



REP. DAVE McCURDY
... "there are alternatives"

McCurdy: Gates Should Withdraw

By Bob Woodward
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Rep. Dave McCurdy (D-Okla.), chairman of the House intelligence committee, said yesterday that Robert M. Gates should withdraw his nomination as director of central intelligence amid the public controversy this week over how Gates handled intelligence reporting in the 1980s.

"If he puts the interests of the intelligence community first, and if he cannot with absolute certainty disprove the charges against him of slanting intelligence reports, the noble thing for him to do is withdraw his nomination," McCurdy said in an interview. "He would have to disprove these charges with certainty and disprove them convincingly ... and that is almost impossible because it now gets down to his word against that of the analysts who are testifying."

McCurdy's remarks came as the Senate intelligence committee heard more testimony from several former CIA analysts alleging that Gates politicized CIA reports to suit his hard-line

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views and suppressed dissent, causing a deterioration of morale among many in the intelligence directorate. McCurdy said the Senate hearing "exposes a side and pattern that can't be tolerated. ... This criticism is of greater concern than even the allegations of his involvement in [the] Iran-contra [affair]. It affects the quality and objectivity of information that flows to the president and the policymakers.

"We need someone as director at the controls quickly who has credibility. There are alternatives," McCurdy added. He declined to name possible alternatives but said there are individuals of proven intelligence experience and stature who could be easily confirmed by the Senate.

The House intelligence committee reviews all intelligence budgets, covert actions and sensitive intelligence operations much like its Senate counterpart but it plays no role in the confirmation hearings of senior intelligence officials.

McCurdy said the Senate hearings have opened up old, painful wounds from the 1980s that could not possibly be healed or resolved in the time a new director of central intelligence is needed. With the nation's intelligence agencies at a critical juncture, he said they must look forward, not backward. Already as a result of the prolonged confirmation process, he noted, action on the intelligence authorization bill and on other sensitive and administrative intelligence matters has been delayed for weeks, amounting to a general "stalemate."

"The intelligence agencies are facing reorganization," he said. "The Soviet threat has completely changed, there are going to be less dollars, and the CIA is getting it from all sides from those who want to abolish it to those who think it is not aggressive enough. Those are

the issues that need attention."

According to Bush administration officials, some serious questions also have been raised internally about the performance of the U.S. intelligence community during the Persian Gulf crisis. While technical intelligence from communications eavesdropping and satellite photography has been excellent, human intelligence has been weak to nonexistent, these sources said.

In addition, the CIA has been unable to launch any meaningful covert action to undermine Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, these sources said.

Said one source: "We knew Saddam was a genuine menace to the region when he invaded Kuwait [in August 1990], and we knew he was a menace when we learned the details of his nuclear program this summer. This was a real opportunity for the DO [the CIA's directorate of operations, which runs covert action] to deliver and show their stuff. It was a hard case, and it is a hard case, but they've shown almost nothing."

Asked about this characterization, McCurdy would only say, "In the Middle East, they don't have their act together."

A CIA spokesman said last night: "We believe we do have our act together in the Middle East. We continue to cooperate with the House committee and will continue to cooperate with them and answer any of their questions."

Discussing Gates, McCurdy described him as "bright" and "a team player" whose performance since 1989 as deputy national security adviser to President Bush "has been first-rate." But the congressman said his own experience with Gates does not provide evidence that Gates has the independence of mind needed to head the intelligence community.

"An effective director [of central intelligence] has to demonstrate his independence and be willing to make tough calls, present dissent, present information that the president doesn't want to hear," McCurdy said.

McCurdy, 41, has headed the House intelligence panel since the beginning of this year. The Oklahoma representative has indicated he may seek the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, but said yesterday he had not yet determined whether to run this year.

McCurdy said that although he was reluctant to become involved publicly in the Gates controversy, he was speaking out now because the intelligence agencies need a leader who has not "suffered serious damage to his credibility." He also said he is aware of the agony of his fellow Oklahoma Democrat, Sen. David L. Boren, who chairs the Senate intelligence committee and has supported the Gates nomination.

"The Senate committee has done a remarkable job of an in-depth review," McCurdy said. "It's a tough, painful position for them, and no one is going to come out a winner."
