

Senate Announces Move to Pass Iran Sanctions Upon Return

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Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid announced today he is “committed” to bringing critical Iran sanctions legislation for a vote after the Senate returns in January.

Signaling the importance of the Iran sanctions bill, Reid made the striking announcement on the Senate floor minutes after the chamber’s passage of the health care bill.

“This important piece of legislation... would impose new sanctions on Iran’s refined petroleum sector and tighten existing US sanctions in an effort to create new pressure on the Iranian regime and help stop Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon,” Reid said in a colloquy with Sens. Dodd and Kerry. “I want everyone to know that I am committed to getting this legislation to the floor sometime after we return in January.”

The Senate bill (S.2799) is cosponsored by Senate Banking Committee Chairman Chris Dodd and Ranking Member Richard Shelby. It includes the Senate version of the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act (S.908) introduced by Sens. Bayh, Lieberman and Kyl, cosponsored by 76 Senators and passed by the House 412-12, as well as the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act (S.1065), overwhelmingly passed by the House in October by a vote of 414 to 6. The Dodd-Shelby bill also contains important provisions clamping down on sanctions-busting activity known as transshipment.

Chairman Dodd, the bill’s sponsor, thanked the majority leader for his effort in trying to move this legislation forward, saying the goal “is to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability “ and that “it is now clearer than ever that tougher sanctions must be a key element of our comprehensive Iran strategy going forward.”

“This comprehensive sanctions legislation would arm the Administration with critical tools to apply additional pressure on the Iranian regime and disrupt its proliferation and terrorist activities at a pivotal time—a time when Iran’s leaders continue to flaunt the will of the international community, trample on the rights of its own people, and threaten the national interests of the U.S. and our strongest allies, including Israel,” Dodd said.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry, also speaking on the floor, urged that the legislation “be considered as soon as possible when we get back.”

This is a matter of great urgency. AIPAC strongly applauds Senator Reid’s commitment and that of the bill’s 76 cosponsors to passing this critical legislation without delay. Iran’s possession of a nuclear weapons capability would be a devastating blow to America’s national security interests. The United States and our allies must do everything we can to use crippling diplomatic and economic pressure to peaceably prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and avoid confronting more distressing alternatives.

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Senator Reid, Senator Dodd and Senator Kerry
Colloquy on
S. 2799, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2009

Senator Reid: I want to speak today about S.2799, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2009. This important piece of legislation, which combines legislation written by Senator Dodd with legislation introduced by Senator Bayh, Lieberman and Kyl, was passed by the Banking Committee earlier this month. It would impose new sanctions on Iran's refined petroleum sector and tighten existing US sanctions in an effort to create new pressure on the Iranian regime and help stop Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

I know that Senator Kerry, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, has been working hard, along with other colleagues, to get a UC agreement so we can get this legislation passed. I understand that we are making good progress towards reaching that goal.

As we move forward with these negotiations, I want everyone to know that I am committed to getting this legislation to the floor sometime after we return in January.

Senator Dodd: I thank the Majority Leader for all of his help in trying to move this legislation forward. This comprehensive sanctions legislation would arm the Administration with critical tools to apply additional pressure on the Iranian regime and disrupt its proliferation and terrorist activities at a pivotal time—a time when Iran's leaders continue to flaunt the will of the international community, trample on the rights of its own people, and threaten the national interests of the U.S. and our strongest allies, including Israel.

It is now clearer than ever that tougher sanctions must be a key element of our comprehensive Iran strategy going forward. My primary goal with this bill is to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability. That's why this measure passed the Senate Banking Committee unanimously in October, and I had hoped that we would be able to consider it in the Senate and move toward a conference with the House before we went out for the holidays. While I would have strongly preferred that, I recognize that given the delays on health care reform, we will not now have time to do that. I am also aware that the administration continues to have some concerns about how to create incentives in the bill for countries to cooperate more closely with US efforts to impose tough new multilateral sanctions. I believe we have made some progress in our discussions of recent days, and I am grateful that the Majority Leader has indicated his willingness to move forward on the bill as soon as possible after we return.

Senator Kerry: I appreciate Senator Reid's commitment to move forward with this legislation and his support of the progress we are making towards a UC agreement. We all share the goal of creating maximum leverage in our efforts to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon – this is a vital national security goal of the United States, and obviously of critical importance to our allies in Israel and around the world.

I believe that this legislation has the potential to make an important contribution to that effort. Having the Senate stand united with the Administration behind this legislation would send a

very strong and positive signal. That's why many of us are committed to working with the administration and the bill's sponsors to craft an amendment that all can agree on. I know these discussions will be continuing during recess with the intention of reaching a mutually agreeable resolution so that this legislation can be considered as soon as possible when we get back.
Thank you.