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FROM:

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WASHINGTON MEMO

--THEY NEED OUR SUPPORT--

Constitution Hall was the site of a rally here May 1. It was a protest, but unlike most protests in Washington, it received almost no publicity.

The May 1 "Appeal for International Justice" was a protest against the inhumane treatment of our American prisoners of war in Southeast Asia.

Even though the appeal, organized by 13 U.S. Senators and Representatives, was largely ignored by the news media, the nearly 1000 family members of men classified as missing in action or prisoners of war in Southeast Asia who attended were not ignored by the people who count.

Nearly 4000 concerned Americans filled the hall for the rally. Included were approximately 30 Kansans who have sons or husbands missing in action or held prisoners of war.

--ONLY ONE REQUEST--

Family members came several days before the rally and some stayed several days after. They visited with Senators, Congressmen, Pentagon officials and officials of several embassies. They asked only one thing -- that American prisoners be treated in accord with the Geneva Conventions which were ratified by North Vietnam in 1957.

Washington officials listened and learned -- learned firsthand of the heartache caused by not knowing whether a missing soldier-son or husband is a prisoner.

Families of 400 of the 1,529 men missing in Southeast Asia know their men are prisoners. Families of the other 1,129 know only that their men are not with their respective military units. Of the 400 men who are known prisoners, only 100 of them have been allowed or are physically able to communicate with their families.

--"THEY AREN'T IMPORTANT"--

The United States Government has made numerous efforts to find out the truth about these men and bring the ill and wounded home. Hanoi has not responded, because officials there do not believe that "only" 1,529 men are of any importance to 200 million Americans. Efforts have been made to repatriate sick and injured North Vietnamese prisoners; North Vietnam doesn't want them, and doesn't believe the American people want theirs.

Heading the list of rally speakers was Vice President Spiro Agnew. He was joined by Capt. James Lovell, Jr., commander of Apollo 13; Dallas industrialist H. Ross Perot; two former prisoners of war in Southeast Asia; and family members of missing and captive men. Mrs. Bruce Johnson, Salina, Ks., whose husband has been missing in Southeast Asia for six years was among them.

--IT'S OUR RESPONSIBILITY--

The point made repeatedly by all participants was that the American public must tell Hanoi these men are important and that we object to the inhumane treatment our men are receiving.

It is known that many American POW's are denied proper medical treatment; they are subjected to torture; they are not allowed to communicate with their families and no one, not even representatives of the International Red Cross are allowed to inspect the prison camps. Hanoi will not even release a complete list of it's prisoners -- thus prolonging the agony of so many women who do not know if they are wives or widows.

Whether the war is right or wrong is not the point here. These men were willing to fight for their country. It's time we fought for them.