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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1977

CONTACT: BOB DOWNEN  
JANET ANDERSON

DOLE INFORMED THAT PANAMA DRUG FILE DELIVERY IS POSTPONED; WILL APPEAL TO ATTORNEY GENERAL

Senator Bob Dole said today that the United States Drug Enforcement Agency would not be providing him with documents this week relating to Panamanian drug trafficking, as earlier promised. Dole said his office received a call from the DEA Administrator's office late Wednesday advising that "clearance procedures" for the classified documents was "taking longer than expected."

"I think this most recent delay will only add to the public suspicion as to what DEA files may say about the involvement of the Panamanian government in illegal drug trafficking," Dole said Thursday. He added that he was filing an appeal today with the Attorney General for DEA files under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. He said he would do this because the DEA had surpassed its allowable extension for responding to his F.O.I. request.

Senator Dole filed a Freedom-of-Information request on October 14 after he was given a list of 44 Drug Enforcement Agency file codes which allegedly contained information linking Panamanian General Omar Torrijos and members of his family with illegal drug trafficking in the Western Hemisphere. Dole said he was told that General Torrijos has played a role in transporting illegal drugs through Panama on their way to the United States and that he received some profit from this role. Dole said he had no idea if the allegations were true, and hoped to have an opportunity to examine DEA files "in order to put the matter to rest."

FILES GIVEN TO SENATE COMMITTEE

Dole said he was advised by DEA Administrator Peter Bensinger that the files in question had been turned over to the Senate Intelligence Committee for examination, but that Dole would be provided with files that had been cleared of national security data by DEA and the State Department.

"What I want to know is, if these files have already been turned over to the Senate Intelligence Committee, why is it taking DEA so long to pull them together for me?" Dole remarked. He said he was given a verbal pledge by DEA officials on November 8 that he would have the cleared files by the end of this week.

SUBMITS APPEAL

Dole said he was taking the next recourse under the Freedom of Information Act, which is to submit an appeal to the Attorney General for the files. The Attorney General would have 20 days to respond to the appeal.

RELEVANCE TO TREATIES

Senator Dole said that his purpose in pursuing the matter is to determine whether it could have some important relationship to the Panama Canal Treaty proposals now pending before the Senate. "Certainly, the personal integrity and the credibility of Panama's government leaders bear upon their reliability as guarantors for the new Treaty," Dole said. "Furthermore, if the United States is to enhance the financial and political status of the Torrijos government by entering into the new Treaties, we should know in advance if that government is infested with corruption."

The Kansas Senator said he has an open mind about the validity of the allegations, "but each additional delay and roadblock raises my suspicion that there is something to these charges after all."