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F03-11 Panama Canal  
F02-1

April 13, 1977

Dear Congressman Treen: *David*

I would like to reply to your letter of February 18 enclosing correspondence from several of your constituents expressing concern about the future of the Panama Canal and the appointment of Ambassador Sol M. Linowitz as a Panama Canal co-negotiator.

We have given their views the most thoughtful and careful consideration. It is, nevertheless, our judgment that the 1903 Treaty with Panama no longer provides, as it once did, the most effective basis for protecting our interest in the Canal.

Many changes have occurred in Panama, the United States, and the rest of the world over the more than 70 years that the treaty has been in effect. Today no nation, including ours, would accept a treaty relationship which permits the exercise of the extensive territorial rights in "perpetuity" which we at present enjoy.

Panama's resentment of our exercise of these rights erupted in 1964 into rioting and death. Today the terms of the present treaty continue to cause unnecessary friction between our two countries. The treaty creates a potential for violence that poses a real threat to our efficient operation and defense of the Canal.

To put the problem into more manageable terms, four successive Administrations have conducted negotiations for a new Panama Canal treaty. In that context I would observe that we do not plan to "give away" the Canal. Rather we intend to operate, control and defend it for an extended period of time.

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(Note: This is typical of many letters written by members of President Carter's staff seeking support for the treaty.)

We expect to have treaty provisions that will safeguard the Canal's continued operation thereafter for as long as it has any benefit to us or world shipping. In short, we believe that the new treaty we are trying to negotiate will offer a greater assurance than does the present one that we will continue to have the Canal open and available for our use.

For your information, I am enclosing a copy of a speech by our chief negotiator, Ambassador-at-Large Ellsworth Bunker, an information sheet on Ambassador Linowitz, and a copy of the Department of State's most recent policy statement.

Sincerely,

Frank Moore  
Assistant to the President  
for Congressional Liaison

The Honorable David C. Treen  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Enclosures: As stated

bcc: Frank Moore

FM/VLG/State/NSC/JN/AVH/rg