

MPR News | Minnesota Now State and local police prepare for third No Kings rally expected to draw tens of thousands 01KMMN7BPKXEY7NNEH7TZYWJB9

NINA MOINI: Tens of thousands of people from across Minnesota and across the country are expected in ST. Paul this Saturday for the No Kings rally. The political protest at the State Capitol is the flagship event on a day when thousands of other rallies are planned across the country.

The event is protesting Trump administration policies. It will feature local officials and activists alongside celebrities like Jane Fonda, Bruce Springsteen, and Joan Baez. This is the third No Kings rally since President Donald Trump took office. But in a press call this morning, organizers expect this Saturday's event to be the biggest.

SUBJECT: We anticipate Saturday being another record breaking the single most largest non-violent day of action in America, with over 3,200 events, with millions anticipated to turning out across all 50 states and nearly every continent around the globe, where in every continent but Antarctica.

NINA MOINI: State and local law enforcement have been making security plans to keep the event here in ST. Paul safe. Joining me to tell us more is ST. Paul Police, Deputy Chief, Kurt Hallstrom. For starters, many people are wondering how many people you're expecting this weekend.

KURT HALLSTROM: Well, that is the million dollar question. The organizers are anticipating anywhere between 50 and 100,000, I would guess. We are aware that we'll have to adjust to whatever shows up. We're prepared to make sure or do our best to make sure that the event goes safely and whether the number is 50 or the number is 150, I believe that we have plans and safety procedures in place to make the event go well.

NINA MOINI: How does that compare to other protests? Does it seem like this will be among some of the largest in recent history?

KURT HALLSTROM: Yeah, I mean, we had the Women's March a few years back that was the largest one that I'm aware of that we've had at the Capitol grounds. We had one last year that was large and that one was on a sad day for the state of Minnesota. And people still showed up for that one.

So I believe that this is going to be a big event. People are going to have to be patient and be kind to each other. And we are there to make sure that they get to where they need to get to in a safe manner. And at the end of the day, they go home feeling heard and listened to. And we are there to support their First Amendment right to demonstrate and protest and share their messages.

NINA MOINI: And I just want to clarify for our listeners, when you're talking about a sad day for Minnesota, you're referring to the June 14, No King's protest that was after Melissa Hortman and her husband had been killed. And Senator Hoffman, John Hoffman and his wife had been shot.

When you are talking about safety and security, and there have been instances across the state that a lot of people are still recovering from emotionally, what are all of the different agencies that you're working with to ensure safety and security? Have you gone beyond what you would typically have in that network?

KURT HALLSTROM: You ST. Paul, and we have a very robust relationship with all our partners, and it's not just law enforcement partners, but it's all agencies coming together. In the city of ST. Paul, you have the Public Works Department, you have Parks Department, you have the Police Department, you have the Fire Department, the mayor's office all coming together to get resources and plans and things in place to make sure that the event goes well.

Outside of that, we have Ramsey County and Ramsey County Sheriff's Office and Ramsey County Public works is also bringing tools and different safety features that we'll be implementing and putting in place. State patrol, they have a number of resources because they're responsible for the Capitol grounds. They have brought in the DNR, the state EOC, emergency

Management. So we have a lot of partners and it's been through years and years of relationship building and running maybe smaller events. But each time you have one of these events occur in your jurisdiction, you get a little bit better at it and you learn and you develop a robust plan. You can't think of everything, but we do our best to try to be prepared.

NINA MOINI: And this event has rallies that begin at three separate locations, sort of in and around downtown in the State Capitol grounds. And they'll converge at the State Capitol for the main event. Can you describe how you monitor multiple locations and moving crowds? I know it's probably very complex, but at 1,000 foot view.

KURT HALLSTROM: Yeah, it is complex. And those are all events that are run by the organizers. We're not going to dictate when they march, how they march, and the pace of their march. But we, the ST. Paul Police Department is assisting with the march from Harriet Island, and Ramsey County Sheriff's Office is assisting with the marches from the ST. Paul College and the other auxiliary locations where people are going to start to gather ahead of the event. And they are fluid. And we will secure the route for the march. And do our best to make sure everybody gets where they need to get to.

NINA MOINI: And then once the crowd is at the Capitol, what will safety look like there? Do you have a sense for how many officers will be on duty? And I know you can't paint the picture completely, but a lot of people do wonder if they want to bring children, what are they going to be seeing around them that might help them to feel like they're in a safe setting?

KURT HALLSTROM: Right. So the roads will be closed through the duration around the Capitol grounds, MLK Boulevard, and John Ireland, and Cedar will be closed for the duration of the event. I would guess that there's probably rough math, upwards of 300 law enforcement officers that will be on and around the Capitol grounds. I don't want to get into too much security details. But there will be a very robust security plan in preparation for the event.

And I would like to think that people will be comfortable saying hi to the officers and thanking them. And we're appreciative for the people coming out and being comfortable in this situation. And we want to be engaging with them. And kids and everybody is welcome.

NINA MOINI: And what do you suggest for individuals and people who are attending that they should keep in mind in terms of how they are conducting themselves within a large crowd?

KURT HALLSTROM: Well, it's a confined space, so if it gets any bigger than the Women's March, we are pretty familiar with the fact that the grounds will be full. I would say be prepared to be patient. Bring water and things to sustain yourself for a time. I know that the event organizers have brought in facilities to take care of bathrooms and things like that. But with that number of people, patients is going to be asked to win the day and be kind to each other.

NINA MOINI: Could you describe for our listeners how law enforcement or how your agency goes about estimating crowd size at events and afterward? Because I'm sure you've heard, as we hear here, a lot of people will have a conflicting idea or number about how many people were at an event after the fact, and then people will take it and use it to say, why are people skewing the numbers? So I just wanted to see if you could explain for the listeners, how do you come up with the number of how many people are present and how many people were there after the fact?

KURT HALLSTROM: Sure depending upon the spacing of the individuals, there's scientific formulas that you can take square footage and then calculate the number of people. So any number is going to be an estimate that can be higher or lower than the given number.

So yeah, I'm aware that they can be high exaggerated one way or the other to whatever position that you want to support. But we will work with the State Patrol, they have a pretty good formula in place to calculate the attendance at events at the Capitol grounds. So we'll analyze photographs and documents from the event and try to come up with a relatively accurate count after the fact.

NINA MOINI: OK. And just lastly, there is a decent amount of construction that's happening around downtown ST. Paul, the State Capitol, what should people keep in mind when it comes to traveling or through ST. Paul on Saturday?

KURT HALLSTROM: Sure. The road closures are going to be relatively close in and around the Capitol. Wabasha Street from Harriet Island will be closed for the march. For a brief period of time, we're going to try to minimize the closures. There's other events occurring in the city. There's the Donnie Smith Bike Show at the River Center is an event that we are aware of.

94 should remain unaffected. The ramps will be closed into downtown for a brief period of time for the event. So the walkers from the cathedral and the ST. Paul College can get across the Marian Street Bridge. So there will be some temporary closures for off ramps. But I think for the most part, people will be able to get in and around the city relatively unaffected.

If they're going to be on Wabasha, they might want to avoid Wabasha between 10:30 and maybe 12:00-12:30.

NINA MOINI: All right. Deputy Chief, Hallstrom, thanks so much for breaking some of this down for us. We appreciate it.

KURT HALLSTROM: Yeah.

HALLSTROM:

NINA MOINI: That's ST. Paul Police Deputy Chief, Kurt Hallstrom.