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Panama: National Legislature Nominates Canal Chief Administrator

by Deborah Tyroler
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On June 29, Panama's national legislature nominated Tomas Altamirano Duque by a vote of 42-0 and 13 abstentions among four candidates. Altamirano Duque, a successful businessperson and publisher of Panama's widest circulation newspaper, La Estrella, holds a business degree from the University of Florida, and has been appointed to government posts under the ruling Revolutionary Democratic Party. He is also described as a friend of Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega. Under the 1977 treaties turning sovereignty of the canal over to Panama in 2000, beginning in 1990, a Panamanian citizen is to be chief canal administrator, and a US citizen deputy administrator. The Panama Canal Commission, created under the treaties to supervise canal operations until 2000, is a US federal agency. The treaties state that Panama's choice to head the Commission must be approved by the US Senate. At present, chief administrator is US citizen Dennis McAuliffe and deputy administrator, Panamanian Fernando Manfredo. According to AP, a visa Altamirano Duque had to travel to the US was revoked by the embassy in September, ostensibly because of his friendship with Noriega and other top military officers. The US Senate is not expected to approve Altamirano Duque as head of the Panama Canal Commission. (Basic data from AP, 06/29/89)

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