

Event as planned for local protesters: Walz emphasizes safety

By Karrie Carlson, Daily Journal Media, June 14, 2025

The demonstration took place as planned on June 14, while the manhunt for an assassin was ongoing only 150 miles away.

Just before noon at Spies Riverfront Pavilion in Fergus Falls, people started to gather as the morning Farmers Market came to a close. The location would be one of almost 2,000 spots across the country recognizing a "national day of peaceful protest."

The "No Kings" protests, as they are called, unite those opposed to the current administration's policies. The theme is credited to the 50501 Movement, a national movement of everyday Americans who stand for democracy and are opposed to what they call the "authoritarian actions of the Trump administration."

The protests coincided with the Army's 250th anniversary celebration, set to include an expensive, lavish military parade. It also happens to be Trump's 79th birthday as well as Flag Day.

While the events themselves have been planned for some time, what took place in the early morning hours on June 14, took the state, and the nation, by surprise.

Minnesota state representative Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark, were shot and killed at their home. State Sen. John Hoffman and his wife, Yvette, were each shot multiple times and underwent surgery, Gov. Tim Walz said in a statement.

"We're cautiously optimistic they will survive this assassination attempt," he expressed about what he called an "act of targeted political violence."

While politicians across the country released statements condemning politically motivated acts such as this, those in Minnesota were told that all planned protests were canceled out of concern for safety.

Even with the warning, many who felt strongly about the movement gathered under the gray sky on Union Ave. with signs saying "We have no king" and other phrases in opposition to the current administration's actions.

Mark Hermes, Fergus Falls, said the violence in the Twin Cities didn't deter him from speaking his mind.

"I'm not going to let that stop me. It's too serious of a situation. My brother is a Vietnam Vet and his wife -- they live in Minneapolis and he was afraid to go (to the rally at the state capitol), but she's too afraid to go now."

Another local protester said her thoughts are with the families of those hurt in the early morning attacks. "What happened to the legislators today was terrible," said Dawn Saxton, Fergus Falls.

It didn't scare her enough to keep her from being part of the movement.

"I was going to come out anyway, because I was going to come no matter what. I just think there's so many reasons to do it. I already went to a rally in Alexandria and one in Morris."

Gov. Walz has ordered all Minnesota and U.S. flags at state buildings to fly at half-staff in honor of Hortman, who he said served Minnesotans with grace, compassion and tirelessness.

"Today Minnesota lost a great leader. A formidable public servant and a fixture of the state Capitol. Melissa Hortman woke up every day determined to make our state a better place."

Rep. Jeff Backer, R-Browns Valley, stated, "I am horrified by the evil attack that took place overnight, and heartbroken beyond words by the loss of Speaker-Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband Mark. My prayers are also with Senator John Hoffman and his wife Yvette as they recover from this horrific attack." Backer added, "This is unimaginably wrong and horrible."

Sen. Jordan Rasmusson, R-Fergus Falls, said in a statement, "The violence that unfolded is both shocking and tragic. As we wait for answers, may we hold each other close and pray for peace in our communities."

Even with fewer numbers than expected, those who turned out for the protest were glad to join together. Said Hermes, "It's a horrible time. It shouldn't have happened, but the more people you get here the better. It's nice being here with the same people with the same attitude about what's going on."