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Washington Rejects Panamanian Government Nominee To Take Over Top Canal Administrator Post In January 1990

by John Neagle

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On Dec. 5, President Bush reiterated rejection of the Panamanian government's nominee to head the Panama Canal Commission, Tomas Altamirano Duque, and proposed that current deputy administrator, Panamanian Fernando Manfredo, take over on Jan. 1. Under the 1977 Panama Canal Treaties, the Canal is due to be taken over by Panama in the year 2000. A major interim step was the scheduled transfer of the top administrative post from a US citizen to a Panamanian citizen on Jan. 1, 1990. The treaties call for the Panamanian government to nominate the administrator and for the US to appoint that person following ratification by the US Senate. The current administrator of the Panama Canal is US citizen Dennis McAuliffe. According to a statement by White House spokesperson Marlin Fitzwater, "As this step demonstrates, the US is committed to meeting the requirements of the Panama Canal Treaty even under current circumstances in which no legitimate government authority exists in Panama...A Panamanian administrator will be appointed at such time as a legitimate Panamanian government exists and proposes its candidate for administrator in accordance with the procedures set forth in the treaty and applicable law." According to the White House, Manfredo accepted Washington's proposal. The Canal deputy administrator served as Trade Minister during the government of Omar Torrijos. (Basic data from AFP, Notimex, 12/05/89)

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