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Obama Wants New START Ratified This Year

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WASHINGTON — U.S. President Barack Obama said he hoped that the Senate would ratify the New START nuclear arms treaty with Russia before the end of this year's congressional term.

Obama, speaking at the end of a cabinet meeting Thursday, listed New START, which he and President Dmitry Medvedev signed in April, among unfinished business he wants handled in the aftermath of congressional elections in which his Democrats suffered heavy losses.

Obama's party saw its majority in the 100-seat Senate, which must ratify the treaty with at least 67 votes, trimmed in Tuesday's midterm elections, meaning that it will be harder for the White House to secure ratification next year.

Obama wants the Senate to approve the treaty, which commits the former Cold War foes to reduce deployed nuclear warheads by about 30 percent, during a post-election special work period called a "lame-duck session" that begins on Nov. 15.

But it is unclear whether Republicans, who already have enough votes to block ratification,

will allow that.

A lame-duck period is the time between a congressional election in November and the start of the new Congress in January. During that time, Congress operates but with many lawmakers who have just been voted out of office and with none of the newly elected members, except victorious incumbents.

But U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said she believed that the White House has the votes to pass New START and she hoped this would happen this year.

"We believe we have enough votes to pass it in the Senate. It's just a question of when it will be brought to the vote," Clinton told reporters Thursday at a news conference with New Zealand Prime Minister John Key in Wellington, New Zealand.

"It may be brought, and it would certainly be my preference that it be brought, in any lame-duck session in the next several weeks," she added. "That is what I am working toward ... but we'll have to wait and work with the Senate and the [chamber's] leadership when they come back for that session."

The Obama administration sees the treaty as a centerpiece of its effort to "reset" relations with Russia.

"This is not a traditionally Democratic or Republican issue but rather a issue of American national security, and I am hopeful that we can get that done ... and send a strong signal to Russia that we are serious about reducing nuclear arsenals," Obama told reporters.

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