

NM protesters concerned about government spending

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) Retired teacher Yvonne Estrada gave up her bowling night to join thousands of other New Mexicans who turned out to voice their concerns about the economy and the federal government's spending habit.

Estrada, who said she is worried about where America is headed, joined a march along a busy Albuquerque street during rush hour Wednesday and carried a sign that read "I am not your ATM."

"It's like the country is headed toward something like Cuba and I'm afraid," she said. "They're spending too much and they just keep spending and spending. I wouldn't have any money in my checking account if I ran things the way Congress does."

The crowd of mostly middle-aged and retired residents were supported by the whistles and honks of passing motorists who appreciated the pink pig balloons and protest signs, including one that read "Honk if I'm paying your mortgage."

Shirley Fought, a 65-year-old retired real estate agent, said she has always been told to pull herself up by her bootstraps when times get tough.

"These banks could have done the same thing. Instead they just went to the storehouse that's handing out money," Fought said.

Residents in more than a dozen other New Mexico communities joined in the tea parties, which were modeled in the spirit of the original "taxation without representation" Boston Tea Party held in 1773.

There were rallies from Las Cruces and Artesia north to Santa Fe and Aztec.

"I was really disappointed in the Republicans over the last eight years," former Gov. Gary Johnson told a crowd on the Santa Fe Plaza, blaming President Bush and Congress for running up record deficits.

"If we were going to go to Iraq, we should have paid for that ... and not deficit spent," said Johnson, a Republican with Libertarian leanings who served two terms, from 1995 through 2002.

The boisterous Santa Fe crowd repeatedly booed and shouted "Go home" at another speaker, Democratic former state Sen. John Grubestic, who said the protesters were misdirected and tax cuts aren't the answer.

The problem, he said, is that Americans get too little for the taxes they do pay, and elected officials act with "complete lunacy." He cited the Legislature's decision last year to provide rebates to taxpayers even though they knew a budget shortfall was looming.

"We did it because it was an election year, and in the political mind a tax cut, no matter how small, helps to get people re-elected," he said.

Tom Gervais, 51, of Albuquerque said the tea party marked his first protest. He said he had to speak up against what he called "out-of-control" government spending.

"The government, they are drunk on spending the tax payers money ... and it goes back a long time. The Republicans under Bush spent like drunken sailors and then the Democrats had to outdo that. I'm disgusted with their behavior," said Gervais, a small business owner. "My children and grandchildren will never be able to pay off this debt."

Clovis business owner Tim Ashley, 45, said he organized his community's event because he wants Congress to get the message that unchecked spending will be a detriment to society.

"We are setting a course for our nation that won't be recoverable. We're turning away from capitalism and turning towards socialism," Ashley said.

Grandmother Jeanie Coates, 45, held onto her protest sign tightly during a rally in Hobbs as the wind kicked up.

"We have to let our voices be heard," she said. "It's always tax and spend, tax and spend. It's not just the current legislative and executive branch, it's the whole system. It needs an overhaul."

Protesters in Roswell were urged to bring a tea bag and a can of pork and beans to the rally, said organizer Jonathan Rothschild. The items will be donated to a food bank following the rally.

"The people coming out, it's Democrats, it's Independents, Republicans they're raising the taxes on everybody. ... It has nothing to do with party. It has to do with we the people," said Rothschild, 64.

In Albuquerque, New Mexico Voices for Children held a separate rally bringing attention to tax fairness and transparency.

Bill Jordan, policy director for the child advocacy group, said it's necessary that the federal government spend right now to shore up the economy. He also said he'd like to see the state implement a tax expenditure budget and fairly tax corporations that do business in New Mexico.

"Corporations from out of state who operate in New Mexico do not have to pay corporate tax. In New Mexico we have a loophole while New Mexico corporations pay their fair share," he said.

Associated Press writer Deborah Baker contributed to this report. National Tea Party Day: <http://www.teapartyday.com> Albuquerque Tea Party: www.albuquerque.teaparty.com Associated Press writer Deborah Baker in Santa Fe, N.M., contributed to this story.