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U.S. Extends Economic Sanctions Against Panama For One Year

by Deborah Tyroler

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On April 3, unidentified administration officials told the New York Times that President Bush will sign an executive order this week to extend economic sanctions against Panama for another year. If the May 7 presidential election is evaluated as fraudulent, the officials said Bush may expand the sanctions. One of the officials said, "We have said there will be no accommodation with a Noriega-dominated regime and that means things will probably get much tougher after the elections." Another told the Times that the options range from small steps, such as reinstating some of the financial measures that were lifted to make it easier for US citizens living and working in Panama, to a major action such as a trade embargo. According to Juan B. Sosa, deposed Panamanian president Eric Arturo Delvalle's ambassador to Washington, in a recent meeting with Secretary of State James Baker, Delvalle acknowledged that the sanctions were damaging US businesses and the Panamanian people. Sosa added that the sanctions must continue for the moment, but should be re-evaluated after the elections. The Reagan administration cut off military and economic aid to Panama in July 1987. In early 1988, after Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega had been indicted in the US on drug trafficking charges, the US prohibited US banks from transferring funds to the Panamanian government, withheld fees owed for the use of the Panama Canal, and suspended special trade benefits. Next, on April 8, 1988, Reagan invoked the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, prohibiting all payments to Panama by US citizens, US companies and their subsidiaries in the country. Revisions to the exemptions have been mandated three times since last year to permit some exemptions, such as the departure tax required to leave the country and excise taxes on gasoline. (Basic data from New York Times, 04/06/89)

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