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## Fonda, Sarandon join mass rally against Iraq war

By LARRY MARGASAK

WASHINGTON (AP) - Thousands of anti-war protesters, energized by fresh congressional skepticism about the war in Iraq, were demanding a withdrawal of U.S. troops in a demonstration Saturday featuring a handful of celebrities such as Susan Sarandon and Jane Fonda.

"We see many things that we feel helpless about. But this is like a united force. This is something I can do," said 59-year-old Barbara Struna of Brewster, Mass.

Struna, who runs an art gallery, said she made a two-day bus trip with her 17-year-old daughter, Anna, to the U.S. capital to represent what she said was middle America's opposition to President George W. Bush's war policy.

"My generation is the one that is going to have to pay for this," added the high school senior who said she knows as many as 20 friends who have been to Iraq.

She held a sign that said, "Heck of a job, Bushie," mocking Bush's words of encouragement to his disaster relief chief, Michael Brown, amid criticism of the government's immediate response to hurricane Katrina in the summer of 2005.

Other demonstrators on a clear, sunny day carried signs to the National Mall that said "Make hip-hop not War," "The surge is a lie," and "Clean water speaks louder than bombs."

United for Peace and Justice, a coalition group sponsoring the protest, said there has been intense interest in the rally since Bush announced he was sending 21,500 additional troops to Iraq. He termed the increase a "surge" aimed at quieting chaos in Baghdad, the Iraqi capital.

The group said its Internet site received more than five million hits this month, including 650,000 on Wednesday - the day leaders held a media briefing about the protest.

The rally was scheduled as congressional opposition to the war was building. The Senate is considering non-binding resolutions that would state opposition to Bush sending the extra forces to Iraq.

Frank Houde, 72, of Albany, N.Y., was a career air force pilot who served in Vietnam. Houde did not carry a sign, but said that his protest was on his hat, which said "Veterans for peace."

"The fact is war doesn't work. Iraq is not going to work. The war was started for reasons that turned out to be false," said the former pilot and navigator.

Houde, retired from the antique restoration business, said he was never upset by protests at home while he was in Vietnam.

"I knew most were protesting on principle," he said. "It was a democratic process."

Houde said he came to this protest to be counted and added, "You can't sit in the middle of the stink of war for a year and not be affected by it. We changed the balance of power in Congress."

He said that since the new Democratic Congress is now starting to listen to those opposing the war, the timing of the protest "isn't an accident."

Scheduled speakers in addition to Fonda and Sarandon included Danny Glover, Tim Robbins, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Kim Gandy, president of the National Organization for Women, and several members of Congress who oppose the war.

A small group of active-duty military troops planned to attend the protest. A Defence Department spokeswoman said members of the Armed Forces can speak out, subject to several restrictions. They must not do so in uniform, and they must make clear that they do not speak on behalf of their military unit, their service or the Defence Department, unless authorized to do so.

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