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Laird Assails McG As 'Hanoi Advocate'

By United Press International

In the harshest rhetoric of the 1972 presidential campaign to date, Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird has accused Sen. George McGovern as acting as "a spokesman of the enemy" on the issue of American prisoners of war.

The problem of the prisoners flamed into prominence in the contest between President Nixon and Democrat McGovern yesterday when the South Dakota senator accused Nixon of delaying the release of three U.S. pilots in North Vietnam for political reasons.

Politics

McGovern, appearing in New York City, called on Nixon "to let these three prisoners come home just as

quickly as possible."

"I regret very much that the Administration seems to be playing politics with these three prisoner of war that Hanoi has already offered to release," McGovern said.

North Vietnam's news agency announced today, Hanoi time, that the three pilots, who were released with ceremony from prison Sept. 17, had sent cables to Nixon asking U.S. authorities not to interfere with their return home.

Geneva Pact

Laird immediately issued a statement saying it was "a despicable act of a presidential candidate to make himself a spokesman for the enemy."

"Sen. McGovern apparently is willing to act as an

agent for Hanoi in undermining the rights of American prisoners of war under the Geneva convention," Laird said.

The defense Secretary said it was the North Vietnamese who have delayed the return of the U.S. officers, Air Force Maj. Edward Elias and Navy Lts. Markham L. Gartley and Norris A. Charles.

Laird said the U.S. government has had no communications from Hanoi about the release, and he offered to send an American medical evacuation plane to Hanoi "within 24 hours" if there is a transportation problem.

"We need no instructions from anyone about reuniting prisoners of war with their families as quickly as possible."