

ABSTRACT

PFEFFER, STEPHEN TODD. "The Drill": The Emergence of the "New Right" as a Political Force in U.S. Conservative Politics during the Panama Canal Debates, 1977-1978. (Under the direction of Nancy Mitchell.)

This thesis examines the rise of the "New Right" in conservative American politics during the Panama Canal debates in 1977-1978. The "New Right" emerged from the frustration many conservatives felt towards the traditional Republican Party establishment because of the defeat of Barry Goldwater, the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, the policy of détente, and the scandal of Watergate. The "New Right" had financial, legislative and social components that worked together to promote its conservative agenda of lower taxes, vigorous anti-communism, and, in the early years of the Carter administration, opposition to the ratification of the Panama Canal treaties. This thesis looks specifically at the "New Right's" fundraisers, most notably Richard Viguerie, Terry Dolan, Paul Weyrich, and Howard Phillips, who raised money in order to influence legislation and provide support for conservative candidates; it also examines the members of Congress who worked in conjunction with this financial apparatus; finally, it analyzes the relationship of Ronald Reagan to the "New Right." The Panama Canal treaties debate served as a test case for the "New Right" to hone its fundraising and media skills on a national level. This work details two "New Right" tactics used to block U.S. Senate ratification of the treaties: the Panama Canal "truth squad" and the direct mail campaign. The "New Right" used the Panama Canal as a campaign issue during the 1978 midterm elections and the candidates it supported defeated three incumbent Democratic senators who had voted for ratification. During the Panama Canal debates, the "New Right" worked outside of the Republican Party to create an effective and well-organized grassroots organization.

**“THE DRILL”: THE EMERGENCE OF THE “NEW RIGHT” AS A POLITICAL
FORCE IN U.S. CONSERVATIVE POLITICS DURING THE PANAMA CANAL
DEBATES, 1977-1978**

by
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family and friends who have supported me throughout this process. I would especially like to thank my parents for all their love and help over the years. I could not have done this without them.

In addition, I dedicate this thesis to the memory of William “Bill” Cofer whose passing left a void in those of us who admired and respected him. His wit, charm, humor, and passion for history have been greatly missed. I hope that this work will serve as a reminder of his life and the tremendous influence he had on those who knew him.

BIOGRAPHY

Todd Pfeffer was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He will graduate in August 2006 from North Carolina State University with an M.A. in history. His concentration focuses on 20th century U.S. diplomatic history. Pfeffer has committed to work on his doctorate at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio beginning in September 2006.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. CHAPTER I: ORIGINS OF THE NEW RIGHT	5
2.1 The Four Areas of Difference between the Old and New Right and the Three Element Comprising the New Right	6
2.2 Creation of the New Right's Financial Element, 1971-1975.....	8
2.3 The New Right's Strategic and Tactical Operations: Direct Mail.....	11
2.4 The New Right's Political and Philosophical Beliefs and their merger with its Legislative and Social Agendas.....	13
2.5 New Right Members of Congress and Ronald Reagan.....	14
2.6 The New Right's Political Agenda 1974-1978.....	17
3. CHAPTER II	24
4. CHAPTER III: "THE DRILL," THE NEW RIGHT'S VIEWS ON THE PANAMA CANAL AS EXPRESSED BY RONALD REAGAN.....	34
4.1 The New Right's Strategy in January-February 1978	40
4.2 January 1978	41
4.3 February 1978	45
4.4 Treaty Opponents Two Main Tactics to Stop Ratification of the Treaties: Direct Mail and the Use of Amendments to the Treaties.....	50
4.5 Legislative Tactics to Block Ratification	55
5. CHAPTER IV: WINNERS AND LOSERS	64
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY	70

INTRODUCTION

This thesis has gone through many stages before arriving at its present form. What had originally started as a project to examine the emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union as a measure of U.S./Soviet relations in the 1970s has morphed into an essay about the New Right and the Panama Canal treaties. I came across the New Right during my research last summer into Jimmy Carter's foreign policy. What fascinated me about this group was the dearth of information about its origins and supporters. During the Panama Canal debates in 1977-1978, the New Right emerged as a powerful political force. However, many sources from the time mentioned the New Right only in passing and did not examine its political or ideological motivations. Few journalists at the time, with the notable exception of David Broder, examined in detail the New Right and its impact on national politics. Subsequent historiography has usually relegated the New Right to a few paragraphs within a much larger body of scholarship. This work shows that the New Right played an influential and powerful role in American politics and changed the Republican Party.

This thesis serves as a microcosm of a much larger narrative that needs to be told about the New Right and its impact on American politics. I have not addressed the "neoconservatives" in this paper because they are different in many ways from the New Right. The neoconservatives emerged in the early 1970s. Members included Senator Henry Jackson (D-WA), Richard Cheney, President Ford's Chief of Staff, and Donald Rumsfeld, Ford's Secretary of Defense. Both the New Right and neoconservatives dismissed the idea of détente, which President Nixon, and until 1975, President Ford, had advocated. They feuded with the realists, like Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in the Republican Party who wanted to ease tensions

with the Soviet Union.¹ Neoconservatives also encompassed a mixture of conservative Democrats, Republicans, journalists, and others who shared some similarities with the New Right. However, many in the New Right viewed neoconservatives as an elitist intellectual force, headed by prominent figures such as Irving Kristol, and “not to be trusted.”² The New Right’s populist message raised the ire of many traditional conservatives. Scholarship of this period has tended to discuss the neoconservatives more than the New Right. By examining the New Right, this work focuses on the “nuts and bolts,” the foot soldiers in Congress and the people who raised money, of the rightward shift in the American political spectrum.

The New Right during the Panama Canal debates reveals a complex and well-organized group of conservatives tied directly to a powerful fundraising apparatus. Deliberately and methodically, the New Right used the Panama Canal as a platform on which to present its ideas to the American public. Many Americans responded by sending money to conservative organizations and by pressuring their senators not to ratify the treaties.

Chapter One explores the origins of the New Right by looking at its fundraisers, its supporters in Congress, and its network of conservative grassroots organizations. This puts the goals and aspirations of the New Right into perspective. This chapter also investigates the role of Ronald Reagan, who reclaimed the national stage as one of the most virulent critics of the treaties. Chapter Two provides a brief explanation of the history of the Panama Canal from 1903 to 1977 in order to help the reader understand the issues that emerged during the debates over ratification of the canal treaties signed by the United States and Panama in 1977. Chapter Three analyzes the actions of the New Right in January and February 1978 during the height of the canal debates in the U.S. Senate. It focuses on three: the Panama Canal “truth squad” that

¹ Jim Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (New York: Viking Press, 2004), 59.

² Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 174.

traveled to four cities in January 1978 to target uncommitted senators and to gather media attention to their anti-treaty views; the New Right's use of direct mail to galvanize supporters, raise money, and pressure senators not to vote for ratification; the New Right senators' tactic of adding amendments to the canal treaties in the hope of "killing" them. Chapter Four, the conclusion, examines the winners and losers of this debate. The New Right came out on top despite the fact that the Senate ratified the treaties in 1978. It emerged from the debates better organized and better funded. It effectively used the Canal in the 1978 midterm elections to get its candidates elected.

I have relied on the works of many prominent New Right supporters, such as Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich, to help explain their origins and ideas. Ronald Reagan's radio speeches from the 1970s have proved invaluable to understanding the positions and arguments employed by anti-treaty advocates. In addition, I have utilized documents from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library to explain how his administration countered the New Right's efforts to derail the treaties. Other sources include the *Congressional Quarterly*, and the secondary works by David Broder, Alan Crawford, Walter LaFeber, Michael Conniff, and Robert Strong, which have helped to place the New Right into context.

Originally, this work would have included not only the Panama Canal, but also the national debate that ensued over the SALT II treaties signed by Jimmy Carter and Leonid Brezhnev in 1979. Panama Canal served as a "drill" for the New Right in order to prepare them for action against SALT II. Both the Panama Canal and SALT II were essentially the same debate over the role of the United States in world affairs. However, covering so much ground would have required more space and time than allotted for this project. Consequently, this effort will highlight the importance of a political group that often remains overlooked and its impact

discounted through the events that transpired during the Panama Canal ratification debates in 1977-1978.

CHAPTER I: THE ORIGINS OF THE NEW RIGHT

During the early 1970s, a movement calling itself the “New Right” arose in American politics. Conservative journalist Kevin Phillips first used the term “New Right” in 1975 as a way to distinguish the emerging movement from the traditional “Old Right” of the Republican Party. Thereafter the media and New Right supporters increasingly used this nomenclature to describe the movement.³ The purpose of this essay is to examine this political force in the context of the Panama Canal ratification debates in 1977- 1978. To accomplish this task, the New Right requires a clear definition in order to understand its major impact on this event.

To describe the New Right and its followers requires an understanding of events that occurred in America during the second half of the 20th century. The New Right’s reactionary political philosophy resulted from its members’ experiences during the turmoil of the 1960s and early 1970s surrounding the Vietnam War, and the Civil Rights movement, and from their hostility to the rapid social changes in American society. The New Right opposed liberal Democrats, but they also battled against the “Old Right” of the Republican Party. Individuals who formed the core of the New Right distanced themselves “from what they believed to be the slightly effete conservative leadership of the East Coast—for example, William F. Buckley, Jr., and his *National Review*.”⁴ Many New Right members of Congress, such as Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Phillip Crane (R-CA), and Paul Laxalt (R-NV) came from Western states. Their admiration of the Old West and their appreciation of the political power of the Sun Belt highlighted additional differences with East Coast Republicans.⁵ The New Right’s political rhetoric was evident in their anti-intellectual and populist message.

³ Paul Weyrich, “Blue Collar or Blue Blood?” in Roger Whitaker, ed., *The New Right Papers*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 49.

⁴ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right: The New Right and the Politics of Resentment*, 7.

⁵ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 83-84.

The New Right challenged the well-established dynamics of the Republican Party. Paul Weyrich, one of the financial backers of the movement, explained that the differences between the Old and New Right encompassed the New Right's "political origins, its philosophical/political motivations, its strategic/ tactical operations and its self conscious goals."⁶ Each of these four areas will help define the New Right's ideology and determine its supporters both within Congress and outside of government. This definition will put the New Right into its historical context. Secondly, the makeup of the New Right contained three elements: a financial, a legislative, and social agenda that coalesced into the formal movement in the late 1970s. These three elements are central to the New Right's origins, political philosophy, operations and goals. By examining this relationship, a cohesive portrayal will emerge of a very complex political movement.

THE FOUR AREAS OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW RIGHT AND THE THREE ELEMENTS COMPRISING THE NEW RIGHT

The New Right's political origins dated back to the frustration of many conservatives over the lack of electoral success of conservative Republicans during the 1960s. Conservatism had fallen out of favor as the New Frontier and Great Society heralded the golden age of American liberalism.⁷ Many in the New Right pointed to the 1964 presidential campaign of Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) as their motivation to get involved in Republican politics. Goldwater's campaign "represented a new wave of citizen activism" and launched the political career of Ronald Reagan as a conservative spokesman and activist.⁸ Future New Right leaders, such as Paul Weyrich, faulted Goldwater for not providing leadership for the conservative movement in

⁶ Paul Weyrich, "Blue Collar or Blue Blood?" in *The New Right Papers*, 50.

⁷ Kevin P. Phillips, *Post Conservative America: People, Politics, and Ideology in a Time of Crises* (New York: Random House Books, 1982), 34.

⁸ Kevin P. Phillips, *Post-Conservative America*, 34.

America after he lost to Lyndon Johnson.⁹ The election of Richard Nixon highlighted to conservatives that a Republican, along with third party candidate George Wallace, could garner 57% of the American electoral vote. Roger Whitaker, a conservative writer, explained that the Democrats lost this election because they had alienated the social conservatives of their party.¹⁰ In the future, the New Right would embrace social conservatives as a key constituency in their movement.

However, the policies pursued during the administration of Richard Nixon, in particular détente with the Soviet Union, which conservatives criticized as weak and defeatist, upset many who would form the base of the New Right. The humiliation of Nixon and Watergate lingered on their minds as well. Howard Philips, founder of the Conservative Caucus, said, “The New Right was born out of Watergate.” He explained further, “Many of us used to believe that conservative fortunes were synonymous with Republican fortunes. We placed an inordinate hope in the GOP and in Richard Nixon.”¹¹ This estrangement with the Republican establishment continued after Nixon’s resignation in 1974. As historian David Reinhard aptly points out, “What, conservatives ask themselves, had over six years of Republican governance accomplished? South Vietnam had gone under, Red China had been recognized, détente had become the entrenched foreign policy, and the military balance of power was shifting in the Soviets’ favor.” Conservatives saw the loss in Vietnam as evidence that détente would not work.¹² The nascent New Right movement would emerge in the 1970s to challenge the policies of the Republican Party.

⁹ Paul Weyrich, “Blue Collar or Blue Blood?” in *The New Right Papers*, 51.

¹⁰ Roger Whitaker, ed., *The New Right Papers*, x.

¹¹ Richard Viguerie, *The New Right: We’re Ready to Lead*, (Falls Church Virginia: The Viguerie Company, 1981), 58.

¹²David Reinhard, *The Republican Right Since 1945* (The University of Kentucky Press, 1983), 229.

When Gerald Ford assumed the presidency in August 1974, his policies further angered many conservatives in the Republican Party. Richard Viguerie, who would emerge as the prominent New Right fundraiser, noted that the event that had stirred him to action had been when President Ford had chosen Nelson Rockefeller, a liberal Republican, as his vice-president. The day after Ford's announcement, Viguerie had initiated a meeting with several friends, most notably Paul Weyrich, Terry Dolan, and Howard Phillips, to challenge what they perceived as the Republican Party's abandonment of conservative principles.¹³ Viguerie realized that they could not stop Rockefeller's appointment because conservatives had no sway within the party.¹⁴ To Viguerie and those present, this lack of power highlighted the need to create conservative institutions independent of the party. These institutions would organize and raise funds to gain control of the agenda of the Republican Party. Viguerie wanted to model these institutions after successful Democratic groups such as Americans for Democratic Action and the National Abortion Rights Action League.¹⁵ "Conservatives," Viguerie wrote, "at long last, were building independent constituencies and pressure groups to match those of the liberal coalition."¹⁶ This meeting gave birth to the New Right's financial coalition, one of the three elements of the movement. Furthermore, this coalition emphasized the New Right's stated goal to influence Republican politics.

CREATION OF THE NEW RIGHT'S FINANCIAL ELEMENT 1971-1975

Richard Viguerie started his direct-mail business, known as RAVCO, or the Richard A. Viguerie Company, in 1965. RAVCO is located in Falls Church, Virginia and still supports conservative causes. Viguerie has made a fortune from this operation by "charging a high

¹³ Viguerie, *We're Ready to Lead*, 50-53.

¹⁴ Richard Viguerie, "Ends and Means," in *The New Right Papers*, 28.

¹⁵ Viguerie, "Ends and Means," *The New Right Papers*, 29.

¹⁶ Viguerie, "Ends and Means," 30.

percentage of the money raised and by using the mailing lists to build his data banks for further fundraising.” *The New York Times* pointed out that Viguerie would keep up to 75 percent of the profits raised from direct mail contributions as a fee and then use the rest to support political candidates.¹⁷ During the 1970s, his company utilized two computers to print his mailers, which by 1980 totaled 100 million letters a year “from 300 mailing lists that contain the names of 25 million Americans.”¹⁸ RAVCO became instrumental in the New Right’s direct mail campaign that raised money for conservative causes and candidates. Furthermore, his company published the monthly *Conservative Digest* and biweekly *New Right Report*.¹⁹

Paul Weyrich formed the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress (CSFC) in 1974 with the financial backing of millionaire brewer Joseph Coors. Weyrich had started his career working as Senator Gordon Allot’s (R-CO) press secretary in the late 1960s. Previously, in 1973, Weyrich helped found the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank in Washington, D.C. with the financial help of Coors. Joseph Coors had been financially supporting right wing organizations, like the American Conservative Union²⁰ since 1971.²¹ He modeled the Heritage Foundation on the Democratic Study Group, a political caucus started in the 1950s to provide information for upcoming legislation for Democrats in the House. Subsequently, the Heritage Foundation provided “public-policy research on a timely basis for congressional debate and

¹⁷ “The New Right’s Strong Ambition Is Fueled by Huge Mail Campaign,” *The New York Times*, 4 Dec. 1977, 73 [No author given].

¹⁸ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 48.

¹⁹ Allen Hunter, “In the Wings: New Right Ideology and Organization,” in *The New Right: Fundamentalists and Financiers* (Oakland, CA, The Data Center, Press Profile no. 4, 1981), 10 The Data Center says in this press release that it “is a non-profit, user supported research library and information center” that gathers “information on political and economic events.”

²⁰ The America Conservative Union was founded in 1964 in connection with the “Draft Goldwater” campaign. According to Crawford, the ACU “spearheaded the anti-Panama Canal treaties effort in 1977 and 1978. In its first year of lobbying, the union spent more than \$1.4 million, purchasing antiratification commercials on several hundred radio and television stations across the country, publishing ads in major newspapers, and mailing more than 2.4 million letters to mobilize sentiment against what they called the surrender of American property.” Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 10.

²¹ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 10.

propaganda purposes” for conservative members of Congress.²² Like RAVCO, the well-funded CSFC advised and provided financial backing to conservative candidates. For example, in 1977, the CSFC financed the successful senate campaign of Orrin Hatch (R-UT) over a Democratic incumbent.²³ In 1978, the CSFC raised over \$400,000 to assist 31 conservative candidates such as John Warner (R-VA).²⁴

Howard Phillips organized the Conservative Caucus in 1975. Formed as a pressure group on Congress, the Conservative Caucus started as a grassroots organization to “mobilize a Congressman’s constituents so as to influence his legislative record and thereby national policy.”²⁵ Secondly, the Conservative Caucus served as an umbrella organization for numerous “home and family” groups that had advocated many single-issue themes, but with limited success.²⁶ Previously, Phillips had worked as part of William F. Buckley’s Young Americans for Freedom and then had served in the Nixon White House in the Office of Economic Opportunity. In 1974, he left due to his lack of support of the president and his policies.²⁷ That same year Howard Phillips and Richard Viguerie started Conservatives for the Removal of the President, or CREEP out of fear that Nixon “would make concessions to the Russians as he tried to deal with Watergate.”²⁸

Finally, Terry Dolan, along with Charles Black, founded the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) in 1975. NCPAC was the largest of the four groups with access to millions of dollars.²⁹ To generate revenue, NCPAC, one of RAVCO’s major clients,

²² David Broder, *The Changing of the Guard* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1981), 180.

²³ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 15.

²⁴ Richard Viguerie, *The New Right*, 54.

²⁵ Richard Viguerie, *The New Right*, 58.

²⁶ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 39.

²⁷ Allen Hunter, “In the Wings,” in *The New Right: Fundamentalists and Financiers*, 10.

²⁸ Richard Viguerie, *The New Right*, 51.

²⁹ Allen Hunter, “In the Wings,” in *The New Right*, 10.

would access Viguerie's computerized mailing lists to raise money for conservative candidates.³⁰ It was located in Rosslyn, Virginia, outside of Washington, D.C. Dolan started his political career as part of the Young Republicans, a GOP youth organization.³¹ Charles Black had previously worked as an aide to Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) and as political director of the Republican National Committee.³² However, Dolan emerged as the leader and prominent spokesman for NCPAC.

Together these four men, Viguerie, Weyrich, Phillips, and Dolan, would form the foundation of the New Rights' fundraising apparatus. Additionally, these four men, particularly Viguerie and Weyrich, would become the public face of the New Right. Their groups provided the New Right with the organizational skills and funding it needed to get its message out. The organization usually started at the grassroots level and the money raised would support New Right candidates and initiatives. In 1976 and 1978, Weyrich, Dolan, and Phillips, "made many key decisions...determining the amounts of money to be contributed to New Right groups, selecting and placing field organizers, in the campaigns, and providing direction in the fields of campaign management, press relations, and advertising."³³ In addition, RAVCO's "fundraising empire" had lists of millions of potential conservative donors from which to draw resources.³⁴

THE NEW RIGHT'S STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL OPERATIONS: DIRECT MAIL

These organizations provided the resources to carry out the New Right's strategic and tactical operations. What made the New Right a political force rested upon its ability to raise large sums of money despite the campaign finance laws that Congress enacted in 1974 as part of

³⁰ Philip Bishop, Christine Holmlund, John Mowitt, and Diane Waldman, "The New Right and Media," Madison Social Text Group, *Social Text* no. 1 (Winter 1979), 171.

³¹ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 16.

³² Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 16.

³³ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 272.

³⁴ Philip Bishop and the Madison Social Text Group, "The New Right and Media," *Social Text*, (Winter, 1979), 171.

the wave of Congressional reforms and oversights. The laws limited the total amount one could contribute to a candidate to \$1,000. This meant anyone running for office needed many smaller donations.³⁵ This gave direct mail particular importance, and Richard Viguerie devoted his company's entire operation to it. RAVCO's direct mail proved the most effective vehicle for the New Right to solicit contributions and galvanize its base.³⁶ Furthermore, direct mail served as an unfiltered source of information between New Right advocates and their supporters. Richard Viguerie wrote, "Our communication has had to begin at the grassroots level—by reaching individuals outside the channels of public opinion." The result, according to Viguerie, made the New Right as "independent of the mass media as we are of the political parties."³⁷

Members of the New Right realized the benefits of publicity. Paul Weyrich believed that the Old Right had not utilized the media to its advantage. The New Right had sought and received more favorable news coverage. "The New Right," Weyrich explained, "recognizes that technology, like the media, is morally neutral and exists to be taken advantage of by anybody." Additionally, in contrast with the Old Right, "the fact that the New Right does speak the language of the common man helps explain the facility with which we can get coverage when we want it."³⁸ However, the New Right wanted to present its views on its own terms. Howard Phillips said, "We must recognize the need to develop our own systems for communication so that we are not dependent upon the errors or good natures of our adversaries to communicate our views."³⁹ Thus, the New Right entered the age of mass media by running ads in newspapers, television, and direct mail campaigns asking like-minded Americans across the country to donate

³⁵ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 44.

³⁶ Alan Crawford, 44.

³⁷ Richard Viguerie, "Ends and Means" in *The New Right Papers*, 31.

³⁸ Paul Weyrich, "Blue Collar or Blue Blood," in *The New Right Papers*, 56-57.

³⁹ Allen Hunter, "In the Wings," in *The New Right: Fundamentalists and Financiers*, 14.

money to their organizations.⁴⁰ When the New Right organized opposition against ratification of the Panama Canal treaties in 1977-1978, an effective and well-funded direct mail and media apparatus was already in place.

THE NEW RIGHT'S POLITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEFS AND THEIR MERGER WITH ITS LEGISLATIVE AND SOCIAL AGENDAS

Thirdly, the New Rights' political and philosophical motivations directly correlated to its legislative and social agenda. In addition to wanting to change the Republican Party, the New Right also wanted to reshape American politics. Philosophically, the New Right viewed the Republican Old Guard as representing conservative intellectuals, such as William F. Buckley, and the upper class. In contrast, the New Right saw itself as a more ethnic middle class movement that appealed to the blue-collar section of American society. Paul Weyrich and others in the New Right noted their own middle class upbringing and ethnic Eastern European and/or Jewish descent.⁴¹

Morality influenced the thinking of many New Right advocates. Members of the New Right believed that government should uphold, as Weyrich said, "certain moral truths."⁴² In 1979, Howard Phillips would reach out to conservative Christian leaders, such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Robinson, in order to harness an influential social network for the New Right.⁴³ The view that both Democrats and Republicans had abandoned social conservatives led the New Right to embrace many groups that advocated single issues, such as the pro-life and anti-busing lobbies.

⁴⁰ Richard Viguerie stated in a recent radio interview that he used direct mail to reach a large audience. According to Viguerie, people motivated by fear and anger are more likely to send money. His business capitalized on these insecurities of a wide range of issues (Viguerie on *Fresh Air with Terry Gross*, recorded December 15, 2004).

⁴¹ Paul Weyrich in "Blue Collar or Blue Blood?" in *The New Right Papers*, 52.

⁴² Paul Weyrich, "Blue Collar or Blue Blood?" 53.

⁴³ Richard Viguerie, *The New Right: We're Ready to Lead*, 53.

Initially in 1974, to emphasize his disenchantment with the Republican Party, Richard Viguerie wanted to create a separate political party. However, he realized the great difficulty in starting a new party, and he saw that the New Right could bring various groups together to raise their stature and influence in the Republican Party and win elections.⁴⁴ This belief would remain a goal of the New Right. In 1982, Roger Whitaker wrote, “The primary objective of the New Right, then, is the formation of a true alliance of social and fiscal conservative as equal partners, preferably within the Republican Party.”⁴⁵

In 1978, *Congressional Quarterly* explained, “a clearly identifiable ‘New Right’...remains questionable.”⁴⁶ However, by the mid 1970s, there was a small core group of senators and congressmen directly tied to the New Right’s financial apparatus.

NEW RIGHT MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND RONALD REAGAN

Individual members of Congress defy simple labels. The term “New Right” can be applied to only a small cadre of very conservative Congressional Republicans and their outside financial and ideological supporters, and it must be used with caution. The core group of New Right members of Congress revolved around Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC), Sen. Jake Garn (R-UT), Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Sen. Paul Laxalt (R-NV), Sen. James McClure (R-ID), Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-WY), Sen. Harrison Schmidt (R-NM), Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-SC), Rep. Phillip Crane (R-IL), Rep. Jack Kemp (R-NY), and Rep. Robert Dornan (R-CA). (Crane, elected to Congress during a special session in 1969, replaced Rep. Donald Rumsfeld, who resigned his seat to work in the Nixon White House). Aside from Strom Thurmond, who had served in the Senate since 1954, these members of Congress had won their seats in the 1970s. Helms and McClure came to the Senate in 1972. Garn and Laxalt won their seats in 1974. Hatch, Schmitt,

⁴⁴ Richard Viguerie, “Ends and Means” in *The New Right Papers*, 29.

⁴⁵ Roger Whitaker, ed., *The New Right Papers*, xi.

⁴⁶ Alan Ehrenhalt, “The Right in Congress: Seeking a Strategy,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 5 August 1978, 2022.

Wallop and Dornan were elected in 1976. Jack Kemp came to Congress in 1971 after a career in the NFL. Kemp rose to national prominence in 1976 when he and Sen. William Roth (R-DE) began advocating the “supply side” economic plan that would cut income tax rates on all wage earners by 33% over a three-year period.⁴⁷ These New Right members of Congress found themselves alienated from the moderate and liberal wings of the Republican Party and saw their election as a chance to move the party away from the perceived failures of its older leaders.⁴⁸

There are a few reasons for mentioning only Republican lawmakers in this small cadre of New Right congressmen. First, very few Democrats received support from the New Right.⁴⁹ In 1978, only about 10% of campaign funding from Terry Dolan’s NCPAC went to conservative Democrats.⁵⁰ Second, these Republican lawmakers, notably Jesse Helms, Strom Thurmond, Orrin Hatch, Jake Garn, and Paul Laxalt, emerged as the most zealous opponents to ratification of the Panama Canal treaties. Lastly, in 1977 and 1978, Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich, the mainstream media, and the *Congressional Quarterly*, mention these Republicans as part of the “New Right.”⁵¹ The New Right’s financial base supported these legislators as well.

Outside of Congress, Ronald Reagan became the New Right’s most prominent spokesman. While not necessarily falling under the New Right label, the former actor and governor of California had been involved in Republican politics since the 1960s. During the 1976 Republican primaries, Ronald Reagan challenged Gerald Ford over the Panama Canal and

⁴⁷ David Broder, *Changing of the Guard*, 167.

⁴⁸ Alan Ehrenhalt, “The Right in Congress,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 5 August, 1978, 2022.

⁴⁹ Notable exceptions included Rep. Larry McDonald (D-GA) who was supported by the ACU, the CSFC, the Conservative Caucus, and served on the national council of the John Birch Society (Crawford, 133). McDonald was also part of the Panama Canal truth squad in January 1978. Another Democrat, Kent Hance (D-TX) received funding in 1978 from NCPAC and CSFC to defeat Republican George W. Bush’s bid for Congress. Due to their anti-establishment creed, the New Right did not support Bush because of his wealthy family connections (Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right* 268).

⁵⁰ Alan Crawford, *Thunder from the Right*, 17.

⁵¹ *Congressional Quarterly* explained some of the New Right supporters in Congress including Phillip Crane, Robert Bauman (R-MD), Jake Garn, Orrin Hatch and Robert Dornan. Alan Ehrenhalt, “The Right in Congress: Seeking a Strategy,” 5 August 1978, 2022-2028.

succeeded in winning a few primaries, notably North Carolina and Texas.⁵² Gerald Ford supported a new treaty with Panama. In response, Reagan's mantra of "We built it, we own it" became a popular anti-treaty argument. Reagan believed that the Panama Canal was vital to U.S. national security. The Panama Canal became one of the major disagreements between the conservative and moderate wings of the Party.

Furthermore, the 1976 Republican primary revealed a split among conservatives as well. The Republican Party was still trying to repair the damage done by Nixon and Watergate.⁵³ Barry Goldwater campaigned for Gerald Ford, and this disillusioned many of the New Right. To add insult to injury, Ronald Reagan named Sen. Richard Schweiker (R-PA), a liberal Republican, as his running mate on the advice of his campaign manager, John Sears.⁵⁴ Many conservatives speculated that liberals had hijacked Reagan's campaign.⁵⁵ Ford defeated Reagan, but not without a cost. He had had to make many concessions to the Reagan supporters in order to secure his nomination at the Republican National Convention in Kansas City.⁵⁶ Reagan's supporters had introduced a "Morality in Foreign Policy" clause to the party's platform. This clause stipulated that the United States' foreign policy would not engage "in secret agreements, hidden from our people." This platform attacked the notion of détente, which Ford had initially supported. Reagan believed that détente had allowed the Soviet Union to surpass the United States militarily. Ford reluctantly agreed to this clause.⁵⁷ They also gained Ford's approval of Sen. Robert Dole (R-KS) as his vice-presidential running mate.⁵⁸

⁵² David Reinhard, *The Republican Right Since 1945* (The University of Kentucky Press, 1983) 232.

⁵³ Craig Shirley, *Reagan's Revolution: The Untold Story of the Campaign that Started it All* (Nashville: Nelson Current Press, 2005), 241.

⁵⁴ David Reinhard, *The Republican Right Since 1945*, 232.

⁵⁵ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 118, 119.

⁵⁶ David W. Reinhard, *The Republican Right Since 1945*, 233.

⁵⁷ James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking Press, 2004). 71-73.

⁵⁸ David Reinhard, 233.

Despite this political setback, Ronald Reagan realized that his stance against the canal treaties had been an effective way to generate national prominence and respect among conservative circle. Reagan laid out a vision of a strong America that knew no limits to its power and influence. The Panama Canal became an issue in which Reagan could attack Soviet communism and the Carter administration. He became the most recognized face of opposition to the Panama Canal treaties.

THE NEW RIGHT'S POLITICAL AGENDA 1974-1978

This group of conservative congressmen and senators actively embraced a new direction for the Republican Party.⁵⁹ At the same time, they distanced themselves from the traditional Republican establishment. As *Congressional Quarterly* stated, these members of Congress came to “Washington with stronger loyalties to national conservative politics than to Congress as an institution, or to the Republican Party, on whose ticket they almost always run.” Additionally, they favored “replacing a generation of conservatives demoralized by defeat.”⁶⁰ Moreover, these individuals had significant financial support from outside the Republican National Committee. The Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress (CSFC), the Conservative Caucus, and the American Conservative Union (ACU) supported them. For instance, in 1978 Rep. Dan Quayle (R-IN), found ample funding from Weyrich’s CSFC. Assured of this source of political funding, Quayle summed up his hostility to the Republican establishment by explaining, “To win as a Republican candidate you have to face reality and go outside. I didn’t even use the word Republican on my brochures last time. I’m not using it this time.”⁶¹

The New Right’s political and social agenda organized around a neopopulist message. The New Right reached out to middle class Americans by proposing tax cuts, attacking big

⁵⁹ No women in Congress were part of the New Right at this time.

⁶⁰ Alan Ehrenhalt, “The Right in Congress: Seeking a Strategy,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 5 August 1978, 2002.

⁶¹ Alan Ehrenhalt, “The Right in Congress,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 5 August 1978, 2028.

business, taking a firm anti-communist stance, and preserving “middle class values.” Part of the New Right’s domestic agenda espoused the politically potent idea of major tax cuts. This idea corresponded to the New Right’s emphasis on smaller government. In 1976, the Kemp-Roth legislation had offered this idea to Americans desperate for a change in an era of crippling inflation and high energy prices.⁶² In 1977, while President Carter told the public they needed to make sacrifices for the good of the nation, the Kemp-Roth tax bill offered another option. In this new conservative theory, lowering taxes would stimulate the economy, create jobs, and, in the future, lead to a balanced budget. Lower taxes, as opposed to sacrifice, had widespread appeal among many Americans. Conservatives saw Kemp-Roth as a positive piece of legislation that gave Republicans a chance to offer an alternative without the usual negative perception that hampered previous Republican initiatives.⁶³ The bill appealed to mainstream Republicans in Congress and brought the party together.⁶⁴ Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), elected in 1976, and in many ways on the liberal end of the Republican spectrum, exclaimed, “People want to enjoy life, even if they can’t afford it. They don’t like being told they don’t have the money. Now along come Kemp and Roth and tell people they’ll be doing a service by spending money...Kemp-Roth has given Republicans a new argument, and a new style, and it’s delightful.”⁶⁵ This idea enticed enough California voters in 1978 to pass Proposition 13, which substantially cut property taxes in the state. On the heels of this vote, a handful of prominent Republicans, including Ronald Reagan, Jack Kemp, Roth, Gerald Ford, and Howard Baker (R-TN), traveled to seven cities on a three-day journey to support Kemp-Roth.⁶⁶

⁶² Kemp-Roth became part of the Republican platform in the 1978 midterm elections, (David Broder, *Changing of the Guard*, 167).

⁶³ Alan Ehrenhalt, “The Right in Congress,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 5 August 1978, 2024.

⁶⁴ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 242.

⁶⁵ Alan Ehrenhalt, *Congressional Quarterly*, 5 August 1978, 2024.

⁶⁶ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 242.

Both the New Right and the Old Right were opposed to big government, but the New Right's rhetoric was also hostile to big business. This contradicted the traditionally close relationship between the Republican Party and large corporations. The New Right stressed the moral and national security reasons behind its views of big business. Richard Viguerie took issue with many companies that wanted to expand trade with the Soviet Union.⁶⁷ Patrick Buchanan, a conservative journalist, lamented, "the obscene haste with which Big Business acts to meet Soviet requests for the latest in Western machinery or technology." Furthermore, big business in America was linked to "radical politics and hard-core pornography" by advertising in magazines such as *Playboy* and *Rolling Stone*, which was "subsidizing and contributing to the degradation of moral values."⁶⁸ In a broader sense, the New Right's attitude towards big business reflected its position on big government. Both presented grave threats to average Americans. The military establishment, however, remained exempted from this condemnation due to its role in fighting Soviet communism.⁶⁹ In other domains, the federal government and big business both symbolized bureaucratic entities that intruded into the lives of the American people.⁷⁰ Some in the New Right simply did not trust corporations. Senator Paul Laxalt (R-NV) said, "We found that our 'friends,' the Fortune 500, were playing both sides," noting that both Democrats and Republicans received corporate contributions.⁷¹

The foreign policy agenda of the New Right centered upon confronting the expansion of Soviet Communism. Conservative writer Alan Crawford wrote that the New Right "retains the frontier psychology of the Old West" in its desire to confront international problems with American firepower. Terry Dolan said in 1979 that in order "to take on international

⁶⁷ Richard Viguerie, interview on *Fresh Air with Terry Gross*, 15 December 2004.

⁶⁸ Patrick Buchanan quoted in Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 214.

⁶⁹ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 209.

⁷⁰ Alan Crawford, 209.

⁷¹ Alan Ehrenhalt, "The Right in Congress," *Congressional Quarterly*, 5 August 1978, 2025.

communism,” the United States should send its forces to the world’s trouble spots, which included Afghanistan, Iran, Angola, etc.⁷² Author Rick Perlstein noted how Goldwater’s book, *Conscience of a Conservative*, espoused the belief “that Soviet expansionism was *enabled* by the fantasy of coexistence.”⁷³ This contradicted the concept of détente that administrations of both parties had advocated to lessen tensions between the two superpowers. The New Right wanted to take a strong stance against any communist threat. Its adherents felt that admitting any weakness was un-American.

Finally, the New Right’s social agenda reflected the backlash against the 1960s from middle class white Americans. The New Right aligned itself with religious fundamentalists and single-issue groups. Thus, “the New Right expresses—and whose values, resentments, aspirations, and fears it tries to articulate—is composed of what sociologist Donald I. Warren calls ‘Middle American Radicals’—MARs.”⁷⁴ Warren expounded upon the characteristics of the MARs. Fundamentally,

MARs are a distinct group partly because of their view of government as favoring both the rich and the poor simultaneously....MARs are distinct in their depth of their feeling that the middle class has been seriously neglected. If there is one single summation of the MAR perspective, it is reflected in a statement which was read by respondents: *The rich give in to the demands of the poor, and the middle income people have to pay the bill.*⁷⁵

⁷² Alan Crawford, 88-89.

⁷³ Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 66.

⁷⁴ Samuel T. Francis, “Message from Mars,” in *The New Right Papers* edited by Robert W. Whitaker (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 66.

⁷⁵ Warren quoted in “Message from Mars,” *The New Right Papers*, 67.

These Americans responded to the perceived excesses of the Vietnam and Civil Rights era by embracing issues such as anti-racial quotas, anti-abortion, anti-ERA, and anti-busing.⁷⁶ As noted, many in the New Right, such as Howard Phillips, embraced these morally charged issues as part of a way to connect to socially conservative Americans. Paul Weyrich noted, “Yes, they’re emotional issues, but that’s better than talking about capital formation.”⁷⁷

Leaders of the New Right found commonality with fundamentalist preachers. The Rev. Jerry Falwell emerged as the biggest endorser of the New Right’s social agenda. Falwell and Howard Phillips saw the Moral Majority, Falwell’s political action committee, as the vehicle to bring together “other right-wing television evangelists and religious leaders” into a patriotic religious coalition.⁷⁸ The New Right understood the tremendous success these preachers had in raising money and influencing their audiences, and it appreciated their potential ability to organize Americans around many causes.⁷⁹ By acknowledging the untapped anger and resentments that many middle class Americans felt during this time, the New Right appealed to a broad swath of American society.

The definition of the New Right, a complex political force, highlights the interaction of its financial, legislative, and social elements. Furthermore, the New Right distinguished itself from the Old Right Republicans in its political origins, thinking, tactics and goals. Born out of frustration with the Old Right and the direction of the Republican Party, the New Right advocated change. This change would see the rise of conservative institutions and political leaders who would challenge and transform the Republican Party and American politics. These

⁷⁶ Phyllis Schlafly’s anti-ERA Eagle Forum was one of the few women’s organizations marginally connected to the New Right. Schlafly, who served on the board ACU, had remained in control of her organization. The anti-abortion movement had “a successful, broad-based, and well-organized national coalition” that the New Right wanted to dominate, but could not achieve this end (Crawford, 34).

⁷⁷ Allen Hunter, “In the Wings,” quote from *Conservative Digest* “The New Right: A Special Report,” June 1979, in *The New Right: Fundamentalists and Financiers*, 12.

⁷⁸ Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 39.

⁷⁹ Allen Hunter, “In the Wings,” in *The New Right: Fundamentalist and Financiers*, 14.

institutions and leaders found resources from the New Right's financial apparatus. The New Right viewed itself as media savvy, well funded, and in touch with the concerns of average Americans.

Internationally, the rise of the New Right and its influence on American politics corresponded to the larger issue of the United States' role and limitations in world affairs after Vietnam. Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter realized that America's position in the world had altered in many ways from the immediate post World War II era when relative American power and prestige peaked. Carter understood America's limitations and tried to utilize his position as president by using issues, like human rights, to enhance American influence in the world. He worked within a belief system, sometimes referred to as the 'Lippmann Gap,' which stipulated that American commitments in the world outweighed its resources to support them. Therefore, the nation needed to channel its energies to avoid overextension.⁸⁰

The New Right challenged this understanding of America's more restricted role in the world. One cannot dispute that both President Carter and the New Right viewed America as the leader of the free world. However, the New Right found no reason to admit limits on the United States' ability to exert its influence and power to confront the Soviet Union and other threats around the globe.⁸¹ In September 1977, the United States and Panama signed the treaties, one of which declared the canal neutral after the year 2000, and the other relinquished control of the canal back to Panama. These treaties intensified the domestic debate in the United States. The Panama Canal treaties raised the ire of conservatives because they believed the Canal Zone was

⁸⁰ Michael A. Genovese, "Jimmy Carter and the Age of Limits: Presidential Power in a time of Decline and Diffusion," *The Presidency and Domestic Policies of Jimmy Carter*, Herbert D. Rosenbaum and Alexej Ugrinsky, eds., (Greenwood Press, Hofstra University, 1994), 187-221.

⁸¹ Historians agree that Carter adopted a more confrontational attitude after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. However, Carter's foreign policy in 1977 through the first part of 1979 was based more on diplomacy and negotiation than on military shows of force.

part of U.S. territory and that “giving it away” showed weakness. In many respects, the canal debates became a battleground for a clash of two differing ideologies concerning the extent of American power.

Throughout 1977-1978, the New Right’s message echoed the frustrations felt by many in the American public. In a larger sense, the Panama Canal debates served as a lens in which to understand a broader political debate going on in the United States. New Right rhetoric effectively tapped into a wellspring of discontent among large numbers of Americans. Nowhere was this more evident than in public polls that asked the fundamental question of whether the United States should give the canal back to Panama. The New Right’s rhetoric embodied a simplistic Cold War view that drew on many American’s fear of communism and loss of national prestige. The actions of the New Right, including its social and legislative agenda, showed that it wanted to lead this transformation in American politics. The Panama Canal debates will highlight this important clash between a nascent political movement and an idealistic administration as each side competed for the support of the American public.

CHAPTER II

The Panama Canal has been a source of tension ever since the United States and Panama signed the 1903 treaty. Prior to that, Panama had been a province of Colombia. By 1902, the Panamanian elite wanted to break away from Colombia due to taxation, civil wars, and trade issues imposed on them from Bogotá. That same year, the United States and Colombia had signed a treaty that allowed the United States to use land in Panama to build a canal, but the Colombian Senate had rejected it. In response, President Theodore Roosevelt began encouraging Panamanian rebels to break away from Colombia. In early November 1903, rebellion broke out in Panama and the United States sent the U.S.S. *Nashville* and other naval ships to protect Panama from Colombian retaliation. The Panamanians succeeded in their rebellion.⁸²

Phillipe Bunau-Varilla was one of the key players, urging Panama to rebel against Colombia while at the same time persuading the United States to help Panama. Bunau-Varilla had worked as an engineer for a private French company that had tried to build a canal in Panama in the 1880s and failed. After the company declared bankruptcy, Bunau-Varilla wanted to sell control of the company's stock and building rights to the United States government. Essentially, Bunau-Varilla needed the U.S. government to bail out him and his employer, the New French Canal Company. At the November 1903 treaty signing, Bunau-Varilla purported to represent the newly formed Panamanian government. In fact, the Panamanian "government" had no representation at the signing, and the Panamanian delegation did not arrive until a few hours after the signing. The treaty stipulated that Panama would receive \$10 million for a ten-mile wide channel of land where the canal would be built, plus an annual annuity of \$250,000 for the

⁸² Robert A. Strong, *Decisions and Dilemmas: Case Studies in Presidential Foreign Policy Making* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992), 140-143. J. Michael Hogan, *The Panama Canal in American Politics: Domestic Advocacy and the Evolution of Policy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 34-37. Michael L. Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The Forced Alliance* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 62-67.

property. Bunau-Varilla and his stockholders received \$40 million from the United States. The controversial clause, Article 3, that most angered the Panamanians stated, “Panama grants to the United States all the rights, power and authority...which the United States would possess and exercise if it were the sovereign of the territory...to the entire exclusion of the exercise by the Republic of Panama of any sovereign rights, power, and authority.” The delegates balked at the terms of the treaty but signed them anyway on December 2. They realized that the United States could withdraw its support for the nascent Panamanian government or seize the land for the canal unilaterally.⁸³ The ownership clause became one of the main arguments of anti-treaty advocates in 1977-1978. They asserted that this statement proved that the United States rightfully controlled the Panama Canal and its surrounding lands.⁸⁴

Historiographically, scholarly monographs of the United States’ involvement in Panamanian independence do not support this interpretation of the 1903 treaty. Walter LaFeber, Michael Conniff, and Robert Strong are the best sources on the history of the canal. While not directly challenging anti-treaty arguments, these sources, however, show that the Roosevelt administration let Bunau-Varilla write most of the treaty on November 18, 1903 to ensure quick Senate approval. U.S. Secretary of State John Hay did not alter the treaties and he signed them before the Panamanian delegates arrived. The Panamanian representatives, Federico Boyd and Dr. Manuel Amador, had little choice but to sign the document. Bunau-Varilla threatened that the United States would withdraw its support for their government. The Panamanians knew that U.S. recognition was crucial to the survival of the state. Panama needed to United States to

⁸³ Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crises in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 23-30. George D. Moffett III, *The Limits of Victory: The Ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 21-23. Michael Conniff, *Panama and the United States*, 63-70.

⁸⁴ Philip M. Crane, *Surrender in Panama, The Case Against the Treaties* (New York: Dale Books, 1978), 6.

protect them from any further Colombian aggression.⁸⁵ Consequently, Article 3 of the 1903 treaty became a source of contention. The question of who owned the canal depended upon how one interpreted the 1903 treaty. Anti-treaty advocates, like Ronald Reagan, cited the exact wording of the 1903 treaty as evidence of U.S ownership of the canal. Reagan would note that the United States had not pressured Panama to sign the treaty.⁸⁶ However, the historical scholarship shows that the United States had acquired the land for the future canal through underhanded methods.

Construction on the Panama Canal began in May 1904. For the next decade, the United States designed and built one of the greatest engineering projects ever conceived. The workers on the canal had to endure the hardships of poor sanitation, yellow fever, and malaria. The Panama Canal was a technological marvel constructed with an ingenious system of locks that could move ships through the entirety of the waterway. Nevertheless, the completion of the canal did not ebb the resentment and anger of the Panamanians. Consequently, the United States became more involved in Panamanian politics and used U.S. troops to keep order in the Canal Zone.⁸⁷ The United States claimed that the 1903 treaty allowed it to defend the canal, and the U.S. government stationed troops in Panama. To Panama, the U.S. military presence exceeded the stipulations of the treaty, and violated Panamanian sovereignty.⁸⁸

Beginning in the 1930s under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the U.S. government sought to amend parts of the 1903 treaty. Roosevelt and Torres Arias, the Panamanian leader, signed a treaty in 1936 that, among other things, increased the annuity paid to Panama for the

⁸⁵ Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 29,30. Robert A. Strong, *Decisions and Dilemmas*, 140 -141. Michael Conniff, *Panama and the United States*, 69-70.

⁸⁶ Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, Martin Anderson, eds., *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, (New York: The Free Press, 2001), recorded 18 October 1977, 204.

⁸⁷ Michael Conniff, 76-77.

⁸⁸ David N. Farnsworth, James W. McKenney, *U.S.—Panamanian Relations, 1903-1978: A Study in Linkage Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 90.

property and ended Panama's protectorate status.⁸⁹ However, Panamanian anger and nationalism increased throughout the ensuing decades. Major riots erupted in 1958 and 1959 leading President Dwight D. Eisenhower to make a concession allowing one Panamanian flag to fly in the Canal Zone within Panama City. Eisenhower's attempt at placating the Panamanians raised the ire of the U.S. Congress, which denounced the action.⁹⁰

In 1964, U.S. troops put down a bloody revolt that left 24 Panamanians dead. This event transpired after American students in the Canal Zone raised the American flag as a gesture of patriotism, thereby inflaming the nationalism of the Panamanian people. The Panamanian government broke off diplomatic ties to the United States "to dramatize the iniquity of the 1903 treaty, maintained in force by American soldiers."⁹¹ The aftermath of this tragedy led President Lyndon B. Johnson to announce that he would "review every issue" between the United States and Panama.⁹² Initially, Johnson pledged to terminate the 1903 treaty. In 1967, the United States and Panama agreed to a new set of treaties. However, the American press printed draft copies of the treaties and the subsequent U.S. public outcry derailed them. Consequently, neither country ratified them.⁹³ In Panama, U.S. control of the canal led to increasingly passionate denunciations of American imperialism.⁹⁴ In 1974, during the Richard Nixon administration, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Panamanian Foreign Minister Juan Tack worked out a new set of treaties.

The breakthrough in the negotiations occurred when Kissinger and Tack settled upon a rudimentary "declaration of principles." These addressed the issues of transferring control of the

⁸⁹ Michael Conniff, 84, 91.

⁹⁰ Robert A. Strong, *Decisions and Dilemmas: Case Studies in Presidential Foreign Policy Making* (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1992), 141.

⁹¹ Michael Conniff, *Panama and the United States*, 116.

⁹² Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 112-113.

⁹³ Michael Conniff, 122-123.

⁹⁴ Robert A. Strong, *Decisions and Dilemmas*, 141-142.

canal to Panama at a set date in the future, at which time the two countries would jointly administer its operations. To accomplish this, a new treaty between both countries became imperative. This new treaty would address the points of contention that stemmed from the original 1903 treaty, which many Panamanian nationalists saw as unfair. Once again, domestic opposition within the United States stalled the proposals, particularly when Ronald Reagan made the Panama Canal an election issue and nearly won the Republican nomination in 1976.⁹⁵ The issue had to wait until Carter's election to the presidency. President Carter used the Kissinger-Tack agreement as a starting point for his administration's discussions with the Panamanian government.⁹⁶

To many Americans, like Ronald Reagan, the Panama Canal reflected the ingenuity and industrial might of the United States. However, the canal's strategic importance began to diminish shortly after its completion due to the growing influence of aviation and the increasing size of ships. By World War II, modern aircraft carriers and oil tankers were too big to move safely through the canal. Moreover, by the 1940s the United States maintained fleets throughout the world.⁹⁷ Additionally, the threat of sabotage and terrorist attacks concerned U.S. officials from President Eisenhower on. Given its decline in strategic importance and increasing the risk of Panamanian nationalism and hostility, the United States needed to revise the original 1903 treaty.⁹⁸ However, there was strong public opposition to such a move. The Opinion Research Center's (ORC) first national poll on the Panama Canal in June 1975 showed that 66% of respondents favored continued U.S. control of the canal.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 143.

⁹⁶ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices*, 142.

⁹⁷ Robert Strong, *Decisions and Dilemmas*, 141.

⁹⁸ Robert Strong, *Decisions and Dilemmas*, 141.

⁹⁹ Bernard Roscho, "The Polls: Polling on Panama-Si; Don't Know; Hell, No!," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Winter, 1978), 552-553. This poll was conducted with 1,021 respondents who were asked the question, "Do you favor the United States continuing its ownership and control of the Panama Canal, or do you favor turning

Despite domestic opposition, some in Congress called for a new treaty before Carter took office. In February 1976, the House Committee on International Relations released a report that noted the necessity of a new treaty. Several reasons highlighted included: America's national interest hinged on the canal remaining open; Panama, a friend of the United States, wanted a new treaty; a new treaty would clarify the notion of America retaining rights in "perpetuity" that angered many Panamanians; it would enhance America's standing in Latin America; and finally, a treaty that both parties would find mutually beneficial would reduce tensions in Panama.¹⁰⁰ Pro-treaty proponents would incorporate many of the findings of this Congressional committee in their arguments.

As a top priority for the incoming Carter administration, President Carter acknowledged in January 1977 that the United States and Panama needed to draft a treaty as quickly as possible. In his memoirs, Carter wrote, "a new treaty was absolutely necessary. I was convinced that we needed to correct an injustice. Our failure to take action after years of promises under five previous Presidents had created something of a diplomatic cancer, which was poisoning our relations with Panama."¹⁰¹ The new administration was determined to tackle a potentially unpopular deal that would certainly arouse the emotions of many Americans and possibly erode the new president's popularity.

The day after the new administration came to office, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski released Carter's first Presidential Review Memorandum. It dealt exclusively with Panama. The document noted that the president ordered a review of US "interests and objectives

ownership and control of the Panama Canal over to the Republic of Panama?" Twelve percent of respondents said they would relinquish ownership while 22 percent answered, "don't know." 553.

¹⁰⁰ "A New Panama Canal Treaty: A Latin America Imperative," Report of a Study Mission to Panama, November 21-23, 1975. Pursuant to H. Res. 315. Published February 24, 1976. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 5-6.

¹⁰¹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 155.

with regard to concluding new canal treaties with Panama.” The memo highlighted that the administration needed “a strategy and program for dealing with the Congress and the general public.”¹⁰² Carter knew that the most Americans did not support any attempt to return ownership of the Canal back to Panama, yet the president had decided upon an unpopular course of action despite such opposition.¹⁰³

The president appointed Sol Linowitz, former ambassador to the OAS (Organization of American States) and Ellsworth Bunker, former ambassador to South Vietnam, as chief negotiators. Sol Linowitz had considerable expertise and knowledge of the delicate negotiations between the two countries. He had served as chairman of the Commission on United States-Latin American Relations in 1976. Shortly after Carter’s election, the commission published a report concerning U.S./Panamanian relations. The report emphasized Panama as the top hemispheric issue that the incoming administration would have to address in the coming year. The committee concluded, “The new Administration should promptly negotiate a new Canal Treaty with Panama; it should involve members of both parties and both Houses of Congress in the negotiations; and should make clear to the American public why a new and equitable treaty with Panama is not only desirable but urgently required.”¹⁰⁴ The Carter administration carried out these suggestions in its handling of the Canal treaties.

President Carter made Linowitz a Special Representative for a six-month term to work out a new treaty with the Panamanian government. Carter used his authority as president to appoint Linowitz in order to forgo any Senate confirmation hearings.¹⁰⁵ Any president has the

¹⁰² Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC 1, “Panama,” January 21, 1977, Digital National Security Archives, Item PD01536.

¹⁰³ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 156.

¹⁰⁴ “The United States and Latin America: Next Steps,” A Second Report by the Commission on United States-Latin American Relations. Published by the Center for Inter-American Relations, December 20, 1976, 2-3.

¹⁰⁵ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 156..

capacity to appoint a special representative without Congressional approval, but only for a specific length of time. After months of delicate negotiations, an agreement between the two countries emerged in the form of two treaties. One granted sovereignty of the canal to Panama on December 31, 1999, and the second declared the canal permanently neutral after the U.S. ceded control back to Panama. President Carter and General Omar Torrijos signed the treaties on September 7, 1977. They then had to be ratified by the legislatures of both countries.

A month later, on October 14 1977, Carter and Torrijos released a public statement to clarify how the canal would be defended in the future. They agreed in principle that responsibility for keeping the canal open and properly defended depended on both countries. The United States' naval vessels would be allowed, "to go to the head of the line" in the event of an emergency. Furthermore, the United States did not have "the right of intervention...in the internal affairs of Panama."¹⁰⁶ This wording became a point of great contention later on in the debates.

The president had political reasons for needing this statement. On October 14, Hamilton Jordan, Carter's political advisor, wrote to the president explaining that the right of defending the Canal required some alteration. According to Jordan, "several Senators who had supported the treaties now tell us they won't vote for it unless several provisions are clarified."¹⁰⁷ Carter knew that he could not amend the treaties easily. Torrijos had told the president that critics would chastise him if he yielded any more to the United States.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, both leaders issued only a verbal clarification. As will be shown in Chapter III, at the height of the Senate debates Carter

¹⁰⁶ David M. Maxfield, "Bryd: 'Optimistic': Senate Canal Debate Set; Supporters Are Encouraged," *Congressional Quarterly*, February 4, 1978, 316.

¹⁰⁷ Hamilton Jordan and Bob Pastor, "Meeting with General Torrijos," Memorandum for President Carter, October 14, 1977, 2. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 36, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

¹⁰⁸ William J. Jordan, *Panama Odyssey*, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1984), 477.

would allow an amendment, put forth by Sen. DeConcini (D-AZ), which permitted U.S. intervention in Panama. The president needed DeConcini's vote.

With negotiations complete, the daunting task remained of securing the sixty-seven Senate votes needed for ratification. Since Carter and Torrijos signed the accords late in the year, the Senate ratification debates would continue into 1978, a midterm election year. This presented a potential hazard for the administration trying to pass an unpopular treaty.

The administration understood the high stakes' gamble and ideological rift these treaties could create among the American public. During the summer of 1977, some polls showed a staggering 78% of Americans against "giving up" the canal.¹⁰⁹ The administration and particularly Carter's key political advisor, Hamilton Jordan, felt that educating the American public about the treaties would close this gap.¹¹⁰ A Presidential Review Memorandum from late January 1977 explained that,

A Roper survey conducted in June 1976 showed that twice as many people oppose, as support, revision of our treaty arrangements with Panama. The Roper findings also confirmed that the Canal issue is primarily of concern to a *small and vocal minority*. This suggests that much of the opposition is "convertible"—if a fair treaty is negotiated and effectively presented.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ This number came from a national poll conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation (ORC) in May 1977. The question asked to respondents was, "Do you favor the United States continuing its ownership and control of the Panama Canal, or do you favor turning ownership and control of the Panama Canal over to the Republic of Panama?" 78% wanted the U.S. to keep control. Jesse Helms used this number in his arguments against the treaties. However, according to Bernard Roshco, a typographical error in the *New York Times* changed the number to 87%, which further publications noticed and drew the conclusion that public approval of the treaties had diminished substantially. "The Polls: Polling on Panama-Si; Don't Know; Hell, No!," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Winter, 1978), 554-556.

¹¹⁰ Strong, *Decisions and Dilemmas*, 146-147.

¹¹¹ Presidential Review Memorandum: "Panama," January 26, 1977, Digital National Security Archives. The italicized emphasis in the quotation is mine.

Thus, the administration had to work quickly and effectively to “convert” enough of the American public to support the treaties.

The New Right and anti-treaties forces unleashed an effective propaganda operation and political machinations that sought to discredit the treaties. Anti-treaty rhetoric employed nationalistic and jingoistic language to galvanize the American public. Carter’s Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, emphasized, “To counter this strategy, in late 1977 and early 1978 we intensified our campaign to explain the treaties to the American public. The struggle was not between the Democratic and Republican parties, but between the liberals/centrists and the Right, between those who believed America must live in the present and those who wanted to cling to the past.”¹¹² Education of the American public became a central strategy of the administration’s efforts to sway opinion polls in favor of the treaties. Chapter III will examine in detail the methods, specifically direct mail and legislative tactics, employed by the New Right and its anti-treaty allies to block ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties.

¹¹² Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices*, 150.

CHAPTER III: “THE DRILL” THE NEW RIGHT’S VIEWS ON THE PANAMA CANAL AS EXPRESSED BY RONALD REAGAN

Ronald Reagan emerged as the most prominent voice against the Panama Canal treaties. Since his unsuccessful bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 1976, Reagan had repeated his mantra “We bought it, we paid for it, it’s ours” to sum up his opposition to the treaties. Reagan was deeply involved with the New Right’s efforts to block ratification of the treaties. Reagan served a member of the New Right’s Panama Canal “truth squad.” Furthermore, the national media sought out Reagan for comment on the canal debates. Reagan’s positions against the canal treaties mirrored the New Right’s arguments. For example, many of the arguments Rep. Philip Crane made in his 1978 book, *Surrender in Panama: The Case Against the Treaty* were identical to claims Reagan made in his 1977 radio addresses. Crane argued that the United States owned the Canal, the communists posed a threat to the region, and Gen. Torrijos was a vicious dictator. In fact, Reagan wrote the introduction to Crane’s book.¹¹³ Reagan and the New Right had a symbiotic relationship and both became synonymous with ardent opposition to the treaties.

Reagan attacked the treaties in several ways. He used his radio addresses, appearances on television news programs, columns written in prominent newspapers, and testimony before Congress to state his positions. For example, Reagan criticized the treaties before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee the day after Carter and Torrijos signed them.¹¹⁴ In the public arena, Reagan used the Panama Canal to appeal to American nationalism. He presented a vision of America as the most powerful and high-minded nation in the world. The United States served as the benevolent protector of the Panama Canal. Furthermore, Reagan warned of communist

¹¹³ Philip M. Crane, *Surrender in Panama, The Case Against the Treaties* (New York: Dale Books, 1978), 13-15.

¹¹⁴ Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, Martin Anderson, eds., *Reagan’s Path to Victory: The Shaping of Ronald Reagan’s Vision: Selected Writings* (New York: The Free Press, 2004), 104.

dangers that could result if the United States relinquished control of the canal. Reagan's radio speeches provide a window on his and the New Right's arguments on the Panama Canal.

In his radio addresses, Reagan attempted to debunk or refute every one of the Carter administration's positions on the treaties.¹¹⁵ Employing Cold War rhetoric, Reagan portrayed General Torrijos as a dictator, a communist sympathizer, or a drug dealer. Reagan felt America had been "bluffed and bullied out of the Panama Canal by a Marxist thug" who had garnered international support for a new treaty.¹¹⁶ Reagan played on the fears of many Americans that Panama would become a proxy of Cuba and the Soviet Union if the Senate ratified the treaties. In April 1977, when the Carter administration and the Panamanian government worked out the details of the treaties, Reagan broadcast that Panama hired an American public relations firm in Washington for the sole purpose of convincing Americans to support the canal treaties. Reagan, as he continued to do in future broadcasts, referred to Torrijos as a "dictator" who had seized power through the military.¹¹⁷ In October 1977, Reagan noted "the real threat to us has to do with the Marxist leanings of the present govt. of Panama & the possibility of an arrangement similar to what Castro has with Russia."¹¹⁸ Torrijos remained a major focal point of hostility in Reagan's arguments.

Reagan accused Gen. Torrijos of being involved in drug trafficking. The Justice Department looked into these allegations in October 1977. It announced that accusations, "most of them hearsay," had been leveled against members of Torrijos' family, but that Torrijos

¹¹⁵ The dates discussed for Reagan's broadcasts *reflect the day they were taped*. For example, Reagan may have taped two addresses on Panama Canal (which he did on October 18, 1977) on the same day. However, they aired at latter dates. The editors of his radio addresses noted that he "usually taped batches of fifteen" and that the air dates occurred a few (2-5) weeks after taping. Furthermore, any emphasis within a quote belongs to Reagan.

¹¹⁶ George D. Moffitt III, *The Limits of Victory: The Ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 172-173.

¹¹⁷ Kiron K. Skinner, *Reagan's Path to Victory*, 144.

¹¹⁸ Kiron K. Skinner, *Reagan's Path to Victory*, 208. This is a typed version of the original notes Reagan wrote for his broadcasts.

himself had “never been the target of investigation.”¹¹⁹ In 1971, Torrijos’ brother Moises had been indicted in New York on drug charges but later released due to lack of evidence.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, in 1977, Reagan explained that he felt compelled to revisit these allegations. Reagan noted that Attorney General Griffin Bell had discussed the issue with Carter and members of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees. Secondly, he referred to a Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) report that labeled the head of the Panamanian secret police as the individual who served as the go-between man for Torrijos and Castro. The purpose of this relationship surrounded the laundering of drug money into Torrijos’ bank accounts. Here Reagan made a connection between Torrijos and Castro. Reagan implied that high-ranking members of the Torrijos government were involved in drug trafficking and that the Carter administration had overlooked these charges.¹²¹ These drug charges, initially broadcast by Reagan, resurfaced during the debates in February 1978. Anti-treaty senators Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Robert Dole (R-KS), capitalized on them in an attempt to stall the treaties.

To further stress the communist threat, Reagan discussed a report in the *English Intelligence Digest* that claimed Moscow had planned to subvert the U.S. by using illegal Mexican immigrants to instigate nationalist tensions on the U.S./Mexican border. The Panama Canal, according to the report, “is but one domino in a line...and a prize too rich for either Moscow or Peking to ignore.”¹²² Here Reagan employed Cold War code words, like “domino,” to imply that Soviet Russia would turn the Canal into a communist outpost. The press noticed these images in 1977. Hanson Baldwin, a conservative journalist, forecast, “if Panama goes, all our positions in the Caribbean may eventually follow.” Baldwin reasoned that if the United

¹¹⁹ Justice Department press release, 11 October 1977 [No author cited]. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 36, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

¹²⁰ William J. Jordan, *Panama Odyssey* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 523.

¹²¹ Kiron K. Skinner, *Reagan’s Path to Victory*, recorded 8 November 1977, 218.

¹²² Kiron K. Skinner, *Reagan’s Path to Victory*, 265.

States relinquished control of the Canal, Mexico could reassert its claim over territory it ceded to the United States.¹²³

Reagan's radio broadcasts sought to change the perception that the value of the Canal to the United States had lessened. Most experts at the time believed the Canal did not have the strategic and military value it had in previous years because big oil tankers and U.S. aircraft carriers could no longer navigate it. In his arguments, Reagan distinguished between the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who supported the Carter administration's assertions about the diminished value of the Canal, and former U.S. military leaders who came out against the treaties. Reagan argued that retired military leaders were more able to question present military policies because they did not have to report to the president. The Joint Chiefs, he asserted, had to support the president's agenda. He quoted a letter sent to Carter by four former US naval commanders that stressed that the Canal remained vital to U.S. interests. One officer, Admiral John S. McCain Jr., who had served as commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, testified before the Senate that the Soviets wanted the Canal and predicted that if the United States gave away the Canal, the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico could fall under communist domination.¹²⁴

Ronald Reagan referred to the Suez Canal as a harbinger of what could happen if the United States relinquished control of the Panama Canal. He quoted an article in the newsletter *Battleline* written by Laurence Beilenson.¹²⁵ Beilenson noted that after Britain and Egypt signed a treaty for British withdrawal in 1954, Nasser violated the treaty in 1956 by nationalizing the Suez Canal. In effect, Nasser's government took control over British installations, which

¹²³ George D. Moffitt III, *The Limits of Victory*, 179.

¹²⁴ Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, Martin Anderson, eds., *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 203.

¹²⁵ *Battleline* was the journal published by the American Conservative Union Foundation. Laurence Beilenson remained a close friend of Reagan's from his Hollywood days. Beilenson had worked as a lawyer for the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) when Reagan had served as president of the Guild in the 1940s.

Beilenson implied could happen to U.S. installations after Panama assumed control of its Canal. The United States would be unable to respond because the United Nations allowed countries to confiscate foreign owned property inside their territory. Reagan advised senators and State Department officials to read the article.¹²⁶ In a second address concerning Panama taped the same day, Reagan emphasized, “There is nothing *in the treaty* that will prevent the Panamanians from nationalizing the Canal as Nasser did with the Suez contrary to the treaty he had signed.”¹²⁷ Dire consequences would follow if the United States left the Panama Canal.

In these addresses, Reagan vehemently attacked the idea that the United States had taken advantage of Panama during the previous seventy-five years. To dispel these claims, Reagan cast the United States as a benevolent protector of freedom in Panama and around the world. After the first treaty passed the Senate in March 1978, Reagan exclaimed, “Nothing angered me more than the *falsehood* continuously perpetuated by treaty proponents that we sinned against Panama.” Furthermore, Reagan listed several items the U.S. had given to Panama over the years such as houses, a hospital, shrimp boats, and other monetary support totaling close to a billion dollars (in Reagan’s estimate) to the benefit of Panama.¹²⁸ In August 1977, Reagan debunked pro-treaty “propaganda” as “designed to soften us up by creating a guilt complex over the canal as if it symbolized American imperialism.” Instead, Americans should feel honored that they built the canal and “our complete lack of selfishness in all the years of its operation.” According to Reagan, Panama remained “better off” because of the United States. Reagan challenged the notion that the United States had no legitimate claim to ownership of the canal.¹²⁹

¹²⁶Kiron K. Skinner, *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 52.

¹²⁷ Kiron K. Skinner, *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, taped 18 October 1977, 206, (emphasis in original).

¹²⁸ Kiron K. Skinner, *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, recorded 3 April 1978, 208-209 (emphasis in original).

¹²⁹ Kiron K. Skinner, *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, recorded 15 August 1977, 198.

Ronald Reagan directed his frustration at the U.S. State Department. He noted that most of the allegedly false information and history about the Canal came from the State Department. For example, in an attempt to debunk the State Department's claims, Reagan said that the United States had not backed the Panamanian revolution in 1903. Eight Panamanian nationalists started the revolution, seceded from Columbia, and then "avidly sought" a treaty with the United States, and "were never encouraged by us to rebel." Therefore, the original treaty signed between both countries stipulated that the United States possessed sovereignty over the canal territory.¹³⁰ Rep. Philip Crane (R-IL), a leading New Right anti-treaty advocate and member of the Panama Canal "truth squad," employed this same argument in his 1978 book, *Surrender in Panama*. Crane wrote, "the main reason the Panamanians had staged the coup in the first place was to secure-not to prevent-an American canal on the isthmus."¹³¹ Sen. Paul Laxalt (R-NV) remarked the 1903 treaty "was welcomed by all Panamanians."¹³² Here anti-treaty advocates employed a concerted effort to rewrite the history of the Canal. To express his discontent, Reagan ended one broadcast by stating, "You know giving up the canal itself might be a better deal if we could throw in the state dept."¹³³ Reagan saw the Panama Canal as U.S. territory and believed that the treaty supporters, in particular the State Department, misled the American public.

Reagan argued that losing control of the canal would pose a grave danger to U.S. security. In support of Reagan, Crane noted how Franklin D. Roosevelt had "warned of the dangers of apathy and retreat, of passive surrender in the face of challenge." According to Crane, America was in danger of losing its "national resolve" to the constant threats presented

¹³⁰Kiron K. Skinner, *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, recorded 18 October 1977, 204.

¹³¹Philip M. Crane, *Surrender in Panama: The Case Against the Treaties*, 6.

¹³² William J. Jorden, *Panamanian Odyssey*, 517.

¹³³ Kiron K. Skinner, *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, recorded 3 April 1978, 209.

around the world by Soviet communism.¹³⁴ Conversely, President Carter asserted that the United States' security *would be enhanced* by giving back the canal to Panama. Many of the arguments between Carter and Reagan would emerge as part of the public and Congressional debates in 1978.

THE NEW RIGHT'S STRATEGY IN JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1978

At the beginning of 1978, the Panama Canal treaties would become one of the major political issues in the country. While the debates in the Senate would not begin until February, supporters and opponents of the treaties engaged in publicity campaigns weeks beforehand.¹³⁵ The purpose of this section is not to retell the history of the debates and the ratification of the treaties, but rather to focus on the actions of the New Right and anti-treaty advocates during this time. The New Right sought to discourage senators from voting in favor of the treaties and to encourage legislative amendments to alter or change the treaties' meaning. These actions posed a threat to the Carter administration's efforts at ratification. The financial and legislative elements of the New Right joined forces. The New Right's funding apparatus financed the Panama Canal "truth squad" in January 1978. Additionally, the money the New Right raised paid for newspaper and radio ads, a TV documentary, and direct mail pamphlets. Senators opposed to the treaties worked feverishly to block ratification in February and March 1978. This section will focus on the senators connected to the New Right either ideologically or financially. The Republican senators referred to in this section are Jesse Helms, Orrin Hatch, Jake Garn, Paul Laxalt, Bob Dole (R-KS), and Robert Griffin (R-MI), who *consistently* opposed the treaty.¹³⁶ Other senators against the treaties had a more nuanced approach for their opposition. These

¹³⁴ Philip Crane, *Surrender in Panama*, 16-17.

¹³⁵ President Carter noted how pro-treaty advocates had "to seize the initiative" because anti-treaty forces had been publicly attacking the treaties since the Kissinger-Tack agreements in 1974, *Keeping Faith*, 161.

¹³⁶ Some Democratic opposed the treaties as well. One example of the Democratic opposition, Sen. James Allen (D-AL), did not want the treaties ratified in any form and proposed many of the amendments to block their passage.

reasons included national security, right of passage of U.S. warships, reparations, Canal Zone issues, etc. Advocates of the New Right's position steadfastly disagreed with all aspects of the treaties and became the public face of opposition to ratification.

Senators opposed to the treaties used a variety of parliamentary devices to stall or derail ratification. Adding amendments to the treaties was the most common tactic. An amendment required a majority of senators voting in favor of it to become part of the treaties.¹³⁷ These amendments would alter the meaning of the documents and undermine the understandings reached by both countries. The hope was that the amendments would "kill" the treaties, making them unacceptable to the Panamanians. Secondly, the New Right's financial base used a direct mail campaign to influence or intimidate uncommitted senators. Aside from the financial and legislative tactics, this section will also examine the role of Ronald Reagan, and Carter's response to his arguments. In the end, the New Right's tactics failed to block ratification. However, the New Right's actions raised awareness of their movement and elevated Ronald Reagan's stature as a conservative icon.

JANUARY 1978

The New Right's first major initiative of 1978 occurred in mid January. On January 17, the Panama Canal "truth squad" began a weeklong, four city journey across the country. Sen. Paul Laxalt had announced the formation of the "truth squad" the previous September. Laxalt had told the press, "President Carter says he is going to take the canal issue to the people. So are we."¹³⁸ Its purpose was "to focus renewed public interest in the treaties" and to put pressure on

¹³⁷ David M. Maxfield, "Early Sparring: Senate Launches Debate on Panama Canal Treaties," *Congressional Quarterly* 11 February 1978, 328.

¹³⁸ Dan Bohning, "Treaty Foes Planning 'Truth Squad' Attack," *The Miami Herald* 11 Sept. 1977, 1.

the senators from the states they were visiting.¹³⁹ The “truth squad” consisted of twenty members headed by Paul Laxalt, Philip Crane, and Ronald Reagan.¹⁴⁰ The group also included members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the New Right’s financial supporters, such as Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich. The financing for this group came from individual donors and eight conservative organizations collectively known as the Committee to Save the Panama Canal.¹⁴¹ These groups raised \$100,000 for this venture.¹⁴² Richard Viguerie stated that he raised the money through a direct mail campaign of 5000 letters that enabled the “truth squad” to charter a plane for the trip. The money also paid for advertisements on the radio and in newspapers.¹⁴³ The group traveled to Miami, St. Louis, Denver, and Portland, Oregon.¹⁴⁴ In each of these cities, the “truth squad” met with local officials and reporters and staged anti-treaty rallies aimed at countering the administration’s attempts to gain public support for ratification.¹⁴⁵

The effectiveness of the “truth squad” resided in its ability to create a united and vocal opposition to the treaties. Concerning the “truth squad,” Philip Crane noted, “That was a drill, a realization we can work cooperatively and get out to reach people.”¹⁴⁶ Secondly, this group proved that it could finance itself and garner media attention. Thirdly, the “truth squad” put

¹³⁹ David M. Maxfield, “Panama Canal: Groups Favoring Treaties Fight to Offset Opponent’s Massive Lobbying Effort,” *Congressional Quarterly* 21 January, 1978, 136-137.

¹⁴⁰ The main members of the “truth squad” included Paul Laxalt, Ronald Reagan, Paul Weyrich, Richard Viguerie, Rep. Larry MacDonald, Rep. Phillip Crane.

¹⁴¹ *Congressional Quarterly* listed the groups as: The American Conservative Union, Conservative Caucus, Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, Citizens for the Republic, American Security Council, Young Republicans, National Conservative Political Action Committee and the Council for National Defense. David M. Maxfield, “Panama Canal: Groups Favoring Treaties Fight to Offset Opponent’s Massive Lobbying Efforts,” *Congressional Quarterly* 21 January 1978, 136.

¹⁴² Richard Viguerie stated that these groups raised over \$110,000 and without the help of the RNC. In fact, Viguerie pointed out that when Sen. Paul Laxalt requested \$50,000 for the “truth squad” from Bill Brock, the chairman of the RNC, Brock declined. Viguerie’s group then sent out two letters to supporters, one signed by Reagan and the other by Sen. Laxalt, which raised the money they needed. Richard Viguerie, *The New Right: We’re Ready to Lead*, 68-69.

¹⁴³ Richard Viguerie, *The New Right: We’re Ready to Lead*, (Falls Church, VA., The Viguerie Company, 1981), 68.

¹⁴⁴ David M. Maxfield, “Panama Canal: Groups Favoring Treaties Fight to Offset Opponent’s Massive Lobbying Efforts,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 21 January 1978, 136.

¹⁴⁵ George D. Moffitt III, *The Limits of Victor*, 141.

¹⁴⁶ David S. Broder, “Responding to the ‘New Right’ Challenge,” in *The Washington Post* 29 January 1978, A14.

pressure on certain uncommitted senators. For example, in Denver, the “truth squad” targeted Sen. Floyd Haskell, a Republican running for reelection. Paul Weyrich told reporters, “We feel a definitive show of constituent sentiment might help him [Haskell] clarify his own thinking.”¹⁴⁷ At the same time, the Conservative Caucus worked on implementing a “voter pledge program” aimed at obtaining assurances from 10,000 voters in every state to “never vote for any person who votes for the treaties.”¹⁴⁸

Congressional Quarterly pointed to January poll that revealed, “a majority of Americans now would support the treaties if amended to assure that the United States could defend the canal if it were threatened.” The ‘truth squad’ enabled New Right supporters to take the initiative.¹⁴⁹ On January 16, Howard Phillips said, “Right now, I think we are losing, but this will turn around if senators see they’ll be opposed and defeated if they vote for the treaties. We’re lining up candidates.”¹⁵⁰ Weyrich said this in response to Senate minority leader Howard Baker’s (R-TN) pledge that same day to work in favor of ratification. (The previous fall, the American Conservative Union [ACU] had paid for a plane with a banner stating “Save our Canal” to fly over a Tennessee football game attended by Baker.)¹⁵¹ The New Right would target senators up for reelection in 1978.

Carter briefly touched on the canal at the end of his State of the Union address on January 19. He emphasized three main aspects of the treaties. First, the canal would remain open to all world shipping, but the United States retained the right to move ahead of all other ships in the event of an emergency. Second, the United States had “the right to defend the Canal with our

¹⁴⁷ Molly Ivins, “Treaty Foes, Led by Reagan, Crusade in Denver,” *The New York Times* 20 Jan 1978,

¹⁴⁸ David M. Maxfield, “Panama Canal: Groups Favoring Treaties Fight to Offset Opponents’ Massive Lobbying Effort,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 21 January 1978, 137.

¹⁴⁹ David M. Maxfield, “Panama Canal,” *Congressional Quarterly* 21 January 1978, 135.

¹⁵⁰ David M. Maxfield, “Panama Canal,” *Congressional Quarterly* 21 January 1978, 135-136.

¹⁵¹ David M. Maxfield, “Panama Canal: Groups Favoring Treaties Fight to Offset Opponents’ Massive Lobbying Effort,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 21 January 1978, 135-136.

military forces, if necessary, to guarantee its openness and neutrality.” Lastly, the president told the audience that ratification of the treaties, “will demonstrate our good faith in the world, discourage the spread of hostile ideologies in this hemisphere and directly contribute to the economic well being and security of the United States.”¹⁵² This statement flatly contradicted the argument used by the “truth squad.” The following day in Denver, Paul Laxalt told reporters that the treaties would not benefit American national interest.¹⁵³ Anti-treaty rhetoric had stressed that the United States already owned the canal and that relinquishing control would hurt national security.

To counteract the opposition’s message espoused by Reagan and the “truth squad,” treaty supporters formed their own organizations to raise money. One high profile example was the Citizens’ Committee for the Panama Canal Treaties. W. Averell Harriman, a distinguished statesman and former governor of New York, headed this group. Harriman ran a 35-member committee that included notables such as former President Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Henry Cabot Lodge. In 1977, this group had \$1,000,000 to institute a media campaign designed to bolster support for the treaties.¹⁵⁴ Other groups in favor of ratification formed as well, but the Citizens’ Committee had the most high-profile public figures and substantial funding. The effectiveness of these groups remains contested. William Jorden, Jimmy Carter’s ambassador to Panama, said that they “never mobilized the energy, resources, or imagination, required to counter the well financed and highly active opposition” from the New Right.¹⁵⁵ However, both sides had prominent public figures and the ability to raise vast sums of money. While each side campaigned for public support, the battle lines shifted to the Senate chamber in early February.

¹⁵² The full text of Carter’s State of the Union reprinted in *Congressional Quarterly* 28 January 1978, 205.

¹⁵³ Molly Ivins, “Treaty Foes, Led by Reagan, Crusade in Denver,” *The New York Times* 20 January, 1978.

¹⁵⁴ “Panama: Turn of the Tide?” *Newsweek*, 2 January 1978, 19.

¹⁵⁵ William Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 517.

Here, anti-treaty senators employed the same arguments that the New Right and Reagan had been articulating since 1976.

FEBRUARY 1978

Carter used a “fireside chat” on February 1 to make his case to the nation. This public address would take to task the positions and arguments highlighted by Reagan and the “truth squad.” According to Hamilton Jordan, Carter’s political advisor, the speech needed to “to define the issues...and to neutralize the very effective mail campaign that is already being felt.”¹⁵⁶ Carter had to make a stronger case for ratification than the administration had been able to mount in the previous months.

Hamilton Jordan had pressured the president to publicly address the canal issue since the previous fall. On November 1, 1977, Jordan suggested to Carter that he give a “fireside chat” during the week when the Senate adjourned for the holiday recess. Carter agreed and wrote “we can’t wait that long. Should be done in December.” Jordan’s assessment of the situation at the time reflected his optimistic outlook concerning the treaties. He based his view on several factors. These included the belief that the direct mail campaign’s impact on Senators had diminished; a slight shift in public opinion polls favored the treaties; and the media had been reporting more positive reviews in favor of ratification. Jordan worked on the assumption that the ratification vote would likely happen in February 1978 and that the opponents would launch an all out assault to block ratification, which could sway moderate Republicans.¹⁵⁷ Jordan’s assumptions turned out to be correct in light of the “truth squad’s” tactics of targeting senators such as Floyd Haskell.

¹⁵⁶ Hamilton Jordan, “Panama Canal Treaty and Fireside Chat,” Memorandum for President Carter, 9 September 1977, three pages. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 50, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

¹⁵⁷ Hamilton Jordan, “Update on Panama Canal/Revised Work Plan,” Memorandum to President Carter, 1 November 1977 nine pages with Carter’s marginalia. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 36, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

One month later, in December 1977, the administration's strategy shifted towards delivering the speech early January before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee resumed its hearings on ratification. As his first major speech of 1978, the president's address would help define the issues for the upcoming Senate debates. According to one report in early December, "there is a growing belief that that President is not committed wholeheartedly to the Treaties and an earlier address could lay the issue to rest."¹⁵⁸ Certain senators, such as Robert Byrd (D-WV), Wendell Ford (D-KY), and Fritz Hollings (D-SC), strongly urged the president to address the nation before Christmas. Senator Ford noted that despite the dip in anti-Treaty mail, the president needed to show greater support and send more pro-treaty speakers to his home state of Kentucky.¹⁵⁹ Ford realized that only a strong message from the president could help assuage key constituent groups in his home state and allow him to vote in favor of ratification. These senators wanted to see if the public mood would change before next session of Congress. They needed the president to ease the political pressure on them.

However, Carter did not give his "fireside chat" to the American public until February. It is impossible to explain the delay based on available evidence. Perhaps the simplest explanation is the best: the president had been preoccupied with other pressing issues such as the Middle East talks between Egypt and Israel. In his speech, Carter laid out the administration's reasons for signing the treaties. Consequently, the speech had to address Reagan's and the New Right's arguments. Furthermore, Carter reiterated in more detail the main points about the treaty from his State of the Union speech. However, the president had a difficult task of arguing a counterintuitive point that the United States would be *more* secure if it ceded control of the

¹⁵⁸ Douglas J. Bennet, Jr., Robert Beckel, and Robert Thomson, "Panama Canal Strategy," memorandum for Hamilton Jordan and Frank Moore, 1 December 1977, ten pages. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 50, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

¹⁵⁹ Bob Thomson and Bob Beckel, "Meeting with Senators on Panama," memorandum to Frank Moore, 12 December 1977, three pages. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 36, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

canal. On the one hand, Carter had to assuage the fears among many of diminished U.S. security in the Canal Zone. The president stressed that ratification of the treaties would enhance national security. On the other, Carter had to make sure that by emphasizing U.S. security needs that he did not alarm Torrijos and the Panamanians. Torrijos had already been criticized by some Panamanians for giving up too much to the United States. Additionally, remarks from anti-treaty senators about the canal and its ownership had outraged many Panamanians.¹⁶⁰

Carter acknowledged that many Americans opposed the treaties but stated that this reflected a failure to understand their full nature. The president emphasized that “when the full terms of the agreement are known, most people are convinced that the national interest of our country will be served by ratifying the treaties.” Ratification of the treaties served “the highest national interests of the United States, and will strengthen our position in the world.”¹⁶¹ Carter did not state the fear many in the administration felt concerning possible sabotage of the canal by the Panamanians. Torrijos had threatened to attack the canal if the Senate failed to ratify the treaties.¹⁶² However, the president’s public argument broadly defined how the United States could respond to a crisis after the treaties had been ratified. Carter reminded his audience that the United States would retain the right to “protect and defend” the Canal. This included “whatever military action is necessary to make sure that the canal always remains open and safe.”¹⁶³

The president did not specify the exact meaning of “whatever military action is necessary,” and he had to qualify his statement so as not to upset the Panamanians. The president emphasized that this ability to defend the canal did not give the United States the right

¹⁶⁰ William J. Jordan, *Panama Odyssey*, 520.

¹⁶¹ Full text of Carter’s speech on Panama Canal Treaties, *Congressional Quarterly*, 4 February 1978, 302.

¹⁶² Michael Conniff, *Panama and the United States*, 136.

¹⁶³ Text of Carter’s speech *Congressional Quarterly*, 4 February 1978, 302.

“to intervene in the *internal affairs* of Panama” and that military action would not violate the political or territorial sovereignty of the country.¹⁶⁴ This point reflected the main tenet from the Carter-Torrijos statement issued the previous October.

In a direct challenge to Reagan, Carter rhetorically asked, “Why should we give away the Panama Canal Zone?” Carter continued, “As many people say, ‘We bought it, we paid for it, it’s ours.’” In response the president replied, “We do not own the Panama Canal Zone. We have never had sovereignty over it. We have only had the right to use it.”¹⁶⁵ In reality, the United States paid Panama a yearly sum to use the Canal and surrounding territory. This statement contradicted Reagan’s notion that the Panama Canal belonged to the United States. Reagan’s position of “We bought it, we paid for it, it’s ours” had been one of his central arguments since his bid for the Republican nomination in 1976.

Carter also questioned the anti-treaty forces’ argument that if the United States left Panama, China, the Soviet Union, and Cuba would move in. Carter offered a different scenario. The treaties, according to the president, would enhance America’s prestige in Latin America and dissipate a major source of anti-American sentiment in the region. The treaties initiated a new beginning that redressed a long history of grievances on the part of Panama and other countries in Latin America.¹⁶⁶ They would strengthen anti-communist, pro-Western forces throughout the region.

In concluding, Carter stated that the treaties reflected America’s understanding of itself as a nation; it was doing the right thing, morally and practically, to return control of the canal to the Panamanians. “When we talk of the canal,” Carter said, “we are talking about very deep and elemental feelings about our own strength” as a country. Furthermore, “this agreement with

¹⁶⁴ Text of Carter’s speech, *Congressional Quarterly*, 4 February 1978, 302. (Italics are mine).

¹⁶⁵ Text of Carter’s speech, *Congressional Quarterly*, 4 February 1978, 303.

¹⁶⁶ Text of Carter’s speech, *Congressional Quarterly*, 4 February 1978, 303.

Panama is something we want because we know it is right. This is not merely the surest way to protect and save the canal; it is the strong positive act of a people who are still confident, still creative, still great.” Then the president referred to Theodore Roosevelt, the Republican under whose presidency the canal had been built, as someone who understood change and would have supported the treaties.¹⁶⁷ By doing so, he reached out to Americans on both sides of the issue. Appealing to a strong Republican leader and offering a strong moral imperative to correct the injustices of the past highlighted the administration’s desire to placate two different constituencies on this issue. Whereas Carter looked to Theodore Roosevelt as a progressive image of American values, Phillip Crane viewed the Republican Roosevelt as defender of American hegemony in the world.¹⁶⁸

Carter’s speech brought the desired result. The following day, *The Washington Post* reported that a Gallup Poll showed a plurality of Americans, 45 percent to 42 percent, favored the treaties. This poll highlighted the changing attitude of many Americans toward the treaties over previous months. Carter received the public support of two more senators, Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and John Durkin (D-NH) for ratification. This brought the total to sixty senators in favor of the treaties. The president still needed seven votes to secure their passage.¹⁶⁹

President Carter had put the treaties in the most favorable light in the hopes of tipping the balance in their favor. Ronald Reagan and the New Right had a far simpler task. To oppose the treaties, Reagan could paint a plethora of dire scenarios that would plant doubts about the wisdom of the treaties in the minds of many Americans. These ranged from fears of further

¹⁶⁷ Text of Carter’s speech, *Congressional Quarterly*, 4 February 1978, 303.

¹⁶⁸ Phillip M. Crane, *Surrender in Panama*, 16-17.

¹⁶⁹ “Carter Takes Case For Canal Treaties to the Public,” *The Washington Post* 2 February, 1978, A1 [No author given].

communist infiltration in the region to the unsavory notion of the United States making deals with a corrupt dictator.

On February 8, Ronald Reagan appeared on CBS TV to refute the president's assertions. According to Reagan, "the new treaties would in a single stroke eliminate the foundation on which our right to permanently use the canal has been based for more than six decades." In addition, Reagan emphasized, "We have the permanent right—right now—but will we effectively have it if the Carter-Torrijos treaties are ratified? I have serious doubts that we will."¹⁷⁰ Returning control of the canal back to Panama would jeopardize the security of the United States. Reagan warned that if the United States relinquished control of the canal "the ultimate price we pay may one day be our own freedom."¹⁷¹ These two speeches show that Carter and Reagan's arguments about the security and value of the Panama Canal were polar opposites. Furthermore, they foreshadowed the divisiveness of the upcoming Senate debates.

TREATY OPPOENENTS' TWO MAIN TACTICS TO STOP RATIFICATION OF TREATIES: DIRECT MAIL AND THE USE OF AMENDMENTS TO THE TREATIES

During the Panama Canal debates in February and March 1978, the New Right and its anti-treaty allies had two potent weapons to try to block ratification. The first was direct mail. Direct mail encouraged constituents to contact their senators and tell them not to vote in support of ratification. The second consisted of a legislative tactic of adding amendments and reservations to the text of the treaty. These changes could force the United States and Panama to renegotiate or scrap the treaties altogether. The Carter administration wanted to stop these amendments at all cost.

¹⁷⁰"Carter Takes Case For Canal Treaties to the Public," *The Washington Post*, 2 February, 1978, A3 [No author given].

¹⁷¹"The Panama Canal: Round One," *Newsweek*, 20 February 1978, 30 [No author given].

New Right financial groups used direct mail as a way to advertise or raise money for conservative issues or causes, like the campaign against the Panama Canal treaties. One way direct mail operated was by encouraging letter-writing campaigns. Those who responded to the sender would be added to the lists of sympathetic supporters.¹⁷² In practice, a person on RAVCO's list would receive a direct mailer; then that individual, if he or she desired, could contact or send in a response to their senator. For example, the Conservative Caucus sent out a mailer with a prewritten message during the Senate debates on the canal treaties. The message on the mailer stated,

I pledge never again to vote for any elected official who supports the surrender of U.S. sovereign jurisdiction and control over the American canal and zone at the Isthmus of Panama. I will not be fooled by cosmetic understandings, reservations or amendments to these treaties....Where do you stand Senator?¹⁷³

The recipient of this mailer had only to sign and mail it to their senator.

The New Right used direct mail to raise funds as well. A 1977 mailer, written by Sen. George Hansen (R-ID), urged its recipients to tell their senator to vote to block ratification of the treaties and to send a donation to the Panama Canal Defense Campaign. Hansen ended his letter by warning, "We will lose our Canal without your help."¹⁷⁴ RAVCO proved very adept in generating revenue and having its supporters return their mailers to senators. Noting the effectiveness of direct mail, Viguerie stated, "It's like using a water moccasin for a watchdog—it's very quiet."¹⁷⁵ Discussions within the Carter administration show that they took the New

¹⁷² Willard C. Richan, *Lobbying for Social Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Haworth Press, 1996), 58.

¹⁷³ Nick Kotz, "King Midas of 'The New Right,'" in *The New Right: Fundamentalists and Financiers* (Oakland: The Data Center, 1982), 49.

¹⁷⁴ George Hansen, Congressional Mailer [no date given except that Hansen mentions that it was written in 1977], four pages. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 36, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

¹⁷⁵ Nick Kotz, "King Midas of 'The New Right,'" *The New Right: Fundamentalists and Financiers*, 49.

Right's direct mail campaign very seriously. Constituents who sent their senator anti-treaty mail generated concern among some senators and members of the administration.

The New Right financial apparatus had carried out a direct mail campaign against the treaties since 1974 in order to raise money and awareness.¹⁷⁶ After the 1976 election, the anti-treaty mailings escalated to members of Congress in the hopes of preventing Carter and Torrijos from signing any new treaty. For example, in March 1977, Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-NY) wrote to Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Advisor, concerning the treaties. The congressman warned, "congressional mail is running overwhelmingly against a new treaty. And if the trend isn't reversed soon, it may doom our efforts."¹⁷⁷ In September, Hamilton Jordan, Carter's political advisor, recognizing the potency of the mail campaign, advised the president to address the nation to counteract it.¹⁷⁸ The need to address the anti-treaty arguments laid the framework for the "fireside chat" in February 1978.

After the president and Torrijos signed the canal treaties, the New Right kept up its direct mail efforts to encourage the public to contact senators. One month after the signing in October 1977, the direct mail campaign still posed problems for the administration. There seemed little consensus within the administration about the effectiveness of the direct mail campaign. While Jordan had been upbeat in 1977 about counteracting the direct mail campaign and anti-treaty arguments with a "fireside chat," White House staffer Joseph Aragona wrote to Hamilton Jordan that negative poll numbers and the direct mail campaign "tended to depict the prospects of ratification as bleak." Aragona realized "a great deal of misunderstanding has been produced

¹⁷⁶ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982), 161.

¹⁷⁷ Rick Inderfurth, "National Committee for a Canal Treaty," Memorandum for Hamilton Jordan, 2 June 1977. [Contained within the memo is a letter to NSA Brzezinski from Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-NY), 30 March 1977]. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 50, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

¹⁷⁸ Hamilton Jordan, "Panama Canal Treaty and Fireside Chat," memorandum for President Carter, 19 September 1977, three pages. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 50, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

through the distorted rhetoric and demagoguery” presented by treaty foes. Aragona’s assessment seems to contradict Hamilton’s view that the direct mail campaign had somewhat subsided.¹⁷⁹

Still, both views attest to the direct mail’s potential to cause problems. Only when the administration began its “education sessions” in late 1977 and early 1978 could it see real results in the rise of support for the treaties.

The New Right’s direct mail campaign, coupled with its threat of targeting senators for reelection, made the administration’s task of getting enough senatorial support difficult. The New Right’s financial groups proved that they could effectively raise money and awareness of conservative issues and they would not hesitate to use those resources in the midterm election. After the signing in September, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee begin to hold hearings on the treaties.¹⁸⁰ However, because these hearings began so late in the fall, the voting would have to wait until the following year.¹⁸¹ This lapse of time allowed more time for anti-treaty mail to intimidate senators. Richard Vigurie’s company and other New Right financial groups had their supporters inundate senate offices with between seven and nine million pieces of mail.¹⁸² Earnest Evans, a congressional staffer, noted, “The mail had a significant obfuscating effect that made senators cautious about making public

¹⁷⁹ Joseph Aragona, “Status Report-Panama Canal Treaties and the Ratification Effort,” White House memo to Hamilton Jordan, 30 November 1977, eight pages. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 36, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

¹⁸⁰ The Senate Armed Services Committee, chaired by John Stennis (D-MS), an ardent treaty opponent, began hearings as well on the technical and military aspects of the treaties. At the time, the Senate Armed Services Committee had the more vocal anti-treaty advocates such as Strom Thurmond (R-SC), Jesse Helms (R-NC), and Jake Garn (R-Utah), among others. These hearings allowed many anti-treaty advocates to record their disagreements with the treaties. William Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 509. Additionally, on February 7, 1978, the Armed Services Committee released a report concluding “the direct cost to the United States in turning the canal over to Panama could run as high as \$318 million.” This served a scare tactic on the part of its members to put pro-treaty senators on the defensive. Robert Byrd responded by saying that polls collected from the canal would pay this cost. David M. Maxfield, “Early Sparring: Senate Launches Debate On Panama Canal Treaties,” *Congressional Quarterly* February 11, 1978, 328.

¹⁸¹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 160.

¹⁸² George D. Moffitt III, *The Limits of Victory*, 171.

commitments for the treaties.”¹⁸³ The actual Senate vote would occur at the beginning of 1978, an election year.

The 1978 midterm election posed another problem for the administration, making those who were up for reelection more wary of voting in favor of ratification. How a senator voted on the Panama Canal became a litmus test of conservative credentials among Republicans. Richard Viguerie wrote in a direct mail piece, “Now conservatives can get excited about the Panama Canal giveaway and they can go to the polls, look for a person’s name on the ballot who favored these treaties, and vote against him.”¹⁸⁴ The continuous direct mail campaign, which caused a flood of constituent mail against the treaties to inundate senate offices, could cause a senator to be concerned about their reelection should they vote in favor of ratification.¹⁸⁵ In early February, Robert Byrd gave a speech on the Senate floor admonishing his colleagues not to give in to the direct mail campaign. He exclaimed, “if you went by public-opinion polls and telephone calls or the volume of mail, you could replace senators with an adding machine or set of scales!”¹⁸⁶ The direct mail campaign left its mark on the debates. After the voting ended, Sen. Thomas McIntyre (D-NH) remarked, “There’s no doubt in my mind that the mail generated by the Panama Canal treaties had an effect...If it did not sway many votes, it surely encouraged the prolongation of the debate and invited the near destruction of the treaty by reckless amendments.”¹⁸⁷ Other senators, such as Wendell Ford, succumbed to the pressure of the mail and voted against both treaties. Senators had to pay attention to the ramifications that their vote on the treaties could have on their support at home.

¹⁸³ George D. Moffitt III, *The Limits of Victory*, 129.

¹⁸⁴ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 160.

¹⁸⁵ George D. Moffitt III, *The Limits of Victory*, 170.

¹⁸⁶ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 166.

¹⁸⁷ George D. Moffitt III, *The Limits of Victory*, 177.

LEGISLATIVE TACTICS TO BLOCK RATIFICATION

Legislatively, by adding amendments or reservations to the text of the treaties, any senator could change their meaning. This could make the Panamanian government withdraw its support from the treaties. Adding “killer” amendments would alter the spirit and understandings inherent in the treaties, thereby effectively voiding them. Thus, the diplomatic process would have to start over again from the beginning. Carter’s political team realized the danger of any change to the treaties. Carter’s Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, wrote, “To counter this strategy, in late 1977 and early 1978 we intensified our campaign to explain the treaties to the American public.”¹⁸⁸

The legislative environment in which the debates occurred reflected the changes in the way the Senate conducted its business. Since the 1950s, the actions of many senators had become more individualistic for two main reasons. The first involved a change in Senate rules in which seniority did not have as much influence. Previously, freshman senators underwent a period of apprenticeship with a more senior member. By the 1960s, this had changed as senators began to speak more frequently on the floor and offer their own amendments to Senate bills.¹⁸⁹ Secondly, the staffs of senators increased after Senate Resolution 60 passed in 1975 allowing senators to hire additional personnel. The increased staff handled the senator’s affairs and let the senator focus on more national issues.¹⁹⁰ As a result, some senators rose to national prominence by supporting certain groups or policies and used the media to draw attention to themselves and these causes. Many have argued that this increased polarization along partisan lines, creating

¹⁸⁸ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices*, 150.

¹⁸⁹ Fred R. Harris, *Deadlock or Decision: The U.S. Senate and the Rise of National Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 120-121.

¹⁹⁰ Fred R. Harris, *Deadlock or Decision*, 132-134.

new challenges for sponsors to get their measures through the legislative process.¹⁹¹ The plethora of amendments and reservations offered during the Senate debates highlights how any senator could attempt to alter the treaties and gain media exposure. These actions made the resulting debates confusing and very divisive.

The Senate debate began on February 8 with massive media coverage. A vote tally from early February showed 62 senators in favor, 28 against and 10 undecided.¹⁹² The numbers would fluctuate during the debates. The Senate agreed to vote on ratification of the neutrality treaty first, and then vote on the more controversial treaty relinquishing control of the canal back to Panama. The idea was that if senators voted on neutrality first, with the belief that the canal would remain under U.S. military protection, then they would be more inclined to vote in favor of relinquishing control of it back to Panama.¹⁹³ The Senate would debate each section of the treaty one after the other. This action had the potential to change one part of a treaty, which could in effect alter the treaties themselves. Some senators wanted to add amendments and reservations to clarify parts of the treaties. For example, Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ), added a security provision to the first treaty that allowed the U.S. to intervene in Panama in order to protect the canal.¹⁹⁴ Many senators considered this reservation crucial to their decision to vote in favor. The administration understood that senators would “protect their political flanks by supporting an alteration while still voting in favor of the resolution to advise and consent.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹Barbara Sinclair, “The New World of U.S. Senators,” in Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, *Congress Reconsidered* (Washington D.C. Congressional Quarterly Press, 2001), 3-4.

¹⁹²David M. Maxfield, “Early Sparring: Senate Launches Debate On Panama Canal Treaties,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 11 February 1978, 328.

¹⁹³ Michael Conniff, *The United States and Panama: The Forced Alliance* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 136.

¹⁹⁴ Michael Conniff, *The United States and Panama*, 136.

¹⁹⁵ Bob Thomson, “Panama Canal Treaties-Strategy,” Memorandum to President Carter from Bob Thomson through Frank Moore, 26 September 1977, p.1. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 36, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

The sheer number of amendments and reservations proposed left the outcome of the treaties in doubt. By the end of the debates in March 1978, senators had offered 105 amendments, 40 reservations, and 30 understandings.¹⁹⁶ However, the Senate approved only two reservations to the treaties. Both came in the final weeks of the debates. The Carter administration supported them in order to gain critical last minute votes in favor of ratification. The first was the Nunn-Talmadge reservation, named after the two Democratic senators from Georgia. The reservation focused on the prospects of keeping U.S. military installations in Panama after the turnover of the Canal at the turn of the century. The second reservation, proposed by Sen. DeConcini (D-AZ), made it possible for the United States “to use military force *in Panama* to reopen the canal” in the event the canal closed down. This caused great concern for the Panamanians, but Carter conceded. These two reservations highlighted real concerns on the part of senators from both parties as to the exact meanings of the treaties. Both these reservations received bipartisan support. They addressed real problems for senators who wanted to ensure U.S. national security in the region. Senators such as Robert Byrd who supported the treaties wanted these reservations to protect themselves politically.

These reservations differed from the legislative amendments offered by the anti-treaty senators. These senators wanted to block ratification and made it known that they did not support the treaties in any form. For example, Bob Dole offered one of the first amendments. Dole wanted the United States to have a military installation in the country after the handover of the canal in 2000.¹⁹⁷ This would have angered many Panamanians if it had passed. Panamanians

¹⁹⁶ William Jordan, *Panama Odyssey*, 565.

¹⁹⁷ David M. Maxfield, “Early Sparring: Senate Launches Debate On Panama Canal Treaties,” *Congressional Quarterly* 11 February 1978, 328.

wanted the U.S. military out of their country.¹⁹⁸ A few weeks later, Sen. James Allen (D-AL) proposed virtually the same amendment. He proposed that the United States should keep military bases in the Canal Zone for twenty years after the turnover of the Canal to Panama. After the Senate tabled the motion, Allen reintroduced the amendment but changed the wording. He proposed that the United States could sustain a military presence after the handover “if the United States was at war with a country that might attempt to send its ships through the canal.” With the work of Sen. Frank Church (D-ID), a treaty supporter, Allen’s amendment did not succeed.¹⁹⁹ Sen. Allen later admitted that he did not support the treaties regardless of any changes. He, like other anti-treaty senators, used amendments not to enhance the treaties, but to stop them altogether.²⁰⁰

Secondly, Robert Dole and Jesse Helms tried to use the allegations of Torrijos’ drug dealing to stall the treaties. The full Senate discussed these allegations during a closed-door session on February 21-22, 1978.²⁰¹ Senator Dole had requested the secret session. The real purpose of this maneuver was to focus the spotlight away from the substance of the treaties. Still, the drug issue worried many Americans.²⁰² Dole and Helms made three main accusations. First, due to ongoing American intelligence activities within Panama, Panamanian leaders had demanded more concessions in their favor from U.S. negotiators. Secondly, drug trafficking by Torrijos and others in his inner circle affected the results of the treaties. Lastly, top U.S. negotiators from Congress and the business community sought monetary payments “in return for

¹⁹⁸ David M. Maxfield, “Senate Defeats Allen Move on Treaties Action, But Vote Not Seen as Outcome Gauge,” *Congressional Quarterly* 25 February 1978, 516.

¹⁹⁹ David M. Maxfield, “Panama Canal: Senate Kills Pact Revisions But Debate Moves Slowly; Long Sessions Threatened,” *Congressional Quarterly* 4 March 1978, 563-564.

²⁰⁰ William Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 564.

²⁰¹ Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 168.

²⁰² William Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 524.

arranging increases in the annuity paid Panama under the treaty.”²⁰³ The Senate debated and discussed this issue for fourteen hours and Dole’s attempt to stall the treaties ended with defeat.²⁰⁴

Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) responded to these allegations by referring to a Senate Intelligence Committee report obtained by the media on February 22. Senator Byrd emphasized that the drug issues did not affect any of the treaty discussions between Panama and the United States. No American official attempted to gain financially, Byrd asserted, by altering the treaties to benefit Panama. In response to Byrd’s claims, Jesse Helms (R-NC) lamented that the drug accusations did not seem to have changed any Senator’s vote.²⁰⁵ Despite this attempt to stop the treaties by linking Torrijos to drug trafficking, the Senate continued with their ratification debates and the issue lost political steam as other problems arose for pro-treaty advocates.²⁰⁶ These legislative tactics prolonged the debates.

Realizing that none of the proposed amendments introduced by treaty opponents would muster enough votes, anti-treaty proponents agreed on March 6 to a vote on the neutrality treaty. Paul Laxalt said, “We figured the time had come to expedite the matter.” He felt that prolonging the debate could lead to a backlash against them from uncommitted senators. Neither side could predict the outcome. Laxalt noted, “One single vote could make the difference—that’s how close it is.”²⁰⁷ This decision to take a vote did not prevent final efforts to block ratification. On March 7, Jesse Helms offered an amendment that would permit the United States “to maintain

²⁰³ David M. Maxfield, “Senate Defeats Allen Move on Treaties Action, But Vote Not Seen as Outcome Gauge,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 25 February 1978, 515-516.

²⁰⁴ William Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 524.

²⁰⁵ David M. Maxfield, “Senate Defeats Allen Move on Treaties Action,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 25 February 1978, 516.

²⁰⁶ William Jorden noted that the individual who accused Moises of drug trafficking later recanted. Furthermore, Jorden implied that Moises was more interested in living his lavish lifestyle and, by his very nature, seemed “an unlikely candidate for the role of international drug trafficker,” *Panama Odyssey*, 523.

²⁰⁷ David M. Maxfield, “Panama: Canal Neutrality Treaty Vote Set; Both Sides Agree Outcome Is Still In Doubt,” *Congressional Quarterly* 11 March 1978, 615.

the Galeta Island base in the Panama Canal Zone after Dec. 31, 1999.” Helms deemed this installation as “irreplaceable” to the United States’ ability to gather intelligence. The Senate tabled the motion 58-36.²⁰⁸ Two days later, Bob Dole proposed to change the “leadership amendment.” This amendment, which passed the Senate on March 10, allowed the United States to defend the canal. It resulted from the “statement of understanding” reached by Carter and Torrijos the previous fall. Dole wanted wording put in the amendment that stated that defense of the canal could be undertaken “as determined by either party.” However, these words would have changed the context of the treaties and required new negotiations. The Senate tabled Dole’s amendment 47-37.²⁰⁹ Sen. Thomas J. McIntyre (D-NH) referred to treaty opponents as “bully boys” and questioned their tactics. He noted, “These people are different from traditional conservatives, the new right cannot comprehend how people of opposing viewpoints can find common ground and work together.”²¹⁰ Aside from the “leadership amendment” and the two reservations, anti-treaty senators could not block the canal treaties. On March 16, the neutrality treaty passed the full Senate 68-32.

However, the second treaty was more controversial. President Carter’s political advisors warned that ratification of the second treaty remained in doubt. After the first vote, Hamilton Jordan wrote to the president explaining the situation at the time. He noted that anti-treaty proponents had devoted their energies to pressuring a select group of six to eight senators to change their vote on the second treaty. Jordan advised the president to call these senators personally. Secondly, he requested that the Secretary of State and Defense give speeches in the coming days to shift focus back to the second treaty. Jordan’s reasoning centered upon the fact

²⁰⁸ David M. Maxfield, “Panama: Canal Neutrality Treaty Vote Set,” 11 March 1978, 615.

²⁰⁹ David M. Maxfield, “Panama: Canal Neutrality Treaty Vote Set,” 11 March 1978, 615.

²¹⁰ David M. Maxfield, “Panama Canal: Senate Kills Pact Revisions But Debate Moves Slowly; Long Sessions Threatened,” *Congressional Quarterly* 4 March 1978, 563-564.

“the foes have dominated the national news media lately.” The administration needed to create a “sense of urgency” in order to counteract the anti-treaty forces’ high profile tactics.²¹¹

Furthermore, the DeConcini reservation remained a major area of contention for Torrijos and the Panamanian public. This fact alone almost halted the ratification of the second treaty in early April 1978. National Security Council staffer Robert Pastor discussed this issue with Brzezinski. He said that the United States needed to reiterate the policy of non-intervention in Panama, and, if possible, DeConcini should make the statement. At the time, many Panamanians remained outraged by the reservation added to the first treaty. In turn, this led to a misperception on the part of senators that the Panamanian people stopped supporting the treaties. This statement would help in getting the Senate back in line with the debate. According to Pastor, “we are in an extremely delicate position now; we share a none too steady ship, and there are many in the Senate and in Panama who are eager to sink it.”²¹²

Keeping this ship afloat required great skill and finesse on the part of many individuals in both countries. Secondly, key players in the administration needed to keep Torrijos from making any rash statements denouncing DeConcini. Panama made it clear that they would reject the treaties if the U.S. did not remove DeConcini’s language.²¹³ During the first days of April, ratification of the second treaty seemed doubtful as administration officials lacked a clear strategy for dealing with DeConcini.²¹⁴

Gen. Torrijos wrote a letter to UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim and other world leaders expressing his concern. Days later, the American press indicated that Panama had

²¹¹ Hamilton Jordan, “Panama Canal Vote,” Memorandum to President Carter, no date given [The contents of this document reveal that it was written shortly after the first canal treaty vote, which would date it around mid to late March, 1978]. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 50, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

²¹² Robert Pastor, “Getting the Panama Debate Back on Track,” National Security Council Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski, 10 April 1978, 1. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 36, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

²¹³ William Jordan, *Panama Odyssey*, 560.

²¹⁴ Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 180.

rejected the treaties, which further complicated the issue. In fact, Torrijos wanted to show that DeConcini's language went against understandings between nations concerning the respect of territorial sovereignty.²¹⁵ To Panamanians, the word 'intervention' had an extremely negative connotation. Sen. DeConcini stoked the flames further when he appeared on CBS News on April 12. DeConcini wanted to add two more amendments. By this time, American officials realized that anything with DeConcini's name attached to it would destroy any hope of ratification.²¹⁶ Eventually, a few key treaty supporters in the Senate and Panamanian Ambassador Gabriel Lewis worked out last minute changes that both countries found acceptable.²¹⁷

On April 16, the Sunday before the vote, Panamanian Ambassador Lewis met in Robert Byrd's office along with Sen. Church (D-ID) and Sen. Paul Sarbanes (D-MD). Together these key figures reworked the wording that Sen. Church had offered during a Senate speech concerning what "intervention" really meant in the treaties. The text of the understanding, originally written by Mike Kozak, a State Department official, reflected an attempt by pro-treaty advocates to address Panamanian concerns and keep DeConcini happy.²¹⁸ The final wording, known as Appendix E, assuaged Panamanian concerns about their own future territorial integrity and at the same time lessened the impact of DeConcini's reservation.²¹⁹

At 6:00 P.M. on April 18, the full Senate voted on the second treaty that concerned the U.S. relinquishing control of the Canal back to Panama at the end of the century. The final vote ended exactly as the first, 68 in favor and 32 against. President Carter had achieved his first major foreign policy victory despite a concerted and well-financed effort to block ratification.

²¹⁵ William Jordan, *Panama Odyssey*, 569-570.

²¹⁶ William Jordan, *Panama Odyssey*, 587-588.

²¹⁷ Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 180-181.

²¹⁸ William Jordan, *Panama Odyssey*, 580-581.

²¹⁹ Michael Conniff, *Panama and the United States*, 135-136.

At a press conference, the president thanked all the senators involved in the process, “despite tremendous pressure and in some cases, political threats” aimed against them.²²⁰ For his part, Torrijos made a speech shortly after the vote and unleashed a tirade against anti-treaty senators. He told the crowd, “Never in our Republic’s life has a Panamanian been more insulted than me. Never has a country been subjected to so much disrespect as Panama. No people has ever seen crude power so closely as we saw it through the conservatives who are a dishonor to a nation of such dignity as the United States.”²²¹

The critical question surrounding this debate involves the role of the New Right in this process. Legislatively, and out of the public eye, key senators worked out a compromise to appease the Panamanians that resulted in ratification of the second treaty. However, the vitriolic and vocal campaign launched by the New Right and its anti-treaty supporters played a prominent part of the domestic debate. The threat from the New Right’s direct mail loomed over many wary senators. This made it extremely difficult to gauge the voting intentions of many uncommitted senators. The tactical use of the “truth squad” and direct mail, and “killer” amendments sought to block ratification. Part IV of this essay will examine the aftermath of these debates and look at the winners and the losers.

²²⁰ Press Release from The White House following ratification of the second Panama Canal Treaty, April 18, 1978. Chief of Staff, Jordan Collection, Box 50, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

²²¹ William Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 622-623.

CHAPTER IV: WINNERS AND LOSERS

The Carter administration declared the ratification of the Panama Canal treaties to be a major foreign policy victory. The president and his staff had cajoled, bargained, and worked tirelessly to get the sixty—eight votes in favor of ratification that both treaties required. The first two years of his presidency had produced other foreign policy victories for Carter over conservatives in Congress. For example, Carter received Congressional approval to sell fighter planes to Saudi Arabia against the objections of many in Congress who supported Israel. Secondly, Carter persuaded Congress not to abruptly lift sanctions against Rhodesia. Conservatives in congress wanted an end to sanctions in order to assist Rhodesia’s white minority government.²²² In addition, the administration claimed victory in lifting the arms embargo on Turkey.²²³ However, in the end, the New Right proved more successful than the Carter administration on a national level, particularly in late 1978 and 1980. Ultimately, Carter “lost” in the Panama Canal debates.

The New Right ultimately won despite losing the Panama Canal vote. Richard Viguerie wrote, “Because of Panama we are better organized. We developed a great deal of confidence in ourselves, and our opponents became weaker.”²²⁴ The New Right’s financial groups had proven that they had the ability to raise tremendous sums of money. This funding let the New Right’s financial apparatus send out mailers to supporters in the hopes of getting their constituents to write their member of Congress asking them not to ratify the treaties. The Panama Canal “drill” allowed additional supporters to be added to the New Right’s mailing lists. Other lessons the New Right learned included how to deal with the media and how to get their candidates elected

²²² “The Year in Review: Foreign Policy, Economics, Defense Top 1978 Key Votes,” *Congressional Quarterly*, November 25, 1978, 3335-3336 [No author given].

²²³ Mark J. Rozell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency* (Boulder & London: Westview Press, 1989), 92.

²²⁴ Richard A. Viguerie, *The New Right*, 71.

to office. To many conservatives, the New Right, with access to major funding and potential candidates, represented a group that could effectively advocate on behalf of their causes. The New Right's organizational skill proved successful in the 1978 midterm elections.

The midterm elections of 1978 revealed a conservative shift in the makeup of the U.S. Senate. Consequently, a correlation exists between senators who voted in favor of ratification and their loss in the midterm elections. National polls from 1978 help show that the Panama Canal treaties remained a factor that the New Right could exploit. Polls taken within a few months of the second vote showed that a plurality of the American public viewed the treaties unfavorably. By the summer and early fall of 1978, data collected from Harris, Roper, and NBC News highlighted that around 50% opposed the treaties and only 30-35% of Americans supported Senate ratification.²²⁵

The New Right had predicted victory in 1978 despite the lack of media attention on them before the election. For example, in January 1978, *The National Review* noted, "The New Right is, in short, an anomaly on the political scene, but one that both the press corps and the politicians in Washington are watching—if not yet taking too seriously."²²⁶ In February 1978, *Congressional Quarterly* predicted that the Republicans "either will hold even or lose a seat or two" in the upcoming midterms.²²⁷ Additionally, in March 1978, *The Washington Post* questioned the New Right's assertion that "the time is ripe for conservative candidates to unseat liberal or moderate incumbents of both parties in this year's House and Senate elections."²²⁸

²²⁵ Bernard Roscho, 562. Harris poll of June 1978: 35% favor, 49% oppose, 16% not sure; Roper poll in June 1978 asking if Senate should have ratified treaties: 30% should, 52% should not, and 18% don't know; NBC News poll in September 1978: 34% approve, 56% disapprove, and 10% not sure.

²²⁶ *National Review* quote from *America's Right Turn: How Conservatives Used New and Alternative Media to Take Power* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 2004) by Richard Viguerie and David Franke, 134.

²²⁷ Peter A. Harkness, "The Comeback Road Is Rough for the GOP," *Congressional Quarterly* February 25, 1978, 416.

²²⁸ Barry Sussman, "'New Right' In U.S. Politics May Be Only An Expression Of Discontent, Not Ideology," *The Washington Post* 5 March, 1978, C3.

Nevertheless, three candidates funded by the New Right came from behind to beat incumbent Democrats who had voted in favor of ratification of the Panama Canal treaties. For example, Floyd Haskell (D-CO), who was targeted by the “truth squad,” lost to William Armstrong, Dick Clark (D-IA) lost to Roger Jepsen, and Thomas McIntyre (D-NH) lost to Gordon Humphrey. Armstrong, Jepsen, and Humphrey all received funding and support from the New Right’s financial groups. Humphrey, in particular, made McIntyre’s vote in favor of ratification of the treaties a campaign issue.²²⁹ One New Right candidate, Jeffrey Bell, lost to Bill Bradley (D-NJ) in the New Jersey race. However, Bell, who had served as the political director of the American Conservative Union, had beaten incumbent Clifford Case (R-NJ) in the Republican primaries. Case had voted to ratify both treaties.²³⁰ In all, Republicans gained three seats bringing the total for the 95th Congress at 59 Democrats and 41 Republicans.²³¹ While only a slight shift, Republican gains eroded the solid Democratic majority in the Senate. Only one incumbent Republican who voted against ratification lost reelection: Democrat Carl Levin defeated the incumbent Republican Robert Griffin of Michigan.²³² The New Right would build upon these successes and became a more potent force in national conservative politics by 1980.

During the Panama Canal debates, the New Right had mastered the art of using ideologically driven direct mail. Detractors marveled at Richard Viguerie’s skill in using his company to raise awareness of conservative causes. Journalist David Broder noted that the New Right “has outstripped the rest of the political world in the exploitation of computerized direct mail” by capitalizing on highly emotional issues such as abortion and the Panama Canal.²³³

²²⁹ Richard A. Viguerie, *The New Right: We’re Ready to Lead* (Falls Church, VA: The Viguerie Company, 1981), 71-73.

²³⁰ Charles W. Huckler, “Senate: Slightly More Conservative,” *Congressional Quarterly* November 11, 1978, 3245.

²³¹ Charles W. Huckler, “Senate: Slightly More Conservative,” 3244, 3246.

²³² Charles W. Huckler, “Senate Slightly More Conservative,” 3246.

²³³ David S. Broder, *Changing of the Guard*, 476.

Secondly, candidates supported by New Right funding could, according to Viguerie, “remain independent of GOP institutional inertia.”²³⁴ The New Right’s threats during the Panama Canal debates that there would be political retaliation the voting booth came to fruition. The candidates who rode to victory in 1978 on the back of the Panama Canal, and with the help of New Right funding, were loyal to the New Right rather than to the Republican Party.

Although conservative Republican candidates made modest gains in the Senate and House in the 1978 elections, the question of why the New Right and its allies in the Senate failed to block ratification remains a point of debate. Directly after the vote, the New Right remained on the fringe of the Republican Party. Historian George Moffitt makes a compelling argument concerning the New Right and its inability to find allies in the traditional Republican establishment. The reasons employed by the New Right against ratification, such as fear of communism and the purported strategic value of the Canal, made a consensus between the old and new conservatives impossible.²³⁵ With the New Right alienated from the mainstream, critics could assail their views as outmoded and out of touch with reality. For example, Sen. Jake Garn (R-UT) complained on the Senate floor that the United States had to deal “with a corrupt military dictatorship.” One of his Republican colleagues told reporters privately that the United States, under Democratic and Republican administrations, had supported military dictators all over the world. One columnist concluded that the allegations of “giving away” the Canal and of Panama turning into a communist state led the American public to realize “that such talk verges on the idiom of cranks.”²³⁶

²³⁴ Richard A. Viguerie and David Franke, *America’s Right Turn: How Conservatives Used New and Alternative Media to Take Power* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 2004), 114.

²³⁵ Moffitt, 178-179.

²³⁶ Clayton Fritchey, “Overkill on the Treaties,” *The New York Times*, March 4, 1978, A17.

However, as the New Right exploited the Panama Canal treaties in the midterm elections, no evidence exists to draw comparisons between a member of Congress' vote on the Canal treaties and the 1980 elections. By 1980, the issues of SALT II, the Iran hostage crises, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the state of the U.S. economy dominated the national debate. Panama Canal had been eclipsed in public memory. However, the lessons of organization and fundraising that the New Right learned from the Panama Canal "drill" prepared them for helping Reagan's successful presidential campaign.²³⁷

Ronald Reagan also emerged as a "winner" of the Panama Canal debates. The canal issue had propelled Reagan to national prominence during the 1976 Republican primaries. The Panama Canal, along with détente, exposed the internal tensions within the Republican Party. However, in 1976, the Republican old guard still had the power to block Reagan's nomination in favor of Gerald Ford, but just barely. Ford had beaten Reagan by only one hundred and seventeen votes.²³⁸ This balance of power would change by 1980 as Reagan took advantage of this division to become leader of a conservative movement that many Republicans failed to understand.²³⁹ Reagan's unwavering stance on the canal gained him the allegiance of conservatives across the country and ushered him into the presidency. The Panama Canal can spotlight the "turn to the right" in the American political spectrum. By 1978, a candidate's voting record on the treaties served as a litmus test of their conservative credentials.²⁴⁰ It is impossible to say what might have happened to Reagan had the Panama Canal not been an issue in 1977 and 1978, but it is undeniable that the debates about the canal helped him recover from his loss in 1976 and gave him a national platform, despite his "exile" in California.

²³⁷ Richard A. Viguier and David Franke, *America's Right Turn*, 135.

²³⁸ Craig Shirley, *Reagan's Revolution*, 328.

²³⁹ Craig Shirley, 336.

²⁴⁰ Craig Shirley, 336.

The Panama Canal debates serve as a lens through which historians can view a very important domestic discussion. In many ways, these debates revealed the extent of American anger and confusion over the defeat in Vietnam. The United States' status as a world power and the belief that any retreat in the world would embolden the Soviet Union deeply worried many Americans. The New Right capitalized on this sentiment to give the impression to the American public that they would protect U.S. interests and stop the spread of communism. Despite the loss of the canal vote, the New Right had begun its takeover of the Republican Party. The election of 1980, when Republicans won the presidency and the Senate, highlighted this ascendancy of conservatism. The New Right and its allies were no longer in opposition, and the man who had led the fight against ratification of the Panama Canal treaties became president of the United States.

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