

# Legislation approved to curb Syria's sales, suspected terrorists

The House International Relations Committee voted overwhelmingly in favor of the Syria Accountability Act

By Frank Davies  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — In a sign of growing U.S. pressure on Syria to stop supporting terrorist groups, a key committee in the House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved legislation on Wednesday that would impose sanctions on that country.

The House International Relations Committee voted 33-2 in favor of the Syria Accountability Act, and Majority Leader Tom DeLay said the full House could approve it next week.

The measure has more than 280 co-sponsors in the House, easily a majority, and 76 of the 100 senators back it. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold a hearing on Syria later this month, a spokesman said.

Until this week, the Bush administration had opposed the measure, calling it a congressional intrusion into foreign policy that could "tie the hands" of U.S. officials.

But White House spokesman Scott McClellan said on Wednesday that the administration no longer opposed the bill: "Syria is on the wrong side in the war on terrorism. Syria needs to change course, change its behavior and stop harboring terrorists."

President Bush and other officials also have declined to condemn an Israeli air attack on an alleged terrorist training camp in Syria, instead supporting Israel's right to defend itself against terrorism.

The bill prohibits the sale of weapons and weapons-related tech-

nology to Syria and mandates that the administration impose at least two of a menu of six trade and diplomatic sanctions on Syria if it doesn't stop harboring terrorist groups, occupying parts of Lebanon and failing to stop guerrillas from crossing its border into Iraq to attack U.S. forces.

"The time has come to hold Syria accountable for its actions," said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., a primary sponsor of the bill.

Rep. Robert Wexler, a Florida Democrat who visited Damascus four months ago, said he warned Syrian President Bashar Assad that Congress would act if Syria didn't change.

"This legislation will be a psychological blow to Assad. For the first time he will not be in control of the situation, and he will feel a real consequence for their failures," Wexler said.

DeLay negotiated a deal with the White House over the bill's language. The administration has shown increasing impatience with Syria, capped when Bush refused to criticize Israel's airstrike on Sunday in retaliation for a suicide bombing on Saturday by the Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad that killed 19 Israelis.

Other allegations also have been made against Syria. L. Paul Bremer, the U.S. administrator in Iraq, told Congress recently that about half the 278 foreign fighters who have been captured in Iraq were from Syria or held Syrian papers. U.S. Air Force prosecutors have charged a translator, Senior Airman Ahmad al Halabi, with espionage, accusing the naturalized U.S. citizen of collecting secrets from detainees at the Guantanamo prison camp and passing them to his native Syria.

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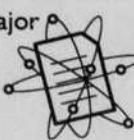
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HEROIN	SPIGOT	
EVENT	SPAREPART	
LIP	SHARP	NOR
PLENITUDE	CACAO	
REMOTE	COMEDY	
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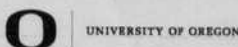
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