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Iran-Contra papers
reported missing

WASHINGTON (AP) - Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh questioned Ronald Reagan last summer in California about a possible cover-up in the Iran-Contra scandal, and highly classified documents used in interrogating the ex-president disappeared after the interview, sources said Friday.

The FBI is trying to recover the material, which a Walsh aide packed in a suitcase and checked at curbside with an airline at Los Angeles International Airport, said sources who spoke on condition of anonymity.

When the aide tried to retrieve the suitcase after the flight to Dulles International Airport outside Washington, it couldn't be found. Some of the lost material is categorized at the

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"codeword" level, the most sensitive classification that can be put on government documents.

Mr. Walsh and his aides had flown to California to accommodate the former president, who didn't want to come to Washington to be questioned, the sources said. Mr. Reagan was questioned for most of one day in late July or early August in 1990 as a defense witness in the trial of ex-national security adviser John Poindexter. But until this summer, Mr. Reagan had never been questioned about his own role in a possible cover-up.

Mary Belcher, a Walsh spokeswoman, said she believes the suitcase containing the classified documents was stolen, but declined to elaborate. Mr. Reagan's lawyer, Theodore Olson, said the ex-president has "cooperated fully with all investigations of this matter, including Judge Walsh's."

An Aug. 14 Justice Department letter accused Mr. Walsh's office of a "flagrant violation" of security rules and of taking two weeks to report the missing suitcase. Two sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed the contents of the letter.

Knight-Ridder Newspapers first revealed the letter's existence in Friday editions, saying a Bush administration source provided it in hopes of embarrassing Mr. Walsh.

Mr. Walsh brought his nearly six-year investigation to a close Sept. 17, but has three pending court cases - the trials of former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and former CIA official Duane Clarridge, plus the re-trial of former CIA spymaster Clair George.

Friday in federal court, prosecutors said they will seek a new indictment against Mr. Weinberger to broaden charges he participated in a Reagan administration cover-up.