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U.S. House Nears Deal on Russia Trade

By The Moscow Times

July 19, 2012



The top Republican and Democrat on the House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee on Thursday reached a deal to move forward on Russian trade legislation, including human rights provisions opposed by Moscow, sources from both parties said.

The expected announcement from Committee Chairman Dave Camp, a Republican, and Representative Sander Levin, a Democrat, comes one day after the Senate Finance Committee unanimously passed a combined Russia trade and human rights bill.

That panel's strong bipartisan vote has lifted hopes the full Congress could approve the legislation before lawmakers begin their August recess.

Russia is expected to join the World Trade Organization in August, 18 years after it first asked to join, putting pressure on Congress to lift a Cold War-provision known as the Jackson-Vanik amendment which is inconsistent with WTO rules.

If Congress does not act, Russia could deny U.S. exporters some of the market-opening

concessions it made to join the WTO and the United States would not be able to challenge those actions through the WTO's dispute settlement system.

Meanwhile, concern about Russia's commitment to human rights, democracy and the rule of law is propelling separate legislation, known as the Magnitsky bill. It would bar Russian officials guilty of human rights violations from traveling to the United States and freeze assets they hold in U.S. banks.

The White House had pushed for a bill free of human rights provisions to terminate Jackson-Vanik and establish "permanent normal trade relations" with Moscow.

But it appears resigned to the bill passed by the Senate Finance Committee, which included the Magnitsky provisions, named after a Russian anti-corruption lawyer that died in 2009 after a year in jail.

"Passage of this bill through the House and full Senate will enable the president to extend Permanent Normal Trade Relations to Russia and allow American businesses, ranchers, farmers, and workers receive the full benefit of Russia's WTO commitment," White House spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden said in a statement.

"We look forward to working with Congress to finalize this important trade legislation," Hayden added.

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