

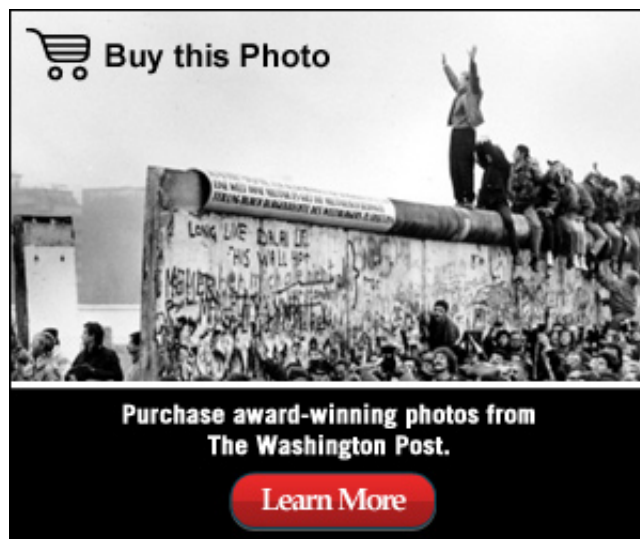
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[Back to previous page](#)

Russia chafes as House passes Magnitsky Act

By [Will Englund](#), Published: November 16

MOSCOW — Russia [kept up its criticism](#) of a measure approved by the U.S. House of Representatives on Friday that would impose sanctions on Russians deemed to have violated human rights. The legislation, known as the Magnitsky Act, was added to a bill granting Russia permanent normal trade status.



“I can confirm that our response will be tough, but not necessarily symmetrical,” Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Friday before the House acted, in comments reported by the Interfax news agency.

“Owing to certain sentiments that prevail in the U.S., including on Capitol Hill, our relations with the U.S. seriously lack what we call three basic principles — mutual respect, equal rights and noninterference in internal affairs,” Ryabkov said.

The bill, which the House approved 365 to 43 and which now [goes to the Senate](#), did accomplish a goal that Russia has long sought. It repeals the Cold War-era Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which tied trade relations to the free immigration of persecuted religious minorities, principally Jews. Since the fall of the Soviet Union more than 20 years ago, Russia has had no exit restrictions, and the amendment has been a source of constant irritation here.

Congress finally moved to repeal it after Russia [joined the World Trade Organization](#) this summer. Jackson-Vanik, under WTO rules, put American exporters at a disadvantage.

But the Magnitsky Act was tied to it. It requires the United States to place financial and visa restrictions on a list of officials associated with the torture and death, three years ago Friday, of Sergei Magnitsky, a whistleblower who uncovered a \$230 million tax refund fraud. Russian officials have denounced the act as interference in domestic affairs.

White House officials told the act’s supporters that the administration would prefer to handle sanctions by way of executive action, not legislation, but support for the bill has been widespread and bipartisan.

“We will signal that corrupt thugs who attack whistleblowers and human rights activists will be held to account in America, if not Russia,” said Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.).

“We must hold Magnitsky’s killers accountable,” said Rep. Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.), who also denounced

Russia's prosecution this summer of the [female punk band Pussy Riot](#) after it took over a cathedral altar last February and sang a song against Vladimir Putin. Two members of the band have since been sentenced to two years in a penal colony, following a trial that Cohen called "little more than a farce."

He called on the band's persecutors to be added to the list of sanctioned Russian officials.

"These are exactly the sorts of victims contemplated in this legislation," he said.

Russian human rights activists support the bill. Lev Ponomaryov, leader of the For Human Rights group, told Interfax it is "a step in the right direction." Putin, who was elected president in March, met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Friday, and she also brought up human rights issues in their talks.

Most of the debate on the House floor Friday was devoted to the advantages to American business if Jackson-Vanik is repealed. Rep. Richard E. Neal (D-Mass.) said U.S. exports to Russia, now worth about \$11 billion a year, could "double or triple."

Several lawmakers emphasized that Russia's accession to the WTO gives the United States and other countries an opportunity to try to ensure that Moscow follows international trade rules.

"Clearly, part of Russia's economy is little better than a kleptocracy," said Rep. James P. Moran (D-Va.). Both parts of the bill — the Jackson-Vanik repeal and the Magnitsky sanctions — would help to nudge Russia in the right direction, he said.

The bill approved Friday also grants permanent normal trade status to Moldova, the one other former Soviet republic still covered by the Jackson-Vanik provision.

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