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SUBJECT Interview with Senator Christopher Dodd

JANE PAULEY: The House of Representatives goes behind closed doors today to debate an amendment that would halt covert CIA aid to rebels fighting the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. And there is some controversy this morning over the creation of a special Central American commission headed by Henry Kissinger.

Senator Christopher Dodd, Democrat from Connecticut, is with us in our Washington studios this morning.

And Henry Kissinger notwithstanding, do you think this blue-ribbon commission itself is a good idea?

SENATOR CHRISTOPHER DODD: I really don't, Jane. I have strong reservations about it. Commissions, from time to time, can serve us well. But they usually are a recourse when all else has failed. And quite frankly, the Administration has yet to make a concerted effort to really work with the Congress to develop that, quote, bipartisan foreign policy. And until that happens, it would seem to me rushing to form a commission was premature.

We've used it effectively on Social Security, not so effectively on the MX missile or on the education commission. I think the commission vehicle ought to be used very, very rarely, that every effort ought to be made to do what the Constitution has directed, and that is to try and develop these policies by working between the Executive and the Legislative Branch.

So, I think it's an idea that really shouldn't be exercised yet in this particular situation.

PAULEY: Do you think it just puts the debate on the

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issue on hold until December 1st?

SENATOR DODD: That's another argument that I'm sure will be used: You members of Congress shouldn't be running off now deciding how these issues ought to be resolved. Let's let that commission decide these issues. That will buy time for the Administration when time is virtually running out for the Salvadoran people, and many in Nicaragua and Honduras as well.

PAULEY: All right. What about Henry Kissinger himself? I know you have said that he's the wrong man and the wrong symbol. But wouldn't you grant that he does have in the public mind the prestige that the President described?

SENATOR DODD: Well, he certainly has that. And I'd be the last person to criticize him in terms of his credentials. He's certainly a brilliant diplomat, and has established that without any question.

But you've seen already what's happened. He's become a symbol to an awful lot of people for a failed foreign policy in the past. He was certainly at least around or involved indirectly during the overthrow of the Allende government in Chile. The whole Cambodian question has certainly been raised. At a time when we're trying to focus on the policy or what the policy ought to be in Central America, I think Henry Kissinger is going to attract more heat and more attention than the issues at hand. And it seems to me when there are so many talented people across this country who know the area -- that is, Central America -- have worked in it for years, to appoint someone who's going to become a virtual lightning rod for all the criticism is a mistake.

PAULEY: What about the other members of the commission? We've heard Terence Cardinal Cooke, Silber from Boston, Lane Kirkland.

SENATOR DODD: Well, again, the Administration has said they will accept no critics of Administration policy on this commission. Well, that's exactly the problem you had with the MX, in effect. You had no one on that commission who disagreed with the question of whether or not we ought to have an MX missile. Now, that's not a representation of a broad spectrum of views.

Bipartisan just doesn't mean two political parties. It means representing a variety of views. If you're not going to have a variety of views represented on this commission, then ad initium, in the very beginning it's not going to make much sense.

PAULEY: If invited, though, would you sit on the commission?

SENATOR DODD: No, because I sit on -- I sit on the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate. Colleagues of mine sit on the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriation Committees. Those are the people that the Administration ought to deal with.

I remember, Jane, only a few months ago a group of us in the United States Senate, Republicans and Democrats, representing a broad spectrum of views tried to meet with the Administration to discuss what the policies ought to be and what the Administration was trying to do. We were flatly refused that request. And I'm very skeptical of an Administration that turns around and says they'd like to set up a commission.

Let's be honest. The fact of the matter is there'd be no commission if the policy was working. My fear is the product is the same and the packaging is changing. That's all.

PAULEY: You say if the policy was working, we wouldn't be sitting here talking about a commission.

SENATOR DODD: That's correct.

PAULEY: Are they, in fact, losing Central America?

SENATOR DODD: Well, losing. I don't -- militarily, I don't believe so. I think, at the very least, it's a stalemate. In fact, there's some suggestions, at this particular hour, the government forces in El Salvador may be winning. Certainly that's not the case in Nicaragua. There, it appears as though the Sandinistas are winning, if that's the framework in which we're discussing this.

But I think we're losing it in a longer sense. We're losing the respect, the loyalty, the trust, the confidence, the identification, all these other issues which are vitally important to the United States in terms of our security, in terms of our efforts in a global sense. And that, to me, is the real long-term danger. We may win in the short term a war. In the process we're going to lose what is vitally important to us, and that is the respect and the willingness to work with us by other nations in the region.

PAULEY: Senator Dodd, thank you for being with us.