

Protesters rally outside Bush ranch in show of support for Cindy Sheehan

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Supporters continue to converge on Camp Casey outside President George Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas ranch despite the absence of Cindy Sheehan, who left to tend to her ailing mother.

The numbers of people arriving to show solidarity with Cindy Sheehan's antiwar vigil are such that a second camp, Camp Casey II, has sprung up on property donated to the peace effort by one of Bush's neighbors, a rancher sympathetic to Sheehan's plight. Shuttles driven by volunteers systematically usher participants between the two camps and the organizers' headquarters in Crawford, dubbed the "Peace House."

One volunteer estimated that around 1,100 people attended the antiwar vigils over the weekend. A seemingly endless stream of vehicles continued to flow through the narrow roads around Bush's ranch. Free food and refreshments were provided by volunteers as temperatures reached 100 degrees Fahrenheit over the weekend. Singers Steve Earle and Joan Baez performed under the large tent erected at Camp Casey II.

The vigil began on August 6 when Cindy Sheehan, a co-founder of Gold Star Families for Peace, an organization of relatives of soldiers who have died as a result of the war, arrived in Crawford and asked for a meeting with Bush, who was on vacationing at his ranch. Her son, Casey Sheehan, 24, was killed in Baghdad on April 4, 2004.

Bush refused to speak with her or answer her questions, and her vigil became a catalyst for the antiwar movement. Hundreds began joining her, including many bereaved mothers, fathers, and other family members who lost loved ones and families of those who lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) and Military Families Speak Out.

After her 74-year-old mother suffered a stroke, Cindy

and her sister left Crawford on August 19, vowing to return as soon as possible. While Bush and supporters of the Iraq war no doubt hoped this would defuse the growing opposition, more and more people continue to pour in. Many said they came specifically because Cindy had to leave. "I am here to stand in the gap," one person told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Gloria, Martha and Ann—aged 70, 71, and 59—drove together from Arlington, Texas. Martha said they came "to show solidarity with the peace effort and Cindy herself, and to let the president know that she's not alone. Next weekend we're going to try to bring a caravan down from Arlington." Gloria said, "This is not going to go away. It was presented to the American public that we had to invade Iraq because of 9/11, but there wasn't a single Iraqi on those planes; they were mainly Saudis. This is clearly an oil-driven war."

Many people spoke of Cindy's courage and determination as an inspiration for their own involvement. Joanne, with her 29-year-old daughter Tina standing beside her, said, "Cindy is a catalyst. There is a tone of frustration and helplessness, and the Democrats don't have their stuff together. But someone stood up. She's like we all are, moms, grandmoms... This war is a lie, and it's time to bring our sons and daughters back."

We asked Suzanne, 43, who has lived in Texas for twenty years, and Bob, 47, who lives in Waco, Texas, whether they had ever protested before. Bob answered, "I never paid attention until recently," and stated that the invasion of Iraq had compelled him to become active and to speak out. Suzanne also said the war against Iraq galvanized her into action. She noted that after the invasion, "The first things they protected were the oil wells. Bush was gung-ho from the beginning. He was going to go in no matter what." "Yes," replied

Bob, “and I didn’t see Bush’s daughters rushing to enlist, either...”

Jeremy, 28, and Alex, 25, came down with their friend Andy, 25, a former Marine who served in both Afghanistan and Iraq and was only recently discharged. Jeremy said, “I got tired of just sitting around and reading about it,” and decided he needed to come to Crawford. Andy, whose two brothers are also in the Marines and are both in Iraq, spoke of his concern for his brothers and his hope for their safe and quick return. “This war must end. The sooner the killing stops, the better.” He said that the Iraqi people clearly do not support the American invasion and occupation.

Calvin Wehrle came from Galveston, Texas. He said he never thought of himself as an activist, but the war against Iraq and particularly Cindy’s action inspired him to become involved. “I had given up on the US,” he said. He has been in Crawford now for over nine days, and spoke admiringly of Cindy’s soft-spoken and caring demeanor, and the grass-roots origins of the antiwar vigil. As he surveyed all the protesters and supporters, he said, “It’s just incredible. People keep coming; I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Ryan, 21, a university student from Eureka, California majoring in political science at Brownsville, Texas, drove seven hours to show support for the antiwar effort. “I never used to like politics,” he said, “but it has become my passion—not by choice but by necessity.” Ryan cited the build-up to the invasion of Iraq as the catalyst for his own growing political activism. “The rationale for war was based on lies; everyone knew that,” he said.

We also spoke with Antonio, 36, whose father died in the World Trade Center attack on September 11, 2001. A member of September 11 Families for a Peaceful Tomorrow, he said that Cindy tapped into people’s hearts—“into my heart.”

Rick Burnley, 66, a poet from New Mexico, said, “For the people who can be here, this is Ground Zero.”

Juan Torres is the father of 23-year-old US Army Sgt. Daniel Torres, who was killed in Iraq on February 4, 2005. He and his sister-in-law Beatrice Saldivar, who acted as his interpreter, spoke about the grief caused by the loss of Daniel, the injustice of the war, and honoring Daniel’s memory. “I came from Argentina looking for the American Dream, especially for my children,” Juan Torres said. “Now my American

Dream is buried six feet under the ground.”

Speaking of the soldiers in Iraq, Beatrice Saldivar said, “Nobody speaks for them. We are their only voice.”



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