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War protest's message is of hope, Jackson says
Nearly 440 from area ride buses to D.C. rally

By Mary Kay Quinn

Beacon Journal staff writer

WASHINGTON - War protesters from Akron and across the nation gathered Saturday near the White House to send what the Rev. Jesse Jackson called a message of hope, not fear.

Jackson, founder of Operation PUSH and a past presidential candidate, urged the protesters to march on, change the congressional balance in 2006 and "take back" the White House in 2008.

Like so many others at the rally organized by United for Peace and Justice, Jackson urged an end to war, leading protesters in cheering "bring the troops home now."

The ANSWER Coalition, another organizer of the protest, said 200,000 people attended the rally and march. The National Park Service, which monitors activities on the Ellipse, no longer releases crowd estimates. Some media reported tens of thousands attended the event.

Nearly 440 people from Northeast Ohio took buses to the march. Two coaches were from Akron and one was from Kent.

Greg Coleridge of the American Friends Service Committee in Akron said the local response to the organized trips was the largest he has seen since a large anti-nuclear rally in 1982.

Many others drove or flew, including Lynn Williams of Akron, who helped carry one of dozens of cardboard "coffins" draped in American flags for the afternoon march.

The procession dubbed 1,000 Coffins calls attention to the count of more than 1,900 Americans who have died in the Iraq war, which started in March 2003.

Protesters are gaining support, said Margee Kimmel, 17, a graduate of Akron Digital Academy. "I think maybe this time, more and more people are looking and saying, 'Hey, they're making a lot more sense now,'" she said

Sheehan gets cheers

Cindy Sheehan, whose son Army Spc. Casey Sheehan was killed in Iraq last year, took the stage, took Jackson's hand and drew even louder cheers than he had received.

Sheehan, known for her protest outside President Bush's Texas ranch in August, said protesters must hold the government accountable for invading another country and allowing torture. "We'll be the checks and balances on this out-of-control, criminal government," Sheehan said.

Local protesters said they are tired of the war and the Bush administration.

"I believe in peace and not violent conflict," said Cat Givens of New Franklin. "This Iraq war was wrong in the beginning. It's obviously wrong now. It needs to end."

The Rev. John Beaty of Akron, a retired United Methodist pastor, said the war is "the most blatant example of the incompetence and the arrogance of the Bush administration."

Katrina response cited

He said he saw the response to Hurricane Katrina as another example, and many protesters made the same assertion.

Kathy O'Hara of Springfield, Va., was among several people who wore T-shirts that said "Make levees, not war," a reference to the belief that the Bush administration unwisely spent money on the war rather than protecting the Gulf Coast from flooding.

Bush was out of town Saturday, monitoring Hurricane Rita response efforts from Colorado and Texas.

Organizers said anti-war rallies were also held Saturday in London and other cities around the globe.

Separately, hundreds of opponents of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund marched toward the White House to join the war protesters.

Police were out in force and brought in reinforcements from New York.

War supporters rally

Meanwhile, about 150 supporters of Bush's policy in Iraq rallied at the U.S. Navy Memorial in Washington.

Kristinn Taylor, a spokesman for a coalition of groups supporting the war, said "you can't honestly separate" support for the war and support for the troops.

Among those in the coalition are Move America Forward, Free Republic and Protest Warrior.

As part of the war protests, United for Peace and Justice plans an interfaith service and grass-roots activities for today.

On Monday, activists plan to go to the White House and demand that U.S. troops be brought home.

Mary Kay Quinn can be reached at 330-996-3778 or at mkquinn@thebeaconjournal.com. The Associated Press contributed to this report.