

Walsh finds new evidence of cover-up

WASHINGTON (AP) - Ronald Reagan's chief of staff and secretary of state had been prepared to testify that his administration misstated facts about the Iran arms sales to protect the president from impeachment, the Iran-Contra prosecutor asserted Monday.

Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh suggested in a report to Congress that Attorney General Edwin Meese "was warning the president's advisers that to disclose the president's knowledge" of a 1985 missile shipment to Iran "would expose him to a charge of illegal activity."

If Caspar Weinberger had gone to trial, former White House chief of staff Donald Regan was prepared to testify that he knew it was untrue when Mr. Meese stated in a Nov. 24, 1986, White House meeting that the president hadn't known about the Hawk missile shipment, Mr. Walsh said in an interim report to Congress.

Mr. Regan "was concerned about the possibility of impeachment," Mr. Walsh contended.

A Weinberger trial "would have exposed new evidence of the administration's efforts to conceal the facts of the Iran arms sales from the public and from Congress," Mr. Walsh said in the report.

The trial was canceled when President Bush pardoned Mr. Weinberger and five other Iran-Contra figures on Christmas Eve. Mr. Walsh called the pardon a "misuse of this power."

Mr. Weinberger was "a former colleague" of Mr. Bush's and his prosecution "arose out of events in which the president himself participated," Mr. Walsh said.

In Houston, Bush spokesman Andy Maynor declined to comment on Mr. Walsh's report. Mr. Bush has repeatedly denied involvement in any arms-for-hostages effort.