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Special Prosecutor For Iran-contragate Scandal Requests 90-day Postponement Of Decision On Immunity For North & Poindexter

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 10 the special prosecutor appointed to investigate the Iran-contragate scandal, Lawrence Walsh, requested a House committee to postpone for at least 90 days decisions on immunity for former National Security Council staff member Lt. Col. Oliver North, ex-national security adviser Adm. John Poindexter and other key witnesses. Walsh met for almost an hour and a half with the House committee investigating the scandal, in an attempt to postpone a decision by committee members to grant prior amnesty from criminal prosecution to the key witnesses. The special prosecutor reportedly requested the postponement due to his concerns that if immunity was provided to the key witnesses at this time, it could damage his investigation of possible illegal actions on the part of Reagan administration officials. He said he would ask the Senate investigative committee, headed by Sen. Daniel Inouye, for a similar postponement on March 11. As reported in the NEW YORK TIMES (03/09/87), on March 8 investigators for the special prosecutor said they expected to bring indictments and are studying a broad range of criminal charges against current and former government officials. At present the focus is on conspiracy to defraud the government, obstructing justice and making false statements to the government. No one has been ruled out, including senior administration officials. According to law enforcement officials, Walsh was expected to make decisions in the next several days on granting immunity to witnesses who may shed new light on the case. The officials said investigators had become increasingly convinced that crimes had been committed and that some Reagan administration members made attempts to cover up the facts in the case. The officials also said Walsh's investigation was being expedited because of congressional plans to grant limited immunity to several people who are also being investigated by Walsh. Prosecutors are generally barred from using that testimony and any leads it may provide in seeking criminal charges. In an interview last week, Walsh acknowledged he was uncomfortable with the time pressures. "If it weren't for extraneous circumstances, we would take out time in these prosecutions and do a very careful approach to all sides. It is important for them (Congress) to do it while the public interest is still aroused. But it does put us in a bit of a hole because we have to act more quickly than we would like to." (Basic data from UPI, 03/10/87; NEW YORK TIMES, 03/09/87)

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