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War protesters who visited Santorum's office acquitted

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A Philadelphia judge yesterday **acquitted** 14 antiwar activists arrested in September when they tried to present a peace declaration at the Center City **office** of then-Sen. Rick Santorum.

Municipal Court Judge Marsha Neifeld announced the not-guilty verdicts after the nonjury trial, ruling that there was not sufficient evidence to prove the 14 committed criminal trespass in the Sept. 26 incident.

"I think this shows that opposition will be heard and that opposition [to the **war**] needs to continue," said Robert M. Smith, one of the 14 defendants. Smith is a veteran antiwar demonstrator from Swarthmore and longtime spokesman for the Brandywine Peace Community.

Smith said that five of the 14 represented themselves at trial and that the other nine were represented by Paul J. Hetznecker and Paul Messing, two Center City lawyers known for defending First Amendment-related criminal cases.

Messing said the 14 were arrested before they even had the chance to deliver their declaration of peace to **Santorum's office**. Four were arrested outside **Santorum's office** and others were in the lobby or trapped in an elevator that stopped when security personnel turned off the power.

Santorum's regional **office** was rented in One South Penn Square, a commercial building southeast of City Hall also known as the Widener Building. Although **Santorum's** officials and city prosecutors contended the building was private, Messing said it was effectively a public building because Santorum, the city district attorney, and some of the state appellate courts were there. Santorum, a Republican, was defeated in the November election.

In addition to Smith, the others **acquitted** yesterday were Beth Friedlan, Caren Wisniewski, Sylvia Metzler, Mary Jo McArthur, Bernadette Cronin-Geller, Melissa Elliott and Ronald Coburn, all of Philadelphia; Timothy Chadwick and Robert Daniels, both of Bethlehem, Pa.; Robin Lasersohn and Thomas Mullian, both of Media; Marjorie Van Cleef of Bryn Mawr; and Silvia Brandon-Perez of Tobyhanna, Pa.

The arrests capped a daylong antiwar march that began at Old First Reformed Church at Fourth and Race Streets, continued along Market Street, stopped at the federal building complex at Sixth Street, and circled City Hall before heading to the Widener Building.

The **protesters** had taken their declaration of peace to all members of Pennsylvania's congressional delegation from the Philadelphia area.

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