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TOP STORY

BREAKING



Atlantic County protesters hope 'a little gesture' empowers others to resist Trump agenda

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Hannah Gettings, 25, of Mays Landing, holds up her sign during Operation Overpass: Undefeated Against Tyranny above the Atlantic City Expressway.

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HAMMONTON — While the point of protests is to effectively express opposition, they can also foster a sense of community, said demonstrators displaying pro-democracy messages on the 8th Street overpass of the Atlantic City Expressway on Sunday.

“A lot of people are looking for somewhere to go, and when you need hope like that, finding community with like-minded people is definitely a reassurance,” said Jasmine Johnson, founder of Fight Against Fascism Organization (FAFO), which promotes veteran protections and democratic values.

The demonstration was one of various coordinated efforts that took place Sunday along the East Coast, Johnson said. More than two dozen people took part in the Hammonton event.

The demonstration follows President Donald Trump’s passage of the so-called One Big Beautiful Bill into law Friday. The bill is characterized by tax breaks, spending cuts to affordable healthcare and food assistance programs, and increased investment in military, defense and deportation efforts, according to the Associated Press.

Protesters brought signs with messages in response to what FAFO’s website describes as unchecked executive overreach, cuts to federal departments and programs and attacks on migrant communities under the Trump administration.

Demonstrators traded in an afternoon on what would have been a nice beach day on a holiday weekend to overlook the expressway and show their message to the thousands of cars heading to and from popular shore points.

One of the goals of a protest is empowering others to join, Johnson said.

“If a little gesture of coming together and holding a sign can maybe make more people feel a little bit more encouraged to do similar actions in their neighborhood, then that’s what we would really like,” Johnson said.

Johnson said her fiancé, stepfather and great-grandfather are all veterans, and as a civilian she feels called upon to be a patriot.

“Patriotism doesn’t mean that you’re loud and proud and out on a boat getting drunk — I’m not saying that you can’t, that’s great — but being a patriotic individual means that you are helping your neighbor, you are making sure that your community is safe,” Johnson said.

Sharon Bybee, 46, Mays Landing, said the Hammonton display was her 41st protest since April 5.

“I need to do this for myself and my mental well-being, I need to do this for the people who can’t come out ... and I need to do this to raise awareness,” Bybee said.

Jose Rodriguez, 41, of Camden, a veteran, said political awareness is a democratic responsibility.

“I just want to show other vets, which is why I wear this,” Rodriguez said, gesturing to his uniform, “that we don’t have to follow along, that we can fight against this.”

Hannah Gettings, 25, of Mays Landing, said the “high visibility” is important for making sure protesters’ messages reach as many people as possible.

“Some people are like, ‘Oh, what’s the point?’ or ‘You’re not accomplishing anything,’” Gettings said. “But they’re trying to silence us at every turn, so we’re going to keep showing up, even if it feels like it’s pointless.”

Gettings held a handmade sign that read, “First they came for the immigrants,” a reference to an anti-Nazi quote from a German pastor that emphasizes the need to speak out against the suffering of others.

“Our message today specifically is resisting fascism, just the idea of rejecting the administration, trying to make things as hard for them as possible even if it feels like we’re outnumbered in the fight,” Gettings said.

Johnson worked with Jenifer Tofts, a representative for the Women’s March feminist organization, and Kimberly Greiser, who leads Atlantic County Indivisible, to organize the demonstration.

Tofts, 50, of Hammonton, said the isolation and anxiety she feels amid the current political climate is relieved by being with others.

“Getting together and basically forming a community of like-minded folks that don’t like what’s going on, that want some sort of (connection) to other like-minded folks, I feel that’s fun,” Tofts said.

Tofts grew up in a “liberal household,” and her father, Jeffrey Tofts, was the president of the Haddon Heights Democratic Club. Her family inspires her civic engagement, she said.

“I will go home and I will have a high from just hearing the honking, and I think a lot of these folks are going to go home and say to their friends, ‘Let’s do the next one,’ and ‘Let’s do this together,’” Tofts said.