Protesters' motive? 'They're angry'

Iowa official says the 'Occupy' message is clear: People are tired of stagnant wages in the face of rising living expenses.

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The Occupy Wall Street movement, which began in New York City and spread quickly to other metro areas, now is entering a second month of protests in some cities.

The action has sparked some volatile clashes between police and protesters, in particular in Oakland, Calif., where last week an Iraq war veteran was injured and hospitalized during an attempt by police to dismantle a camp outside City Hall.

Oakland's interim police chief said officers used the "least amount of force necessary to protect officers from the crowd."

Confrontations have become even more widespread in the days since. Over the weekend, protesters were arrested in Austin, Texas; Portland, Ore.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Denver.

Other weekend gatherings, like one in San Francisco, had more of a festive atmosphere, while in other cities, like Philadelphia, the interactions between law enforcement and protesters were relatively quiet.

The movement has even struck a chord overseas, with large rallies being held in London, Berlin and other European cities.

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J. PAT CARTER • *The Associated Press*

Hundreds of "Occupy Fort Lauderdale" (Fla.) protesters march in heavy rain Saturday. Protesters nationwide have spoken out against the ever-widening income gap between the rich and the poor.

PROTESTERS: Braley works on related legislation

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The "Occupy" movement has had a little bit of traction in Iowa so far. Small groups of protesters have made appearances in Dubuque and other eastern Iowa cities.

About 75 people attended a gathering in downtown Dubuque earlier this month, citing a range of economic and political reasons for joining in. Several local and state leaders are following the phenomenon, although some say it remains unclear what exactly the demonstrators are protesting.

"I'm not sure what their message is. I think it's kind of all over the board," said Rod Blum, a Dubuque-area businessman running as a Republican against Rep. Bruce Braley for his seat in Iowa's 1st Congressional District.

Rod Blum

"But to the extent they oppose the bailout of the big corporations, I agree with them. And to the extent that they oppose big government taking your freedoms, I agree with them."

Although Blum said he is not entirely sure what the purpose of the protests is, he also stressed that he likes to see more citizens getting involved.

"I would defend forever their right to organize and protest," Blum said. "I certainly agree with their right to protest. Hats off to them."

But Michael Mauro, Iowa's labor commissioner, said he completely understands the sentiments of the protesters. He spoke at the Mississippi Valley Labor-Management Conference meeting at the Hotel Julien last month.

Michael Mauro

"I keep hearing different people saying, 'What are they trying to prove, what are they saying?' I think the message is very clear," said Mauro, mentioning increasing living expenses coupled with stagnant wages.

"And you wonder why are people concerned?" Mauro asked. "I think the message is clear from these people in that class: 'We can't continue to go up on one side and stay the same or fall down on the other.'"

The former secretary of state said he hasn't seen people hurting this much from economic circumstances in his lifetime. He believes the frustration crosses political lines.

"Everybody's saying the same thing, they're tired of it. Democrats blame Republicans, Republicans blame Democrats, the tea party blames everybody and what do we get? We get nothing. We get gridlock," he said.

"The American people are mad. They're angry. It makes no difference what party you are."

Mauro believes it is a necessity that the American people, and through them leaders in Washington, find some common ground in the near future.

"I believe the people of this country can make that happen," Mauro said.

Blum's opponent, Braley, has not released any statements on the Occupy movement, according to Jeff Giertz, the congressman's communication director.

But Braley is working with Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., to create a Wall Street Speculation Fee, part of a bill that is expected to be introduced in coming days, according to Giertz.

Bruce Braley

The legislation would institute a fee onto Wall Street stock transactions, discouraging "the high-speed trading and rampant speculation that have led to so much market volatility in the past three years," said Giertz, in an email to the TH.

He said the legislation is something that a segment of the Occupy Wall Street demonstrators have called for.

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