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White House Approved Secret CIA Effort To Affect Outcome of El Salvador Voting

By DAVID ROGERS

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WASHINGTON—The Reagan administration secretly funneled about \$2 million into El Salvador as part of a two-year effort by the Central Intelligence Agency to facilitate national elections and assist parties competing with right-wing candidate Roberto d'Aubuisson, intelligence sources said.

Christian Democrat Jose Napoleon Duarte, who claimed victory in the runoff Sunday, was the chief beneficiary of the aid. But aid also was given to at least one other party, the party of National Conciliation, headed by Francisco Jose Guerrero. Mr. Guerrero, who finished third in the March voting, remained neutral in the runoff, but his April 16 decision against endorsing Mr. d'Aubuisson—who also has claimed victory in the runoff—was seen as a major boost for Mr. Duarte.

Sources familiar with the program say it was carried out with President Reagan's approval. Mr. d'Aubuisson's defeat is considered crucial to the Reagan administration's hope of winning increased military aid for El Salvador, and, if Mr. Duarte is declared winner, the White House will move quickly to capitalize on Mr. Duarte's image as a moderate and his support in Congress.

Within Congress, however, the CIA program has provoked new controversy on both the left and right. Advocates contend that the money was useful to facilitate free elections and to counterbalance the power of right-wing forces in El Salvador. Critics argue that the depth of CIA involvement was excessive and represented tampering with another nation's internal politics.

The harshest criticism has come from Sen. Jesse Helms (R., N.C.), a leading conservative who has bluntly charged the State Department and CIA with buying the election for Mr. Duarte, a Christian Democrat. Sen. Patrick Leahy, (D., Vt.), in a classified letter filed with the Senate Intelligence Committee, also has protested to Secretary of State George Shultz. According to sources, Mr. Leahy cited the CIA program as one reason for his decision last week against serving as an observer in last Sunday's elections.

Both House and Senate Intelligence Committees reportedly were informed of the program, but the level and detail of involvement by the CIA have surprised key members.

According to intelligence sources, the money assisted three major parties competing with Mr. d'Aubuisson—the Christian Democrats, Party of National Conciliation, and Accion Democratica—as well as unions aligned with Mr. Duarte. Part of the funds went to improve the election process, including the purchase of better equipment and paper to avoid ballot fraud, while aid to the parties included money to hire news media and political consultants.

"There was nothing nefarious," said one source. But funds are said to have been used twice to manipulate press reports in an attempt to denigrate Mr. d'Aubuisson's candidacy before the March and May elections.

Initial press reports of some CIA involvement came from El Salvador last week, in accounts published by the Washington Post and Boston Globe. Mr. Helms's office said he based his attack this week on reports in the Salvadoran press, but he is known to have spoken privately with at least one member of the Senate Intelligence Committee before he released his statement Tuesday night.

Given the sensitive nature of the covert program, the details of Sen. Helms's re-

marks surprised other senators, and the episode is likely to add to tensions between the CIA and the Intelligence committees charged with its oversight.

The House panel, which appears to have been unaware of the full scope of the program, is expected to take up the issue at a meeting today. It is unclear what effect the disclosures will have on future aid to El Salvador.

"I tell you I would have been a lot more upset if d'Aubuisson won," said one member of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Though embarrassed by the means used, many liberal Democrats don't argue with the outcome. "You've got rich Salvadorans from Miami pouring in money to help d'Aubuisson," said one senior House Democrat. "I don't believe in the CIA interfering in other nation's elections. But if you're asking me if I'm terribly upset about the result and will it change my vote on aid to El Salvador, the answer is a resounding no."

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