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Republicans & Democrats Reach Tentative Agreement On Contra Aid

by Deborah Tyroler

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On the evening of March 23, details of a "tentative agreement" on contra aid were revealed by congressional aides and administration officials. The agreement would continue non-military aid to the contras camped in Honduras through February 1990. The aid level is to be set at the current rate \$4.5 million a month. The aid flow would be subject to congressional review and veto in November 1989: members of certain committees could halt the aid at that time if they concluded that the administration was not acting in good faith to promote a peaceful solution to conflicts in the region, and to support peace efforts by the five Central American presidents. Next, the aid would reportedly be stopped if the contras resumed combat operations or cross-border raids into Nicaragua. Under the "gentlemen's agreement," the Senate Foreign Relations Committee or the Appropriations Committee in either house could stop aid to the contras in November. According to the New York Times, "such a legislative veto could be unconstitutional if it was formally put into law." Democrats involved in the negotiations with Secretary of State James Baker included House Speaker Jim Wright, Sen. Christopher Dodd (Conn.), chairperson of the Foreign Relations subcommittee on Latin America; George Mitchell (Maine), Senate majority leader; Rep. David E. Bonior (Michigan); David Obey (Wisconsin); Thomas Foley (Washington), House majority leader; and Toney Coelho (Calif.), House majority whip. Bush was scheduled to go over the terms of the tentative agreement at a White House meeting March 24 with Wright and the majority and minority leaders of the House and Senate. The agreement would be followed by legislation appropriating money for the contras. Unnamed members of Congress and administration officials told the Times that some of the money could be used for the voluntary reintegration of the contras into Nicaraguan society "under safe and democratic conditions." (Basic data from New York Times, 03/24/89)

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