

Biden Says START Has Enough Votes

December 19, 2010

The  Moscow Times

WASHINGTON — Top Democrats, including Vice President Joe Biden, said Sunday that they believe they have enough support in the U.S. Senate to ratify the New START nuclear arms treaty with Russia.

The Senate was poised to resume debate on New START as early as Sunday, a top priority of President Barack Obama with Congress set to adjourn in the coming days.

The treaty, signed by Obama and President Dmitry Medvedev in April, would require the former Cold War adversaries to reduce strategic nuclear warheads and bombers. It would also establish a verification and inspection system to ensure both abide by terms of the agreement.

Republicans opposing the treaty say the pact would limit U.S. efforts to develop systems like those it plans to deploy in Europe to defend against any limited missile attacks from Iran or North Korea.

It was unclear whether the deal had enough Republican support to garner the 67 votes needed to pass in the 100-member Senate.

Biden expressed optimism that supporters had enough votes to support ratification.

"I believe we do," he said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Richard Durbin, the No. 2 Democrat in the Senate leadership, told "Fox News Sunday" that he thought there was enough support.

"I think we need to bring this to a vote," Durbin said.

Senator Jon Kyl, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate and a leading critic of the treaty, told "Fox News Sunday" that he was going to vote against ratification if there was no change to the treaty.

"This treaty needs to be fixed, and we are not going to have the time to do that" in the few days left in the current session of Congress, he said.

Obama invoked the late Republican President Ronald Reagan as he used his weekly radio address Saturday to urge bipartisan support for the treaty. Obama said it was crucial to put a new treaty into place so inspections of Russia's nuclear facilities could resume after a lapse that began when the old START treaty expired a year ago.

"Without a new one, we won't be able to verify Russia's nuclear arsenal, which would undercut President Reagan's call to trust, but verify, when it comes to nuclear weapons," Obama said.

Failure to approve the treaty would jeopardize Washington's warmer ties with Moscow, he added.

Obama plans to work the phones this week to try to win support for START, said White House spokesman Robert Gibbs.

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