

U.S. Senators Seek Magnitsky Sanctions

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Fourteen U.S. senators have submitted a bipartisan bill that would sanction Russian officials implicated in the death of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in a Moscow jail and others guilty of human rights violations.

"While this bill bears Sergei Magnitsky's name in honor of his sacrifice, the language addresses the overall issue of the erosion of the rule of law and human rights in Russia," Senator Benjamin Cardin, a Democrat, said Thursday when he introduced the legislation in Washington, according to a transcript of his remarks.

The U.S. legislation, whose sponsors include Republican John McCain and independent Joseph Lieberman, would impose a visa ban and asset freeze on the 60 officials implicated in the Magnitsky case. They are from the Federal Security Service, the Interior Ministry, the Prosecutor General's Office, the Federal Tax Service and the Federal Prison Service.

It also targets any Russian officials deemed responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture or other gross human rights violations, with the aim of protecting whistleblowers who expose illegal activity by the government.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich could not immediately be reached for comment Friday.

Investigative Committee head Alexander Bastrykin told Rossiiskaya Gazeta last September that there was "no reason" to believe Magnitsky's death was connected to those prosecuting the criminal case against him.

Magnitsky, a 37-year-old lawyer advising London-based Hermitage Capital, died in November 2009 after almost a year in pretrial detention during which he said he was abused and denied medical treatment to force him to drop fraud allegations against Russian officials.

Hermitage founder Bill Browder was the biggest foreign investor in Russia when authorities stripped him of his visa in 2005, citing national security concerns. He has been campaigning for the prosecution of 60 Russian officials he blames for the death of Magnitsky. Russian authorities plan to charge Browder with tax evasion as a possible step toward requesting his extradition from Britain, the Interior Ministry said last week.

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