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**Contact: Judi Irastorza
202-223-3959**

**Panama's President Describes
Country As 'Land of Opportunity'**

(Washington, DC, June 20, 2017) --The President of Panama, Juan Carlos Varela Rodriguez, commended the economic health, stability and commitment to democracy of his country in remarks at The Economic Club of Washington, DC, on Tuesday. President Varela addressed the Economic Club during an official visit to Washington, DC, that included a meeting with President Trump at the White House and meetings with various other Administration officials and agencies. President Varela said that his meeting with President Trump was "very good."

President Varela described Panama as a "land of opportunity" that is a growing hub for companies seeking to do business in Latin America. He said that the recent expansion of the Panama Canal was the most important infrastructure investment that had been made in the region and was integral to the economic health of the Western Hemisphere. He also attributed a "boom" in business for the southern ports of the United States to an increase in the flow of imports and exports made possible by the increased capability of the canal to handle larger ships. The canal expansion also was a "game changer for the East Coast" of the United States, he said, because it has increased capacity for exports to Asia.

President Varela told the audience that Panama's strong economic growth that has averaged over 6 percent in recent years has made it possible to raise the standard of living for all Panamanians through increased pensions for elderly people, improved health care services and advances in the education system. He said that "the success comes from the hard work of the Panamanian people."

In discussing world affairs, President Varela called for global unity to help all countries build strong economies and promote freedom and democracy. He predicted that Cuba will become a more open society and said that he sees an opportunity now to continue talking with Cuba to help move that process along.

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