

Progressive Voices of Iowa
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Joni Ernst's Roast and Ride Greeted by Two Groups of Protesters

By Eva McBride. JUNE 5, 2017

The riders in Joni Ernst's Annual Roast and Ride were greeted by two groups of protesters along their route as it went through Polk City, IA. The two groups of protesters were in different areas along the route and separately organized but I hope that made more of an impact on the riders.

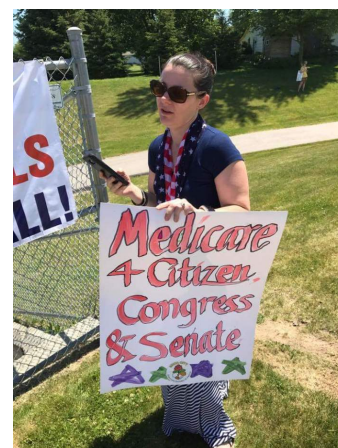
One protest was planned far in advance by the Group, Action Iowa and organized by Elizabeth Dinschel, Nora Taft, Chris Laursen, Michael McKinley and Jess McCord. Their message was, "The VA is broken, Trumpcare Kills and Medicare for All."



I participated in this protest and it was a long, hot wait because the group of riders was delayed. Action Iowa organizers had contacted the police department in Polk City in advance and were pleased to find them very helpful. (Shout out to Polk City PD for making sure the group followed safety rules but not interfering in any way.

The route had been changed presumably to avoid the protesters so Action Iowa moved to the new route to wait. Organizers checked Twitter and Snapchat and got some behind-the-scenes information so that they could verify that we were positioned on the correct route. They also tried to track the timing of the riders' approach to our position so we would be ready for their arrival.

We were all hot, tired and thirsty by the time we heard the sound of hundreds of motorcycles riding together in the distance. Despite the wait, protesters were newly enthused to hold up signs and chant, "People Over Profit!" and "Trump care Kills!" Joni Ernst led the pack of motorcycles but it was hard to see her reaction because of her helmet. Some of the riders did respond. A few were smiling, waving or laughing at us or with us. Others responded by giving us the middle finger, yelling or revving their engines and honking.





Betsy Riot protesters showed up unannounced as is their style. The ladies of Betsy Riot were dressed all in black, carried black parasols, American flag bandanas and the top half their faces were covered by white cat masks.

I drove by them on the way to meet up with Action Iowa group and the effect of their matching costumes was very striking along with their black signs with white lettering. Their signage and verbal responses to the riders were much more confrontational than Action Iowa. Liberal use of the F-word, suggestions for where to put things and disparaging comments directed at the riders' Mothers was common. Betsy Riot practices guerrilla



style protests and although non-violent are metaphorically very much in the face of those they are protesting. Self-described Neo-suffragists and Punk Patriots who are rescuing their country from Trump and his cronies. They oppose anyone interfering with social justice and they have a particular dislike of guns and are not afraid to show it. The two different groups of protesters were in different areas along the route but it had to have an impact on the riders. I can imagine once the riders passed us that they may have not been expecting the verbal abuse the ladies inflicted on them.

I spoke with two of the Action Iowa organizers and asked them why they organized their protest. I spoke with Elizabeth Dinschel first and she was happy to talk about the non-partisan progressive group and their goals. Dinschel said, "Direct action is imperative to the Democratic process and is protected by the Constitution. Mike Pence went to the Roast and Ride and bragged about Republican policies that will kick 24 million people off of insurance and will drive down access to quality healthcare. People will die and his supporters are celebrating not knowing they will all be deeply affected by this legislation. We sent a direct message to the 500+ riders and the hundreds of passersby that the VA is broken, Trumpcare kills, Medicare for all!" Dinschel is on the Johnson County Democrats Executive Board and currently running for the Coralville City Council.

Another Action Iowa organizer, Chris Laursen who is a US Army veteran and President of UAW Local 74 had this to say, "Politicians, regardless of the color of their jersey, have a long history of trying to dupe Americans into political agendas that hurt them. They cloak it with guises like democracy, freedom, hope, change, making America great and other sorts of propaganda. Sure, Joni is a vet. But yet, she is also a tool of the military industry complex, insurance companies, big pharma, etc. Joni's annual public relations stunt is aimed at hijacking the American flag, veterans, and bikers. Our intent was to show Iowans that the Roast and Ride's fluttering flags and the armada of bikers is hogwash. Joni and her cronies' political agenda stands in deep contrast to what is in the best interest of the poor and middle class of America. It was important to call them out and we did it directly. It was no picnic but it certainly was a pleasure."

I drove halfway across the state to protest at this event because Universal Healthcare is a cause I feel very passionate about and it did feel good to be

taking direct action. I was also excited to see one of Iowa's newest gubernatorial candidates, Cathy Glasson at the protest. I look forward to learning more about her but I think it spoke volumes that she took the time to show up and be a part of the action herself. Action Iowa will have more protests coming up so keep an eye on their facebook page if you would like to be involved in the action. The next protest they're planning is a joint effort with Indivisible Iowa and they will be gathering at the offices of Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst in Des Moines to make it noted that Iowans want Trumpcare killed. I'm posting a link for anyone interested. Hope to see you there!

https://www.facebook.com/events/301013847018802/?active_tab=about