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3: -Drug Smuggling, Bjt,0594  
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7: Hearings Ask: Did Reagan Administration Condone Drug Smuggling?  
8: By LARRY MARGASAK  
9: Associated Press Writer  
10: WASHINGTON (AP) A House panel is opening hearings on whether  
11: the Reagan administration condoned drug smuggling and other  
12: criminal activities to further its Central American policy.  
13: Chairman William J. Hughes said his House Judiciary subcommittee  
14: on crime will examine ``allegations of drug smuggling, gun running  
15: and money laundering between Central American and the U.S. and  
16: the role our government played in ignoring or even encouraging the  
17: criminal activities."  
18: Hughes said the series of hearings will ``demonstrate there were  
19: other motives driving drug law enforcement, like votes on Contra  
20: aid."  
21: President Reagan has been a strong opponent of Nicaragua's  
22: Sandinista government and steady supporter of the Central American  
23: nation's Contra rebels. At various times, both sides in the  
24: Nicaraguan conflict have been accused of aiding or taking part in  
25: drug smuggling.  
26: Hughes said the first hearing today would examine allegations  
27: that members of the Sandinista regime cooperated with the Colombian  
28: drug cartel to import cocaine into the United States in 1984.  
29: The committee is to hear testimony on flights to Nicaragua and  
30: other locations in South and Central America by convicted drug  
31: pilot Barry Seal, who became a government informant in a federal  
32: sting operation.  
33: The Seal operation, designed to trap cocaine smugglers, was  
34: compromised and ended early because of leaks to the news media from  
35: sources familiar with the plan.  
36: Hughes said a CIA witness was invited to testify on the agency's  
37: role in the operation, but he notified the committee he would  
38: refuse to cooperate on Fifth Amendment grounds of  
39: self-incrimination.  
40: More than 100 subpoenas have been issued for witness testimony  
41: and the production of documents, Hughes said. Judicial grants of  
42: immunity have been obtained to compel testimony of six persons who  
43: refused to cooperate, invoking their Fifth Amendment privilege.  
44: No immunity grant has been issued for the CIA witness, and  
45: Hughes said there has been no decision on pursuing the agency's  
46: testimony.  
47: Seal in February 1986 was assassinated in a Baton Rouge, La.  
48: machine gun attack, as he pulled up in his Cadillac at a Salvation  
49: Army halfway house. He was confined there part-time on a six-month  
50: sentence for narcotics and bank fraud convictions.  
51: In an interview Wednesday, Hughes said, ``We're looking at  
52: whether ... an obstruction of justice'' caused the end of the Seal  
53: operation. ``The whole operation was aborted because of leaks to

54: the media."

55: Seal had contacts with the Colombian drug cartel and ``came in

56: contact with at least one Sandinista," Hughes said.

57: In October 1985, Seal told a presidential organized crime

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58: commission that he quit his job as an airline pilot because  
59: ``smuggling was so simple, so lucrative.'' He said he easily eluded  
60: detection to fly tons of cocaine into the United States for a top  
61: fee of \$1.5 million.  
62: ``I have landed clandestinely in probably every South American  
63: country there is,'' Seal said. ``There is no problem if you have  
64: the necessary contacts and dollars with you.''   
65: Seal told panelists how fly-for-hire pilots take off and land  
66: without interference from authorities in Colombia, Nicaragua and  
67: other Latin American nations.  
68: Seal said he transported cocaine into the United States while  
69: working for an illicit drug cartel he said was as sophisticated  
70: ``as any Fortune 500 company.''   
71: He displayed night-vision goggles, telephone encryption devices  
72: and high-technology message-sending units. ``I don't believe  
73: there's any paramilitary group better equipped than my former  
74: associates,'' he said.  
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