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NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

(R.—Kans.)

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DOLE SAYS RECLASSIFICATION OF MIA'S "TAKES THE PRESSURE OFF"

Washington, D.C. -- Senator Bob Dole said today that President Carter's decision to resume status reviews for missing American servicemen in Southeast Asia is "clearly his latest idea of 'putting the past behind us' -- that is, 'out of sight, out of mind'". "This means that the Administration has essentially given up on all intention of actively seeking information on the 712 men still listed as 'missing-in-action'", Dole remarked.

Senator Dole said that the decision to resume reclassifications came at a particularly poor time, as it "tells the Vietnamese, in effect, that we no longer consider their accounting efforts a priority matter, and a precondition to improved relations." Dole noted that the President earlier this year endorsed United Nations membership for Vietnam and is proceeding with "normalization" plans between the two governments, despite his campaign pledge to make the MIA issue central to future relations.

In announcing the decision yesterday, Department of Defense officials admitted that "most, if not all, of the cases will result in a presumptive finding of death." Officials said this judgement is based on the fact that a Presidential Commission which visited Hanoi in March concluded there is "no evidence" that any missing Americans are alive in Southeast Asia.

"I don't know whether any missing Americans in Southeast Asia are alive or not, and I don't think anyone else in this country does either," Dole said. "But I hardly think a few days spent in Hanoi by a Commission could conclusively answer the question. I don't think reclassification hearings can conclusively answer the question."

"However, in wiping the slate clean, we are taking all pressure off the Vietnamese to provide for a further accounting--beyond the meager information on only 35 Americans they have given us in the past two years."