

Republican Delays Vote On Envoy To Russia

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WASHINGTON — A Republican in the U.S. Senate has forced a delay in the consideration of the White House's nominee for ambassador to Moscow because of concerns about possible cuts to nuclear weapons spending.

Senator Bob Corker did not raise any specific objection to the nominee, Michael McFaul, who is President Barack Obama's top adviser on Russia policy and a proponent of the "reset" in U.S.-Russian relations.

But Corker objected on Tuesday to a planned Senate Foreign Relations Committee vote on McFaul, forcing a postponement of at least two weeks, while he seeks assurances on continued funding for the U.S. nuclear weapons complex.

"We are working with the administration right now to get where we need to be on the [nuclear] modernization piece," Corker told reporters outside the Senate.

"We weren't comfortable going ahead [with a vote on McFaul] until we got this other issue

worked out,” the senator said.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry, a Democrat, said he expected the problem to be worked out so that there could be a vote soon on McFaul. Committee aides said the panel’s vote could be rescheduled for late November.

But even if McFaul’s nomination makes it out of committee onto the Senate floor, it could face trouble there from critics of Russia’s human rights record and the Obama administration’s talks on missile defense cooperation with Moscow.

It’s also not clear what assurances the Obama administration can give Corker about future funding for nuclear weapons, given the deficit crisis now facing Washington.

A year ago, the Obama administration convinced a number of Republican lawmakers, including Corker, to support the new START nuclear arms control deal with Russia by pledging \$85 billion over the next decade for maintaining and modernizing remaining U.S. nuclear weapons.

Since then, the deficit crisis has thrown a question mark over whether such a large spending pledge can be met, even if successive administrations and Congresses want to do so.

Other lawmakers have proposed nearly half a billion dollars in cuts for 2012 in spending on the National Nuclear Security Administration, which manages the nation’s nuclear weapons.

Democrats and Republicans on a congressional “super committee” are supposed to come up with a plan shortly that would cut \$1.2 trillion more from all programs over 10 years.

Some House Democrats say the super committee should find \$200 billion of this money by slashing expensive delivery systems, such as bombers and submarines, for nuclear weapons.

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