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Protests today in Washington, DC, over health care reform

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AMY ROBACH, anchor:

A sea of people as far as the eye could see stretched from the Capitol to the White House today. Tens of thousands frustrated and angry over what they feel is too much big government in their lives and a president they don't trust in the White House. At the same time, President Obama was on the road far from those protests, trying to sell his message on health care in Minnesota. We have it all covered, and we begin on Capitol Hill with NBC's Tom Costello and today's massive rally.

Good evening, Tom.

TOM COSTELLO reporting:

Hi, Amy, good evening to you. Park police estimate the crowd at tens of thousands, our own people think hundreds of thousands of people were here to have a voice or to express their voice to Capitol Hill. So many people, DC police had to close down Pennsylvania Avenue for a time to accommodate everybody making their way to the National Mall. Their message: no to runaway government and no to government health care. They came by the tens of thousands, carrying a vast array of protest signs and claiming to represent every state in the union.

Group: (In unison) Here we are! Here we are!

Unidentified Man #1: Do you have any idea what it takes to get someone from Montana to come to DC?

COSTELLO: United in their anger at President Obama, Congress and a government they see as out of control.

Unidentified Man #2: Well, I'm tired of the communism that's in Washington, DC.

Unidentified Woman #1: We're not right-wing radicals, we are American people. We're just like everybody else out there and we have something to say.

Mr. JIM ANDERER: I stand before you an angry man.

COSTELLO: Jim Anderer came from New York, blaming President Obama's Chrysler bailout for losing his Jeep dealership.

Mr. ANDERER: Island Jeep was seized from me, stolen from me with no compensation whatsoever.

COSTELLO: Mark Catalano came from New Hampshire.

Mr. MARK CATALANO: Health care's broken. I'm an employer, I can't provide it to my employees. It's broken. It needs to be fixed. Fix it, don't screw it up any more than it is.

COSTELLO: Most of the crowd, made up of conservatives and independents with different agendas...

Unidentified Woman #2: We are losing our country.

Unidentified Woman #3: That's right.

Woman #2: We think the Muslims are moving in and taking over.

COSTELLO: ...but united in their distrust of big government and angry at billion and trillion-dollar bailouts and rising debt.

Unidentified Man #3: They're spending too much money we don't have. They're going to put future generations into debt they'll never get out of.

Ms. DENEEN BORELLI (Project Twenty One): We the people have had enough.

COSTELLO: This rally, organized by a collection of conservative and libertarian groups.

TEXT:

09.12.09 March on Washington

National Sponsor

FreedomWorks Foundation

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Mr. ROBERT LEVY (Cato Institute): Too much power, too little freedom. It is time to restore constitutional government.

COSTELLO: Almost all echoing a common theme.

Senator JIM DeMINT (Republican, South Carolina): We must stop this government takeover of health care.

COSTELLO: And coming after a summer of heated town hall meetings and Congressman Joe Wilson's outburst at President Obama during Wednesday's address to Congress.

Representative JOE WILSON: You lie!

COSTELLO: Among today's organizers, former House Majority Leader Dick Armey, now the chairman of conservative action group FreedomWorks.

Former Representative DICK ARMEY (FreedomWorks): I think if it's necessary, we'll come back next year at this time.

COSTELLO: A cross-section of American determined to be heard.

A handful of Republican lawmakers also here today, but the Republican leadership largely wasn't. They met with organizers on Thursday. But by and large, Amy, this was a grassroots reunion, if you will, or an organization that brought so many people here to Washington. Back to you.

ROBACH: Tom Costello, thank you.

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