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NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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## "NO" TO VIETNAM

Yesterday the Clinton Administration decided to ease the trade embargo with Vietnam by allowing U.S. firms to bid on development projects financed by multilateral development banks.

In my view, now is not the time to lift or to ease the embargo against Communist Vietnam. The Senate Foreign Relations committee clearly agrees, having defeated a measure last week to call on President Clinton to lift the embargo.

Our relationship with Vietnam over the last 20 years has consisted of nothing but uncertainties and doubts. And, nothing has really changed. The recent documents received from Moscow and released by the Pentagon, yet again, raise more doubts and more questions. How can we justify rewarding a country that continually resists giving the United States a full accounting of our POW/MIA's? Furthermore, how can we explain easing the embargo to the family members who are yet to know the fates of their loved ones? Uncertainty must not result in normalization of trade or diplomatic relations with Communist Vietnam.

Vietnam speaks of a new policy of cooperation with the United States which boils down to nothing more than red carpet treatment for fact-finding representatives of the United States. But few, if any, facts are offered with the red carpet.

If Vietnam wants to cooperate, let them release information about the POW cases that Dr. Henry Kissinger raised in February 1973. Kissinger provided dossiers to Hanoi, containing news articles and pictures of our POW/MIA's which had appeared in newspapers in Vietnam, Laos, Russia, and other communist countries. More recently, General John Vessey has presented the Vietnamese with his discrepancy list containing over 135 names. No doubt about it, the Vietnamese should have easy answers to these cases since it was their photos and publications which first illustrated the fact that our men were alive. The U.S. should not reward Vietnam by easing or lifting the embargo until answers are provided to the POW/MIA's families.

And what about Vietnam's despicable record on human rights? At this point in time, it is a catastrophic error to waste the leverage that a tight embargo gives us without insisting that the 70 million suffering Vietnamese be accorded basic human rights.

According to Amnesty International and Asia Watch, Vietnam is one of the world's most oppressive regimes. In March of this year, the International Red Cross closed its office in Hanoi because its representatives were not permitted access to political prisoners.

In 1975, the "so-called" liberation of Vietnam -- when the Communist North Vietnamese defied the Paris Peace Accord by marching into Saigon -- did nothing but create one of the world's poorest and most repressive countries. These inhuman conditions have created an atmosphere worse than the infamous Vietnamese famine of 1945. Over 1 million proud Vietnamese have left their homeland to escape communist rule. Rewarding this behavior by easing the trade embargo shows a serious lapse in judgement by the Clinton Administration.

It was no accident that on May 24th, as news of massive voter turnout in Cambodia suggested the communists would be defeated at the polls, that a huge demonstration was held in front of the Hue, Vietnam police station in which a Buddhist monk self-immolated. This event -- reportedly was witnessed by 10,000 pro-democracy Vietnamese and widely reported in the state-controlled media -- surely sent shock waves throughout a regime which remembers vividly that similar events preceded the demise of South Vietnam's Diem government in 1963. The winds of democratic change may even be blowing in Vietnam. I believe the

U.S. should side with the forces of change not with the communist bureaucrats who have misled us and repressed their people for two decades.

A third concern is the current situation in Cambodia. Thanks to the efforts of the United Nations, the civil war has nearly over but the battle for democracy continues. One wonders what Hanoi's ultimate objectives are. For example, Vietnamese colonization of strategic real estate, including prime agricultural areas and rich rubber farms, has increased in recent years.

The President's decision to let U.S. firms to bid on multilateral projects is not likely to generate much U.S. business since the MDB's procurement process is notoriously stacked against U.S. Firms. Even the head of a U.S. venture capital fund concedes the President's decision "doesn't help us much." The irony is that easing the embargo sends a signal of approval to the communist regime in Vietnam while allowing U.S. firms to engage in an historically unproductive area.

Perhaps someday Vietnam will do something to deserve the easing -- or even lifting -- of the trade embargo. But President Clinton's decision is the worst of all possible worlds: a terrible signal condoning Vietnamese behavior is sent and received while U.S. businesses are unlikely to receive any financial benefit.

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