

Senate votes in favor of B-2 bomber production

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate voted 51-48 Wednesday night to continue production of the B-2 stealth bomber, despite fresh questions about its ability to evade enemy radar.

The vote came on a move to halt production of the bat-wing aircraft after the 15 already authorized by Congress, an action that would have scuttled the Bush administration's plan to spend \$3.2 billion next year to buy four B-2 planes.

The roll call was the first in an expected series of challenges to the Bush administration's plans to continue production of several weapons designed to confront the Soviets, including the Strategic Defense Initiative anti-missile system.

Vice President Dan Quayle presided over the vote on the B-2, in case administration forces needed him to break a tie. Just eight weeks ago the Senate voted by a

Close vote follows disclosure of plane's detection by radar

wider margin, 57-42, to defeat an attempt to kill the B-2 program.

The future of the B-2 has come increasingly into question since the disclosure earlier this month by the Air Force that a July 26 flight test indicated the plane was more easily detected by radar than originally expected. The Air Force says the problem can be overcome, but critics have expressed doubt.

Sen. Jim Sasser, D-Tenn., was chief sponsor of the defeated amendment. He also was pressing a related amendment to the 1992 defense appropriations bill that would limit spending on the Star Wars anti-missile system to \$3.5 billion next year.

The appropriations bill includes \$4.6 billion for Star Wars, or \$600 million less than requested by the administration.

The main subject of debate was whether to provide the \$3.2 billion that Bush wants to buy four B-2 bombers. The president has said he would veto the defense bill if it does not provide money for the planes. The bill as approved by the Appropriations Committee last week included the \$3.2 billion but said it could not be spent until a separate vote was taken by Congress next year.

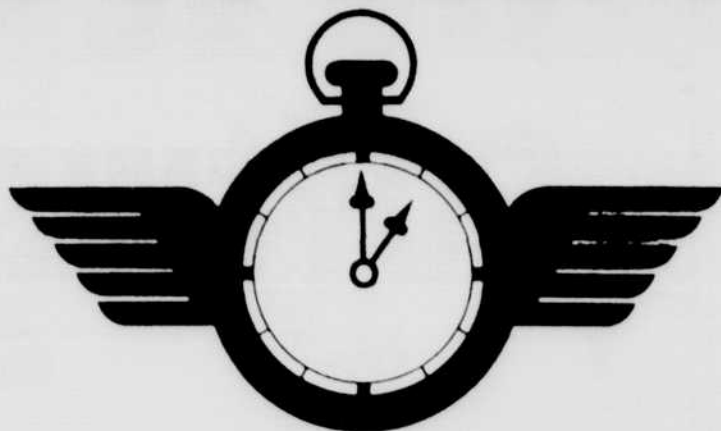
In its version of the defense spending bill passed earlier this year, the House provided no money for B-2 purchases. The Air Force wants eventually to buy 75 B-2s. Only three have been built; they are being used for flight tests.

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Chinese sighted drift-netting; Packwood livid

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chinese vessels were sighted fishing illegally with drift nets in the north Pacific Ocean last week, despite a pledge this summer to halt the practice, Sen. Bob Packwood said Wednesday.

"The Chinese are back drift-netting again. I am livid," the Oregon Republican said in an interview.

Controversy over use of drift nets has intensified recently because the so-called "curtains of death" can stretch for as much as 30 miles across the ocean, killing all fish, marine mammals and fish in their path.

The United States has moved to bar imports of fish harvested with drift nets and related fish products.

The Chinese government said in a telegram to the U.S. Embassy in Beijing in July that it had ordered an end to the use of drift nets because of growing international opposition.

Packwood aide Jill Lockett said the National Marine Fisheries Service confirmed Wednesday that a joint flight of U.S. and Canadian officials observed 16 Chinese drift-net fleets in illegal waters on Sept. 18 and 20.

"They documented 16 (Chinese) drift-net vessels actively fishing 300 miles north of the open area in the North Pacific," she said.

National Marine Fisheries officials could not be reached for direct comment. Spokesman Roddy Moscoso did not immediately return telephone calls.

Packwood is the sponsor of a bill the Senate has approved that would mandate U.S. trade sanctions against countries that continue to fish with drift nets after next summer.

"If this an example of their promising to quit, we are in trouble," Packwood said.

The Bush administration put Taiwan and South Korea on notice last month that they will face trade sanctions if they continue to fish illegally with the nets. The Taiwanese government has since announced it will comply and halt use of the nets on July 1, 1992.

The administration announced last week it will urge the United Nations to permanently ban international drift-net fishing, closing loopholes in a previous UN resolution allowing some continued use of the nets.