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Protesters March on Washington

By [JAKE SHERMAN](#)

WASHINGTON — Tens of thousands of demonstrators descended on Capitol Hill Saturday, protesting the expansion of government spending and illustrating the network of conservative activists that has emerged in opposition to President Barack Obama's policies.

Organizers said they believed people from all 50 states came for the "Taxpayer March on Washington." Crowds filled nearly every pocket of open space near the west lawn of the Capitol, many standing and listening without a view of the stage. They marched from Freedom Plaza, adjacent to the White House, as shouts of "U.S.A." echoed through downtown Washington and marchers dressed as colonials banged drums. Some people stayed stranded on Constitution Avenue as the program began near the Capitol, unable to find room to watch the speakers.

A spokesman for D.C. Fire and Emergency Medical Services estimated the crowd at "in excess of 75,000" people. Local and federal law enforcement authorities don't provide crowd estimates.

The gathering was largely peaceful. Speakers and demonstrators said they opposed Democratic plans to overhaul health care, as well as the bank bailouts of the past year. "It's not about health care, it's about Obama seizing our freedom," said one sign. Opposition to climate-change bills moving through Congress was also on display, with coal workers in hard-hat helmets lining the front of the stage during a speech about energy.

Former House Majority Leader Dick Armey, a Texas Republican, roused the crowd when he criticized Mr. Obama for big spending and rising deficits, suggesting that the president had violated his "commitment of fidelity to the United States Constitution." Much of the crowd then repeatedly chanted "Liar!"

"Isn't that wonderful?" Mr. Armey replied

Current Republican lawmakers also spoke, including Reps. Mike Pence (Ind.), Marsha Blackburn (Tenn.), Tom Price (Ga.) and Sen. Jim DeMint (S.C.).

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Waterloo!" Mr. DeMint said to a wave of roaring applause, referring to a widely quoted comment he made earlier this summer, professing hope that Mr. Obama failed in his quest for health care overhaul. "If we're able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo," Mr. DeMint told conservative activists on a conference call in July. "It will break him."

"While some are prepared to write the obituary on capitalism and the conservative movement, I believe we are on the verge of a great American awakening," Mr. Pence told the crowd. "And it will begin here and begin now and begin with you."

While Mr. Obama's critics were flooding the streets near the White House and Capitol, the president was in

Minnesota Saturday afternoon, speaking to a rally that police estimated to have drawn 15,000 people, to drum up support for his health-care plans. While Mr. Obama didn't directly acknowledge the protests back home, he did refer to his opponents. "Now, what we've also seen in these last few months is the same partisan spectacle that has left so many of you disappointed in Washington for so long," Mr. Obama said to applause. "Too many have used this opportunity to score short-term political points instead of working together to solve long-term challenges."

Some of the Washington marchers and featured speakers praised the outburst of South Carolina Republican Rep. Joe Wilson, who shouted "You Lie!" at Mr. Obama during the president's Wednesday night health-care address to Congress. One held a sign saying: "Joe Wilson Speaks for Me."

"I thank God for Congressman Wilson to have the courage to say 'You lie,'" William Greene, the executive director of the political action committee Right March, said in his speech to the crowd.

Hi-Caliber, a conservative hip-hop artist, took the stage with lyrics that called for "more Anne Coulter and less Bill Maher." The last line of a two-song set posed the question, "Where's your birth certificate," referring to widely circulated -- and debunked -- argument that Mr. Obama wasn't born in the U.S.

Those who marched and demonstrated said they did so for different reasons.

There was the Brown family of North Carolina and Florida. Jason, 31, his father Jimmy, 55, and Jason's young son Tucker were near the front of the march. Jason watched as his son bounded up and down on the street and said, "Obama's values, those aren't the values I was raised with."

Vance Elliott, 56, of Lincoln, Neb., had the top of the constitution tattooed to his right shoulder. Mr. Elliott said he flew from Nebraska and pitched a tent 30 miles from the Capitol, in Maryland. He said rain washed his tent away but he still managed to make the morning start of the march, Army rationed food strapped to his waist.

"We need to take our country back," Mr. Elliott said, blocks from the White House. "That's why I'm here."

Some, like 45-year-old Lee Hopkins of Houston, were in the military and feel a personal connection to public service. Mr. Hopkins, who was in Germany with the U.S. Army, recalled how Adolph Hitler destroyed that country. He said he sees shadows of that now in America.

Others, like David Stanley, a 34-year-old construction worker from Richmond, Va., came alone to protest one issue: high spending.

"People have had enough of paying too much," Mr. Stanley said.

While some Republican officeholders were at the rally, not everybody there called themselves Republicans. Theodore Korponai, a 28-year-old automotive technician from Charleston, S.C., said he didn't vote for Republican John McCain last year. "I won't vote for a lesser evil," he said.

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