

US-Bahrain free trade pact approval unlikely soon

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Washington, DC, Sep. 20 (UPI) -- The Bush administration is unlikely to push for congressional approval of a U.S.-Bahrain free trade agreement this year due to lawmaker concerns.

Congress Daily reported Monday that the move comes following the less than enthusiastic reception the bilateral trade deal has received from key members.

Senate Finance ranking member Max Baucus, D-Mont., has written U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick that while he supports the trade deal, quick movement on it this year would mean bypassing meaningful congressional oversight.

House Ways and Means Chairman Bill Thomas, R-Calif., also reportedly had problems with U.S. officials negotiating with Bahrain in the first place.

Currently, neither the House Ways and Means, nor the Senate Finance committees have scheduled hearings to examine the deal, which given the short time frame left in the legislative year means approval is not likely anytime soon.

Signed last week, the deal would make all consumer and industrial product traded and 81 percent of U.S. agricultural exports duty free.

Last year, the two countries did nearly \$900 million in two-way trade, with U.S. exports making up more than \$500 million of the total.