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U.S. Lawmaker Calls For Halt to Russian Ex-Im Deals

By The Moscow Times

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WASHINGTON — A conservative U.S. lawmaker has called for the Export-Import Bank to halt deals with Russia, while a U.S. company warned that closing the export credit agency would stymie a project helping to wean Ukraine off Russian energy.

Republican representative and Ex-Im critic Jeb Hensarling said Friday that the worsening situation in Ukraine, where government forces are fighting pro-Russian separatists, showed Russia was in direct conflict with U.S. interests and said Ex-Im should stop any financing that benefits Russian companies.

Hensarling, who chairs a House committee with jurisdiction over the lender, wants Ex-Im to close down when its charter expires at the end of September. Its prospects for survival remain uncertain as Congress approaches a summer break.

"Ex-Im's continuing — and even increasing — connections with Russian companies, many

of them run by [President] Vladimir Putin's cronies, has got to stop and stop immediately," he wrote in a letter to U.S. President Barack Obama.

In 2013, Ex-Im authorized $630 million for deals in Russia, mostly loan guarantees. Customers say they need the bank to underwrite credit that commercial lenders avoid.

New Jersey-based nuclear waste specialist Holtec International, however, said it was relying on Ex-Im to guarantee a loan for a storage facility for used nuclear fuel in Ukraine. The project would create about 200 U.S. jobs.

"Without the [Central Spent Fuel Storage Facility], Ukraine is dependent on Russia to keep its nuclear reactors running," Holtec chief nuclear officer Pierre Paul Oneid said. "We are literally at the 11th hour. ... This could not have come at a worse [time]."

Democrat Senator Chris Murphy said legislation to extend Ex-Im bank's charter was unlikely to pass Congress next week, the last before lawmakers return to their districts for the August recess.

It is more likely to come up in September, possibly as part of a temporary move to keep funding the government.

"Short-term reauthorization is a last resort but we will not allow Ex-Im bank legislation to expire. If we have to do a short-term reauthorization, we will get that done," Murphy said on a conference call with reporters.

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