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A Congressional Mission's Plea For Asia Peace

By Philip McCombs
Washington Post

Saigon

The U.S. congressional delegation investigating Indochina policy left for Washington last night with several of its members calling for a "major new diplomatic initiative" by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to bring peace to the area.

At least half the eight-member delegation said they had visited South Vietnamese prisons and found political prisoners who were denied rights without trial.

Several delegation members also had engaged in heated arguments with North Vietnamese and Viet Cong representatives about missing American soldiers in Southeast Asia.

The members who visited the prisoners described conditions of torture and political intimidation that they said will be the subject of a major report when they arrive back in Washington.

Representative Paul McCloskey Jr. (Rep-Calif.) said that of 32,000 prisoners in South Vietnam's jails, half have never been tried. "I think they fit the pattern of political prisoners," he said.

McCloskey said that if half of the prisoners in South Vietnam are political ones, "Then we're going to have to cut off aid under the

law," or South Vietnam is going to have to change its policies to give fair trials to accused prisoners.

Other members of the delegation who visited prisoners described the visits as "dreadful," the prisoners as "terrified" and the government officials as uncooperative.

Representative Millicent Fenwick (Rep-N.J.), who visited briefly with one of the 18 journalists arrested early in February and accused of being an underground Communist, said she

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found him "all prepared and frightened to death."

"He didn't dare say anything," she said, "but when he shook my hand, there was a terrible sense of mute appeal there in his eyes that I've never seen in a human being before."

Fenwick and others who tried to visit the journalists cut off their visit when they learned they would not be alone with the prisoners or allowed to ask any substantive questions.

Later Fenwick and Representatives Bella Abzug (Dem-N.Y.) and Donald Fraser (Dem-Minn.) flew to a provincial defectors' center to interview arrested former student leader Huynh Tan Nam, who has been held by the government since 1972.

Nam is an anti-government activist who the government claimed was a Communist.

The three members of Congress said he is being kept prisoner in the defector center and for more than a year has not been allowed to see a lawyer or his family or even to send and receive mail.

"He said he had been threatened with punishment if he were to tell us the truth," Fraser said. "He said he had been tortured and beaten many times. He said he is not a Communist and is not a rallier."

Abzug said there is "no



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SENATOR DEWEY BARTLETT
He angrily pointed to an MIA bracelet

question but that Nam is a political prisoner.”

Fraser said, “The fact that in Hanoi human rights are systematically violated does not in our judgment furnish a standard to be followed by an ally of the United States.”

Asked if he would vote for military aid for South Viet-

nam, Fraser said, “Not the \$300 million.”

McCloskey said he hopes Kissinger will “take a week off” from the Middle East to devote his full attention to Indochina, where thousands of people are being killed in continuing wars in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

Senator Dewey Bartlett

(Dem-Okla.) said in an airport press conference, “Yes, each one of us thinks we would like Secretary Kissinger to play a very big role and play it right away with Russia and China to reduce the level of war.”

Last night’s departure brought to an end a frantic week here in which the eight legislators, representing a broad spectrum of American political opinion, examined the U.S. role in Indochina before a crucial decision by Congress on the Ford Administration’s request for \$522 million in supplemental military aid for South Vietnam and Cambodia.

Often ignoring the itineraries set up for them by U.S. embassies, the legislators set their own pace and went where they pleased from the front lines to the prisons. Six of them spent a day in Phnom Penh.

The delegation had dinner with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu Saturday night, and McCloskey said he was impressed with the President’s enormous political acumen. But Abzug said she hadn’t realized before this trip how much Thieu’s internal political support has eroded.

By last night they seemed to have formed opinions and were spending much of their time making them known to the press.

McCloskey said that he was leaving with mixed feelings: admiration for the accomplishments of South Vietnam, but real concern about what he called “unlimited interrogation in se-

cret prisons with only hearsay for charges."

Earlier in the day members of the delegation confronted North Vietnamese and Viet Cong representatives with demands for information on the missing bodies of U.S. servicemen.

The legislators received vague promises and political lectures from the Commu-

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nists, hurled back some accusations of their own and departed to spend the rest of the day meeting political figures and visiting prisoners.

Seven of the legislators visited Communist negotiating delegations yesterday that were set up under the terms of the 1973 Paris cease-fire agreement. The eighth, Representative John Murtha (Dem-Pa.), a twice-wounded Vietnam veteran, did not attend.

As news cameras whirred and reporters pressed around the conference table at the Communist compound at Tan Son Nhut Airport on the edge of Saigon, Bartlett passed a silver MIA (missing in action) bracelet down the table and demanded, "I want you to tell me what I should tell Mrs. Frieszel when I return to Oklahoma."

The bracelet bore the name of Captain Clifford Frieszel, who was shot down

over North Vietnam in 1968. He was not returned with the other American prisoners of war or been accounted for in any other way.

When North Vietnamese Colonel Nguyen Duc Bao seemed vague in his response, Bartlett snapped: "We have a term in Oklahoma which I think covers your answer, and it's hogwash."

Bao then promised to make inquiries about Frieszel and asked:

"Is it reasonable while the U.S. government is bringing in war materials to kill the Vietnamese people for it to seek information on MIAs?"

Representative William Chappell (Dem-Fla.) said "I shall vote good and strong in the affirmative" for supplemental military aid for South Vietnam.

At least one other legislator, Representative John Flynt Jr. (Dem-Ga.), joined Bartlett and Chappell in this tough approach. Flynt's insistent demands for information on the MIAs interrupted a Viet Cong general in a second meeting, bringing it to a premature and acrimonious close.

"You can see the hurt with which they (the Communists) speak," Fenwick said after the meetings. "You've got to. Think of that and understand. They've been killed with U.S. guns. It will take a lot of effort to strike through in some human way (to an understanding)."