

Iran-Contra was kiss of death for Bush

by Edward Spannaus

In a campaign that was fighting an uphill battle from the beginning because of the sorry state of the U.S. economy, the final blow to Bush's electoral hopes may have been the release of new information linking Bush to the Iran-Contra scandal. Numerous Bush-Quayle campaign officials are blaming the disclosures for Bush's defeat.

The disclosure of notes taken by former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, and proving that Bush was not "out of the loop" on Iran-Contra, as he has claimed, was made on Oct. 30 by the team headed by Iran-Contra special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh. The irony is that Walsh himself is an old-line Republican, whose principal function up until recently seemed to have been to protect the President from being tainted by the Iran-Contra affair.

The Walsh moves did follow a pattern. In the last weeks before the election, the Bush administration was wracked with infighting centered in the police-state apparatus on which much of Bush's power rested.

- The FBI's Dallas office, headed by the former number two man in the FBI, Oliver "Buck" Revell, ran a "sting" operation against the Texas head of the Bush-Quayle campaign, James Oberwetter. In a letter to the *New York Times* on Oct. 28, Sessions defended the sting as having been conducted "only after lengthy consideration in Dallas and here in Washington."

- The FBI conducted seven search-and-seizure raids against homes and offices of U.S. Treasurer Catalina Vilalpando and her business associate Ernest Olivas, Jr. Olivas, the Bush-Quayle campaign director for Hispanic outreach, was forced to resign on Oct. 30.

- The director of the FBI, William Sessions, came under a criminal investigation by the Justice Department, with Sessions's wife charging that her husband was being "framed" by subordinate officials.

- These moves followed the outbreak of accusations and finger-pointing among the FBI, CIA, and Justice Department over the "Iraqgate" scandal and allegedly illegal loans made to Iraq in the pre-Persian Gulf war period.

Interviewed on the NBC "Today" show the morning after Bush's smashing defeat, Bush-Quayle campaign chairman Robert Teeter agreed that the release of the Weinberger notes was "the kiss of death which stopped the President in his tracks."

On the eve of the election, campaign officials speaking

anonymously were even stronger, calling the release of the notes a "dirty trick" which shifted the momentum of the campaign. An unidentified "senior official" of the campaign told the *Washington Post* that release of the notes "was an incredibly low blow by a mean, political hack. . . . This was the lowest of the low. It amounts to a dirty trick."

During the week before the elections, polls had shown Bush closing in on Clinton, and the two candidates were almost even on Friday before election day. But by Saturday, after the Weinberger notes were the lead item of most news programs, the gap between Clinton and Bush began to widen again. "We were really picking up steam until this happened," complained a campaign official.

In a Nov. 5 interview with the *Washington Times*, Dan Quayle termed the new Weinberger indictment "a travesty of justice" which halted the campaign's "comeback."

Weinberger's notes

The new indictment against former Defense Secretary Weinberger contained many quotes from notes written by Weinberger, including some taken following a January 1986 meeting at the White House in which the sale of 4,000 TOW missiles to Iran in exchange for the release of five hostages was discussed. Weinberger's notes state clearly that he and Secretary of State George Shultz opposed the scheme, and that Bush joined William Casey, Ed Meese, and Adm. John Poindexter in favoring it.

Bush has consistently maintained that he did not know about the arms-for-hostages deal until December 1986, when the Senate Intelligence Committee made findings about the arms scheme. In a Dec. 3, 1986 speech, Bush had said, "I was not aware of, and I oppose, any diversion of funds, any ransom payments." In a *Washington Post* interview on Jan. 14, 1988, Bush told columnist Mary McCrory: "I have said over and over again that the original proposal was not presented as an arms-for-hostages swap."

In an Aug. 6, 1987 *Washington Post* interview with David Broder, Bush said: "If I'd sat there and heard George Shultz and Cap express it strongly maybe I would have had a stronger view. But when you don't know something it's hard to react. . . . We were not in the loop."

However, the precise wording of Weinberger's notes gives the lie to Bush's disclaimers: "Met with President, Shultz, Poindexter, Bill Casey, Ed Meese, in Oval Office. President decided to go with Israeli-Iranian offer to release our 5 hostages in return for sale of 4,000 TOWs to Iran by Israel—George Shultz & I opposed—Bill Casey, Ed Meese & VP favored—as did Poindexter."

Shortly after the new Weinberger indictment was issued, Bush said that the new evidence "isn't anything new. That's all been testified to over and over again. It is absolutely absurd." But Weinberger's notes have never been made public before; in fact, he is charged with withholding them from Congress and previous investigators.