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# Hearings on Gates could develop into debate on CIA role

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By Jennifer Spevacek  
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Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd yesterday warned that hearings to confirm a successor to CIA Director William Casey could develop into a debate over the activities of the intelligence agency.

"Those hearings could very well turn into some kind of forum" for a congressional inquiry into the CIA, Mr. Byrd said.

The West Virginia Democrat declined to predict whether Robert Gates, nominated yesterday by President Reagan to head the agency, would be confirmed.

President Reagan was wise to select a career intelligence professional to take the helm of the CIA, said Sen. Patrick Leahy, Vermont Democrat and a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

"A political appointment would have guaranteed a long, drawn-out confirmation process," Mr. Leahy said.

The announcement that Mr. Casey, who is recovering from cancer surgery at the age of 73, had resigned was met on Capitol Hill with praise for his efforts to restore morale at the agency. He also was criticized for his turbulent relations with Congress.

Lawmakers also noted that Mr. Casey won increased funding for the CIA during his six-year tenure.

"Bill Casey brought the CIA back from when it was in a very weakened condition to a situation," said Sen. Orrin Hatch, Utah Republican and a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Americans are largely unaware of Mr. Casey's accomplishments, Mr.

Hatch said, but the congressional oversight committees "all owe a great debt of gratitude and thanks to him," Mr. Hatch said.

Sen. Dave Durenberger, Minnesota Republican and former Senate Intelligence Committee chairman, said Mr. Casey was "as good a director of central intelligence as you're ever going to get in this country."

But Mr. Durenberger and others were also critical of Mr. Casey's difficult relations with Congress, calling him a reluctant participant in the oversight process who seldom volunteered information.

"Overall, I don't think he's done anything to enhance the image of the CIA," said Rep. Larry Smith, Florida Democrat and a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "In Mr. Casey's tenure we saw an inward-turning of the CIA and a growing doubt here on the Hill of the credibility factor."

Mr. Smith, who has accused Mr. Casey of lying to the committee during hearings on the Iran-Contra affair, said the CIA director's resignation was "in the national interest."

"I'd like to say his answers were a result of something physiological, but I really don't think so," Mr. Smith said. "I am very happy he resigned. ... I'm also grateful because I've been very disappointed in his performance in the last few months."

Rep. Dave McCurdy, Oklahoma Democrat and a member of the House Intelligence Committee, said Mr. Casey was reluctant to deal with members of Congress one-to-one.

"There was a tremendous gap between the Congress and Mr. Casey," Mr. McCurdy said. "I don't think he appreciated the role of Congress."

"Mr. Gates will be a breath of fresh air," Mr. McCurdy said. Mr. Gates, 43, is a "very open, straightforward person" who will change the style of the CIA and improve relations with Congress, he said.

Rep. Richard Cheney, Wyoming Republican and another member of the House Intelligence Committee, also praised the selection of Mr. Gates.

"I am a big fan of Gates," Mr. Cheney said. "He is the kind of pro the agency needs."

Nevertheless, Mr. Gates might still face a difficult confirmation process in light of his involvement in

the Iran-Contra affair, Mr. Leahy said.

According to a report released by the Senate Intelligence Committee last Thursday, Mr. Gates testified that he first received indications of the possible diversion to the Nicaraguan resistance of Iran arms sale proceeds nearly two months before it was revealed by Attorney General Edwin Meese III Nov. 25.

"I'd ask a couple of questions of Mr. Gates," Mr. Leahy said. "What did he do to stop it and why wasn't our committee notified?"

Mr. Leahy said Mr. Gates seems to have broken a pledge he made during his confirmation hearings last year to keep the committee fully informed.

Sen. Howell Heflin, Alabama Democrat, said Mr. Casey's illness shows a need for regular medical examinations of top government officials.

"I think perhaps we should look at the idea of requiring, as we do commercial airline pilots, that there be periodical physical examinations to determine whether a person has some impediment, some mental or physical defect that could affect the decision-making function," Mr. Heflin said.