

CIA Move Irks House Panel

Byrd Plan Attacked in Rare Open Session

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Area lawmakers, hoping to fend off an attempt by Sen. Robert C. Byrd to transfer 3,000 CIA employees to West Virginia, received a major boost yesterday when members of the secretive House Intelligence Committee attacked the plan as a "covert action."

In a rare public session, committee members repeatedly asked CIA Director William H. Webster to explain why the agency recommended in June that the West Virginia facility be built. They also complained that they had no advance warning of the proposal, which was promoted by a handful of key senators, including Byrd, a West Virginia Democrat.

The hearing represented an un-

usual public challenge to Byrd, who in recent months has used his power as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee to move several federal installations, and 3,400 federal jobs, from the Washington area to West Virginia. Those agencies include an FBI fingerprinting facility and a facility for the Bureau of Public Debt.

Rep. Dave McCurdy (D-Okla.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said his panel found that the CIA ignored standard federal procedures for selecting a location, and chose a site in West Virginia over objections from its own real estate consultant.

"Clearly, the normal process was not followed here," McCurdy said. "There's no reason for this to be

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cloaked in secrecy . . . This doesn't have to be run like a covert action."

Although McCurdy said he did not know if Byrd played a role in choosing the site, he joked, "I think the boundaries of the state [of West Virginia] are important considerations."

Byrd said yesterday that he introduced legislation setting the project in motion but that neither he nor anyone else had done anything improper. "These were appropriate procedures," Byrd said, "and [they] were followed every step of the way . . . This is a good proposal, and it is in the long-term interest of national security."

The tough talk from McCurdy and other House members raises serious questions about the future of the West Virginia project and another proposed compound in Prince William County, to which 3,000 other CIA employees would be transferred. The proposed moves were announced last month by Byrd and Sen. John W. Warner (R-Va.).

The Prince William facility would house science and research analysts; the West Virginia facility would include data-processing and other support staff. The employees now work in 21 offices scattered through Northern Virginia.

The full Senate has approved both new compounds, but intelligence legislation passed by the full House includes neither; a conference committee will not take up the issue until September or later.

Both the House and Senate Intelligence committees almost always meet in private. But emotions on the House side were running high yesterday, and the public hearing was designed to deliver a message to Webster and the Senate panel.

"It seems to me if this wasn't so pathetic, it would be funny," said Rep. David O'B. Martin (R-N.Y.). The West Virginia plan "is sort of like the Baltimore Colts sneaking out of town on the back of a truck some years ago. This casts a pall on the entire intelligence community."

Rep. Frank R. Wolf (R-Va.), who testified before the committee, has emerged as a leading critic of the plan. Wolf said that no one at the White House had asked for the relocation plan or was aware of it when Webster and the senators gave it

Challenges Byrd's Plan to Relocate CIA



BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

CIA Director William H. Webster, left, confers with R.M. Huffstutler, deputy director for administration, at the hearing.

their approval. "Talk about a group of people out of control," Wolf said. "This appears to raise serious concerns in any procurement process."

Both Democrats and Republicans in the House criticized the CIA for going outside customary channels to find the West Virginia site. Although the location was not identified yesterday, Jefferson County developer Howard Jonkers has told The Washington Post that a consultant representing the CIA has asked him to take 500 acres south of Charles Town off the market. McCurdy confirmed that the Jonkers site is the CIA's first choice.

Almost all government agencies lease and buy real estate through the General Services Administration, which maintains a sizable bureaucracy for that purpose. The CIA, for example, leases offices across the Washington area, and most of those leases were obtained through General Services.

But a 1949 law allows the CIA to handle its own real estate transactions in some instances. The agency exercised that option when planning the two new compounds and hired a private real estate firm to conduct a site study.

According to McCurdy, the firm evaluated more than 200 potential sites and selected the top 10 in late January. The Jefferson County site did not make either list.

But in late April, the firm prepared a list of four finalists, and the Jefferson County site was one of them. McCurdy said yesterday that House investigators had been told that CIA officials instructed the firm to include the Jefferson County property, but Webster denied that.

Webster and other CIA officials said the Jefferson County land initially was eliminated by the consultant because it was too far from the agency's Langley headquarters. But this spring, CIA officials decided to

build two compounds, including one where regular commutes to Langley would not be necessary. They said that the West Virginia site is suitable under those guidelines.

McCurdy and Rep. Bud Shuster (Pa.), the committee's senior Republican, said that their concerns about the move are so serious they are considering stripping away the CIA's power to make land deals on its own. "Lay out a procedure, tell us what it is and follow it," McCurdy told Webster. "If you cannot do that, we'll turn it over to other people."

Webster defended the decision to go to West Virginia, saying there are "strong arguments" for locating in an area where land prices are low and for acting when the real estate market is in a lull. But under questioning, he also acknowledged that "you can make a strong argument" for suspending the plan until questions about it are answered.