

Senate Set to Approve Trade and Rights Bill

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The U.S. Senate was poised on Thursday to approve legislation to punish Russian human rights violators as part of a broader bill to expand U.S. trade with the former Cold War enemy.

The vote would send the package to President Barack Obama, who is expected to sign it into law despite Moscow's warning that the human rights provisions will damage relations.

The House voted 365-43 last month to approve the bill, which grants permanent normal trade relations, or PNTR, to Russia by lifting a Cold War-era restriction on trade.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said the Senate would vote on the bill on Thursday after wrapping up five hours of debate earlier in the week.

"Russia is a fast-growing market. For the United States to share in that growth, we must first pass PNTR. And if we do, American exports to Russia are projected to double in five years,"

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, a Montana Democrat, said Wednesday on the Senate floor.

Business groups have been pushing Congress for months to approve the bill, which would ensure that U.S. companies get all the benefits of Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization. Russia joined the WTO on Aug. 22.

Without it, the groups fear they will be left at a disadvantage to companies around the world that already have full WTO relations with Russia.

The United States also cannot use the WTO dispute-settlement system to challenge any Russian actions that unfairly restrict U.S. imports until PNTR is approved.

The PNTR bill, in a provision that infuriates Moscow, directs Obama to publish the names of Russians allegedly involved in the abuse and death of Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian anti-corruption lawyer who died in a Russian jail in 2009.

It also would require the United States to deny visas and freeze the assets of any individual on the list, as well as other human rights violators in Russia.

Moscow has warned that the human rights provision would hurt relations and has promised to retaliate if it becomes law.

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