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GATES MEETS WITH TOP REAGAN AIDES ON CIA POST  
WASHINGTON

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Acting CIA Director Robert Gates conferred today with White House Chief of Staff Howard Baker and National Security Adviser Frank Carlucci amid indications Gates would end his bid for Senate confirmation.

Administration and congressional sources said FBI Director William Webster was among those being considered as a possible replacement for Gates, whose role in the Iran-contra scandal came under fire at Senate hearings.

But Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) spokeswoman Kathy Pherson said after Gates' half hour-meeting with Baker and Carlucci that there was "no change" in the status of the acting director, whom President Reagan nominated to replace William Casey in February.

Gates, 43, a spy agency career employee, took over as a acting director of the CIA in December after Casey underwent surgery for a brain tumor. Gates had been Casey's deputy.

During his confirmation hearings before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, some senators questioned whether Gates had been frank in discussing the extent of his knowledge of the Iran affair. The CIA has been strongly criticized for its role in the scandal.

Republican leaders yesterday expressed doubts about Gates' nomination.

"The Gates nomination is in trouble," Paul Laxalt, a former senator from Nevada and Reagan confidant, said. Senate Republican leader Robert Dole said the nomination "could be in some difficulty."

The Washington Post said Republican leaders had told Reagan that Gates' nomination would focus additional attention on the Iran affair at a time when the White House was trying to make a fresh start.