

Monterey County demonstrators back Rep. Sam Farr's opposition to Syria strike

By WILL HOUSTON, Monterey Herald Correspondent

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While the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was approving the use of military force in Syria on Wednesday, protesters for peace gathered outside the office of Rep. Sam Farr in Salinas.

The demonstrators from the Peace Coalition of Monterey County were not there to reprimand Farr, but to thank him for his stance to oppose U.S. military intervention in Syria and to remind him to keep to his word when the time comes to vote.

Gary Karnes, co-chairman of the Peace Coalition, explained why they thought it necessary to gather to reinforce the message.

"It's important to let the public know that there is organized opposition now and to let them know what Sam's position is, which at the moment is concurrent with ours," Karnes said.

Farr, D-Carmel, proclaimed his stance on Syria on Saturday.

"I want to thank everyone who came to my office today in support of peace," Farr said in a written statement. "...Without the full support of our allies and a firm case that our national security is at risk, I cannot in good conscience vote now to commit our troops to war."

The Peace Coalition is comprised of a number of organizations and individuals who strive to promote non-violent resolutions in world conflicts and policies that will create a more peaceful world. Among the 30 protesters gathered outside the office on West Alisal Street were representatives from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Monterey Peace and Justice Center, the Monterey Peninsula Quakers and Veterans for Peace.

Joyce Vandevere, board president at the Monterey Peace and Justice Center in Seaside, said that non-violent alternatives may not be the fastest way to settle the Syrian conflict, but they are the right way.

"There are hundreds of factions in Syria," Vandevere said. "It's not going to be easy. It will be a long, slow and difficult process, but it is the way."

In response to Obama's red line on the use of chemical weapons, Vandevere explained that human lives are more important than political reputations.

"The business of saving face and looking good in the world is not as important as people's lives," she said.

One of the prominent figures at the protest was Phillip Butler, president of Veterans for Peace, Chapter 46, and former chairman on the organization's national board of directors.

Butler served as a pilot during the Vietnam War and was taken prisoner after his plane was shot down in 1965. After living in a POW camp for eight years, he was released and wanted to find out what had happened in the war during his captivity.

"I was very discouraged and angry to see what it had really been all about," Butler said. "As things began to develop, we started doing more and more of these kinds of interventions and wars and CIA murders and drone attacks. Over time, I became against war."

Disheartened by his findings, Butler traveled the country to promote peaceful resolution to conflicts and became heavily active in Veterans for Peace in 1991.

"I still consider myself to be warrior, but I've changed direction," Butler said. "I'm not a pacifist, but a warrior for peace and social justice."

The Peace Coalition will be holding a "No War on Syria" demonstration at Window on the Bay Park in Monterey on Monday to coincide with Congress returning to session to discuss military intervention.

"All wars end with a diplomatic agreement, they never end with combat," Butler said.

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