

Shame on Sen. Hatch for his 'nutcake' insult



BARB GUY

Orrin Hatch called you a nutcake.

OK, maybe he didn't. But he might have said it about your kid's civics teacher, your friend down the street, your dentist, or your 85-year-old uncle. He called me one. He said, "You're always going to have some nutcakes out there [protesting President Bush]."

I attended the nonviolent protest rally at Pioneer Park last Monday, the day President Bush spoke to the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention. The most amazing part of the local TV news coverage that evening was Sen. Hatch's odd little quip, given on the airport tarmac and broadcast on KSL Ch. 5.

In a voiceover, the reporter, John Daley, tells us that Hatch characterized the movement to protest the president's policies as

"small and sporadic," then Hatch says in a sound bite, "You're always going to have some nutcakes out there no matter what you do."

I went to the rally with my friend Lisa, who is no nutcake, if you're wondering. She is a bright and competent woman, the first face you see when you go to the emergency room. Sure, we saw a person in a chicken costume, some remarkable punk hairdos and all manner of intriguing people, but we also found thousands of regular people at the protest.

In our informal survey, there were ministers, teachers, a stockbroker, nurses and doctors, students, lawyers, a waitress, social workers, neighbors, musicians, "Mormons for Peace," little kids, a rabbi, pregnant moms, PhD candidates, welders, a mayor, my dog Allie's favorite veterinary technician, railroad workers, college professors, a Mary Kay lady, a radio executive, bureaucrats, technocrats and veterans from as long ago as World War II and as recently as last month.

Office workers on lunch hour listened to the speakers while they nibbled sandwiches out of paper bags. A heck of a lot of drivers of semi-trucks, cement mixers, dump trucks and delivery vans tooted their horns approvingly as they passed.

I think of Sen. Hatch as an intelligent man and an effective senator, if one with whom I rarely agree. Over his 29 years in the United States Senate, I've noticed that he's a pretty good compromiser, sometimes even working with Democrats on legislation that transcends party. I believe that his oft-mentioned friendship with Sen. Ted Kennedy is authentic.

That's why I was sad to hear him say, or imply, that Utahns who came out on Monday to protest President Bush's policies are nutcakes.

I do kind of like the word nutcake, which I think the senator must have made up on the spot. I might even use it myself in the future; it has some of the elements of "nut case" without being quite so cruel, while blending in an accusatory hint of "fruitcake."

The nuances of the newly coined word are not what rankle; it's the idea that a man with such tremendous experience would hand some of his sincerely concerned constituents such a flip insult. He could just as easily - and much more diplomatically - have said: "War is complicated. People of good will can disagree. Thank goodness that in America everyone has the right to freely speak their minds. I certainly support free speech and

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apparently a few thousand people are engaging in it today."

An August Gallup poll says 57 percent of Americans believe that the Iraq war has made us less safe from terrorism, not more so. The Associated Press recently released a poll saying that just 38 percent of Americans approve of Bush's handling of Iraq. I'm no math major, but that seems to leave 62 percent of the American people who do not approve. Are we all nutcakes? I think not.

Some people disagreed with the war from the get-go. They noticed that Osama bin Laden, the evil genius behind 9/11, and his cohorts were mostly Saudis, not Iraqis. They saw that Saddam Hussein, Iraq's sicko-dictator-torturer, never attacked America and posed no greater threat to us than the other sicko-dictator-torturers around the world whom we ignore.

They noticed Karl Rove and Donald Rumsfeld drawing a big circle around Osama and Saddam, trying to convince Americans that they're the same guy, in order to justify Bush's pre-existing obsession to take down Iraq.

Others backed the president, hoping he would succeed in the war. He's our commander in chief, they said, let's support him. But the war is now edging toward its third year, 1,871 Americans have died, and somewhere between 23,500 and 100,000 Iraqis have been killed -

we'll never know the number. At least 14,000 American service people have come home physically broken; the mental health toll can't be measured.

The astounding carnage can take the twinkle out of some of the president's most zealous supporters' eyes, making them grow edgy and forget their manners. Making them hurl a smug insult at good people who want peace.

Nutcakes, unite!

Barb Guy is a regular contributor to these pages.