

U.S. Official Urges Russia Trade Bill Passage

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk urged lawmakers to approve long-delayed legislation to upgrade trade relations with Russia when they return after the Nov. 6 U.S. elections.

It is critical that lawmakers pass the legislation to ensure U.S. companies share in the full market-opening benefits of Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization, he said in a speech at a services industry conference.

"We hope that when [lawmakers return after the Nov. 6 election], as many issues as there are going to be on the table, Congress will move immediately to ... grant Russia permanent normal trade relation status," Kirk said late Wednesday.

The country joined the WTO in August, after nearly 18 years of on-and-off negotiations.

But U.S. action on a bill to grant Russia "permanent normal trade relations" by lifting a Cold War trade provision known as the Jackson-Vanik amendment has been repeatedly delayed this year because of concern over Moscow's record on human rights and its support for governments in Iran and Syria.

Despite that, business groups say there is widespread bipartisan support for the bill because most lawmakers recognize U.S. companies stand to lose the most if the bill is not approved.

"This is a critically important jobs bill and we urge congressional leaders to make passage of [permanent normal trade relations] a top priority after the election to ensure it is approved by the end of the year," Thomas Donohue, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said in a statement.

"More than 150 countries are now seizing the full benefits of Russia's accession to the WTO, but the United States is not among them," Donohue said.

The 1974 Jackson-Vanik amendment tied the most favorable U.S. tariff rates to the rights of Jews in the former Soviet Union to emigrate freely. Russia has been in compliance with Jackson-Vanik for nearly two decades. But the measure remains on the books, at odds with WTO rules that members provide each other normal trade relations on an unconditional basis.

Lawmakers are expected to attach legislation to the bill that would direct the executive branch to impose sanctions on individual human rights abusers in Russia and potentially other countries around the world.

Moscow opposes that new legislation, known as the Magnitsky bill after an anti-corruption lawyer who died in jail.

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