

# House Committee Approves Magnitsky Bill

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk **Eric Bridiers**

A committee of the U.S. Congress voted Thursday to penalize Russian officials for human rights abuses, adding to tensions with Moscow and complicating White House efforts to pass Russian trade legislation in coming months.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee approved on a voice vote the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act, named after a 37-year-old anti-corruption lawyer who worked for the equity fund Hermitage Capital. His 2009 death after a year in Russian jails spooked investors and blackened Russia's image abroad.

The measure would require the United States to deny visas and freeze the assets of Russians linked to Magnitsky's death. The Obama administration already has imposed visa restrictions on some Russians believed to have been involved in Magnitsky's death, but kept their names quiet.

Russian officials have warned repeatedly that passage of the bill would harm U.S.-Russian relations. The measure would make the list of alleged offenders public, broaden it to include other abusers of human rights in Russia and prohibit them from doing their banking in U.S. institutions.

Approval by the House panel was the first step in advancing the bill by Representative Jim McGovern, but its future remains uncertain. Before it can get a vote of the full House, two more committees must either approve it or waive jurisdiction. The Senate has not acted on a similar bill by Senator Ben Cardin.

Some U.S. lawmakers are hoping to attach the Magnitsky bill to a proposal to grant "permanent normal trade relations" between the United States and Russia that the Obama administration is expected to ask Congress to approve this year. U.S. business groups oppose that step, and the White House says it prefers a "clean" trade bill.

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