

# A call for action: Cindy Sheehan speaks in Chico

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Chico Enterprise-Record  
Wed, 09 May 2007

Cindy Sheehan told her sons she'd never let them go to war.

But somehow her son Casey did go to war in Iraq, where he was killed at the age of 24.

Sheehan recalled getting an e-mail from a medic who told her he'd held Casey's brains inside his head while a doctor tried to save his life.

"We mothers have to realize we can't give our children to war anymore," she said.

Sheehan, an internationally known peace activist, spoke to a crowd that nearly filled Harlen Adams Theatre at Chico State University Wednesday night.

It's a time for strong action, she said.

Again and again, at the personal and the national level, Americans have allowed the unthinkable to happen, she said. They've said they want peace yet have let their leaders start or join wars that have only served profiteering corporations, she said.

The leaders who start these wars need to be impeached and tried for war crimes, she said. Unless that happens, the next batch of leaders will just start another war.

Speaking in a quiet, unassuming voice, Sheehan told her audience (of mainly people 40 years old and over) that nothing short of revolution is needed in America. But she said it must be a peaceful revolution.

"We have to model peace for the world," she said.

Sheehan said there's support in Congress for impeaching the president and vice president. The main obstacle is Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who needs to be convinced the action is imperative, she said.

Casey Sheehan was killed in early 2004. Later that year, Sheehan began speaking against the war.

She went to Texas in August of 2005 while President Bush was vacationing there at his ranch. She set up a tent in a ditch across the street from the ranch and vowed to stay there throughout

the president's vacation unless he met with her and explained to her the cause for which her son died.

Bush did not meet with her, but hundreds of people joined her protest at what became known as Camp Casey. It was reported as many as 1,500 supporters were there with her at times, including members of Congress, actors, singers and civil rights leaders.

Sheehan described that protest as a turning point &mdash; where Americans' support for the war in Iraq turned to opposition.

Recently, she said, she appeared at a town in Arkansas, where she was warmly received. A man asked her what she thought would have happened if the president had met with her in Texas, as she had wanted. She said she probably would have gone back to California, the peace movement wouldn't have been re-energized and America would probably be fighting in Iran now.

"One of the things Camp Casey did is remind us we are the sovereigns," she said. "How sassy was it of me to go down and say, 'I want to talk to the president. He works for me. We're going to have a job evaluation.' "

"I think when I did that it showed people we did have power," she said.

In sympathy, some local opponents of the war set up their own Camp Casey in Children's Playground near downtown Chico. Sheehan said she was pleased to hear the first sympathy camp was in Chico. Many others soon followed.

People don't really understand what the troops are going through &mdash; the heat they endure and the violence they experience, she said. "Most of us haven't had to suffer the way our soldiers have suffered."

So many of the homeless, whom Americans shun, are Vietnam War veterans, she said. The country can expect another generation of such homeless from the current war.

Sheehan said she has reached many young people with her message through her Web page on MySpace. She has nearly 6,000 "MySpace friends."

She travels about 27 days a month, and she's learned first-hand how unpopular Americans have become around the world, she said. It used to be that only America's leaders were hated, but now citizens in other countries are scornful of the American people. They can't understand why they put up with the leaders' aggressive policies, she said.

Sheehan's visit to Chico was sponsored by a number of groups, including the Chico Peace and Justice Center, the Chico State University Democratic Club, the Peace Institute and 1,000 Grandmothers.

Wednesday afternoon, Sheehan spoke to more than 100 people who gathered for a rally and peace protest in Children's Playground.

Chico had "meant a lot" to Casey, she said. She had been a youth minister in Vacaville, and she and Casey often came to Chico to participate in activities of youth groups at Our Divine Savior and St. John's Catholic churches. Casey also had a girlfriend in Chico.

Another speaker at the rally was Sue Williams, who said her nephew was Steven Walberg-Riotto, a Butte County resident who was recently killed in Iraq.

Her nephew had a lot of potential, but he also needed a way to belong &mdash; something he sought in the military, she said. "He wanted his own self-confidence. How can we build that without having a war to give it to these young people?"

Six or seven women at the rally held signs expressing support for Bush and his policy in Iraq. A couple of them said some of the anti-war people were very rude to them.

Several men who said they'd been in combat in Vietnam were at the rally to protest the war in Iraq.

They said most people don't realize the enormous human cost of war. Besides all those killed or maimed, a large proportion of those who see action come home with lasting emotional wounds that also hurt their families.

Sheehan has traveled extensively, speaking against the war in Iraq. She's gone to England, Ireland, Australia, Venezuela and Cuba, among other places.

Last year, she published her memoir, called "Peace Mom: A Mother's Journey Through Heartache to Activism."

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