

House decisively passes new Russia sanctions bill curbing Trump's power

WASHINGTON (AP) — Eager to punish Russia for meddling in the 2016 election, the House on Tuesday overwhelmingly backed a new package of sanctions against Moscow that prohibits President Donald Trump from waiving the penalties without first getting permission from Congress.

Lawmakers passed the legislation, 419-3, clearing the far-reaching measure for action by the Senate. If senators move quickly, the bill could be ready for Trump's signature before Congress exits Washington for its regular August recess. The Senate, like the House, is expected to pass the legislation by a veto-proof margin. The bill also slaps Iran and North Korea with sanctions.

The 184-page measure serves as a rebuke of the Kremlin's military aggression in Ukraine and Syria, where Russian President Vladimir Putin has backed President Bashar Assad. It aims to hit Putin and the

oligarchs close to him by targeting Russian corruption, human rights abusers, and crucial sectors of the Russian economy, including weapons sales and energy exports.

"It is well past time that we forcibly respond," said Rep. Ed Royce, R-Calif., chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Trump hasn't threatened to reject the bill even though Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and other senior administration officials had objected to a mandated congressional review should the president attempt to ease or lift the sanctions on Russia. They've argued it would infringe on the president's executive authority and tie his hands as he explores avenues of communication and cooperation between the two former Cold War foes.

But Trump's persistent overtures to Russia are what pushed lawmakers to include the sanctions review. Many lawmakers view Russia as the nation's top strategic adversary and believe more

sanctions, not less, put the U.S. in a position of strength in any negotiations with Moscow.

Trump's "rhetoric toward the Russians has been far too accommodating and conciliatory, up to this point," said Rep. Charlie Dent, R-Pa.

"Russian behavior has been atrocious," Dent said. "They deserve these enhanced sanctions. Relations with Russia will improve when Russian behavior changes and they start to fall back into the family of nations."

Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., said Congress "is uncomfortable with any rapprochement with Moscow without getting some things for it." But he said the legislation isn't intended to be a message to Trump.

"We're sending a message to Moscow," Kinzinger said. "But if the president had any intention of trying to give Vladimir Putin what he wants on certain areas, I think he'll think twice about it."

U.S. Navy fires warning shots near Iran ship in Persian Gulf

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A U.S. Navy patrol boat fired warning shots Tuesday near an Iranian vessel that American sailors said came dangerously close to them during a tense encounter in the Persian Gulf, the first such incident to happen under President Donald Trump. Iran's hard-line Revolutionary Guard later blamed the American ship for provoking the situation.

The encounter involving the USS Thunderbolt, a Cyclone-class patrol ship based in Bahrain as part of the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, is the latest confrontation between Iranian vessels and American warships. It comes as Trump already has threatened to renegotiate the nuclear deal struck by his predecessor and after his administration previously put Iran "on notice" over its ballistic missile tests.

The Thunderbolt was taking part in an exercise with American and other coalition vessels in international

waters when the Iranian patrol boat approached it, 5th Fleet spokesman Lt. Ian McConaughy said. The Iranian ship did not respond to radio calls, flares and horn blasts as it came within 150 yards (137 meters) of the Thunderbolt, forcing the U.S. sailors aboard to fire the warning shots, McConaughy said.

"After the warning shots were fired, the Iranian vessel halted its unsafe approach," the lieutenant said in a statement, adding that the Iranian vessel created "a risk for collision." Large ships can't stop immediately on the water, meaning getting close to each other risks a collision.

Video released by the Navy included a sailor giving a position off the eastern coast of Kuwait as the Iranian vessel sat directly in front of an American warship's bow. Another video included images of the Iranian ship off the Thunderbolt as its horn blared. The sound of machine gun fire followed.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard instead blamed the Thunderbolt for the incident in a statement, saying the American vessel moved toward one of its patrol boats. It said the Thunderbolt fired into the air "with the intention to provoke and create fear."

Iran and the U.S. frequently have tense naval encounters in the Persian Gulf, nearly all involving the Revolutionary Guard, a separate force from Iran's military that answers only to the country's supreme leader. The last one to involve warning shots happened in January near the end of then-President Barack Obama's term, when the USS Mahan fired shots toward Iranian fast attack boats as they neared the destroyer in the Strait of Hormuz.

The U.S. Navy recorded 35 instances of what it describes as "unsafe and/or unprofessional" interactions with Iranian forces in 2016, compared to 23 in 2015.

IRS sees big drop in identity theft, stolen tax refunds

WASHINGTON (AP) — The IRS is seeing a big drop in the number of identity theft victims after the agency teamed up with tax preparers to fight the problem, IRS Commissioner John Koskinen said Tuesday.

The number of victims was nearly cut in half last year, compared to the previous year. At the same time, he said, more businesses are being targeted.

In 2015, thieves stole the identities of nearly 700,000 victims. Last year, the number dropped to 377,000. Koskinen said the IRS identified 107,000 identity theft victims in the first five months of this year.

Thieves use stolen identities to try to obtain fraudulent tax refunds. They get the refunds by obtaining private information about

victims — Social Security numbers, birth dates and income data — and using it to file fraudulent tax returns in their name.

Victims then have to go through a sometimes lengthy process to get their legitimate tax refund.

The IRS is a popular target for sophisticated identity thieves because the agency issues more than \$300 billion in tax refunds each year. Several years ago, the IRS started teaming up with the major tax preparers to crack down on the problem.

The IRS has updated its computer filters to identify more fraudulent tax returns while tax preparers have stepped up their security.

"They are having more trouble getting past our security protections in our

tax processing systems, so they are increasingly taking aim at the places where large amounts of taxpayer data reside," Koskinen said.

"That means trying to access data belonging to tax return preparers and other tax professionals, as well as the payroll community, small employers and human resources departments," Koskinen said.

One play involves thieves emailing workers in the payroll department of a large employer, masquerading as a supervisor seeking W-2 information about other workers.

The payroll worker thinks they are emailing the information to the company CEO, but "instead of going to the CEO it goes to someone in Belarus," Koskinen said.

NKorea's missile program farther along than believed

WASHINGTON (AP) — Intelligence officials believe North Korea will have a reliable, intercontinental missile capable of carrying a nuclear weapon as early as next year, according to a report published Tuesday amid a warning from a top Republican lawmaker who says he has grown increasingly alarmed about Pyongyang's weapons program.

The Washington Post reported that a new confidential assessment by the Defense Intelligence Agency trims two years off the timeline for when North Korea could strike North American cities with atomic weapons. The assessment was triggered by recent North Korean missile tests that indicated the nation's program was further along than expected.

The newspaper said that U.S. officials who had seen the assessment said it concluded that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will be able to produce a "reliable, nuclear-capable ICBM" program by sometime next year, allowing the program to move from prototype to assembly line.

The House Armed Services Committee held a classified briefing for all members of the chamber on Tuesday to discuss North Korea's intercontinental ballistic missile development. The briefing team included Rob Soofer, deputy assistant secretary of defense for nuclear and missile defense policy; Air Force Lt. Gen. Samuel Greaves, director of the Missile Defense Agency; and representatives from the DIA and the National Air and

Space Intelligence Center.

"The apparent success of the July Fourth test is an alarming development as North Korea accelerates its pursuit of being able to hold the United States at risk with nuclear weapons," Committee Chairman Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, said after the classified briefing, "I have grown increasingly alarmed that North Korea is acting with a greater sense of urgency than we are."

North Korea raised the stakes with its launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile as Americans celebrated Independence Day on July 4. The test marked a significant step toward North Korea's goal of developing a missile with a nuclear warhead capable of reaching the United States

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON & EVENING

Table with 24 columns (12 PM to 11:30 PM) and 10 rows of TV channels (FOX, CBS, NBC, ABC, PBS) listing programs like 'Paid Program', 'The Talk', 'The Doctors', 'The Wendy Williams Show', etc.

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Large grid table with 24 columns (12 PM to 11:30 PM) and 40 rows of TV channels (A&E, AMC, ANPL, CMT, CNBC, CNN, DISC, DISN, ESPN, ESPN2, FOC, FOND, FREE, FOX, GOL, GSN, HALL, HGTV, HIST, LIFE, NICK, ROOT, SPIKE, SYFY, TBS, TCM, TLC, TNT, UNI, USA, WE, WGN, HBO, HBO2, HBO3, MAX, SHOW, STARZ, STZENC) listing various programs and events.

WEDNESDAY LATE NIGHT & THURSDAY MORNING

Table with 24 columns (12 AM to 11:30 AM) and 10 rows of TV channels (FOX, CBS, NBC, ABC, PBS) listing late night and morning programs like 'Friends', 'The Tonight Show', 'The Daily Show', etc.