

LOS ANGELES TIMES

2 March 1987

FILE ONLY

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 12

'Smell' of Scandal on Gates Raises Doubts, Laxalt Says

By SARA FRITZ, *Times Staff Writer*

WASHINGTON—President Reagan should consider withdrawing the nomination of Robert M. Gates as CIA director from consideration by the Senate because he has "the smell of Irangate on him," a presidential confidant said Sunday.

Senate Intelligence Committee members are expected to meet this week to discuss the Gates nomination, and Reagan Administration officials have mounted an offensive to rebut allegations that the acting CIA director was involved in any aspect of the Iran-*contra* affair.

In the Senate as well as at the White House, the Gates nomination is being viewed as a major test of the Reagan Administration's relationship with Congress in the wake of the Iran-*contra* scandal.

Proximity to Scandal

But former Sen. Paul Laxalt (R-Nev.), one of the President's closest friends and advisers, said the nomination is "in trouble" in the Senate not because of anything Gates himself did, but because of his proximity to the scandal and because the CIA was involved in many aspects of the affair.

"It's because he has the smell of Irangate on him," Laxalt said in an interview on ABC's "This Week With David Brinkley." "Unfortunately, I think, Mr. Gates is a victim of circumstances."

Meanwhile, Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) predicted that the President will decide later this week whether to withdraw the nomination in the face of mounting opposition. Dole said he is currently polling GOP senators to determine where they stand on Gates.

Dole, who appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press," recalled that he told the President during a meeting at the White House last week that Gates could be rejected by the Senate Intelligence Committee, which must approve the nomination before it is considered on the Senate floor. And, he added that even if Gates is approved by the

panel, the nomination could encounter "a long process" of consideration on the Senate floor.

According to sources, Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) has told his Democratic colleagues that if the Gates nomination is voted out of the committee in the near future, he may refuse to bring it up for a vote on the Senate floor until it can be proved by congressional investigators that the CIA official was not involved in the Iran-*contra* affair.

Dole Against Long Delay

Dole indicated he would oppose a long delay, either by the committee or the full Senate.

Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), a leading member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, predicted that a Senate floor vote would be 51 to 49 against Gates. "I wouldn't bet any money on it," he said in an interview on John McLaughlin's "One on One."

Yet despite the growing opposition to Gates, Sen. William S. Cohen (R-Me.), vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said it is "too early" for the President to consider withdrawing the nomination. He advised the Administration to wait until after the committee hears more testimony from Gates on Wednesday on several controversial points.

Among other things, the committee wants to know whether Gates permitted the White House to influence intelligence assessments of the situation in Iran—as suggested by the Tower Commission—and whether he authored a plan for a joint U.S.-Egyptian invasion of Libya in 1985.

As The Times reported Sunday, Gates has supplied the committee with a 1985 memo that he wrote to then-CIA Director William J. Casey in which he strongly opposed the Libyan invasion. At the time, Gates was the agency's chief intelligence officer.

Nunn said that the Tower Commission report hurt Gates' chances for confirmation.