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## Cindy Sheehan's Pitched Battle

In a Tent Near Bush's Ranch, Antiwar Mother of Dead Soldier Gains Visibility

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CRAWFORD, Tex., Aug. 12 -- Cindy Sheehan vaulted into national consciousness this month on the power of her story as the grieving mother of a fallen soldier.

But what began as a solitary campaign to force a meeting with President Bush by setting up camp along the road to his ranch has quickly taken on the full trappings of a political campaign. Sheehan is working with a political consultant and a team of public relations professionals, and now she is featured in a television ad.

Sheehan began her protest here last Saturday after crisscrossing the country for more than a year demanding answers on why Bush continues to wage what she calls an unjust war in Iraq. After her son Casey Sheehan, 24, was killed in Baghdad last year, she founded Gold Star Families for Peace, an antiwar organization that labored largely in obscurity -- until now.

In part, Sheehan's case has echoed as her grievances merged with what polls show is growing dissatisfaction with the war. But her cause has also been aided by political organizers who swiftly mobilized around her -- recognizing an opportunity to cause acute discomfort for a vacationing president and put a powerful emotional frame around the antiwar movement.

No one watching cable television news this week, dominated by coverage of Sheehan's crusade, could doubt that they largely achieved their aim.

Sheehan's Crawford encampment has swollen in the past week, as other antiwar protesters have flocked to Texas. Members of CodePink, a women's antiwar organization, have pitched their tent near Sheehan's.

TrueMajority -- an antiwar group founded by Ben Cohen, one of the creators of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream -- hired Fenton Communications, a Washington public relations firm that has worked intermittently with Sheehan over the past year to coordinate media coverage.

With this help, Sheehan has courted coverage from the traveling White House press corps with a news conference. A schedule of when relatives of other military casualties in Iraq are expected to join Sheehan here was distributed to reporters. Her team is coordinating an antiwar rally planned for Saturday.

Joe Trippi, the political consultant behind former Vermont governor Howard Dean's early success in the 2004 Democratic presidential primary race, hosted a conference with Sheehan for liberal Internet bloggers, hoping their online dispatches will draw even wider attention.

On Saturday, Sheehan launched a TV ad campaign hoping to achieve what her roadside vigil so far has not: a second chance to directly tell Bush about the devastation she has experienced since her son's death.

"Mr. President, I want to tell you face to face how much this hurts," Sheehan says in the ad, which will air with only a modest \$15,000 buy of airtime in Waco, the nearest broadcast market to Bush's 1,600-acre spread. "How many more of our loved ones need to die in this senseless war?"

The rising profile of Sheehan's vigil has proved awkward for the president's staff, which has been reluctant to publicly refute the mother of a soldier killed in Iraq, even as they do not wish to be seen as bowing to what they view as an orchestrated publicity campaign. On Friday, as Bush's motorcade whizzed by Sheehan's camp on the way to a nearby barbecue expected to raise \$2

million for the Republican National Committee, Sheehan held up a sign saying "Why do you make time for donors and not for me?"

Bush has been publicly respectful, responding to Sheehan's case with reporters on Thursday and saying he has thought "long and hard about her position," even though he disagrees with her about the war.

Still, as Sheehan has stepped onto the media stage, she has become a target in the way that happens inevitably to anyone involved in high-stakes political combat -- with opponents questioning her motives and examining her statements for contradictions.

"Despite what the headlines say, Sheehan, 48, is more antiwar protester than grieving mother," said a column Friday in the online version of the American Spectator. "She is co-founder of Gold Star Families for Peace, an organization that seeks to impeach George W. Bush and apparently to convince the U.S. government to surrender to Muslim terrorists."

Meanwhile, the Heart of Texas chapter of FreeRepublic.com, an online conservative forum, has scheduled a demonstration here for Saturday to counteract Sheehan's protest and show support for Bush and the war.

Others have also raised questions about Sheehan's account of her first meeting with Bush, which occurred two months after her son's death in April 2004. Sheehan was part of a larger group of grieving family members who met with Bush at Fort Lewis in Washington state.

After the meeting, she was quoted by the newspaper in her hometown of Vacaville, Calif., as saying that the president seemed sympathetic. Subsequently, she has said that Bush treated her callously during the meeting.

Sheehan said her initial reaction to Bush reflected her shock over her son's death. In addition, she said she grew increasingly angry toward Bush as it became clear that the United States had not found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and as evidence emerged that the administration had discussed an invasion of Iraq before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. She has said that she has become further angered as the administration has sent mixed signals about its plans for withdrawing troops from Iraq.

Though Sheehan's protest has galvanized support among antiwar activists, it has divided parts of her own family, some of whom sent an e-mail to news organizations distancing themselves from her protest.

"We do not agree with the political motivations and publicity tactics of Cindy Sheehan. She now appears to be promoting her own personal agenda and notoriety at the expense of her son's good name and reputation," said an e-mail sent to the Reporter newspaper, in Vacaville. The e-mail was signed by Casey Sheehan's aunt Cherie Quartarolo on behalf of his paternal grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

"The Sheehan family lost our beloved Casey in the Iraq War and we have been silently, respectfully grieving," the e-mail said. "The rest of the Sheehan family supports the troops, our country and our president, silently, with prayer and respect."

Sheehan, however, told the paper that the admonition came from in-laws who often disagreed with her.

"We have always been on separate sides of the fence politically and I have not spoken to them since the elections when they supported the man who is responsible for Casey's death," Sheehan said. "The thing that matters to me is that my family, Casey's dad and my other three kids, are on the same side of the fence that I am."