



Written by [Ed Hiserodt](#) on September 14, 2009

Media Shocked by D.C. Tea Party Turnout

The mainstream media were predicting that a few thousand people would attend the 9/12 tea party in Washington, D.C., protesting runaway government spending, deficits, and taxation. Organizers would have been extremely pleased with 30,000. How many showed up? According to the London Daily Mail, a million people attended the tea-party rally. But other media sources such as the Associated Press put the number at tens of thousands.



Your correspondent's napkin math would suggest more like 300,000 based on YouTube time lapse photos showing throngs of 20 to 25 abreast streaming from Freedom Square to the Capitol from 8 a.m. until 11:30 a.m.

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Actually most didn't get close to the Capitol as only the early birds made it east of the General Grant memorial with others surrounding the reflecting pool a dozen deep, and stretching west past 3rd Street NW toward the Washington monument.

Whatever the numbers, they only tell a fraction of the story. The spirit of America on display was overwhelming. When getting on a metro train that had turned back to Washington only one stop earlier, there was standing room only. We, as newcomers, were greeted by cheers and applause when we squeezed in. We sang America the Beautiful, the National Anthem, did the "USA" thing, and cheered whenever anyone shouted "Freedom!" To those of us that had traveled many miles to be on the metro early that morning, it was astounding to find the Washingtonians — who were just riding to do Saturday morning errands — had never even heard that there was going to be a rally at the Capitol. One might imagine the publicity that would have blanketed the mainstream media had this been an event in favor of (say) a "public option" for socialized health care.

Marchers were supposed to be organized by states and were to carry their state flags, but the crowds at Freedom Square were so large that the march commenced an hour or so early precluding any kind of organization. There just wasn't any room to stand still; it was as if we were toothpaste and the tube was being squeezed pushing the tea party protesters down Pennsylvania Avenue.

Different than any such demonstration within living memory was the spontaneity of the gathering. There were no famous politicians or movie or rock stars to draw a crowd, nor a crowd manufactured by organizers who supplied transportation, food, lodging, and/or stipends for the marchers. Participants were there at their own expense without even having registered or otherwise given any notice to the tiny, dedicated cadre of volunteer rally organizers that they were coming. Except for a few "Life and Liberty" signs, there were few machine printed posters with the originality of the verbiage being one of



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the main sources of marchers' good humor. Everyone was taking pictures of everyone else's signs. Except for one case where an alert demonstrator scooted a picture of Obama under the product of a police horse, the signs (so far as I was able to see) were in remarkable good taste with the "Take Our Country Back" theme overwhelming anti-Obama rhetoric by a large margin.

It is likely that never in the last 150 years has there ever been such a mass demonstration at the capitol where the participants were not asking for a federal handout, a law favorable to special interests, or some other sort of favoritism. Instead, the marchers were demanding that the government obey the Constitution and "just leave us alone." Many people would come up to a stranger and say such things as "I am so very glad you are here" and "Isn't it wonderful thing to be an American today?" While not sure about the reaction of others to these heartfelt comments, your correspondent had a very difficult time holding back the tears. In fact, recalling that feeling, I'm having the same difficulty right now.

Practicalities, however, beg the following questions:

- What will be the effect on current legislative proposals? It is extremely unlikely that the Obama administration or Democratic congressional leaders will pay any attention at all to protests as they are driven by a collectivist ideology immune to any consideration of public opinion. But how will the moderate Democrats and the few renegade Republicans be influenced? We often hear that a factor of 10 or 100 is given to the weight of each letter received by politicians — that there is assumed another 10 or 100 people have the same opinion but didn't bother to take the trouble to send the message. How do these politicians calculate the weight of constituents who in many cases spent hundreds of dollars to travel hundreds (or even thousands) of miles, stay in motels, pay for baby sitters for the kids at home, and cover all of the other expenses necessary for a working individual to uproot family activities in order to show their opposition to the proposed unconstitutional growth in the federal government? In many cases, of course, these constituents had to take time off from work on Friday (often using a vacation day for the purpose) because of the travel time involved to be to Washington for the rally on Saturday.
- Will this movement be a flash in the pan? Will it lead to political action? And, far more importantly, will it result in large numbers of Americans (including the tea-party participants) becoming better informed about the Constitution and the principles of limited government? Without such an awakening, many good Americans including tea-party participants could easily be misled by political leaders who claim to support lower taxes while working for big government. American voters have certainly been fooled in the past, but the better informed voters become, the more difficult it will be for pied pipers to once again lead them astray. And this, of course, is exactly why informed constitutionalists should make their voices heard within the tea-party movement and point as many tea-party participants (many of whom have never been involved before) in the right direction.

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