

Editorial: Peace's face/Lourey makes powerful witness

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Thirty-five years ago, the antiwar movement was typified by a long-haired, scruffy young male of draftable age, burning his draft card.

A new antiwar movement is being born this summer on a Texas roadside. It presents a much different face — feminine, older, wiser, and filled with grief and righteous indignation. The face is that of mothers who lost sons and daughters in Iraq, first Cindy Sheehan of California, and now more, including Minnesota state Sen. Becky Lourey.

The moral authority of the blossoming movement's face is undeniable and, despite concerted conservative efforts to discredit it, unassailable. Even those who disagree with the antiwar encampment's contention that the war in Iraq is delivering none of its promised gains for this country are obliged to concede that Sheehan and other Gold Star mothers have the right to express their sorrow and anger as they see fit.

To these mothers' credit, they see fit to grieve in silence no longer. Their witness is that stubborn adherence to a failed policy is not patriotism, and that the sacrifice of fallen sons and daughters is not dishonored by an admission that their assignment was flawed, and needs revision.

Lourey, who spent three days at the protest site dubbed Camp Casey outside President Bush's ranch, offers the antiwar movement a powerful voice — one capable of attracting national attention if this summer's grass-roots combustion in Crawford catches lasting fire.

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Both personally and politically, the DFL state senator from Kerrick commands respect. Lourey, 62, is an indefatigable 15-year legislator admired for her warmth, passion and lawmaking skill. She and her husband raised 12 children, eight of them adopted, while establishing a successful family business. She is as riveting a speaker as exists in Minnesota's liberal camp.

Lourey fell silent in the weeks after her Army pilot son Matt was shot down and killed near Baghdad in June. Her grief's quiet phase appears to have ended. We expect that she now has much to say that, in coming weeks, Americans should hear.

The Minnesota contingent at Camp Casey also included DFL Second District congressional candidate Coleen Rowley, the former FBI agent and whistleblower on the agency's inept handling of tips about the terror plot that became 9/11. Rowley's participation drew out U.S. Rep. John Kline, the Second District incumbent whom Rowley is challenging.

Kline faulted Lourey, Rowley and other war protesters. Their action "is harmful to the morale of the soldiers, and it encourages the enemy," he said on a visit to the Star Tribune.

To Americans past a certain age, the accusation is familiar. It echoes the rhetoric that hawks used to try to stifle the antiwar movement that burgeoned during the Vietnam War, especially after the Tet offensive in 1968, when Americans came together in large numbers to change this nation's policy in Southeast Asia.

Suggesting that protesters have insufficient concern for American troops was an easy charge to level against draft-dodging youth, and it probably is to be expected as congressional campaign season gets underway. But it does not ring true when aimed at parents who raised children so patriotic that they volunteered for military service.

Such parents understand what support for those sons and daughters requires. They know that it does not require blind loyalty to bad policy.