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DOLE: "CONFIDENTIAL" CABLE PROVES PANAMA CANAL TREATY FLAWED

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Senator Bob Dole today released the text of a Confidential State Department cable which he said proves "beyond a doubt" that U.S. and Panamanian officials have far different interpretations of key defense provisions in the proposed Panama Canal Treaties. Dole has requested comments from Secretary of State Cyrus Vance on the contents of the cable, which the Senator received a copy of on Monday of this week. "This document demonstrates beyond a doubt the vast differences in interpretation of the most important part of these treaties -- that portion which bears directly on our vital national defense interests," Dole said.

Senator Dole, who is due to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Wednesday morning, said that the Senate "must clarify our defense rights by Amendment, not by weak 'understandings' that have no legal and binding effect." Senator Dole is the only Senator to have introduced Amendments and Reservations to change the language of the Canal Treaties proposed by President Carter.

The State Department cable was received from the American Embassy in Panama last Thursday, September 29, and described Panamanian negotiators as "disturbed" over testimony by Secretary of State Vance and U.S. Ambassadors Ellsworth Bunker and Sol Linowitz before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last week. One Panamanian negotiator confirmed that the U.S. would have no military intervention rights under the Treaty, and there would be no "preferential passage" for U.S. warships through the Panama Canal. Secretary Vance, along with several other Administration witnesses, indicated in his testimony last week that such American rights were "understood" within the language of the Treaties.

Senator Dole said it is "essential" that the United States retain unilateral authority to step in and defend the Canal militarily at any time it is threatened. He said it is also essential to have clear-cut rights to priority passage through the Canal during wartime. Senator Dole has already introduced Amendments to the Treaties which would guarantee both rights to the United States permanently.

In other remarks prepared for the Committee, Dole said defects and omissions in the Treaties must be corrected by Amendment or Reservation, both of which would be legally binding, rather than by Understanding or Declaration, which have only an interpretive purpose for the party that makes them.

Dole described in detail his six Amendments and two Reservations which, in addition to those described above, would cut U.S. payments to Panama in half; guarantee the U.S. right to construct a new interoceanic canal anyplace in the Western hemisphere; extend the transition period for transfer of U.S. jurisdiction over the Canal Zone; insist on human rights observance in Panama for U.S. and Panamanian citizens; and give the House of Representatives a right to act on the Treaty proposals.

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ATTACHED IS A COPY OF THE CONFIDENTIAL STATE DEPARTMENT CABLE.