

Did he know? Gates can't seem to recall

Robert Gates is described by friends and associates as a meticulous man. The consummate detail-oriented analyst, forever correcting the trivial inconsistencies that plague all government bureaucracies.

Why then, at the mere mention of the word "Iran-Contra," does the nominee for the top post in the CIA go into a stammering ah-um routine that would make former President Ronald Reagan proud?

Maybe it's because all of his deputies keep contradicting his story. He says he knew nothing about the Iran-Contra affair until Oct. 1, 1986 — almost two months before then-Attorney General Edwin Meese broke the scandal in a White House press conference. Gates colleagues, testifying in front of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he was informed about the arms-for-hostages deal during the summer and early fall of 1986.

But Gates doesn't remember. Or so he says.

Members of the Senate Intelligence Committee are understandably skeptical. They have thus far refrained from calling Gates an out-and-out liar, but such blatant statements can't be too far around the corner. The sad truth is that the confirmation hearings have taken on the tone of a schoolyard argument.

"We told you about the scandal," Gates' colleagues chime.

"Did not!"

"Did too!" And so on.

The people contradicting Gates are not jealous subordinates looking for network air time. One, Charles Allen, is a senior analyst with the CIA, and the other, Richard Kerr, is the agency's acting director. Both have impressive backgrounds. Both are pretty much telling the same story.

Gates has been in this position once before. Reagan nominated him for the post in 1987, but furor over the Iran-Contra affair made him withdraw from the race. In the four years since then, more details about the scandal have come forth, and Gates has changed his stance ever so slightly.

While so far he has come up with nothing to dispute Allen's and Kerr's claims, Gates has accepted some of the blame for the scandal, saying he should have taken warnings about the affair "more seriously." But in doing so, he has also slammed his former boss, then-CIA director William Casey, who makes a good scapegoat because he was aloof, "unbureaucratic," and is now conveniently dead.

Gates' memory lapses are damning, but probably won't cost him the nomination. Committee member Alan Cranston, D-Calif., in support of Gates, said "You just can't be expected to remember everything you heard or did or said five years ago." That statement shouldn't come as a shock once you remember Cranston's own selective memory loss during the Keating 5 hearings.

What makes the whole confirmation process ironic is that while Allen and Kerr have raised doubts about Gates through their testimony, both have endorsed him. Kerr said "I don't think anyone else is as qualified to take the job."

Makes one wonder what qualifications are needed to be CIA director. Maybe we should check out George Bush's resume a little more.

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COMMENTARY

Measure 5 supporters should rethink vote



THE FINE PRINT

BY CATHIE DANIELS

Hopefully Measure 5 supporters will reconsider next time the ballot comes around.

Barbara Roberts finished her "Conversation with Oregon" Sunday in Eugene. The governor traveled to six Oregon towns to meet with taxpayers and gather ideas on how to find replacement revenue for monies lost with last year's approval of Measure 5.

The measure set a cap on state property taxes, which ended up decreasing money available for state-funded operations.

One result stemming from the state's \$750 million general-fund loss was an almost one-third tuition hike for the state's eight higher education schools, a two-year phase out of 500 faculty and staff positions, the elimination or consolidation of 68 degree programs and the trimming of 2,000 students.

It's understandable that voters would just say no to taxes by approving Measure 5. Tired of seeing money disappearing into thin state-and-national-tax-system air, they figured if government hasn't gotten enough by now, too bad. They'll get no more.

However, there is one thing these voters should consider. Because the forest products industry is Oregon's largest segment of private employment,

it's a good bet that at least some of the state's landowners work in this area.

And since Measure 5's passage would set a limit on property taxes, there's little doubt the voters who approved the measure were primarily landowners.

In short, it's my guess that a sizable portion of those voting yes on Measure 5 worked in timber-related jobs. Unfortunately, since the price of the retraining many of these workers will inevitably need is now further out of reach than ever.

It's no secret Oregon's timber industry is in trouble. Innovations allowing one person to do the work of several, the setting aside of timber lands for conservation and the exportation of unprocessed logs are causing the number of timber-related jobs to shrink.

Add the fact that Oregon's population grew 5.7 percent between 1980 and 1989, thus increasing the competition for jobs, and it becomes obvious this already-growing pool of dislocated workers needs help.

Oregon's higher education system offers a path out of this mess. The skills offered at these institutions will become increasingly necessary for these workers to gain a foothold in what looks to be a deteriorating situation.

True, state college and university tuition have been nearly impossible for average Oregonians to afford, blocking an offensive number of the general public's accessibility to higher edu-

cation. But passing legislation that cuts school funding makes the increasingly important learning option even more remote.

And granted, the transition from timber to other jobs will be difficult for many of these workers for a variety of reasons. Workers who have claimed the timber industry as their own for generations don't want to be the last of their species; many have worked their entire lives in the woods don't know anything else; and perhaps even more just plain and simple don't see the need to change — period.

But the facts show change in the timber labor market is indeed happening and will probably continue. Re-education may be the last thing these workers may want to consider, but the list of alternatives is growing smaller by the minute.

This group represents a tappable resource of labor — a fact not only timber workers but all taxpayers need to remember. Keeping education at a quasi-affordable level and quality high means marketable skills for these transitional workers and a wealth of re-skilled laborers for Oregon.

Roberts will decide by March 1992 whether she will set a reformed tax package before the state's voters. Should she do so, I urge taxpayers to vote for legislation supporting school funding. In the end, it's our most viable hope during these changing times.

