

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### GOP presidential hopefuls gather

Under the guise of honoring Sen. Paul Laxalt (R-Nev.), the Republicans got together at a big social event here on March 3. Every potential GOP presidential campaign was represented at the "non-partisan" fête honoring the retiring Senator Laxalt, who is more and more being talked of as a candidate himself.

President Reagan made a few remarks at the dinner. But the real interest was in the line-up of potential candidates for 1988, either there in person or officially co-sponsoring the event.

These figures included, besides Laxalt himself, Vice-President George Bush, Congressman Jack Kemp, former Secretary of State Alexander Haig and, remarkably, television evangelist Pat Robertson.

Yes, Robertson's campaign committee was invited on board the official, prestigious list of Republican leaders and organizations co-sponsoring the event, meaning he has the blessing of the party leadership to be among its bona fide candidates in 1988! The affair was organized by Paul Weyrich, formerly of the Heritage Foundation and a major promoter of religious fundamentalism within politics.

Laxalt, of course, played a key role in pulling the plug on the Marcos regime in the Philippines. He was known by Marcos from the days when Reagan was governor of California, as a close friend of the President—which Marcos also believed he was, himself, until recent events proved otherwise.

This was how Laxalt was able, beginning with his trip to the Philippines

last fall, to pressure Marcos to hold elections in the first place, and then, in the last hours, to convince Marcos that Reagan was not going to back him up.

On a popular local interview show in Washington, Laxalt described his last phone call with Marcos, when Marcos finally asked Laxalt his candid opinion on what he should do and Laxalt told him to leave. Laxalt said Marcos was silent on the other end of the line for over a minute, and then mumbled, "I am very, very disappointed."

Laxalt's public gloating over his decisive role in cracking Marcos has apparently propelled him into favor among Reagan insiders as the preferred option to carry the Reagan banner in the White House, now that it has become clear that George Bush cannot hack it as a candidate.

Bush was lampooned by the national press for his bungled appearance in San Antonio on March 2 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Texas independence from Mexico. Bush claimed at the Alamo event to be a Texan, which few Texans take seriously (he was born and reared in Connecticut). Bush tried to make his point by listing the out-of-state hometown of every Alamo defender.

Laxalt's so-called "loyalty" to the President is about as reliable as a gypsy's. He sided with the Wall Street Palace Guard—Don Regan and crowd—to put the barbaric Richard Burt into West Germany as ambassador. Laxalt confided his role in convincing Reagan to accept Burt to this reporter in a private meeting one year ago—long before Burt's appointment became public.

In Paul Laxalt, the Republicans are stuck with one more duplicitous charlatan—as if Bush, Haig, Kemp, and Robertson were not enough.

### Right and left agree on Nicaragua

Defense Secretary Weinberger's three-hour grilling by the House Armed Services Committee March 5 on the President's request for \$100 million in aid to the Nicaraguan "contras" opposing the Sandinista regime, revealed a tell-tale convergence of left and right calling for direct U.S. military intervention in Central America.

This was heard coming out of the mouths of leftist sympathizers like Colorado Rep. Pat Schroeder and right-winger Rep. Thomas Hartnett (R-S.C.). Schroeder said that since the Defense Department claims the Soviets have put \$500 million into Nicaragua and 3,400 Cuban advisers, then obviously \$100 million in aid to the contras is inadequate, and we might as well not send anything. If we decide we need to clean that situation up, then we should do it properly, and not keep deceiving the U.S. population by asking for a little money at a time, she argued.

Weinberger, who appeared haggard at the hearing, expressed genuine exasperation at the concept. He added that if the Contadora process fails and the contras fail, over 100 million people in the Central American region from Mexico to Colombia are directly militarily threatened, as well as the U.S. borders. "Then we would be confronted with a major strategic crisis," he said.

Weinberger also made it clear, in contrast to Shultz, that Mexico and the other Contadora nations in no way support Nicaragua, but are forced to modify their public statements only because they have found the U.S. to be unreliable in terms of backing them up, and they cannot handle the Nicaraguan "armed camp" militarily alone.