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House OKs package to aid Contra rebels

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House on Wednesday approved \$3.5 million in new "humanitarian" aid to the Nicaraguan Contras, and House Speaker Jim Wright said he expects it to be the last U.S. aid ever sent to the rebels.

The money was part of a stopgap spending bill to keep the government running after the current fiscal year ends Sept. 30. The measure, approved 270-138 after little debate,

was sent to the Senate, where it is not expected to encounter major opposition.

The Contra aid money had been worked out in a bipartisan agreement between Wright, D-Texas, and House Republican leader Robert Michel of Illinois.

The \$3.5 million represents the amount of money needed to sustain the rebels into November and is

based on this year's \$100 million in Contra aid money that has been used for food, medical supplies and uniforms for the anti-government rebels.

The vote came a day after President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica traveled to Capitol Hill to appeal to lawmakers to "take a risk for peace" and eschew further military aid to the Contras at least until Nov. 7, the target date for a regional cease-fire.

Asked whether he believed the new money would be the last U.S. aid to flow to the rebels, Wright said, "Yes, unless some drastic change were to occur in the situation in Central America."

"The evidence indicates to me reason to be optimistic — still guardedly, but less guardedly than before."

The Reagan administration has signaled its intention to ask for \$270 million in new military aid for the Contras over 18 months if the peace plan fails.

Wright cited as signs of progress the pledge by Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega to begin a partial, unilateral cease-fire, the reopening of the opposition newspaper *La Prensa*, the resumption of broadcasts by a Roman Catholic-operated radio station and the appointment of a reconciliation commission led by Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, a leading government critic.

"All of these give me reason to have hope," Wright told reporters.

The cease-fire announcement from Managua was drawing skeptical responses from the administration, however, with Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams calling it "a trick" to get the Contras to surrender.

In Miami, Aristides Sanchez, one of six members of the Contra political directorate, said the rebels will not respect the cease-fire.

"We take it as a simple publicity stunt on President Ortega's part," he said.

But President Vinicio Cerezo of Guatemala, while conceding that the Nicaraguan move could be a ruse, said the United States should "maintain a more open position" toward any peace overtures.

"If they (Nicaraguan leaders) are making a step in favor of peace, we have to discuss this step," Cerezo said on NBC-TV's "Today" show.

Nicaraguan leaders claim restored rights were unjustly taken

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (AP) — The leftist Sandinista government's decision to lift press restrictions merely restores rights that it should not have taken away in the first place, opposition leaders said Wednesday.

The leaders also said the government's announcement that it would begin a unilateral cease-fire was aimed primarily at ending U.S. aid to the Contra rebels.

"They're releasing our freedoms bit by bit after having taken them away," said Enrique Bolanos, head of the Private Enterprise Council, an opposition group. "That's not freedom."

Barricada, the official newspaper of the governing Sandinista National Liberation Front, lauded the government's moves and said they were in compliance with a Central American peace plan.

Barricada called on the Reagan administration to "take its hands out of Central America."

The government on Wednesday released 17 Central American prisoners to comply with the peace plan. The National Assembly on Tuesday approved a presidential decree to free the prisoners, some of whom had been accused of ties to the U.S.-backed Contra rebels.

The Sandinista government on Tuesday said it was working on a plan to clear certain areas of troops to begin a unilateral cease-fire.

A government statement said the National Reconciliation Commission, headed by Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, archbishop of Managua, and smaller local peace commissions could then see if rebels in the areas would accept a cease-fire.

The commission was formed to oversee compliance with the peace plan in Nicaragua.

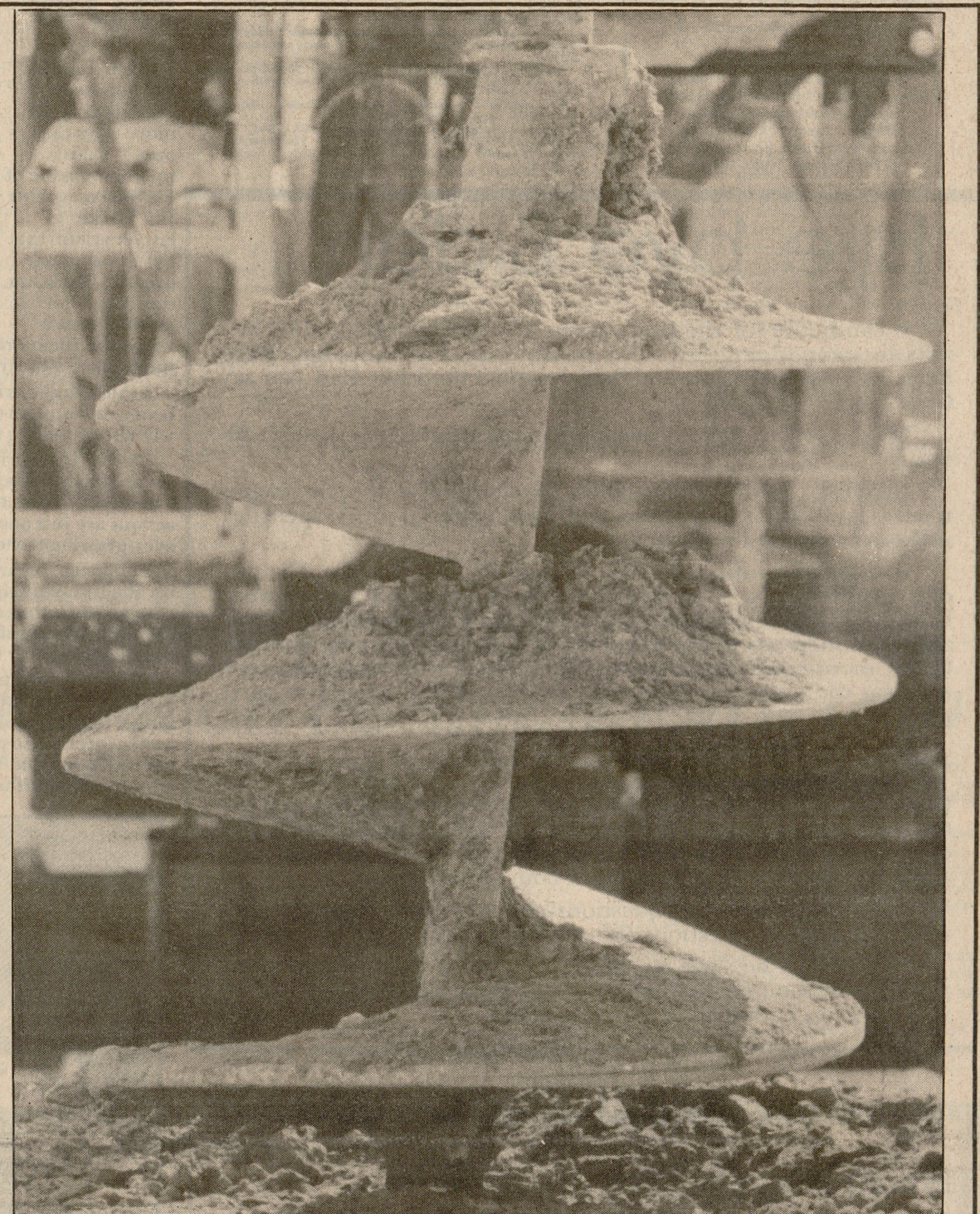
The Central American peace plan was signed by the presidents of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica and Guatemala. It calls for cease-fires, amnesties, halting foreign aid to rebels and freedom of the press, among other points.

In Washington, the State Department accused Nicaragua's government of engaging in mere "cosmetic gestures."

Spokesman Phyllis Oakley said a recent statement by Interior Minister Tomas Borge indicates that the Nicaraguan media will be forbidden to provide news about the two most important subjects facing Nicaragua — the peace process and the economy.

At the White House, presidential spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said there are no assurances that the Sandinistas would not use a cease-fire to their advantage.

He said the Sandinistas could maintain a cease-fire for a time, using that opportunity to rebuild their forces or surround the Contras or cut off their supplies.



Screw up

Roy Farmer manipulates a 42-inch diameter drill bit over the spot for the next foundation pier hole at the new parking garage. The crane with the rig

on it weighs more than 70 tons. The foundation pier holes, when completed, will be 55 feet deep and will hold the concrete supports for the garage.

Photo by Robert W. Rizzo

Biden 'reluctantly' ends campaign for president

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Joseph Biden ended his quest for the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination "with incredible reluctance" on Wednesday, saying the "exaggerated shadow" of mistakes made it impossible to continue his candidacy.

Biden withdrew from the campaign after a week in which his campaign was rocked by admissions of plagiarism and false claims about his academic record.

The Delaware Democrat is the second candidate to be forced from the race by questions of character and integrity.

"I made some mistakes," Biden, with his wife at his side, told a room crowded with reporters. "Now the exaggerated shadow of those mistakes has begun to obscure the essence of my candidacy and the essence of Joe Biden."

Biden said he had to choose between continuing his presidential campaign and chairing the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on the Supreme Court nomination of Robert H. Bork.

"And although it's awfully clear to me what choice I have to make, I have to tell you honestly I do it with incredible reluctance, and it makes me angry," he said. "I'm angry with myself for having been put in the position — put myself in the position — of having to make this choice."

"And I am no less frustrated at the environment of presidential politics that makes it so difficult to let the American people measure the whole Joe Biden and not just misstatements that I have made."

Biden refused to take reporters' questions and returned to the Judiciary hear-

ings, where he was lauded by his fellow senators.

Sen. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, the ranking Republican on the committee, said, "I would like to say the Democrats have now lost their most articulate spokesman."

Biden's rivals for the Democratic nomination were quick to react to his withdrawal. Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis said in Iowa, "I'm very saddened by it. It takes a lot of courage to do what he has done — to put the Judiciary Committee's responsibilities ahead of his future."

Rep. Patricia Schroeder, D-Colo. said, "It's one more down note. And I think we all get tarnished by that type of news."

Biden's staff said the former candidate would travel to Iowa and New Hampshire

on Thursday to thank his supporters.

Reading from his statement, Biden said, "You know this is presidential politics where you press folks ask me, 'Biden, what's going to happen when the white-hot heat turns on?'"

"You warned me what it was going to be like. I thought I knew. It's a tough arena. And I'm a big boy. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose."

Biden did not rule out a future run for the White House.

"There will be other presidential campaigns and I'll be there," he said.

Biden left it to his aides, campaign consultant John Martilla and spokesman Larry Rasky, to answer questions from the crush of reporters and photographers.

Rasky lamented that "10 minutes of 15

years (of Biden's Senate career) have been focused on in the last two weeks, and it seemed like all anyone was going to focus on."

"I feel some sadness. . . . I'm sick." Biden's prospects as a candidate have plummeted during a week in which he admitted committing plagiarism in law school, acknowledged making exaggerated claims of his academic record and was criticized for lifting sections of other politicians' speeches without attribution.

Sources who spoke only on condition of anonymity said Biden made his decision after close aides and family members advised him to give up his damaged candidacy at a late-night meeting at his Wilmington, Del., home.

Burger urges Senate to OK 'mainstream' Bork as justice

WASHINGTON (AP) — Retired Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, stirred by what he called unprecedented disinformation, declared on Wednesday that Supreme Court nominee Robert H. Bork is not "an extremist any more than I'm an extremist" and deserves confirmation.

Burger, in an extraordinary appearance for a sitting or former member of the high court, told the Senate Judiciary Committee, "If Judge Bork is not in the mainstream then neither am I."

"It would astonish me to think he's an extremist any more than I'm an extremist." In particular, he criticized paid newspaper advertisements that have suggested dire consequences for the nation if Bork's nomination is confirmed.

The hearings, despite Burger's appearance and a heated exchange later between committee chairman Joseph Biden, D-Del., and Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah,

were overshadowed to some extent by Biden's announcement that he was withdrawing from the presidential race.

Biden took time out from presiding over the hearings to tell a news conference he was quitting the campaign because of reports that he committed plagiarism and exaggerated his academic accomplishments.

He said he couldn't expend the effort to get his candidacy back on track and still be closely involved in the hearings on Bork.

Biden, who opposes the nomination, said of the fight over Bork, "I intend to be deeply involved in that battle. I intend to attempt to bring it to victory."

Among Bork critics, Professor William E. Leuchtenburg of the University of North Carolina said the Senate should block the appointment because of Bork's stands against Supreme Court rulings of the past 30 years that expanded civil rights.

U.S. battleships try to recover mines, warn commercial boats near Bahrain

MANAMA, Bahrain (AP) — American warships swept a strip of the central Persian Gulf on Wednesday to recover mines believed planted by the Iranian ship that U.S. helicopters attacked this week.

Commercial ships were warned away from the waters about 50 miles northeast of Bahrain.

There were reports that some mines had been found.

Five Iranians were reported killed and 26 were captured in the helicopter raid on the Iranian vessel Monday night.

It was the first direct American attack on Iranians in the two months since the United States began protecting shipping in the gulf.

Iran has vowed revenge for the American attack.

The Iranian president said in New York that the two nations were moving toward war.

Britain announced that it was closing Iran's military procurement office in London.

It also urged a United Nations arms embargo because of Iranian attacks on Persian Gulf shipping.

President Ali Khamenei of Iran, in New York for a U.N. session, said the U.S. government had taken the road to war.

"The people of the United States have a right to ask why is their government dragging them toward war," he said.

Despite the increased tension and the possibility of more floating mines, gulf-based shipping sources said a reflagged Kuwaiti gas carrier had begun a southbound voyage under U.S. escort.

The reported departure of the 46,723-ton Gas Prince from Kuwait would be the 10th convoy since President Reagan's program of escorting Kuwaiti tankers went into effect in mid-July.

But Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger was asked in a Washington television interview whether a convoy was moving.

"Not that I know of," he replied.

In Washington, Pentagon officials said threats of Iranian reprisal for the ship attack by the United States would not deter Weinberger from leaving as scheduled for a five-day trip to the region.

He was to visit Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and U.S. warships.

Iranian officials angrily promised retaliation for Monday's attack and U.S. embassies and military bases worldwide were warned to be alert for terrorist incidents.

Officials from the United States were discussing how to return the 26 Iranians taken off the ship *Iran Ajr* to their homeland.

The Iranians, described as "detainees" by the Pentagon, were being held aboard navy ships in the Persian Gulf.

In the search for mines, there was no official word here on how many were recovered.

But shipping executives, speaking on condition they not be named, said the Navy had found eight of the moored, contact-type explosives.

Gulf civilian radio monitors said Navy warships were warning all vessels to keep clear of the channel 50 miles northeast of Bahrain.

This is an area where U.S. naval vessels often anchor when not on convoy duty.

There was new fighting reported in the 7-year-old war between Iran and Iraq.

Iran's official news agency said Iraqi warplanes struck industrial and residential areas at Bakhtara, western Iran, at midday Wednesday.

Iranian artillery bombarded Iraqi military and industrial targets in southern Iraq.

The state-run Iraqi News Agency, also monitored in Cyprus, said Iraqi jet fighters flew 87 combat missions during the day, one of the highest totals in recent weeks.