

Senate panel postpones hearings of CIA nominee

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate Intelligence Committee on Tuesday put off for two months confirmation hearings for Robert Gates, President Bush's nominee to head the CIA, while it seeks further answers to questions about what Gates knew of the Iran-Contra affair.

The panel, with the concurrence of the White House, voted unanimously to begin the hearings Sept. 16.

The committee also voted to grant limited immunity from further prosecution to Alan Fiers, a former CIA official who has told

prosecutors that top agency officials covered up their knowledge of the affair and Oliver North's secret network to supply guns to Nicaraguan rebels.

Fiers has pleaded guilty to two counts of withholding information from Congress in the scandal in a plea bargain with prosecutors.

Committee Chairman David Boren said the decision to delay the hearings came after consultations with Gates and senior White House officials, who had concluded that delaying the start of hearings would be better than

Bush himself had delivered an emotional defense of Gates just four days earlier, calling for immediate hearings and accusing the Senate panel of panicking and running "like a covey of quail" under public pressure to scrutinize Gates further.



a start-and-stop process that could drag on for months.

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mediate hearings and accusing the Senate panel of panicking and running "like a covey of quail" under public pressure to scrutinize Gates further.

Bush changed his mind because of the legal and procedural problems the committee faces, said Boren, an Oklahoma Democrat.

Boren and senior committee Republican Frank Murkowski, R-Alaska, said they may also issue subpoenas later — but without any guarantees of immunity — for Clair George, CIA director of operations during the Iran-Contra period, and for Jerry Gruner, then chief of the agency's Latin American division.

George retired from the CIA in 1987.

Gruner still works for the agency as a station chief in a European capital. His name had not been made public until Boren did so Tuesday.

North's calendars show that he was in contact with Gruner during 1986 when Gruner was chief of the CIA's Latin American division. Gruner was Fiers' immediate superior.

Fiers has told prosecutors that he told George of the diversion of arms sale proceeds to the rebels late in the summer of 1986, but that George already knew about it when Fiers told him.

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Soviets offered relief Summit leaders grant Gorbachev economic aid

LONDON (AP) — Western leaders hailed Mikhail S. Gorbachev's efforts toward "an open and democratic Soviet Union" on Tuesday and searched for agreement on how to translate their good wishes into specific economic help.

On the eve of the Soviet president's precedent-setting appearance at a free-world economic summit, President Bush and Secretary of State James A. Baker III promised Gorbachev would not leave London "empty handed."

The seven largest industrial democracies also endorsed a universal register for arms transfers, vowed to leave all sanctions on Iraq until it complies with remaining U.N. sanctions and endorsed Bush's new push for a Middle East peace.

The Mideast effort, given new life with apparent conciliatory movement by Syria, may be the best chance yet for direct peace

talks between Israel and her Arab neighbors, Baker told reporters. But he cautioned that there remain "plenty of hurdles. We're not there by a long shot."

In a political communique that highlighted the second day of the annual gathering, the leaders of the United States, Britain, Japan, Germany, France, Italy and Canada said their support for political and economic reforms undertaken by Gorbachev was as "strong as ever."

"The scale of this undertaking is enormous: an open and democratic Soviet Union able to play its full part in building stability and trust in the world," the joint statement said. It also credited Gorbachev with "new thinking" in foreign policy.

In private sessions, the summit leaders thrashed over what form Western assistance to Moscow should take.

"There's no chance that he will

leave here empty handed," Baker said. "There are any number of things the countries here will agree should be done."

As Gorbachev arrived for a subdued welcome at Heathrow Airport outside London, the summit leaders and their wives gathered for a royal banquet at Buckingham Palace, finishing off the middle of their three-day meeting with a reception by Queen Elizabeth II.

All seven nations agree that there should at least be some technical assistance and associate memberships for Moscow in the International Monetary Fund.

In London, Bush was asked whether Gorbachev would leave the summit with nothing to take back to Moscow. "No, no, absolutely not," he said.

Baker said Bush and Gorbachev — who meet for lunch on Wednesday before Gorbachev

pleads his case to all Group of Seven leaders — were to discuss a new strategic arms reduction treaty, but no agreement was expected to be announced.

In his bid for aid, Gorbachev depicted a Soviet Union on the edge of economic collapse, citing critical shortages of food and medicine. He said a worsening of the situation could threaten the democratic reform effort.

The most likely outcome was that the Soviets would be granted associate IMF status and limited pledges of technical support, but nothing close to the \$25 billion to \$35 billion a year that Soviet supporters had hoped to get.

Still, the possibility of last-minute surprises existed, given a strong push by Germany, France and Italy for a more concrete response to Gorbachev's pleas.

Gramm attacks EPA's emissions testing plan

WASHINGTON (AP) — Texas service station owners are riled up over a government proposal to centralize vehicle emissions testing in El Paso and Houston, which they claim would strip

them of substantial revenue and cause long lines for motorists.

Sen. Phil Gramm calls the Environmental Protection Agency proposal a "bureaucratic nightmare" and says it is "rigid, un-

necessarily costly and remarkably inefficient."

At issue are regulations the EPA must write to enforce last year's revisions to the Clean Air

Act, including enhanced vehicle emissions inspections in cities with the most severe pollution. In Texas, only El Paso and Houston would have to provide the enhanced inspections.

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New Orleans disputes census, count hurts federal funding

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The Big Easy is having a hard time swallowing the federal census count that puts New Orleans below a half-million people, at a yet to be determined cost to the city's pocketbook and pride.

"It makes you fall into the Little League of cities," Councilman Lambert Bossiere said.

"You just don't hit that magic number. Everybody wants a city over 500,000. It hurts you in business, regardless of what handout the government was going to give you. ... It hurts you in everything you do."

The federal government on Monday rejected demands by cities and states for a statistical adjustment to add 5.3 million Americans to the 1990 census, including more than 18,000 in New Orleans.

The government's count gave New Orleans a population of 496,938. After extensive analysis, the Census Bureau proposed adjusting the count

by 3.5 percent to 515,000.

New Orleans was among 32 cities, states, organizations and individuals who asked a federal court to order the census corrected. The court instead ordered Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher to decide.

Mosbacher's decision to stick with the actual count will send the plaintiffs back to court next week, a spokesman for New York state Attorney General Robert Abrams said.

New Orleans officials predicted the city would lose at least \$1,000 in federal aid during the 1990s for every uncounted resident, for a total of \$18,062,000.

"This is just another nail in the coffin of what's happening to local governments, especially in older cities like New Orleans," said Leonard Simmons, the city's chief administrative officer.

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Inspection team hunts for nuclear arms in Iraqi desert

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) — The job description is less than inspiring: 14-hour days spent in desert dust up to the kneecaps, 130-degree heat laced at times with radioactivity, the occasional gunshot.

But for the team of nuclear inspectors from 22 countries, many of them scholarly types better suited to laboratories than deserts, the opportunity to seek out and destroy Iraq's nuclear capability is not to be missed.

"I feel like I'm part of history. We're doing something the agency's never done before," said Richard Hooper, 49, a Seattle resident who has been a statistician for the International Atomic Energy Agency for 2 1/2 years.

Under the cease-fire terms imposed on Iraq by the United Nations after the Persian Gulf War, the Vienna-based IAEA has been conducting surprise checks on the Iraqis with an aggressiveness unprecedented in its 35-year his-

tory as a global watchdog over nuclear development.

With just 200 full-time field inspectors operating worldwide, the agency normally makes only limited inspections of uranium stocks at a country's invitation. And it doesn't oversee destruction of facilities, as it is now assigned to do.

What inspectors have found by trekking through scorching desert wilderness and once-secret army bases has confirmed U.N. suspicions that Iraq had developed an elaborate clandestine program to manufacture weapons-grade uranium.

Still, members of the 28-person team now in Baghdad say they don't reflect much on the publicity suddenly surrounding them as the most unlikely frontline troops in the allied campaign to neutralize Saddam Hussein.

There's not much time to reflect.