Thousands pay tribute to Va. Tech dead

by UPI

BLACKSBURG, Va. - Thousands gathered on the Virginia Tech campus to mourn the 32 students and staff members slain by a gunman in the worst slaughter at a U.S. school in history.

U.S. President George Bush played first mourner in chief at the ceremony at Cassell Coliseum just one day after a student armed with two handguns opened fire in a dorm and then at Norris Hall on the Blacksburg, Va., campus before turning a weapon on himself. Overflow seating was set up elsewhere on campus and private viewing was provided for family members of the victims.

"This is a day of mourning for the Virginia Tech community and it is a day of sadness for our entire nation. We come to express our sympathy," Bush said, adding that he and his wife came with "hearts full of sorrow."

"In this time of anguish I hope you know people all over this country are thinking about you and asking God to provide comfort for all who have been affected. ... It's impossible to make sense of such violence and suffering."

Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine, who cut short a two-week trade mission to Asia, called the day "bitter and sad."

"There are deep emotions that are called for by a tragedy such as this," Kaine said, praising the students for the face they portrayed to the world in the midst of their grief.

Dr. Zenobia L. Hikes, vice president for student affairs, opened the tribute, saying those killed can never be replaced.

University President Charles Steger said the community came together to grieve, hoping at the same time to wake from the nightmare. Steger said words cannot express the enormity of the loss, calling it "incomprehensible" and "senseless."

The gunman was identified as Cho Seung-hui, 23, a South Korean national majoring in English.

Copyright Â© 2007, by United Press International. All Rights Reserved.

Thousands pay tribute to Va. Tech dead by UPI