

News Digest

By The Associated Press

Iran-Contra debate continues Senate to vote on contempt motion against Secord

WASHINGTON — The Senate ordered Thursday to vote on a civil contempt resolution against retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard Secord as investigators tightened the vise on a key figure in the Iran-Contra affair.

Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd, D-W. Va., said he hoped to act quickly on the matter, which would send the citation to U.S. District Court for possible enforcement.

The Senate select committee investigating the Iran-Contra affair voted on Wednesday to set the contempt process in motion after Secord refused a Feb. 23 order that he give consent for overseas banks to turn over records of accounts he may have controlled.

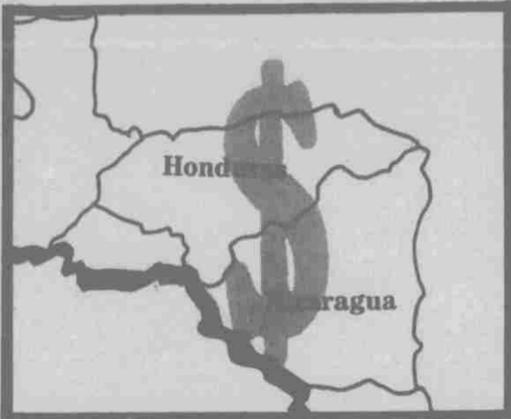
His action "has frustrated the committee in its efforts to answer critical questions relating to the flow of funds from the sales of arms to Iran to the Nicaraguan resistance forces," the committee said in a report accompanying the contempt citation.

The report noted that some \$20 million from the transactions remains unaccounted for, and said it had little hope that going through formal treaty channels with the Swiss government would yield the records soon.

If a contempt citation against Secord were enforced by a court, he could be put in the position of either signing the consent directive or facing jail until he did sign.

The contempt action was just the latest in a series of moves designed to put pressure on Secord, who according to the Tower commission and other reports was intimately involved in the sale of arms to Iran and in the resupply of Nicaragua's Contra rebels.

Congressional investigators have put out the word that Secord is not among the dozen or so witnesses to whom they plan to grant limited immunity from prosecution in order to compel testimony in hearings that will begin in May.



But among the witnesses who are being granted immunity are many who dealt with Secord, particularly on efforts to funnel supplies to the Contras during a time when Congress had barred direct or indirect government military aid to the rebels.

Secord has invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination when asked to testify about his role in the Iran-Contra affair, and investigators say they expect his attorney to argue the same protection should extend to the records of bank accounts in Switzerland and elsewhere believed controlled by Secord.

But the committee argued in its report that "the Fifth Amendment does not give Mr. Secord the right to hide behind foreign bank secrecy laws," and that signing the consent order would not violate those rights in any case.

Reagan: I wouldn't go down same road again

WASHINGTON — President Reagan conceded Thursday night that his Iranian policy had turned into an arms-for-hostages arrangement, and said, "I would not go down that same road again."

At his first news conference in four months, Reagan said anew he was unaware until last November that profits from the arms sales had apparently been funneled to Contra rebels in Nicaragua, and said he still doesn't know what happened to the money.

At a question and answer session dominated by the Iran-Contra affair, Reagan also said he had never deliberately lied to the public, while admitting to a misstatement at his last news conference people. "I'll leave that to others," he said after being questioned insistently on the subject.

He told one questioner that for some time, "all you knew was what I told you."

Asked whether disclosure of the affair had complicated efforts to free remaining hostages, the president turned the question around.

"The day that the information leaked it was my understanding that the other two were due to get out in the next few days," he said. "If it hadn't leaked I don't know... whether we would have gotten more out."

Reagan opened the 39th news conference of his presidency by uttering a "rock solid" pledge to veto any attempt in Congress to raise income tax rates. And he called on the House and the Senate to adhere to the requirements in Gramm-Rudman legislation to make new spending cuts.

The news conference was the first since Nov. 19, a four-month period of political and personal trial for Reagan.

The Iran-Contra affair has mushroomed into a full-fledged scandal in the intervening months, with the president's popularity plummeting in the polls to the lowest of his presidency.

Thus, many Republicans in Congress and some administration officials said in advance that Reagan needed a skillful, polished performance at the news conference to still any doubts about his ability to lead the nation for the next two years.

Meese suggests drug tests for teachers seeking tenure

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Edwin Meese III said Thursday that local school boards should be free to institute drug-testing programs for probationary teachers who seek tenure.

"We in the Department of Justice view freedom from drugs as a valid condition of employment for school teachers," he said.

"Drug testing has been upheld when applied to transportation workers and others whose jobs have a direct effect

on public safety," Meese said. "And it seems to me almost an insult to teachers to maintain that their jobs are any less important."

His remarks were in a speech prepared for delivery at the University of Mississippi, and copies were released in Washington.

His comments came in connection with a court brief the Justice Department filed two weeks ago supporting a proposed teacher drug-testing program

on Long Island. There, the Patchogue-Medford School District notified all probationary teachers who were eligible for tenure that they would be required to submit urine samples to their school nurses for drug testing.

Recent court rulings on drug testing in the workplace have sought to strike a balance between protecting the constitutional right to privacy and seeking to ensure that an employee is fit for duty.

"In the case of teachers, the transmission of values and ethics... is an important part of their professional duty," Meese said in his speech. "Thus, freedom from drugs is very much a fitness-for-duty issue for them."

Asked whether Meese was suggesting that all teachers ought to undergo drug tests, Justice Department spokesman Terry Eastland responded that the speech should be read in "light of the (Patchogue) brief" supporting only drug testing for probationary teachers.

Senate approves highway bill; speed limit legislation to be decided

WASHINGTON — The Senate passed an \$88 billion highway bill Thursday under threat of a presidential veto over millions of dollars of construction projects, and moved toward action Friday on a speed limit increase provision.

The highway bill passed the chamber by a vote of 79-17, but Republicans readied an effort to remove the so-called demonstration projects that promoted the veto threat.

A separate piece of legislation which would allow states to increase speed limits to 65 mph on rural interstate highways was set aside until Friday, becoming a pawn in a procedural contest that was developing.

Under Senate rules, the highway bill — which is a compromise between the House and Senate — cannot be amended.

But Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole, R-Kan.,

planned to amend the speed limit provision by adding to it the version of the massive highway bill passed earlier this year by the Senate and which did not contain the construction projects in question.

Dole's strategy would have the effect of deleting the disputed projects.

Those projects would cost \$890 million in federal aid, over five years, above the money states normally receive under distribution formulas.

"If this bill is presented to me in its current form, I will return it to the Congress without my signature," President Reagan said in a letter to Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd, D-W. Va.

The bill would provide \$70 billion in highway aid and \$18 billion for mass transit projects for the states.

Israel announces boycott of arms, trade to S. Africa

JERUSALEM — Heading off a confrontation with the United States, Israel announced Thursday it would not sign contracts for new weapons sales to South Africa and would reduce its close trade and cultural ties with the country.

The Israeli decision, announced by Prime Minister Shimon Peres, followed pressure from the United States to end military trade with a South African government that maintains a policy of apartheid.

The sanctions left the Israeli government with room to maneuver in its 38-year-long relationship with South Africa by failing to end existing weapons contracts or to cut off all trade.

Israel does not discuss weapons sales, and it was not known how long existing contracts run or what kind of licensing arrangements Israel has with South Africa for the manufacture of Israeli-designed weapons.

A government panel was appointed to recommend further sanctions within two months and to specify which trade links would be curtailed, Peres said.

Israel has been reluctant to take action against South Africa because of the close business ties between the two countries and

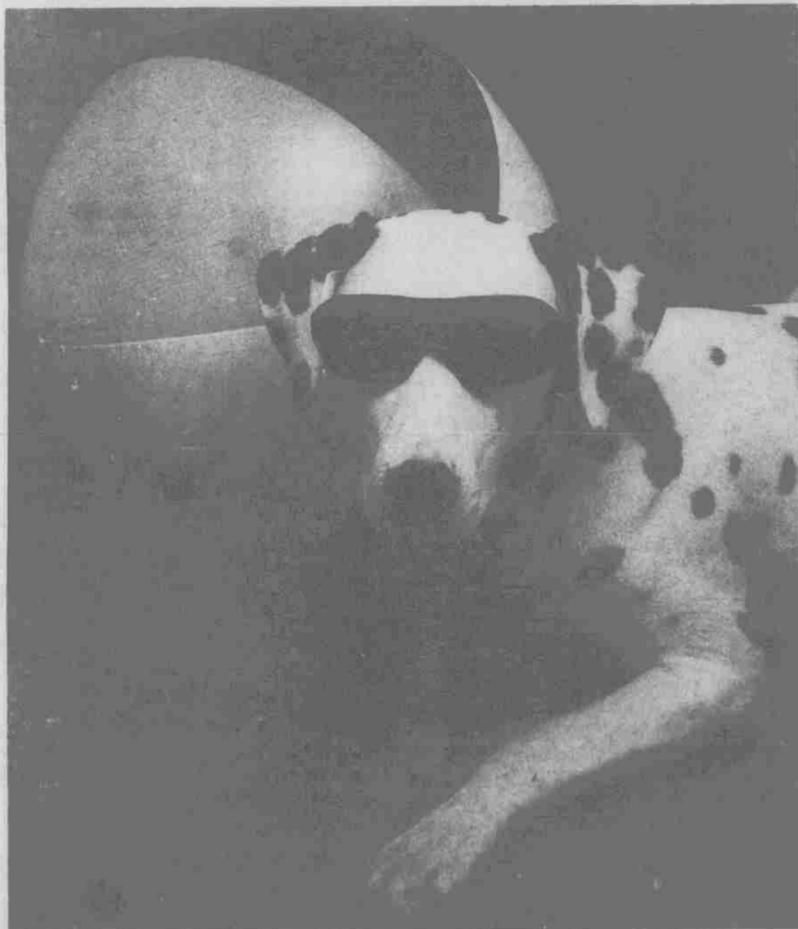


because of concern for the welfare of South Africa's Jewish community of 120,000.

South Africa also is a major customer of Israel's billion-dollar-a-year arms industry, and loss of that market could hurt the economy and cost jobs in Israel.

The United States bans sale of American arms to South Africa because of the country's policy of racial separation.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Charles E. Redman said, "We welcome this step as a positive development."



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