

Hostage hopes soar as Iran responds, passes bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Carter administration, encouraged that a breakthrough may be imminent in the long hostage stalemate, said today it has received a "substantive" Iranian reply to the latest U.S. proposals but still can't predict an agreement to free the 52 Americans.

After affirming that it is willing to press the negotiating effort right to the moment that Ronald Reagan is sworn in next Tuesday, officials disclosed at midafternoon that Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher had been handed an Iranian response through intermediaries in Algiers.

According to an official State Department statement, "The American delegation in Algiers has received, through the Algerian intermediaries, a substantive Iranian response to the American messages" which were sent to Iran on Jan. 2.

State Department spokesman John Trattner said earlier today that while "important differences remain to be resolved," the United States and Iran are moving forward to clear away the "underbrush of technical detail" still blocking an agreement.

He said Christopher remained on standby in Algeria, where he has spent the past week clarifying the U.S. position for Iran through the Algerian intermediaries.

Reports reached the department at midday that Iranian and Algerian diplomats were meeting in Algiers. Shortly thereafter, the Iranian statement was delivered to the Americans.

U.S. negotiators had told Iran that Friday, Jan. 16, would be the last practical day to strike a deal with the Carter administration.

It is unclear what would happen if Friday passed without agreement, but Muskie's comments indicated flexibility.

President Carter, in his televised farewell address to the nation Wednesday night, said he can't predict what will happen in the intense negotiations through Algerian intermediaries, but he vowed to spend his last days in office trying to bring the hostages home.

"I will continue as I have during the past 14 months to work and pray for the lives and the well-being of the American hostages held in Iran," Carter said.

Other officials have said if a breakthrough is near on Inauguration Day, they assume Reagan simply will pick up where Carter left off.

The president-elect, asked about the hostage situation as he arrived in Washington on Wednesday to await his inauguration, said, "I think there is reason to be optimistic. I think we all are."

Committee favors Haig, Bell; FBI probe ahead for Donovan

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 15-2 Thursday to recommend Senate confirmation of Alexander Haig to be secretary of state, despite questions raised by some senators about his role in the Watergate scandal.

Haig, one of the more controversial of Pres.-elect Ronald Reagan's Cabinet choices, is virtually certain to be confirmed by the full Senate next Wednesday, the day after Reagan is inaugurated.

The two committee members who voted against Haig's nomination were Sens. Paul Sarbanes, D-Md., and Paul Tsongas, D-Mass.

Tsongas praised the former White House chief of staff and NATO commander for being "capable, intelligent, tough, pragmatic with a sense of history and a knack of retaining his options," and predicted he would "absolutely dominate this administration."

But Tsongas said he opposed Haig's confirmation because of the risks involved, "the risks inherent in having all those enormous skills not properly focused by a dominant sense of moral purpose. The risk of expediency, despoiling the otherwise solid performance."

At other confirmation hearings Thursday:

- The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee postponed a scheduled vote on New Jersey construction executive Raymond Donovan to be labor secretary and asked FBI Director William Webster to begin an investigation of unspecified "new developments" in Donovan's case.

- William Smith of Los Angeles, personal lawyer and friend of Reagan, pledged "vigorous protection of the constitutional and statutory rights of all our citizens" as the Senate Judiciary Committee began hearings on his nomination to be attorney general. He faces questioning about his membership in two private California clubs that exclude women.

- The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee quickly approved the nomination of Terrel Bell, former U.S. commissioner of education, to be secretary of education. Bell said he would be committed to carrying out Reagan's pledge to strip the Education Department of Cabinet status.

- After approving the Haig nomination, the Senate Foreign Relations opened hearings on the nomination of Jeane Kirkpatrick, former political science professor at Georgetown University, to be U.S. ambas-

sador to the United Nations. Five days of exhaustive and sometimes emotional questioning of Haig during the committee's hearings did not finally dispose of the Watergate issue, however.

The committee disclosed that lawyers for former President Richard Nixon had moved to block access to National Security Council minutes on meetings in which Haig took part in discussions of the bombing of Cambodia, Vietnam peace talks and covert U.S. operations against the former Marxist government of Chile.

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making the news

From Associated Press Reports

BOSTON, Mass. — The governor of Massachusetts on Thursday ordered schools closed to conserve precious fuel, while Florida orange juice producers jacked up their prices to record levels almost before the ice on the citrus trees had melted.

Across the frigid East, a cold wave that came in at Christmas had eased up a bit, but light snow sprinkled the icy sludge already on the ground in a wide area, waterways remained blocked and some cities were running out of fuel to keep their people warm.

With most residents of Massachusetts ignoring an appeal to turn down their thermostats until an emergency supply of natural gas could reach the state, Gov. Edward King ordered gas-heated schools closed Friday to conserve the state's supply of natural gas.

He also ordered all commercial customers of Boston Gas Co., the state's largest gas utility, to turn down their thermostats.

"My request for conservation is not giving us satisfactory results," said the governor, who had declared an energy emergency on Tuesday and asked residents to voluntarily turn their thermostats down to 63 degrees. "The prospect of industrial shutdowns within the Boston Gas Company's service area stands before us."

King added, "The entire Northeast is on the edge of the natural gas supply problem we are now experiencing."

All Boston schools, which have an enrollment of about 65,000, will be closed Friday, School Superintendent Paul Kennedy said.

SEATTLE — A coalition of environmentalists unveiled on Thursday a proposal for a 216,000-acre Mount St. Helens National Monument, an area almost as big as Mount Rainier National Park.

The monument would stretch from the Lewis River on the south to the Cowlitz River on the north. It would include lands devastated by the May 18 eruption along with other areas north and south that were hardly touched.

The Mount St. Helens Protective Association, which took the lead in developing the plan, said a large area must be protected to preserve evidence of the volcano's earlier eruptions and to provide comparisons with damage done May 18.

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