

Sanctions Repeal Has Bipartisan Support

By [The Moscow Times](#)

June 12, 2012

The  **Moscow Times**

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan group of four senior U.S. senators Tuesday unveiled a bill to boost trade with Russia by eliminating a Cold War-era provision, and said they would push for approval of a separate bill to address Russian human rights abuses.

"This is an opportunity to double our exports to Russia and create thousands of jobs across every sector of the U.S. economy, all at no cost to the U.S. whatsoever," Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus said in a statement.

Baucus was joined on the bill to establish "permanent normal trade relations" with Russia by Senate Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman John Kerry, a Massachusetts Democrat, and Senator John McCain, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Senator Orrin Hatch, the top Republican on the Finance Committee, was conspicuously absent, but another Republican on the panel, Senator John Thune, attached his name to the legislation.

Russia is expected to enter the Geneva-based World Trade Organization by the end of August. That has put pressure on Congress to establish permanent normal trade relations by removing Russia from a 1974 law known as the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which links trade relations to the rights of Russian Jews to emigrate freely.

If Congress refuses, Russia could, under world trade rules, deny U.S. exporters some of the market-opening concessions it made to join the WTO.

Business Roundtable, a business group made up of corporate chief executives, said Tuesday that it had launched a campaign aimed at winning approval of permanent normal trade relations before the August congressional recess.

Many members of Congress are reluctant to remove Russia from the old human rights legislation without passing a new law to address current human rights concerns.

"The extension of permanent normal trade relations status and the repeal of the Jackson-Vanik amendment for Russia must be accompanied by passage of the Magnitsky Act," McCain said, referring to legislation already approved by the House of Representatives Foreign Relations Committee that would penalize Russian officials for human rights abuses.

"I appreciate Senator Baucus' written commitment that he will work for Senate passage of both of these pieces of legislation as soon as possible this year. As we take steps to liberalize U.S. trade with Russia, as we should, we must also maintain our long-standing support for human rights and the fight against corruption in Russia," McCain said.

U.S. Commerce Secretary John Bryson informed President Barack Obama on Monday that he was taking medical leave after suffering a seizure connected to two traffic accidents in the Los Angeles area over the weekend, the Associated Press reported.

Bryson, who was expected to attend the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, did not specify how long he would remain on leave but said he would not perform the functions of the office "during the period of my illness."

Officials said the 68-year-old former utility executive was not on government business at the time of the accidents. He took a Breathalyzer test that didn't detect any alcohol.

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