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U.S. To Provide Funding To Nicaraguan Political Opposition

by Deborah Tyroler

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According to a report by the New York Times (04/25/89), Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy visited Managua this month and told National Assembly secretary Rafael Solis that the US government plans to spend $2 million in support of organizations opposition the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in the February 1990 elections. The money was appropriated in October 1988 and released last month as a result of the bipartisan compromise under which Washington has provided continued funding to maintain the contra army in Honduras until the Nicaraguan elections. The Endowment is a private nonprofit corporation that receives almost all of its funds from the US government. Recently, the Nicaraguan government has indicated that it plans to permit some opposition groups to accept money form the US, subject to certain conditions. In October 1988, four days after Reagan signed a bill authorizing $2 million "for the promotion of democracy in Nicaragua," the National Assembly passed a law establishing a prison term of three to 12 years for anyone convicted of accepting such money. A law approved by the Assembly last week would permit opposition parties to accept foreign contributions provided that 50% of the money was given to a government agency, the Supreme Electoral Council of Nicaragua, to help pay the administrative costs of the election. In an interview with the Times, Gershman said, "Our purpose is not to overthrow the Sandinistas, but to strengthen democratic institutions, processes and values in Nicaragua." The National Republican Institute for International Affairs, a foundation affiliated with the Republican Party, in the US, is tentatively scheduled to receive $174,000 from the Endowment. The National Democratic Party in the US expects to receive $260,000 from the endowment. Keith E. Schuette, president of the Republican Institute, said it would sponsor a "seminar on election law and the practice of politics" for 15 opposition parties in Nicaragua. Daily newspaper La Prensa, which has been receiving about $100,000 a year from the Endowment since 1985, is scheduled to receive $220,000 under the new law. Paul S. Reichler, a Washington lawyer who serves as an adviser to the Nicaraguan government, said the new law "gives the United States the opportunity to aid the opposition openly, so it does not have to resort to covert means."

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