

START Faces Delay Tactic in U.S.

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Gibbs, left, and Obama attending a White House news conference Monday. **J. Scott Applewhite**

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Democrats pressed for debate on the New START nuclear arms treaty with Russia on Wednesday despite Republican objections, prompting one opposition lawmaker to threaten to force a full reading of the accord.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said the Senate would vote on Wednesday afternoon on beginning debate on the treaty. He indicated debate would run several days, with a final vote possible on Sunday.

Republican Senator Jim DeMint, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who has threatened to use delaying tactics to try to block passage of the accord until the new year, indicated on Wednesday that he might demand a full reading of the pact when it is introduced.

The treaty itself is only 17 pages, but an accompanying protocol runs to 165 pages, and three additional annexes add another 174. Democrats estimated it could take 12 to 15 hours to read the documents into the Senate record.

"This is a new low in putting political stunts ahead of our national security, and it is exactly

the kind of Washington game-playing that the American people are sick of," White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said in a statement.

He noted that many Republicans have said the Senate does not have enough time to debate the treaty fully before the current legislative session ends.

"While some express concern that the Senate doesn't have time to debate the treaty, Senator DeMint wants to waste 12 hours to read the text of a treaty that has been available to every member of the Senate and the public for more than eight months," he added.

Reid also criticized the idea.

"This treaty has been around since April or May. Even a slow reader could finish reading every word of that many, many times. I would hope that no one will require us to read the treaty — what a colossal waste of time," he said.

Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev signed the New START agreement in April, committing the former Cold War rivals to reducing deployed nuclear warheads to no more than 1,550 within seven years.

The treaty also would reduce the number of deployed ballistic missiles and nuclear bombers to no more than 700, and it would create a new inspection regime for verifying the two sides are living by the terms of the agreement.

Medvedev has indicated that Russian lawmakers would ratify the treaty immediately after U.S. approval.

The previous START treaty expired a year ago. Since that time, Russia and the United States have not been able to conduct inspections of each other's nuclear stockpile, leading to uncertainty about what is happening with their arsenals.

"Every minute that the START treaty is being read on the Senate floor increases the time that we lack verification of Russia's nuclear arsenal," said Gibbs, the White House spokesman. "It is the height of hypocrisy to complain that there is not enough time to consider this treaty, while wasting so much time reading aloud a document that was submitted to the Senate months ago."

(Reuters, AP)

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