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SUBJECT William Webster's Expected Impact on CIA

RENEE MONTAGNE: Former Judge and FBI Director William Webster was confirmed by the Senate yesterday as the next Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Recently, the relationship between Congress and the CIA has been an uneasy one because of questions about the role the late CIA Director William Casey played in the Iran-Contra affair. New York Times reporter Steven Engelberg says many observers feel William Webster's appointment will improve communications between the CIA and Congress.

✓ STEVEN ENGELBERG: He's a new kind of animal. He is obviously someone the President knows and is going to, you know, be comfortable with, but you wouldn't call him a political intimate of the President's. And he's also not, you know, the career intelligence professional, a guy who's spent his whole life in that kind of field. The problems of collection, particularly all these various technical systems that we use, which, by the way, is the kind of major area that we spend our money on in intelligence: satellites, photography, signals intelligence interception -- that's where the money is. And he's going to obviously have to learn a whole new kind of technology, a whole new set of issues. And it's not going to be an instantaneous process.

MONTAGNE: In confirming Webster, the Senate took a position that he was well suited to repair the relationship between Congress and the CIA. That seemed to be the overriding concern there.

ENGELBERG: Well, indeed it was. And I think Judge Webster, whatever he may or may not know about the intricacies of

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technical collection, is a man of impeccable reputation with the Congress. Through his nine years with the FBI, there has never been any question about the man's integrity, his honesty, the way he runs the agency.

When things have gone wrong within his agency, as they have on occasion -- with, say, the Jackie Presser case -- he's been very forthright with Congress, and what he said has held up. And I think people -- some of the same people who are on the Intelligence Committee have been on the Judiciary Committee watching Judge Webster perform. And I think that was his key qualification. He was a man with just unimpeachable integrity.

And in addition to that, he's a man with a reputation of running things by the book. You're not going to see a lot of kind of wild off-the-books kind of thing that you saw with Bill Casey. And they felt that, to some extent, the Agency's tendency or -- I shouldn't say "the Agency" at all. I should say Mr. Casey's tendency to run things out of his hip pocket was very disturbing to them. And they know that Judge Webster will never do that.

MONTAGNE: Could we explore for a minute what the relationship has been between the CIA and the FBI?

ENGELBERG: Well, the history of their relationship is an interesting one. When J. Edgar Hoover was in charge of the FBI, the relationship was nonexistent to worse. Hoover wanted nothing to do with the CIA, wanted very little to do with counterintelligence in the United States, chasing Soviet spies around. And there was very little cooperation. Which, of course, is a terrible idea, since the spies the CIA chases overseas, Russians who might be diplomats, say, in the embassy in Prague, eventually come to the United States. And there needs to be a great deal of coordination between the two of them if you want to have any kind of, you know, reasonable counterintelligence.

More recently, things have gotten better. Everybody agrees the relationship is much better than it was under Hoover. There are still times -- and, in fact, some recent reports by the Intelligence Committees cite some examples of this -- when the two of them don't get along as well as they could.

MONTAGNE: Well, is that sort of communication much more likely now that William Webster is head of the CIA?

ENGELBERG: Oh, I think you'd have to say so. I mean I think one can be a little bit cautious in making assumptions. I mean Webster is going to have to deal with a culture out there which is longstanding. I mean this is the intelligence professionals of the Agency, and they have a view of life and they

don't -- I don't think they, intrinsically, want to just run across the street to their friends the cops, which is how they view the FBI. But clearly, I mean, Webster's going to have much less reticence about telling the FBI things than any of his predecessors.

MONTAGNE: So, where will the FBI be once William Webster goes from one building to the other?

ENGELBERG: If they don't fill that job reasonably soon, you're going to have a leadership vacuum over there much like the CIA has had. And if you don't have somebody in charge, and firmly in charge, and confirmed and so on, I think it slows the work of the agency down.

MONTAGNE: Steven Engelberg is a Washington correspondent for the New York Times.