

Senators propose tougher U.S. trade enforcement

Reuters

August 1, 2007

WASHINGTON - A pair of senior senators unveiled legislation on Wednesday to give Congress a stronger role in the enforcement of U.S. trade laws and to create a new administration position focused on bringing trade cases.

The bill crafted by Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, a Montana Democrat, and Sen. Orrin Hatch, a Utah Republican, directs the U.S. Trade Representative's office to compile an annual list of the most serious foreign trade barriers and then take action to resolve them.

The legislation reflects anxiety over the huge U.S. trade deficit and the belief the U.S. manufacturing sector has lost jobs because other countries don't play by the rules.

A key provision allows either the Finance Committee or the House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee to require USTR to target a specific foreign practice in its report.

The bill also creates a chief enforcement officer to investigate and prosecute trade cases against other countries and authorizes \$5 million annually for enforcement actions. Another section establishes a commission of retired judges and trade law experts to review adverse World Trade Organization decisions against the United States.

That measure, reflecting concern about a number of WTO rulings against U.S. anti-dumping laws, would bar the White House from changing any regulation to comply with WTO decisions until Congress receives the commission's report.

The bill would also make it harder for the White House to deny import relief for U.S. manufacturers under a special anti-surge "safeguard" provision that China accepted when it joined the WTO in December 2001.

President George W. Bush has angered many lawmakers by denying that relief in a number of cases.