

11 April 1984

CENTRAL AMERICA JENNINGS: Good evening. The Reagan administration has been up on Capitol Hill again today trying to explain to Congress's (sic) satisfaction why the waters around Nicaragua have been mined without many members of Congress knowing anything about it. It was the deputy secretary of State, Kenneth Dam, who had to face the congressional mine field, and as Charles Gibson reports, both the rhetoric and the votes were running strong against the White House.

GIBSON: The House Foreign Affairs Committee voted today 32-to-3 for a non-binding resolution to cut off funds for mining the ports of Nicaragua. House leaders now intend to rush it onto the floor of the House tomorrow, where an overwhelming vote against the administration is also expected. REP. WILLIAM BROOMFIELD (R-Mich.): What is the rush of getting it through our Congress tomorrow? REP. DANTE FASCELL (D-Fla.): I think it's important for the Congress one way or another to express its opinion on the matter now.

GIBSON: The same language passed the Senate last night, 84-to-12, with even staunch supporters of the president, like Laxalt of Nevada, voting for it. The resolutions are non-binding, but their practical effect is that as the funding for the anticommunist rebels in Nicaragua runs out, probably by the end of the month, Congress certainly will not appropriate any more. REP. HOWARD WOLPE (D-Mich.): The Senate voted 84-to-12 to reject the mining of the harbors in which the United States is engaged. If that's not a repudiation of an administration policy on a bipartisan basis, I don't know what is? REP. GERRY STUDDS (D-Mass.): What the hell are you doing? What are you doing with and to our country?

GIBSON: Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Dam was taking that congressional heat today. Realizing Congress will no longer fund the Nicaraguan guerrillas, the administration is now just trying to save funds for the government of El Salvador. Without such funds, says Dam... KENNETH DAM (Deputy Secretary of State): It would be just a question of time before, uh, democracy in, in El Salvador goes down the drain. Um, not everyone's happy about the situation in, political situation in El Salvador, but believe me, it can be a lot worse.

GIBSON: But things couldn't be much worse for the administration here on Capitol Hill on the subject of Central America. Some House Democrats are asking the attorney general now whether a special prosecutor

Continued

shouldn't be appointed to investigate possible U.S. violations of international law in Nicaragua. Charles Gibson, ABC News, Capitol Hill.

NICARAGUA/  
FIGHTING

JENNINGS: Couple of observations about the mines in Nicaraguan waters in a minute, but as the debate continues over funds for covert operations against Nicaragua, the administration today leaked new figures reportedly showing major buildups of troops and equipment in Nicaragua itself. The Sandinista regime reportedly has about 60 tanks, 10 times any other nation in the region. And thousands of Cuban workers, says the administration, along with 200 Soviet advisers, are helping to build at least 13 new Nicaraguan bases.

NICARAGUA/  
MINES

JENNINGS: Now, a couple of observations, as I said, about the mines in those waters. American shipping companies who travel to and from Nicaraguan ports say the mines appear to be low-level explosives designed to harass rather than destroy. The shipping companies say they continue to operate in Nicaraguan waters despite the threat. As ABC's John Quinones reports, not all ship owners are so relaxed, and neither are the Nicaraguans.

QUINONES: The government of Nicaragua wasted no time in presenting its case to the international press by giving reporters a tour of the mined harbor of Port Corinto. Military officials today charged the explosives were planted in these waters at night by CIA-trained Cuban-Americans and other Hispanic commandos on board armed speedboats. The commander-in-chief of Nicaragua's navy charged that the mining operation was directed from a CIA freighter called the Gallery, 35 miles off the Nicaraguan coast. Nicaragua's minister of commerce then talked about the damage to the economy. At least seven shops have refused to enter the mined harbor, he said, including an English freighter headed to Nicaragua with 1,000 tons of milk. The mining of the harbor, he said, has had the effect of a blockade. The underwater sabotage has also hit hard at Nicaraguan exports. Thirty percent of the country's shipments, including thousands of bales of cotton, are still sitting on the docks of Port Corinto. The shippers are too afraid to venture out past the mines. Although there have been reports that the alleged CIA operation has been suspended, Nicaraguan officials say they plan to continue asking foreign countries for technical assistance to remove the mines and for military aid to defend their harbors, if necessary. John Quinones, ABC News, Port Corinto, Nicaragua.