting Tancredo to flee and campus police to shut down the event.

Tancredo was brought to campus by a UNC chapter of

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Youth for Western Civilization, a national organization of students who oppose mass immigration, multiculturalism and affirmative action.

Before the event, campus security removed two women who delayed Tancredo's speech by stretching a 12-foot banner across the front of the classroom. It read, "No dialogue with hate."

Police escorted the women into the hallway, amid more than 30 protesters who clashed with the officers trying to keep them out of the overcrowded classroom. After police released pepper spray and threatened the crowd with a Taser, the protesters gathered outside Bingham Hall.

Police spokesman Randy Young said the pepper spray was "broadcast" to clear the hallway. He said officers' use of force was under investigation by the department.

Inside the classroom, several student protesters screamed curses at Tancredo and Riley Matheson, president of the UNC-Chapel Hill chapter of Youth for Western Civilization.

"This is the free speech crowd, right?" Tancredo joked.

UNC-CH geography professor Alpha Cravey joined protesters in chanting the names of Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus.

But campus visitors and some faculty members in the capacity crowd of 150 urged the students to let Tancredo speak.

"We are the children of immigrants, and this concerns us," said junior Lizette Lopez, 22, vice president of the Carolina Hispanic Association. "So we would at least like to hear what he has to say if you want to hear what we have to say."

The protesters relented, and Tancredo began to speak, describing failed state and federal legislation aimed at providing in-state tuition benefits for undocumented immigrants.

Two women stretched out another banner, first along one of



Former congressman Tom Tancredo, shown here in 2007, made a hasty getaway from UNC on Tuesday night.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

the aisles and then right in front of Tancredo. Tancredo grabbed the middle of the banner and tried to pull it away from one of the girls. "You don't want to hear what I have to say because you don't agree with me," he said.

The sound of breaking glass from behind a window shade interrupted the tug-of-war.

Tancredo was escorted from the room by campus police.

About 200 protesters reconvened outside the building. "We shut him down; no racists in our town," they shouted. "Yes, racists, we will fight, we know where you sleep at night!"

Reached by phone after his departure, Tancredo said he had never been silenced by protesters, even at American University where 400 of them recently attended one of his speeches.

"We're very sorry that former Congressman Tancredo wasn't able to speak," Chancellor Holden Thorp said in a prepared statement. "We pride ourselves on being a place where all points of view can be expressed and heard, so I'm disappointed that didn't happen tonight. I think our Public Safety officers appropriately handled a difficult situation."

Police spokesman Randy Young said he couldn't recall student protesters shutting down another campus event.

"Fascists are fascists," Tancredo said. "Their actions were probably the best speech I could ever give. They are what's wrong with America today. ... When all you can do is yell epithets, that means you are intellectually bankrupt."

UNC graduate student Tyler Oakley, who had organized the protest, said he regretted the broken window but not silencing Tancredo. "He was not able to practice his hate speech," said Oakley. "You have to respect the right of people to assemble and collectively speak."

Lopez said she had mixed emotions about how the event ended.

"We were more interested in an intellectual conversation instead of a shouting match," she said. "Ironically, the people that are trying to get our voices heard silenced us."

Matheson, who formed UNC-YWC this year with seven other conservative students, said he knew Tancredo would be controversial but he never expected this kind of response.

"I didn't expect them to literally chase him out of the building," he said.

Staff writer Samuel Spies contributed to this report.

jesse.deconto@newsobserver.com or  
919-932-8760