

WASHINGTON POST
18 May 1984

NOT REPRODUCED
CONFIDENTIAL

Latin Requests Face Further Test

House Conferees Balk at Arms Aid

By Joanne Omang
Washington Post Staff Writer

A House-Senate conference committee broke up in sharp disagreement yesterday over Reagan administration requests to send more military aid to Central America, and returned them to the House for another test of strength on the issue, possibly next week.

House conferees said they were in "total opposition" to a Senate provision that would give \$21 million to rebels fighting the leftist government of Nicaragua; the House rejected such aid twice last year. The House members also balked at a Senate provision giving \$61.75 million in emergency aid to the government of El Salvador, which is fighting leftist insurgents.

The conferees' stance was a surprise. They were expected to give in to the Senate after the House narrowly voted a week ago to authorize more than twice the amount at stake in the conference.

"We could lose on the House floor on this," said Rep. Clarence D. Long (D-Md.), a leading opponent of full funding for the Salvadorans, "but they [the Reagan administration] can't take it to the well too many times. People are getting awfully tired of voting foreign aid to El Salvador."

The conference action will bring to the House for the first time this year the three-year-old program of aid to the Nicaraguan rebels, called "contras," as well as force the House to vote on an actual appropriation for El Salvador.

The Democratic-controlled House last week authorized funding there by only four votes, and many Republicans, generally hostile to for-

ign aid, could balk at actually providing the money.

After the House votes, the bill must go back to conference.

Undersecretary of State William Schneider Jr., who was present during negotiations on both measures, said he was "cautiously optimistic" that the House would approve some funding for both programs. "If not, there are other legislative vehicles we can use," he said. The most likely one is a pending bill to raise the national debt ceiling, a Senate source said.

The conferees acted swiftly to return the contra aid program to the House after Rep. Edward P. Boland (D-Mass.), chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, said he stood "in total opposition to this particular activity."

House Appropriations Committee Chairman Jamie L. Whitten (D-Miss.) predicted heavy going in the House for the proposal. "Boland feels very strongly about this. I have backed him on it and will continue to do so," he said.

The Salvadoran decision took longer. The conferees had delayed a vote Wednesday after Long said that he wanted to be briefed about new, secret information that he had just been given. He entered yesterday's session announcing that he was "satisfied this is not a problem we have to worry about here."

Congressional sources said the information concerned a classified proposal from the CIA last month under which the agency would have provided about \$20 million worth of helicopters and other heavy military equipment directly to the Salvadoran government, bypassing Congress.

The sources said that Long had received a letter from Boland advising him that the intelligence committee had protested the

plan and that it had been dropped as a result.

Long was briefed yesterday morning by CIA officials. "If we don't get what we thought we'd be getting" in information on the plan, Long said, "we'll want to take a further look at it."

Long, who is chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, proposed a "mini-conference" on Salvadoran aid between himself and his Senate counterpart, Sen. Robert W. Kasten Jr. (R-Wis.). Long indicated that there might be "agreement on language." But he and Kasten, and about 20 other staff and State Department officials, emerged from the meeting half an hour later with no accord.

Sources close to both sides said that neither offered a compromise proposal.

The administration requested the Salvadoran money in February on an emergency basis, but Congress did not act and President Reagan finally used a special fund in mid-April to send El Salvador \$32 million in arms and ammunition without congressional approval. About half of the \$62 million under consideration now would go to repay the special fund.

The conferees approved nearly \$1.1 billion for other parts of the appropriations measure, including \$845 million for women's and children's nutrition programs, \$60 million for African drought relief, \$100 million for summer youth employment programs, \$25 million for Customs Service airplanes and \$7 million to aid refugees in El Salvador.

The conferees also approved three pet congressional projects: \$21 million requested by Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) for the Army Corps of Engineers to buy a water project in Tug Fork, W. Va.; \$14 million for construction of the Cumberland Gap Tunnel in Maryland and \$1 million to clean up the Colorado Tailings mining site in Colorado.