

House expands probe into Jonestown massacre

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WASHINGTON — The House Intelligence Committee has expanded its investigation into alleged CIA involvement with the Peoples Temple Cult and the Jonestown bloodbath in November 1978.

The four-month-old probe originally was limited to a staff scrutiny of documents related to the case where 917 U.S. citizens died and former Rep. Leo Ryan, D-Calif. was assassinated. Now the committee staff has begun to interview persons close to the tragic events and has already spoken to a number of CIA agents.

The investigation will most likely take Intelligence Committee aides to the San Francisco area to question a number of persons familiar with the matter. The majority of members in the

Peoples Temple cult hailed from the Bay Area and traveled in a mass exodus to Jonestown, Guyana with their fanatical leader, Jim Jones.

"We are talking to people directly who made allegations that the CIA was involved with Jonestown and the assassination of Congressman Ryan," said Intelligence Committee Staff Director Michael O'Neill. While he acknowledged that some CIA agents had been questioned, O'Neill declined to divulge their names.

O'Neill did say that the staff plans to interview G.W. "Joe" Holsinger, Rep. Ryan's top aide at the time of his death by gunfire on a remote landing strip in the Guyana jungles. Holsinger has been a leading voice in the chorus of allegations about CIA complicity in the Jonestown massacre.

Following the Foreign Affairs subcommittee hearings, the full

committee sent a letter to the Intelligence Committee requesting scrutiny of the alleged CIA links. Foreign Affairs Chairman Clement Zablocki, D-Wisc., said he doubted the CIA connection but added the matter is outside the jurisdiction of his panel.

The Intelligence Committee is the second and now the only congressional panel to take interest in the specific incidents that led to the mass deaths. Committee director O'Neill said the staff's preliminary report should be complete and ready for committee review before the end of the congressional session in December.

If the initial report warrants further investigation, O'Neill said the committee could order a much wider probe. He said the initial presentations will be made in executive session with no public access.

He added that some investigative material would be declassified.