

News Digest

By The Associated Press

Democrats: Reagan not off the hook

WASHINGTON — Democrats controlling both the House and Senate served notice Wednesday they won't let President Reagan off the hook despite his plea that Congress not "let partisanship weaken us" over the Iran arms deal controversy.

The day after the president made the appeal in his State of the Union address, House Speaker Jim Wright, D-Texas, said Democrats will waste no time pursuing their own legislative goals this year, without waiting for Reagan's specific proposals.

As Wright spoke to reporters, three separate congressional panels under Democratic chairmen were beginning hearings on the arms issue.

Amid a chorus of Republican praise for the president's speech on the House floor, Rep. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., rose to declare: "The Gipper has fumbled the ball, and he hasn't yet recovered."

Referring to the Iran-Contra affair, which promises to dominate the attention of Congress this year, Reagan conceded that "serious mistakes were made" in trying to achieve the "worthy" goals of establishing contacts with strategically important Iran and gaining the release of American hostages.

Nicaragua frees Hall, drops spy charges

MIAMI — Soldier of fortune Sam Nesley Hall was freed from a Nicaraguan jail Wednesday after his captors said he was mentally unstable and flew home to the United States, apologizing for the actions that got him arrested on spy charges.

Hall was admitted to a Veterans Administration hospital and officials said he would spend a few days there, but declined to discuss his condition.

"I just have one thing to say to the Nicaraguan people," Hall told reporters before boarding a flight in from Managua to Costa Rica on Wednesday morning. "I'm sorry I tried to ambush them."

Nicaraguan officials said they were releasing Hall, 49-year-old brother of Rep. Tony Hall, D-Ohio, after 1 1/2 months in captivity, because he showed signs of mental instability.

"He has been admitted to the V.A. hospital and will be there for the next few days," said Veterans Administration spokeswoman Donna St. John in Washington. She said rules governing patient privacy prevented her from talking about his condition.

Hall was arrested Dec. in a restricted area of the Punta Huete air base, 13 miles northeast of Managua. Authorities said they found maps and sketches of military targets, crudely

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— Hall

drawn on hotel stationery, stuffed in his socks, and threatened to try him for espionage.

Javier Chamorro Mora, Nicaraguan deputy foreign minister, told a news conference Tuesday night that Hall was being released "so he may be taken to the United States and receive adequate treatment at a specialized institution."

He said a psychiatrist and a clinical psychologist had found Hall to be "a very unstable personality . . . inclined to carry out acts that could end his own life."

As a result, he said, Hall had been "declared exempt from responsibility" for acts that "clearly violated" Nicaragua's criminal code.

Troops fire tear gas at holed up Marcos rebels

MANILA, Philippines — Government troops fired warning volleys of tear-gas grenades Thursday at a broadcasting center held by more than 200 rebels who defied an ultimatum to surrender.

Military chief Gen. Fidel V. Ramos met through the night at a military base with 200 officers who urged violence not be used to end the two-day siege by mutinous soldiers supporting former President Ferdinand Marcos.

Up to 1,000 heavily armed soldiers, marines and riot police took positions around the walled broadcast center in suburban Manila. It was the last position held by rebels who attempted a pre-dawn coup Tuesday, the most serious challenge by right-wing military men since President Corazon Aquino came to power 11 months ago.

Late Wednesday night, Brig. Gen. Alexander Aguirre gave the rebels a half-hour to leave the studios of Channel 7 and DZBB radio station and surrender.

The deadline passed, and five tear-gas grenades were fired near the station wall as warnings. There were no reports of fire by the mutineers.

During a lull in the tear gas volleys, an unidentified woman inside the broadcast center issued a defiant warning over DZBB that the mutineers would not give up. The woman was among about 50 pro-Marcos civilians who joined the estimated 190 mutinous military men.

Aquino vowed Tuesday to punish the mutineers to the "fullest extent of the law."

In Brief

U.S. restricts travel to Lebanon

WASHINGTON — The State Department today announced restrictions on travel to Lebanon to try to force remaining U.S. citizens to leave the country and to discourage other Americans from going there.

Exceptions to the passport restrictions will be made for the immediate families of the eight Americans held hostage by terrorist groups in the Middle Eastern country. Journalists and others may also apply for special permission to go there.

Otherwise, U.S. passports will no longer be valid for travel in Lebanon, the U.S. official said. The estimated 1,500 U.S. citizens in the country will be given 30 days to leave before their passports also become invalid.

Minuteman 3 missile test succeeds

VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. — The Air Force successfully launched an unarmed Minuteman 3 missile here Wednesday at a target 4,200 miles away in the South Pacific, officials said. The 30-minute flight with three inert warheads began about midnight at Vandenberg Air Force Base, 135 miles northwest of Los Angeles.

The test was the 125th of the Minuteman 3, which is a key element in the nation's nuclear arsenal, Addison said.

Soviets oust aging politician from Politburo

MOSCOW — The Communist Party expelled two old guard stalwarts from its highest ranks Wednesday and gave Kremlin leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev greater control of the powerful secretariat, but it did not make some reforms he proposed.

Removal of the former Kazakhstan party leader, 74-year-old Dinmukhamed A. Kunaev, from the ruling Politburo eliminated one of the last Brezhnev-era leaders from the national leadership.

The Central Committee, which groups the top party members from Moscow and the 15 Soviet republics, also retired 72-year-old Mikhail S. Zimyanin from the party secretariat "for health reasons."

The official news agency Tass said the Central Committee chose two new party secretaries, alternate Politburo member Nikolai N. Slyunkov and Anatoly I. Lukyanov.



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