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ARTICLE APPEARED ON PAGE 2

WALL STREET JOURNAL
9 August 1984

Senate Backs Reagan on Central America, Rejects Cuts in $565.3 Million Aid Plan

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WASHINGTON – The Senate, in a strong showing for the Reagan administration, rejected Democratic efforts to cut substantially a $565.3 million military and economic aid package for Central America.

El Salvador was again the focus of debate, and by better than 2-1 margins, the Republican-controlled chamber approved President Reagan's request for an additional $117 million in military aid to the new Duarte government this fiscal year.

The Democratic majority in the House approved none of the Salvadoran arms assistance last week. But the size of the Senate vote virtually assures the administration it will receive some increase above the $126.5 million previously approved by Congress for fiscal 1984, which ends Sept. 30.

Supplemental Spending Bill

The action came as the Senate began debate on an underlying $6.9 billion supplemental spending measure. It includes $700 million to prevent an interruption this month of federal payments under the food stamp program. The pressure for these domestic funds is driving the legislation through Congress this week. Also, the administration has mounted a strong lobbying campaign to win a major increase in Central America aid before the Republican convention this month.

The Senate legislation drops a House-passed provision limiting the Postal Service's ability to hire new workers at below contract wages. But it includes a measure to delay until next July proposed Federal Communications Commission regulations that would lift the limit on ownership of television stations to 12 from seven stations.

Army Gen. Paul Gorman privately briefed members of the Senate Intelligence Committee before yesterday's votes, and liberal Democrats who previously have been critical of increased aid later backed Mr. Reagan on the floor.

"They made the most compelling case to date," Sen. Joseph Biden (D., Del.) said in reference to intelligence data presented on communist arms shipments into El Salvador. As many as 16 Democrats, including Mr. Biden, Sen. Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts, and New York Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, opposed an amendment denying any more military aid to El Salvador this year.

The proposal, by Sen. Daniel Inouye (D., Hawaii), failed on a 69-29 roll call; an amendment by Sen. Christopher Dodd (D., Conn.), allowing $25.3 million in new Salvadoran arms, fared little better on a 62-37 vote.

More than $1 billion of the Senate bill represents increased foreign aid, about four times the $230.5 million approved by the House as part of its smaller $5.4 billion supplemental bill. In comparison with the $565.3 million Senate package for Central America, the House appropriated only $129.7 million for the region, including only $24.7 million for military aid.

These numbers, however, overstate the policy differences between the two chambers, because all of the House figures were dictated by the Appropriations Committee and procedural problems made it difficult to test the issue on the floor.

Many Democratic leaders expect some increase will be accepted. After Mr. Duarte's May election, the House narrowly gave initial approval to increase funding comparable to the Senate figures.

Major Arms Buildup

With the $126.5 million already approved for El Salvador, the $117 million in the Senate bill would continue a major arms buildup under Mr. Duarte. It compares with 1983 funding of $81.3 million.

The action came as the House gave final approval to $11.5 billion in 1985 appropriations for the Commerce, State, and Justice departments and related agencies. The legislation is expected to be quickly approved by the Senate and sent to the president. It includes $64.3 million for the Federal Trade Commission and $305 million for the Legal Services Corp., neither of which were included in the initial House bill for lack of authorization.

On a 226-193 roll call, the FTC escaped an attack by critics seeking to limit new rulemaking. But the final bill includes an amendment prohibiting the agency from pursuing its antitrust complaint against cities for limiting licenses for taxicabs.

Funds for the National Endowment for Democracy were restored. But the level was reduced to $18.5 million, and restrictive language was included. The House had voted 226-173 to cut out all money for the project in May, but with labor lobbying alongside the administration, the Foreign Affairs Committee defeated its critics on a 237-181 roll call.

Despite administration protests, the Senate not only accepted a $60 million House provision for emergency shelter aid but doubled the sum last night on a 58-40 roll call. The $120 million total brings federal spending for this program to $260 million over the past two years, or more than five times the $50 million the White House agreed to as part of what was meant to be a one-time relief program in the 1983 jobs bill.

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