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Tax Day Rallies Were Anything But 'Astroturf'

By [MICHELLE MALKIN](#) | Posted Friday, April 17, 2009 4:20 PM PT

Let's use liberal math to calculate attendance at last week's nationwide Tax Day Tea Party protests.

When left-wing activists make crowd estimates, the algorithm is: six figures = one million. An incomplete survey of newspaper accounts and organizer estimates pegged the Tea Party protest population at a minimum of 250,000. We can now, therefore, officially call it the Million Taxpayer March.

Or the Million Right-Wing Extremists March if you work for the Department of Homeland Security.

To George Soros-funded grievance professionals, 250,000 is an insignificant number. But unlike recent anti-war and pro-illegal-immigration rallies padded with union workers, college students and homeless people, the Tax Day Tea Party demonstrations featured small-business owners, working taxpayers and families.

This wasn't a weekend or holiday, mind you. A quarter-million people took time off in the middle of the workweek to raise their voices against reckless taxing and bipartisan spending.

Multimillionaire jet-setter Nancy Pelosi scoffed that the Tax Day Tea Party movement was nothing more than "Astroturf" politics to protect the "wealthiest people." Democratic Rep. Jan Schakowsky called the peaceable assemblies "despicable."

Other Tea Party-bashers grumbled that activists only showed up where Fox News cameras were. But tens of thousands more came out in rain, snow and cold — in Bozeman, Mont.; Eau Claire, Wis.; Carson City, Nev.; White Plains, N.Y.; Bend, Ore.; Lansing, Mich.; Hilo, Hawaii; Nashville, Tenn., and everywhere in between — with no media personalities or celebrities in sight.

If only the condescending cable TV anchors at CNN and MSNBC had paused from wallowing in gutter puns about tea bags, they might have reported an even more significant phenomenon: Tea Party protesters were as vocal in their criticism of Republicans as they were of Democrats.

In Salt Lake City, a crowd of 2,000 repeatedly booed GOP Sens. Orrin Hatch and Bob Bennett, who both supported the \$700 billion TARP bailout, and protested GOP Gov. Jon Huntsman's decision to accept \$1.6 billion in porky stimulus funds.

In Sacramento, Tea Party organizer Mark Meckler singled out California GOP Chair Ron Nehring for waffling on proposed \$16 billion tax hikes. The crowd of 5,000 greeted Nehring — who unsuccessfully tried to hitch his wagon to the Tea Party movement — with a roar of boos and catcalls.

Speaker after speaker lambasted Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger for abandoning fiscal-conservative principles. The loudest chant of the day: "Throw them out."

In Madison, Wis., GOP Rep. Paul Ryan — hyped as a conservative "rock star" — was well received. But I heard from staunch fiscal-conservative constituents who refused to be silent about Ryan's complicity in the rush to pass TARP last fall and his votes for the auto bailout and the Barney Frank-Nancy Pelosi AIG bonus-bashing stampede.

Milwaukee blogger Nick Schweitzer wrote: "He ought to be apologizing for his previous votes, not pretending he was being responsible the entire time, but I don't see one bit of regret for what he did previously."

Other Tea Party participants pointed out that Newt Gingrich, who jumped aboard the bandwagon, flip-flopped on TARP in the space of a week last September and made cause with Al Gore and Pelosi in ads calling for action on "climate change."

Before the Tea Party movement took them by surprise, Beltway strategists argued the GOP's traditional focus on taxes and spending had become outdated. The re-branders pitched their own ideas to replace the anti-tax-and-spend agenda and inspire new voters. They included Gingrich's "green conservatism," David Frum's proposal to raise carbon taxes and open-borders Republicans' plans for new forms of amnesty.

Eco-zealotry and in-state tuition discounts for illegal aliens didn't bring out thousands of first-time activists. Stay-at-home moms weren't up all night making signs that read "Tax me more, please!"

What resonated on Tax Day were nonpartisan calls to roll back pork, hold the line on taxing and spending, end the endless government bailouts and stop the congressional steamrollers that pushed through mountains of legislation without deliberation.

This is a teachable moment for GOP public-relations peddlers in Washington. While they search for the Holy Grail of Re-branding in tony salons and country club conferences, the agenda for 2010 is smacking them in the face — the three T's of Too Many Taxes, Trillions in Debt and Transparency.

The GOP path to reclaiming power lies with candidates who can make a credible case they'll support fiscal responsibility. That means acting on fiscal-conservative principles now, not paying lip service later.

The reckonable forces of the Tea Party movement didn't let opportunists escape accountability on Tax Day. The GOP shouldn't assume they'll get a pass on Election Day, either. As one of the most popular Tea Party signs read: "You can't fix stupid, but you can vote it out."

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