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FISHER INVESTMENTS

Peace activist Cindy Sheehan vows to continue tax boycott

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By Suzanne Hurt
 SACRAMENTO, California | Thu Apr 19, 2012 9:58pm EDT

(Reuters) - California peace activist Cindy Sheehan has agreed to meet with Internal Revenue Service agents seeking to collect back taxes she refuses to pay as a protest of U.S. wars, but she vowed on Thursday to persist in her tax boycott.

Sheehan, whose son Casey was killed in action in Iraq while serving in the U.S. Army in 2004, appeared before a federal judge as the government sought a court order requiring her to answer an IRS collection summons seeking information about assets that could be used to satisfy her tax liability.

The 54-year-old activist, who gained widespread attention in August 2005 for her extended anti-war protest outside President George W. Bush's ranch in Texas, said she believes the government is persecuting her for her political beliefs.

"No matter if the government says I owe a penny or \$100,000, I'm not paying one penny to them," Sheehan said outside the federal courthouse in downtown Sacramento after the hearing. Her lawyer, Dennis Cunningham of San Francisco, stood at her side as a handful of protesters looked on.

During the hearing, Cunningham acknowledged to U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge John Moulds that Sheehan has not filed a federal income tax return or paid any federal income taxes since her son's death, but that her failure to do so was an act of conscientious objection to the war in Iraq.

He argued that her constitutional rights to freedom of expression and protection from self-incrimination would be violated by answering further IRS questions about her assets.

Sheehan maintains she has met twice with IRS representatives after the agency conducted assessments of her tax liability for 2005 and 2006.

She insists she is living a "bare-bones" existence, does not own a house and thus has little for the government to take. A resident of the Vacaville area, between Sacramento and San Francisco, she has kept details of her precise living arrangements private.

One possible source of income might be royalties from her book, "Peace Mom: A Mother's Journey

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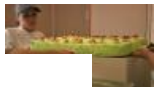
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Through Heartache to Activism," published in 2006.

U.S. Attorney Adair Borroughs, from the U.S. Justice Department's tax division, said regardless of any sympathy one might feel for her political views as a conscientious objector, Sheehan does not have the right to violate U.S. laws "with impunity." Borroughs added that invoking Fifth Amendment protections against self-incrimination cannot be used to "evade tax payment."

The judge said he would take arguments from both sides under advisement and set an additional hearing on the matter for June 4. Nearly 20 supporters of Sheehan sat through the hour-long hearing.

Cunningham later told reporters that Sheehan and the government had agreed after the proceeding that she would meet on May 9 in Sacramento with IRS agents to hear what questions they had about her assets, but he did not expect her to answer them.

Cunningham told the judge that Sheehan believes she has been followed on at least two occasions recently by agents working for the federal government, which he said wants to "shut her up" and halt her activism.

Her Internet blog, called "Cindy Sheehan's Soapbox," encourages others to withhold tax payments as an anti-war protest.

During the hearing, the judge said others have made political statements with tax protests while still managing to comply with the law.

"It strikes me as a civilized way to protest uncivilized acts," Moulds said, bringing tears to Sheehan's eyes inside the courtroom and again at the news conference afterward as she recalled his words.

"Finally, someone in this government recognizes my pain," she told reporters.

(Editing by [Philip Barbara](#))

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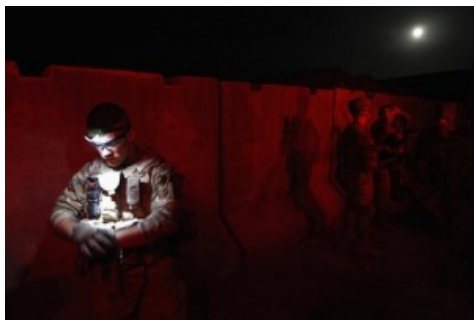
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