

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. RES. 54

Expressing the vital importance of the Panama Canal to the United States.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 4, 2025

Mr. LEE (for himself, Mr. SCOTT of Florida, Mr. TUBERVILLE, and Mrs. BLACKBURN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Expressing the vital importance of the Panama Canal to
the United States.

Whereas early efforts of the Colombian Government and French investors to construct a canal across Panama were unsuccessful and resulted in bankruptcy by 1889;

Whereas, as a condition of United States Government support for Panama's independence from Colombia, including the positioning of United States troops in the then-territory of Panama, the United States was to be assured access to construct and control a canal in perpetuity, an agreement that culminated in the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, signed at Washington November 18, 1903;

Whereas the Panama Canal was never initiated, engineered, or built by the Panamanian Government;

Whereas the United States Government funded, pioneered, and built the Panama Canal over a 10-year period from 1904 to 1914, at a cost of \$375,000,000 and 10,000 lives, and raised the canal above sea level through construction of a lock system;

Whereas, historically, the Panama Canal has been distinct from the sovereign territory of Panama;

Whereas the Panama Canal serves as a vital connection between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, connecting the east and west coasts of the United States and providing passage for more than 14,000 vessels in 2023;

Whereas, approximately 72 percent of vessels traveling through the Panama Canal are traveling to or from United States ports;

Whereas, without the Panama Canal, vessels would have to pass through the notoriously dangerous Cape Horn, extending transit by nearly 8,000 miles;

Whereas, in 1977, President Carter surrendered United States control over the Panama Canal in a series of treaties with Panama known as the “Torrijos-Carter Treaties”;

Whereas one of those treaties, the Treaty Concerning the Permanent Neutrality and Operation of the Panama Canal, signed at Washington September 7, 1977, otherwise known as the “Neutrality Treaty”, reserved the right of the United States to use armed force to defend the permanent neutrality of the Panama Canal;

Whereas, for nearly a decade, the People’s Republic of China has steadily increased its footprint in the Panama Canal;

Whereas, in 2016, Panama ceded control of Margarita Island, the Panama Canal’s largest Atlantic port, to the

People's Republic of China-affiliated Landbridge Group
in a \$900,000,000 agreement;

Whereas, in 2018, Panama entered into a \$1,400,000,000
agreement for the China Communications Construction
Company and the China Harbor Engineering Company to
construct the fourth bridge across the Panama Canal;

Whereas CK Hutchison Holdings, based in Hong Kong, man-
ages two of the Panama Canal's five ports, including the
Balboa port along the Pacific and Cristobal port along
the Atlantic;

Whereas the rapid acceleration of Chinese influence in the
Panama Canal poses a high risk of intelligence-gathering
and surveillance by the People's Republic of China;

Whereas Chinese law requires the assets of civilian firms to
be made available to support the armed forces of the Peo-
ple's Republic of China;

Whereas the Panama Canal would serve as a logistics point
between the east and west coasts of the United States in
the event of a conflict involving United States Armed
Forces, cementing its value to homeland and hemispheric
defense; and

Whereas the ability of the People's Republic of China to con-
trol major entry and exit points of the Panama Canal
would provide the People's Republic of China with a sig-
nificant military advantage relevant to United States
Armed Forces in the event of a conflict: Now, therefore,
be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) recognizes the ingenuity and labor of Ameri-
3 cans that made the Panama Canal possible for fu-

1 ture generations, with special regard for those Amer-
2 icans who lost their lives in pursuit of the Panama
3 Canal project;

4 (2) expresses that the Panama Canal is vital to
5 United States regional security, hemispheric hegemony,
6 and economic interests;

7 (3) assesses that a pattern of Chinese-backed
8 investment in port infrastructure and canal operations
9 in Panama constitutes a violation of the Neutrality Treaty;
10 and

11 (4) urges the Trump administration to ensure
12 that the canal remains neutral and to take all appropriate
13 measures to enforce the Neutrality Treaty.

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