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Mr. Casey Steps Down

ILLNESS HAS now forced William Casey's resignation as the government's intelligence chief. No one who followed the sad story of Mr. Casey's battle with cancer will be surprised that he has been compelled to go. Mr. Casey was the president's chief intelligence adviser and also director of the lead intelligence organization, the Central Intelligence Agency. As such he had the central role in delivering on Mr. Reagan's campaign promise—he was his 1980 campaign manager—to reshape American intelligence to make it the servant of a newly assertive foreign policy. This is sometimes described as “restoring” the CIA's morale, its budget, its status in Washington and, not least, its capabilities in analysis and operations—especially support of anticommunist guerrilla movements.

Mr. Casey, charging hard, also crossed institutional and policy lines with abandon—too much abandon—and as a consequence came into sharp conflict with others in the administration on whose territory he tromped and whose mission he rather casually claimed for his own. Inevitably, the CIA found itself in a tense situation with its congressional overseers, most recently in respect to the Iran-contra affair.

The question of replacing Mr. Casey stirred a

vigorous battle inside Republican ranks, chiefly because the administration's persisting internal divisions opened the possibility that a new intelligence chief could tip the balance one way or another. Sounding the alarm, Human Events urged the president to “pick someone in the Reaganaut mold, a strong non-careerist who is firmly willing to buck the bureaucracy and vigorously implement the sound intelligence policies that the president himself fully embraces.”

Yesterday the president announced his choice of a career man, Robert Gates, a 43-year-old Soviet specialist who came up on the analytical side of CIA and served as William Casey's deputy. Even though others were asked first to take this job, the appointment of Mr. Gates suggests the president rejects the suggestion that the bureaucracy and “sound policy” are natural enemies. It also suggests that Mr. Reagan, needing no new public controversies, wants a professional policy-neutral intelligence directorate. Mr. Gates' confirmation hearings should provide a useful opportunity for the Senate to explore, and bargain out, the terms on which American intelligence will operate for the next two years.