



Protest without leaving home

■Stars, former lawmaker launch the virtual march on Washington.

By Johanna Neuman, Times Staff Writer

The call for a virtual march on Washington -- an anti-war assault next Wednesday by e-mail, fax and telephone -- began in the nation's capital Wednesday with the help of a Hollywood connection. Tom Andrews, a former Democratic congressman from Maine, who now heads an umbrella coalition of groups called Win Without War, said the idea was to extend the momentum from last weekend's rallies against a possible war in Iraq.

Having taken to the streets, he said, now it is time to "take to the suites." Joined by a coalition of actors and celebrities both in Hollywood and Washington, Andrews urged those who oppose the potential war in Iraq to visit MoveOn.org. The organization hopes to coordinate calls to Senate offices and to the White House, scheduling them one every minute.

Actor James Cromwell said that the virtual march on Washington would afford "ordinary people ... the opportunity to express their disapproval" and to "take back a sense of omnipotence" by governments seeking to impose their will by force.

The organization's intent isn't to shut down the Senate or White House switchboards, Andrews said, although he admitted that "it's possible." Asked why the House of Representatives was excluded, Andrews said organizers wanted to try a smaller universe first, and may include the House on a second effort. "A couple of political messages are going to resonate," he predicted. "There are a lot of us, and we are organized."

Cromwell lashed out at the "mainstream media" for ignoring the administration's plans for a post-Saddam Iraq, particularly its disregard for the rights of Kurds, and for likewise paying little heed to the fragile peace in Afghanistan, where President Hamid Karzi faces a security risk on leaving the capital of Kabul.

Cromwell assailed "certain voices on the right" for launching boycotts of celebrities, like Sean Penn, who have spoken out against the war. Andrews and Cromwell introduced a 30-second ad in which actor Martin Sheen, who plays a president on TV's "The West Wing," urges Americans to participate in the virtual march. The ads will begin running today.

Several all-news cable networks, including Fox and CNN, have declined the ads, saying they are not accepting anti-war commercials. But the group hopes to bypass networks and buy time from local cable operators.

Sheen, in the Los Angeles press conference, said, "Our message to Washington will be clear -- 'Don't invade Iraq! We can contain Saddam Hussein without killing innocent people, diverting us from the war on terrorism and putting us all at risk.'"