

CENTRAL AMERICA
/U.S. AID

JENNINGS: It is the eve of a critical congressional vote on military aid to El Salvador. Congress has spent days working over the president's plan for Central America. Tonight, Mr. Reagan takes the offensive with a television speech to the nation. As our White House correspondent, Sam Donaldson reports, the president insists that without the money the Salvadoran government will not survive the next guerrilla offensive.

DONALDSON: The president set the stage for his latest personal appeal in Central America by meeting with U.S. observers to last Sunday's presidential election in El Salvador, hearing their positive report on it, then telling them to spread the word. They lost no time in doing so. SEN.\JOHN\CHAFEE (R-R.I.): We reported to the president that the elections were fair and open, that there was no coercion on the people, that there was a massive turnout. SEN.\PETE\WILSON (R-Ca.): It is going to take military force to suppress terrorism, and without suppressing terrorism the entire meaning of this election will be lost.

DONALDSON: In his speech tonight, the president will say the United States must continue its aid, not only for the Salvadorans' sake, but because U.S. national security is involved. Using charts and graphs, he'll outline the threat from Soviet-Cuban-Nicaraguan subversion. He'll nod approvingly at pressure from anti-Sandinista forces on Nicaragua, and that includes covert CIA pressure. And in a slap at his critics, he'll say U.S. goals in Central America are not attainable though wishful thinking,

moralizing, and inaction. On Capitol Hill, some but not all House members received a telegram from the apparent winner of the El Salvador election, Jose Napoleon Duarte, pledging to establish peace and justice through dialogue, and ending somewhat plaintively, 'Please help the people of El Salvador.' Duarte's appeal may have been persuasive for some, but not if they pay attention to Sen. Jesse Helms, who sees Duarte as a dangerous left-winger. SEN.\JESSE\HELMS (R-N.C.): Mr. Duarte happens to be 10 miles to the right. No, 10 miles to the left of George McGovern. And to call him a moderate is ridiculous.

DONALDSON: Meanwhile Rep. Michael Barnes

follow the president on television tonight for the Democrats, rehearsed his argument that continued aid to El Salvador is not the issue, but whether that aid is effectively tied to progress on matters such as human rights and peaceful negotiations. So once again the president is preparing to do television battle for public support, employing few new arguments, but a lot of the old tried-and-true Reagan technique. And his advisers believe he can't lose. Even if it doesn't work, he can always blame Congress for anything that goes wrong in Central America. Sam Donaldson, ABC News, the White House.