

By Mead Gruver

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CHEYENNE, Wyo. – A decision by the University of Wyoming to name a new center for international students for former Vice President Dick Cheney is drawing criticism from people who say Cheney's support for the Iraq war and harsh interrogation techniques should disqualify him from the distinction.

The former vice president and wife Lynne are expected to attend Thursday's dedication of the new Cheney International Center on the Laramie campus.

Protesters plan to be there, too.

The center is funded in part with \$3.2 million the Cheneys donated to the university in several installments while he was vice president.

The university's decision to name the center after Cheney, a former Wyoming congressman, prompted a petition that collected more than 150 signatures. The petition said policies of the Bush administration were "very controversial" and the name will affect how people perceive the center.

Cheney's support for harsh interrogations — torture, some say — is one reason to oppose naming the center after him, said Suzanne Pelican, who began circulating the petition a year ago.

Pelican also criticized the Bush administration's "go it alone" strategy when several U.S. allies opposed the invasion of Iraq and didn't participate in the war.

"We feel that by naming it the Cheney International Center, that the programs and UW can't avoid being identified with that ideology and that approach to global politics that the Bush-Cheney administration championed," Pelican said Tuesday.

Pelican is an extension educator in the university's College of Agriculture who plans to peacefully protest during the dedication.

A phone message left with Cheney's assistant Lucy Tutwiler wasn't immediately returned.

A state program matched the Cheneys' \$3.2 million gift with \$3.2 million in state funding. The university spent \$3 million to renovate and expand an existing building for the center.

A total of \$3.4 million has been allocated for scholarships for students to study overseas.

Another Laramie resident opposed to the name is Nancy Sindelar, with the group Veterans For Peace.

"Mr. Cheney is not the best example of demonstrating how nations should get along with each other," said Sindelar, who is retired. "Putting his name on an international center is counterintuitive."

Sindelar's group opposes the Iraq war, and its Wyoming chapter has held weekly protests in Laramie since before the war began.

On Thursday, Sindelar plans to be part of a march to Prexy's Pasture, the campus quadrangle where the dedication ceremony will be held. Demonstrators don't plan to disrupt the ceremony but will be visible, she said.

University President Tom Buchanan defended the naming decision in a recent opinion piece in the Casper Star-Tribune, writing "tolerance and diversity cut many ways," and the new center will benefit students.

"Whether you are Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, Catholic or Protestant, gay or straight, white or black, you are welcome at the University of Wyoming. Should we subject potential donors and the purpose of their gift to public referendum? I think not," Buchanan wrote.

The international center shares a building with the university's student health center and will have offices for university staff members who work with international students.

Students also will be able to hang out there, said university spokeswoman Jessica Lowell.

"This is a place where international students can come and watch soccer if they want to. There's a lounge for them," Lowell said.