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## Conscientious objectors create tribute to slain GIs

By Nathan Welton  
SAN LUIS OBISPO TRIBUNE

**SAN LUIS OBISPO** - One picture shows an American soldier kissing his baby, while another depicts a man hugging his cat. In a third, a smiling woman poses at a graduation.

The images of American service personnel killed in Iraq composed a Sunday display organized by a group of San Luis Obispo youths who oppose war.

About 850 pictures appeared altogether, one for each military member who has died since the conflict began in the spring of 2003.

About eight youths from around San Luis Obispo County formed the Young Objectors United to End War, which unveiled its Faces of War exhibit in San Luis Obispo's Mission Plaza. Its members range in age from 14 to 22 and spent close to 200 hours constructing the work.

"The fact is that there is legislation regarding reinstating the draft," said project mentor Melinda Forbes, a mother of one of the teens. "So we want to create a history of young activism against war."

The Universal National Service Act of 2003, which would essentially reinstate the draft, is before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Total Force. If signed into law, it would require all 18- to 26-year-olds to perform two years of military or civil service. Conscientious objectors would not have to perform war-related duties.

Rep. Pete Stark, D-Fremont, who is opposed to the conflict in Iraq, cosponsored the bill in order to lift the burden of war from America's poor and disadvantaged.

"It is my understanding that out of the 435 members of this House and the 100 members of the Senate," he said in a 2003 statement, "only one -- only one -- has a child in active military service."

But that does not make military service a pleasing possibility for 15-year-old Stuart Brownlee.

"If they're going to reinstate it, we need to show we don't want war to happen," the 10th-grader said. "It's a waste of life."

The somber tribute to those killed in action touched some visitors, and organizers said it caused one young girl to cry.

"I have two young kids -- 20 and 17 -- and I can't imagine how my wife and I would feel if their photos were among those that are hanging there, right in front of me, staring at me," wrote a man, who identified himself as William, in a guest book at the site.

"It's horrible we don't have a say in this," said Bela English, 14, referring to the fact that he is not old enough to

vote against legislation or politicians that could affect his future.

Forbes noted that the artists can serve their country in different ways -- and that the youths' stand for freedom of speech represents a benefit to America.

Still, not everyone who saw the exhibit felt that military service is unappealing.

"The military offered me a different way of life -- I wasn't going anywhere before joining -- but I learned discipline, integrity and all that stuff you hear in the commercials," said Jaime Logan, an Air Force enlistee who just returned from rebuilding schools in Iraq. "But the bottom line is freedom of speech, and everyone should have it -- from Michael Moore to Michael Savage."

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