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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION,
AT THE DEDICATION CEREMONIES, FORT AMADOR, PANAMA, JANUARY 10, 1980.

On behalf of President Carter, I am honored to represent the United States of America on this historic occasion.

One hundred years ago work began on a canal, to be constructed -- in the words of Ferdinand De Lesseps -- "for the benefit of all mankind."

The Panama Canal fulfills that dream.

It is a tribute to the vision of a few, the courage of many and the sacrifices of thousands. It is testimony to the summits of human achievement, and the limits of human endurance.

The Spanish came first to the isthmus of Panama.

Balboa, in 1513, stood atop a Panama peak, marveled at the vast sea before him, and suggested in his report to Ferdinand of Castile that if a strait connecting the two oceans could not be found "perhaps it might not be impossible to make one."

The impetus for that dream came 400 years later when the French builder of the Suez Canal, Ferdinand De Lesseps, began construction of a sea-level canal across Panama.

That heroic effort did not succeed, but the French engineers left a priceless legacy for their American successors -- quantities of well preserved steam-shovels, dredges and railroad equipment, many of which remained in use during the entire completion of the canal, and a library of extremely accurate maps, surveys, plans and records.

George Goethals, the American engineer, was later to remark that when he needed information on a specific point he consulted the French records because they were "first-rate."

Under U.S. leadership, construction resumed in 1904, continuing until the canal opened in August 1914.

Today the Panamanian flag flies over the Canal as it does over the country first formed as an independent nation in 1903, with Dr. Manuel Amador as its president.

The people of Panama have contributed much to the construction, operation and security of what Goethals called "a bridge of water -- dividing a continent, uniting a world."

As we celebrate the first one hundred years of Canal history, we also mark one hundred days of operations under the Panama Canal Treaties.

Those treaties, pursued and concluded by President Carter and Head of Government General Torrijos, have launched a new era of friendly relations between the United States and the Republic of Panama. The commitment by Panama to the neutrality of the Canal assures its continued use by all nations of the world for international trade and commerce.

Let this plaque, which we dedicate today, remind us of the great price paid by past generations of our three nations and the immense value of this Canal to us and to future generations.

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