



By William PHOENIX, AP

Skeptical: Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., denounces CIA report denying direct links between contras and the flow of drugs.

CIA can't be trusted to investigate itself

By DeWayne Wickham

S-98

LOS ANGELES — Maxine Waters doesn't trust the CIA. The California congresswoman thinks the spy agency didn't tell the truth earlier this month when its inspector general went before the House Select Committee on Intelligence to deny accusations that it played a role in bringing crack cocaine into the United States.

The CIA's denial "defies the evidence," Waters told me. She ought to know.

Waters has spent the better part of the past year searching out some of the people who were named in a *San Jose Mercury News* series about the connection between the CIA support of Nicaragua's "contra" rebels and Latin American drug traffickers.

The story, which was later criticized by the paper's executive editor, suggested that the CIA turned a blind eye to the activities of drug dealers who funneled some of their profits to the rebels fighting Nicaragua's Sandinista government.

Although the newspaper report was widely panned by journalists and government officials, Waters doggedly pursued people named in the series to hear firsthand what they had to say about the CIA's links to the drug trade that was taking such a heavy toll in her congressional district.

► She interviewed Gary Webb, the reporter who wrote the series.

► She visited prisons in the United States and Nicaragua to talk to jailed drug dealers.

► She met with a Drug Enforcement Administration agent who claimed to have knowledge of a CIA-backed drug ring that operated out of El Salvador, and a former Los Angeles police officer who said he was forced out of his job after he uncovered evidence of a tie between the CIA and a Southern California drug gang.

While what she got out of these meetings was less than conclusive, it was enough to convince Waters that the CIA could not be trusted to investigate itself.

There's good reason not to believe the CIA's denial of collusion with drug traffickers. The spy agency has a long history of lying to the American public.

For 37 years, it denied that Alabama National Guard pilots in its employ had flown bombing missions over Cuba during the Bay of Pigs invasion. Earlier this month, it finally admitted that it had recruited the pilots and ordered the bombing raids, in which at least two American fliers lost their lives — a fact that was kept secret from their families for 17 years and from the American people until now.

In 1997, five years after the CIA first promised to make public the records of its involvement in the 1953 overthrow of Iran's government, the CIA reneged. The files, it claimed, had been destroyed decades earlier.

Even more troubling than all of this is the fact that in 1990 CIA operatives, who had been enlisted to help thwart foreign drug dealers, allowed Venezuelan smugglers to ship a ton of cocaine into this country.

No one was arrested, and the drugs were not seized.

The CIA agents did this to allay suspicions of the drug kingpins whose operation they were trying to infiltrate. It's unclear if they ever did, or if anything came of it. What's undisputed is that the cocaine ended up in the bloodstreams of thousands of Americans, compliments of the CIA.

Given all this, Waters correctly concludes that the results of the CIA's yearlong investigation of itself can't be trusted. She wants Congress to initiate its own probe. She wants legislators to look into the CIA's admission that the Reagan administration gave its agents authority to ignore allegations of drug trafficking by operatives who worked for the spy agency but were not on its payroll.

Could this directive have opened the floodgates for smugglers intent upon introducing crack cocaine to inner-city drug users? Did it amount to a "don't ask, don't tell" policy for drug-dealing CIA operatives? Did the CIA in any way aid and abet the poisoning of millions of Americans?

Maxine Waters thinks so.

But the only way to know for sure is for someone other than the people who run the CIA to investigate the spy agency's dealings with Latin American drug traffickers.

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