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DEPUTY HAS FULL POWERS IN CASEY'S ABSENCE
WASHINGTON

Robert Gates, a Soviet affairs specialist and a National Security Council veteran, is in charge of the CIA and all U.S. intelligence agencies in the absence of ailing Director William Casey, CIA officials say.

Casey, 73, the nation's chief spy since 1981, underwent surgery to remove a brain tumor Thursday. Officials at Georgetown University Hospital said they were not yet sure how long he would be in the hospital.

Gates, a Kansas native, joined the CIA in 1966 and was appointed by Casey as his principal deputy eight months ago. In that role, he assumes all of Casey's powers while the director is unable to head the agency, officials said.

NBC News, citing senior administration officials, reported Thursday night that Casey's wife does not want him to return to the CIA, although his doctors said after the surgery he should be able to "resume his normal activities."

There has been some speculation about who would succeed Casey if he retires.

Gates was assigned in 1974 to the NSC staff and served nearly six years on the top-secret council during the Nixon, Ford and Carter administrations. He returned to the CIA in January 1980.

In addition to directing the CIA in Casey's absence, Gates is responsible for all U.S. intelligence agencies -- including the Defense Intelligence Agency, various branches of the armed forces, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and certain branches of the FBI and other government agencies.

"He has just about the same powers as the director," a CIA spokeswoman said this week. "When one of them is not there, the other is in charge."

Gates received his bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary in 1965 and a master's degree in history at Indiana University in 1966. He earned a doctorate in Russian and Soviet history from Georgetown University in 1974.