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PROGRAM Good Morning, America

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SUBJECT Zelnick Reports on Selection of Andropov

STEVE BELL: As we said, a day after the Soviet Union announced the death of President Brezhnev, the Kremlin has selected his replacement. While thousands of Soviet soldiers filed past Brezhnev's casket today, the Communist Party leadership was busy selecting former KGB chief Yuri Andropov as the Secretary-General of the Soviet Communist Party. No word yet on whether he'll also take over Brezhnev's other role as President.

More on Andropov from Bob Zelnick in Moscow.

BOB ZELNICK: Andropov is 68 years old. He is regarded by Western diplomats as an able and intelligent man, fluent in English. He was also a patron of the U. S. A./Canada Institute and its head, Georgi Arbatov.

He may be more prone to experiment, economically and in other ways, than any other senior member of the Politburo. He did head the KGB beginning in 1967, but those who are students of the Soviet Union say he was named to that post because the Communist Party wanted to get rid of a loose cannon. It wanted somebody who reflected the party view controlling the secret police of the Soviet Union.

It should also be noted that while KGB chief, he effectively stamped out the dissident movement. However, there are members and former members of the dissident community who feel that, behind this tough facade, there lurks the soul of a real civil libertarian, at least in Soviet terms.

BELL: Robert Zelnick in Moscow this morning.