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Dole Steps Up Scrutiny Of Special Prosecutor

By JAKE THOMPSON
The Kansas City Star

WASHINGTON — As special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh digs deeper into the Iran-Contra debacle — now clouding President Bush's last days — one voice complains ever louder:

Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole.

For about two years, the Kansas Republican has waged an aggressive campaign against Walsh's six-year, multimillion-dollar investigation.

Walsh and at least one congressional expert said they believe this is the first time a Senate leader has injected himself into an investigation in the 19 years

special prosecutors or independent counsels have existed.

That hasn't stopped Dole's attack on Walsh.

"I think he's out of control," Dole said. "I think he ought to quit."

Dole commented after Walsh announced he's now focusing on Bush himself. On Christmas Eve, Bush pardoned former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and five others accused of lying to or withholding information from Congress.

Dole's scrutiny of Walsh began quietly enough two years ago when one of his staffers brought him new clippings about the rising cost of Walsh's investiga-

tion. That led Dole to issue the first of at least 15 statements criticizing Walsh's efforts.

Dole said he has taken on Walsh because he believes the investigation is a partisan attack on Republicans. And Dole said he thought the White House was hampered by how much it could defend itself publicly, while as Republican Senate leader he could speak out freely.

Mary Belcher, spokeswoman for Walsh, defended the investigation by noting that Walsh was appointed by a Republican, former Attorney General Edwin Meese. Walsh himself is a Republican.

Walsh and his team have interviewed more than 1,000 high-ranking government officials to explore the Iran-Contra deal, she said.

"It has been a long and expensive process, and I don't see how it could be otherwise," Belcher said.

Stephen Hess, a congressional scholar at the Brookings Institution in Washington, said Dole's attacks on Walsh were unusual because they focused on one prosecutor, not on the often-debated role of special prosecutors.

But Hess added: "I don't think Bob Dole is doing this without cause. To some degree Walsh has brought it on himself by using language such as 'misconduct' and 'arrogant' in reference to Weinberger and Bush. As a result, this has gotten to be a thoroughly politicized issue."

The focus on Walsh's investigation also comes at a time when the special prosecutor law is expiring. The first special prosecutor was Archibald Cox, named in 1973 to investigate the Watergate break-in and cover-up. Congress passed a law formally enabling the appointment of special prosecutors in 1978 and renewed it during the 1980's.

Congress will consider renewing the position again next year.

Dole and others have said the law should be more clearly defined to put time limits on investigations, hold down expenses and make the investigations more fact finding than prosecutorial.

"You can go out and besmirch somebody's name, ruin their reputation, run up big, big legal bills," Dole said.

Dole has accused Walsh of politically timing the indictment of Weinberger, which occurred four days before the election, in which Bush was defeated.

Over the last two years, Dole also has criticized the cost of Walsh's investigation, which Belcher put at \$33 million.

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