

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Dear Congressman McCurdy:

I am writing to express my strongest support for your bipartisan proposal to assist the forces of democracy in Nicaragua. It is essential to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Central America that the House of Representatives pass that proposal, without any weakening amendments.

My Administration is determined to pursue political, not military, solutions in Central America. Our policy for Nicaragua is the same as for El Salvador and all of Central America: to support the democratic center against the extremes of both the right and left, and to secure democracy and lasting peace through national dialogue and regional negotiations. We do not seek the military overthrow of the Sandinista government or to put in its place a government based on supporters of the old Somoza regime.

Just as we support President Duarte in his efforts to achieve reconciliation in El Salvador, we also endorse the unified democratic opposition's March 1, 1985 San Jose Declaration which calls for national reconciliation through a church-mediated dialogue. We oppose a sharing of political power based on military force rather than the will of the people expressed through free and fair elections. That is the position of President Duarte. It is also the position of the Nicaraguan opposition leaders, who have agreed that executive authority in Nicaragua should change only through elections.

It is the guerrillas in El Salvador--and their mentors in Managua, Havana, and Moscow--who demand power sharing without elections. And it is the Sandinistas in Nicaragua who stridently reject national reconciliation through democratic processes. Our assistance has been crucial to ensuring that democracy has both the strength and will to work in El Salvador. In Nicaragua, our support is also needed to enable the forces of democracy to convince the Sandinistas that real democratic

change is necessary. Without the pressure of a viable and democratic resistance, the Sandinistas will continue to impose their will through repression and military force, and a regional settlement based on the Contadora principles will continue to elude us.

I understand that two "perfecting" amendments will be offered that will seek to nullify the intent of your proposal. One, supported by Ed Boland, would prohibit the exchange of information with the democratic resistance and permanently deny even humanitarian assistance because it would "have the effect" of supporting "directly or indirectly" the military efforts of the resistance. The other, supported by Dick Gephardt, would prohibit humanitarian assistance for at least six months and then continue the prohibition until Congress votes yet again.

The Boland Amendment is clearly intended to have the same effect as the Barnes Amendment that was rejected by the House in April. If the Boland prohibitions are enacted, the only way humanitarian assistance could be provided would be for the recipients to abandon their struggle and become refugees. The Gephardt proposal, guaranteeing the Sandinistas six additional months without effective pressure, would send a signal of irresolution to friends and adversaries, while denying the democratic resistance help that it so desperately needs. These amendments would prevent us from providing humanitarian assistance and exchanging information to sustain and preserve the democratic resistance. They would effectively remove the resistance as a source of pressure for dialogue and internal reconciliation. If those struggling for democracy are not supported, or worse, forced to become refugees, the Sandinistas will be encouraged to press their military advantage and the prospects for a peaceful resolution will be diminished.

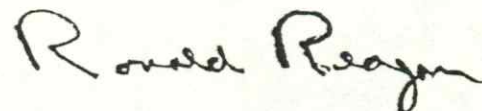
I take very seriously your concern about human rights. The U.S. condemns, in the strongest possible terms, atrocities by either side. We are committed to helping the democratic resistance in applying strict rules regarding proper treatment of prisoners and the civilian population. And we urge their leaders to investigate allegations of past human rights abuses and take appropriate actions to prevent future abuses.

I recognize the importance that you and others attach to bilateral talks between the United States and Nicaragua. It is possible that in the proper circumstances, such discussions could help promote the internal reconciliation called for by Contadora and endorsed by many Latin American leaders. Therefore, I intend to instruct our special Ambassador to consult with the governments of Central America, the Contadora countries, other democratic governments, and the unified Nicaraguan opposition as to how and when the U.S. could resume useful direct talks with Nicaragua. However, such talks cannot be a substitute for a church-mediated dialogue between the contending factions and the achievement of a workable Contadora agreement. Therefore, I will have our representatives meet again with representatives of Nicaragua only when I determine that such a meeting would be helpful in promoting these ends.

Experience has shown that a policy of support for democracy, economic opportunity, and security will best serve the people of Central America and the national interests of the United States. If we show consistency of purpose, if we are firm in our conviction, we can help the democratic center prevail over tyrants of the left or the right. But if we abandon democracy in Nicaragua, if we tolerate the consolidation of a surrogate state in Central America responsive to Cuba and the Soviet Union, we will see the progress that has been achieved in neighboring countries begin to unravel under the strain of continuing conflict, attempts at subversion, and loss of confidence in our support.

There can be a more democratic, more prosperous, and more peaceful Central America. I will continue to devote my energies toward that end, but I also need the support of the Congress. I hope the House will support your legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Ronald Reagan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent "R" and a long, sweeping tail.

The Honorable Dave McCurdy -
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515