



NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

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FROM THE NATION'S CAPITOL
BY SENATOR BOB DOLE

THE PANAMA CANAL

The issue of continued American sovereignty over the Panama Canal and the adjacent Panama Canal Zone continues to confront this Congress, and will likely be a point for Senate consideration when Members return from the August recess.

As many of us recall from our American History textbooks, U.S. involvement in the project began with an agreement between the two governments in 1903 for the U.S. to build, operate, and defend the canal, and to maintain sovereignty over the adjacent zone, in perpetuity. In return for this authority, our government paid the Panamanian nation a sum of ten million dollars and agreed to provide an annual payment for the indefinite future. For over sixty years since, the United States has provided skillful and efficient operation of the Canal, establishing valuable commercial and economic benefits for both itself and the Panamanian nation. To date, Panama has the largest per capita income of any Central American state.

PANAMANIAN RESENTMENT

But growing, sometimes violent resentment among some Panamanian citizens over the extent of American rights in the area has kept the United States at the negotiating table since 1964, in an attempt to arrive at a new bilateral treaty agreement. The degree to which our government should submit to physical and political pressure by the Panamanian government and its people to reduce its sovereign rights over the Canal and Canal Zone has become a matter of immediate importance.

Congress has the Constitutional responsibility to review and pass judgement upon any treaty agreement formulated by our State Department and the Panamanian government. But recent indications of sentiment among Members of Congress makes it doubtful that either the House of Representatives or the Senate will ratify any new treaty that would substantially reduce or eliminate traditional U.S. authority in

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this area. Earlier this year, I joined with thirty-seven other Senators in co-sponsoring a Resolution to oppose any lessening of our control over the Canal and Canal Zone, and on June 26 the House voted to amend the State Department Appropriations bill to bar any use of funds to negotiate a "surrender" of American rights in the area.

VITAL FOR SECURITY

Like a large number of Kansans, many of my colleagues and I simply feel that this waterway link between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans is too vital to our security -- and to that of the entire Western hemisphere -- to wholly entrust its operation and defense at this time to a Panamanian government that lacks fundamental technical expertise and political stability. The United States has provided effective defense and control of this critical region for the better part of this century, and any agreement affecting the Canal's future should ensure the continuation of full rights of use by our government. To a considerable extent, the economic and political security of the West depends upon the decisions to be made about the Canal's status, and I'm confident that Congress will use prudent judgement in making those determinations.