

Mail Tribune

Thousands converge in Medford for Women's March

By **Nick Morgan**

Mail Tribune

Posted Jan 20, 2018 at 4:20 PM

Updated Jan 24, 2018 at 12:25 PM

A crowd spanning generations and genders filled Medford parks Saturday, joining in a national demonstration of discontent over the country's — and its leaders' — direction.

For the thousands marching through downtown Medford in the second annual Southern Oregon Women's March, Lesley Gore's 1963 hit "You Don't Own Me" became a rallying cry as the crowd packed Pear Blossom Park and spilled over nearby.

The park's lawn was filled close to capacity with marchers brandishing signs such as "We need to talk about the Elephant in the womb," "Sex offenders aren't allowed in government housing" and "Trump treats objects like women, man!" Some marchers flocked to nearby sidewalks and behind the stage to hear keynote speakers, including state Rep. Pam Marsh, D-Ashland, and Democratic congressional candidate Jamie McLeod-Skinner, among others.

March co-organizer Rhonda Lee said she couldn't immediately guess the turnout beyond "thousands," but said that The Commons block, including Pear Blossom Park, can accommodate as many as 10,000 people.

"We were pretty much there," Lee said. "They just kept coming."

The only sign of opposition to the march was a lone man standing on the sidewalk with a Trump-Pence election sign as marchers passed by on East Main Street.

Though heartened by the turnout, Oregon District 2 Indivisible co-founder Jessica Sage said that she hopes it motivates people to take further action to resist

President Trump and Republicans in the House and Senate.

“It’s empowering, it’s uplifting, but if it’s all we do it won’t be enough,” Sage said.

Sage said that a year after the first Women’s March helped spark the Indivisible movement around the country, the Southern Oregon chapter is working to turn its momentum into action. Local initiatives include getting Oregonians to vote for Measure 101, a health care funding measure on the Jan. 23 ballot, and registering people for the midterm elections, which typically have lower voter turnouts than presidential elections.

Sage said in an interview that prior to President Trump’s election, she “would’ve laughed” had someone told her she would become a political activist. “But now I have no choice,” Sage said.

Sage said a mix of outrage, disgust, anger and shock at the president’s initiatives — citing particular concerns about environmental deregulation — fuels her.

“I’m using these emotions to hopefully sustain a movement,” Sage said. “There are many people like me around the country who are putting emotions to action.”

Jamie McLeod-Skinner, one of seven Democratic candidates vying for Republican Rep. Greg Walden’s congressional seat, said in her speech she hopes to see more women in Congress.

“Women make up less than 20 percent of our Congress, and it’s time for that to change,” McLeod-Skinner said. “It’s time to run like a girl.”

McLeod-Skinner said she “stands on the shoulders” of strong women, including her mother, who worked as a teacher in Southern and Central Oregon, and her grandmother, who now lives in Medford. **(Corrected)**

“Our district has a history of strong women, and after 125 years it’s time to be represented by one,” McLeod-Skinner said.

Wearing a pink “Pussy Hat,” Marsh told the crowd she understands that the seemingly daily “disorienting and often very disturbing” national news can make it difficult to get out of bed in the morning.

“We get up every single day because we understand that the cascade of bad news that we are hearing from the national level means that we have to double down on the really good work that we are doing here in our communities,” Marsh said. “We’ve done and will continue to do that at the state level.”

Marsh said that after the president walked away from the Paris climate agreement, the state doubled-down on green energy; when Republican healthcare cuts threatened the state’s public healthcare, legislators worked to protect it; and when the federal government began aggressive deportation tactics the state “stepped up to affirm the rights of all Oregonians.”

“And, by the way, along the way, we passed here in Oregon the nation’s most progressive and inclusive reproductive rights policies,” Marsh said.

Despite the checks to presidential initiatives at the state level, Marsh told the crowd, resistance isn’t easy.

“Make no mistake, my friends, this is a long-term struggle — we’re not going to solve it in an afternoon,” Marsh said, concluding with “but today we celebrate!”

For Oregon District 2 Indivisible Steering Committee member Kristin Moline of Jacksonville, the march didn’t have quite “the same intensity” as last year’s march in Ashland, but in its stead, Moline said, she saw a commitment and determination in the crowd that had been missing as people acclimated in the wake of last year’s inauguration.

Moline said the steering committee meets weekly for two hours and holds rallies monthly.

“We’re still vibrant,” Moline said.

— Reach reporter Nick Morgan at 541-776-4471 or nmorgan@rosebudmedia.com. Follow him on Twitter at [@MTCrimeBeat](https://twitter.com/MTCrimeBeat).