

Mr. Speaker:

Americans are confused. On one hand, they hear many critics of President Reagan referring to the contras as fascist thugs, and to the Sandinistas simply as nationalists with socialist leanings. On the other hand, we hear the President rhetorically referring to the contras as the "moral equivalent of our founding fathers".

I cannot equate the Sandinistas with misguided socialists, nor the contras with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Somewhere between these extremes of rhetoric is a policy that is slightly gray, but which advances U.S. interests and can possibly gain public support.

I was disturbed during my recent trip to Nicaragua by evidence of growing Sandinista repression, censorship and duplicity, and by the escalation of their military forces. Democratic changes are under way, however precariously, throughout Central America, except in Nicaragua. I believe, as I did two years ago, that the Sandinista government poses a clear threat to the security of its neighbors and that it must abide by the promises it made to the OAS in 1979.

What we desperately need -- what we have needed all along

-- is a clear-cut, realistic policy. As the chairman of the Intelligence Committee in the other body, Senator Durenberger, has stated, because we have no policy, we appear to be reacting to events, rather than carrying out a strategy with goals by which to measure progress.

Americans are confused by strong Administration rhetoric and lack of Administration action; by Congressional procrastination and debate. They are looking for coherence and a sense of vision. If we oppose the Sandinistas, why do we buy Nicaraguan beef and bananas when Honduras could use our trade? Why do they still enjoy Most-Favored-Nation status? If the regime is illegitimate, and its overthrow a goal of U.S. policy, why do we continue diplomatic relations? If we are serious about meeting the Marxist challenge in Central America, it is time to begin shaping a long-term, affirmative policy and stop confusing intentions with accomplishments.

We must ask ourselves what is really happening in Central America, what we would like to see happen, and what we can do about it. In the past we fought change; now we must decide whether to ignore it or support it. Unfortunately, too many Americans have visited this region with open eyes and closed minds -- looking not at what is happening, but only at what is happening that would support their strongly held views.

Both in committee and on this floor, I have voted against covert aid to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. But having recently returned from the region, I believe more strongly than ever that there is a compelling case for continued American involvement in Central America.

The Sandinista regime is an obstacle to the growth of democracy. It is also a dictatorship that is doomed to fail unless it is kept alive by outside help. There is growing internal opposition to the economic and militaristic policies of the Sandinistas. Nicaraguans are increasingly dissatisfied and frustrated with their government, but it is equally obvious that the contras do not have the political persona or identity to advance their cause.

In my opinion, to relieve the outside pressure on the Sandinistas would be a mistake. But the American people must believe that all channels of diplomatic, economic and political pressure have been exhausted before there can be any support for paramilitary or military options.

The \$14 million that has been the focus of so much debate can have little practical effect. No one who has been there or who looks at the record believes that the contras can overthrow

the government of Nicaragua, with or without these funds. But this money can be a symbol of bipartisan determination to stand firm for democracy in Central America.

I will vote for the Hamilton substitute. It provides no funds for military or paramilitary operations, although I do not believe these options should be ruled out. It seeks to impose multinational pressures on Nicaragua, including the possibility of trade sanctions, and it supports the regional peace process. I believe the substitute could have gone further. For example, it could have provided a trigger-date and Congressional observers to further encourage a ceasefire and peace negotiations. But the substitute as it stands is better than the alternatives.

We can no longer afford to view the problems of Central America in black and white terms. Foreign policy requires military strength; it also requires skilful use of diplomacy and economic tools. The substitute allows for rapid action on any further requests for Contra aid. If no peace agreement is reached by October, we will be able to judge which side is responsible for the lack of progress and act accordingly. I urge its adoption.