

# Bush Presses Gates Nomination Amid

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President Bush yesterday renewed his public campaign to gain Senate approval of Robert M. Gates to head the CIA, but senior officials expressed fear the Senate will try to kill the nomination by delaying a vote on it.

One senior official said the White House is "confident [Gates] will get approved if he gets to a vote," but said he feared Democratic leaders "will leave him twisting in the wind" with the hope Gates will withdraw his nomination in frustration.

But the official said Gates, who withdrew once before in 1987 under similar circumstances, would not do so again. "It's the only job he wants and this is his last chance," said the official.

Sen. Frank H. Murkowski (R-Alaska), vice chairman of the Senate intelligence

committee that will open confirmation hearings on Gates on Monday, said yesterday he does not expect the Democrats to hold up the nomination. Murkowski said he plans to push for a committee vote "upon conclusion of the hearing process" and expects the Senate Democratic leadership to "expedite" bringing the nomination to the Senate floor.

Bush discussed the nomination with GOP leaders at the White House, opening the meeting with a statement that included praise for Gates, currently his deputy national security adviser. "He's the right man to run the intelligence community," he said as Gates looked on.

Later, Bush conferred with senior Senate Republicans, urging them to be vocal in their support for Gates and to push for swift confirmation, according to participants. The White House has begun daily strategy sessions to deal with issues

raised in the Gates confirmation.

The Republican lawmakers echoed the administration's concern that Democrats might further delay action on Gates's nomination by citing the continuing criminal investigation into the Iran-contra affair, which developed in the mid-1980s when Gates was the CIA's deputy director.

Murkowski and Senate intelligence committee Chairman David L. Boren (D-Okla.) met for about an hour Tuesday with Independent Counsel Lawrence E. Walsh in an effort to determine what more might emerge from the Iran-contra investigation that would relate to Gates. A surprise guilty plea in July by a former senior CIA official, who implicated other top agency officials in a coverup of the Iran-contra affair, prompted the Senate committee to delay the confirmation hearings until this month.

## Fear Vote Will Be Delayed

Gates "remains a subject" of Walsh's investigation, "but not a target," Murkowski said—meaning his conduct remains subject to review by the grand jury but he does not necessarily face indictment. Gates's status as a subject of the Walsh inquiry is a "legitimate concern," Murkowski said, "and a legitimate question to be posed to Gates."

Murkowski said that although there was no reason to believe Gates would become a Walsh target, "there is no assurance he won't"—as "remote" a possibility as that might be. "Bob Gates will be prepared to respond" to questions about his status, Murkowski added.

The senator noted that last week's indictment of Clair E. George, the former head of CIA covert operations, means the Walsh inquiry into the activities of senior agency officials "will proceed for an unknown amount of time." George, who was subordinate to Gates but reported directly

on most matters to then-CIA Director William J. Casey, is alleged to have illegally withheld information on the Iran-contra affair from congressional committees.

What George might have discussed with Gates about the affair as it was unfolding is a question of considerable interest. The committee is making an effort to get George to testify or respond to written questions, Murkowski said, but there has yet to be a response.

Gates will be the panel's first witness when the hearings open Monday, Murkowski said. Among the six or seven other witnesses, Murkowski said, will be Alan D. Fiers, former head of the CIA's Central American Task Force—the former agent who pleaded guilty in July to withholding information from Congress and has since cooperated with Walsh's investigation. The senator did not identify the other witnesses.