E-mails from public overload House Web site

August 14 2009, By ANNE FLAHERTY , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Amid a boisterous debate on health care reform, people flooded members of Congress on Thursday with so many e-mails that they overloaded the House's primary Web site.

Technical support issued a warning to congressional staff that the site, http://www.house.gov , may be slow or unresponsive because of the large volume of e-mail being sent to members.

Jeff Ventura, a spokesman for the House's chief administrative officer, which maintains the Web site, said traffic data was not available and could not be released without the lawmakers' consent.

"It is clearly health care reform," Ventura said. "There's no doubt about it."

Lawmakers are in their home districts for the August recess, where a populist backlash has emerged in some quarters against President Barack Obama's plan to overhaul the nation's health care system.

A spokesman for Rep. Joe Barton, a Texas Republican, said e-mail traffic related to health care has exploded in recent weeks.

Sean Brown said the office has received 2,761 e-mails on the subject since the debate heated up five weeks ago. In the five weeks before that, the office received 368 health care-related e-mails. He estimated that 90 to 95 percent of the e-mails were opposed to Obama's plan.

Democrats are trying desperately to regain control of the debate, with the White House posting a new Web site designed to dispel what it called "the misinformation and baseless smears that are cropping up daily." House Democratic aides have set up a health care war room out of Majority Leader Steny Hoyer's office. It is designed to help lawmakers answer questions about the legislation.

Ventura said the last time he saw such a significant slowdown in the system was in January, shortly before the House passed an $819 billion bill to stimulate the economy.

Ventura said new technology called "load balancing" is in place to try to handle spikes in volume. So far, the House Web site remains available to the public.

In particular, people are heavily using a link on the site called "Write Your Representative," which helps a voter track down their representative by plugging in their ZIP code.

On the Net:

http://www.house.gov

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