P.Se to the NEWS

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WHO SUPPORTS THE PANAMA TREATIES?

Why is it that some Senators appear to be willing to take the political risk of defying the overwhelming majority of their constituents on the issue of ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties? Some Senators admit that their mail is running 1,000 to 1 against the treaties but still they plan to vote for them.

One answer to that question is the power and prestige of the hidden backers of the treaties, namely, the giant international banks. On December 1, 1977, 95 large international banks ran an advertisement in the Wall Street Journal announcing that they had loaned Panama another $25 million on November 2. This brings the total bank loans outstanding to Panama to $2.777 billion.

The treaties that President Carter signed with dictator Torrijos are the only way these banks can ever be repaid. The Torrijos regime is paying 39 percent of its national income in debt service. Just ask any banker how much he will lend you if you tell him that you are now paying 39 percent of your income in interest on money you have already borrowed.

The banks know those loans are uncollectible unless Torrijos takes control of the U.S. Canal. Those banks have a large financial stake in the ratification of the Panama Treaties -- clearly enough to justify contacting their correspondent banks and other business connections who happen to be constituents of undecided Senators.

Intense pressure is also generated by the "selling" campaign carried on by President Carter, the State Department, and the Pentagon. To sway the vote of first-term Democrat Senator Edward Zorinsky, President Carter invited 280 Nebraska opinion makers to visit him in the East Room of the White House. The President hopes the guests will be so impressed with the honor of his hospitality that they will rush over to Capitol Hill and ask Senator Zorinsky to vote yes.

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The State Department has a massive lobbying campaign for ratification that resembles the political headquarters of a presidential candidate, complete with charts and pinboards for every state, and a weekly progress report called PITS {Panama Information Track Score).

In one week's activity, the State Department arranged 476 pro-treaty speeches or debates and 288 media interviews to counteract the "bombardiers" (State's lingo for treaty opponents).

Much of the information put out at taxpayer expense by the Carter Administration is not accurate. The Administration originally claimed, for example, that the treaties would not cost the U.S. taxpayers any money because Torrijos' new money will come out of Canal tolls.

Congressman Philip Crane has listed some of the specific costs that will have to be born by the taxpayers if the treaties are ratified: $135 million to pay for the early retirement of Panamanians now employed in the Zone, an estimated $1.3 billion for services now provided by the Panama Canal Company which would have to be provided by the Defense Department, the construction of new facilities for our military personnel to replace those turned over to Panama, the expense of training Panamanians to run the Canal, and the loss of $17 million a year in tolls that the Canal Company has been paying to the U.S. Treasury but which will go to Panama under the treaties.

President Carter said in his fireside chat that "the Canal Zone has always been Panamanian territory." To the contrary, in the 1907 case of Wilson v. Shaw, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled: "A treaty with it [the Republic of Panama], ceding the canal zone, was duly ratified.... Congress has passed several acts based upon the title of the United States.... It is hypercritical to contend that the title of the United States is imperfect, and that the territory described does not belong to this nation."

Our Supreme and lower Federal courts have continued to cite with approval Wilson v. Shaw's holding that the Panama Canal Zone belongs to the United States.

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