November 30, 2005

Dear Bring Them Home Now Tour Participants and Supporters,

We are writing to share some of the stories and lessons from the Bring Them Home Now Tour. The tour was launched on the last day of Cindy Sheehan's vigil outside Bush's ranch and travelled three different routes to Washington, DC, building momentum for the United for Peace and Justice rally on September 24th. The tour was a great success - with over 200 events, in 51 cities, in 28 states, in 21 days. From large events - like the 2,500 person rally in Austin - to small events - like the parking lot whistle stop in South Bend, Indiana - the tour brought the voices of those most directly affected by the war in Iraq to communities and elected officials across the country.

Local organizers reported that the tour helped them recruit people to participate in the Sept 24th events in Washington, D.C., as well as ongoing peace and justice work in their communities. In some places the tour created or strengthened connections between local military families and veterans and active peace groups - which is so greatly needed in building a strong movement to end the war in Iraq.

Media coverage helped us get our messages out to a wider audience. In September we had 600 media hits on national and local TV, an average of 3 - 9 stories in major local newspapers and 3 - 9 radio interviews per day. The tour had coverage in every major national news outlet on the first and last day of tour.

But as always, it's more about the stories than about the numbers - such as the Gold Star brother who happened to walk by the tour event in Amherst - his brother had committed suicide upon returning from Iraq. He met MFSO and GSFP members Joyce and Kevin Lucey, whose son had also committed suicide - and immediately added his brother's boots to the Eyes Wide Open exhibit where they were speaking. Or the City Council Resolution passed in Philadelphia, stating: "Resolved, that the Council of the City of Philadelphia, on behalf of the people of Philadelphia, welcomes the Bring Them Home Now Tour to Philadelphia and urges the United States government to commence an orderly and rapid withdrawal of United States military personnel from Iraq as expeditiously as possible."

Or the story of Cody Camacho of Iraq Veterans Against the War explaining to some counter protesters from the stage that they had spelled "soldier" wrong on the sign they were carrying, and that this was a result of a violation of their right to a good education - undermined by the US drive to war. And the feeling of solidarity expressed by the Southern bus when they met in front of the Martin Luther King museum in Montgomery, AL. Julie Cuniglio of GSFP stated, "There, standing in the shadows of the greatest civil right leaders of our time, all of [our difficulties] were forgotten and we were brothers in one cause. I think cities like Montgomery united us and helped us to bring a unified and crystallized message to other cities."

The web site has lots of stories from the tour, such as IVAW's Hart Viges' speech at American University. (http://www.bringthemhomenowtour.org/article.php?id=226)

Kelissa Stanley of MFSO said of Hart's speech, "At the final speaking event where all three tours had come together I heard Hart give his best speech yet. I had heard that same speech at least 10 times, I had held his hand while he recovered from the emotional toll it took on him night after night, and I had discussed with Lietta limiting the number of times Hart told that story because it would take him so long to recuperate. He always spoke about the moment in Iraq where the whole world came down on him and he realized he could no longer be a soldier. However, on that final night, Hart gave that speech with the same
amount of passion that he always did. I even watched him prepare for it that night in the way the he always did, by clenching his fists and going into an introverted, almost trance-like state from the time the speeches started until the moment his name was called. But this time it was different. He wowed the audience as usual, but as he walked back to his chair, his shoulders were straight and he was holding his head high. I told him later that it was the first time he owned the story and it didn't own him."

From small towns to big cities, the messages of the Bring Them Home Now Tour were well received. Even in towns where there was opposition, tour members found ways to respond effectively. VFP member Tom Palombo said: "In advance of our visit, folks who were opposed to us set up a table with yellow ribbons – we suggested that if they were so in support of the mission, they could sign up so that our loved ones can go home. We invited some recruiters to be on hand for this purpose. The people that support the war are often not the ones directly affected by it."

We learned a lot about how to work with local communities, streamlining contact info, using phone cards instead of satellites, mapping RV dump stations in advance and so on. Your evaluations helped us tremendously in learning what worked, and what would have worked better.

WE WILL BE COMPILING A BOOK FROM THE TOUR -- - please let us know if you would like to contribute some writing or photos based on your experience with the tour.

We thank you so much for your participation and support. The Bring Them Home Now Tour, and your involvement in it, helped to build the movement needed to end this war. The sponsoring organizations, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Military Families Speak Out, Gold Star Families for Peace and Veterans For Peace are continuing to work locally and nationally to bring our troops home now, take care of them when they get here, and never allow them to be sent off to an unjust and unjustifiable war again. You can stay connected with this work by regularly visiting our websites:

www.gsfp.org
www.ivaw.net
www.mfso.org
www.veteransforpeace.org

On behalf of the Bring Them Home Now Tour,
Gold Star Families for Peace
Iraq Veterans Against the War
Military Families Speak Out
Veterans For Peace