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(H.R. 525/S. 406)

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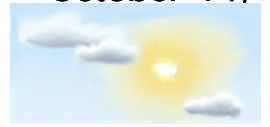


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October 14,



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Anti-Semitism office planned at State Department

By Nicholas Kralev
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

President Bush plans to sign a bill passed by both houses of Congress that would establish a State Department office to monitor anti-Semitism around the world, despite the department's strong objection, administration officials said yesterday.

"The bill is expected to arrive at the White House on Thursday and the president intends to sign it," one official said.

The House and Senate, acting shortly before the Nov. 2 election, passed the Global Anti-Semitism Awareness Act late last week.

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"It's more of a bureaucratic nuisance than a real problem. We are not going to fight a bill that has gained such political momentum," a State Department official said.

Establishing an anti-Semitism monitoring office and producing an annual report would duplicate work by other offices in charge of monitoring human rights and religious freedom, officials say.

"We opposed creation of a separate office for the purpose and opposed the mandating of a separate annual report," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher told reporters.

"We expressed the view that separate reports on different religions or ethnicities were not warranted, given that we already prepare human rights reports and religious freedom reports on 190 countries," he said.

The legislation was introduced by Rep. Tom Lantos, California Democrat and the only Holocaust survivor in Congress, in response to the rising tide of anti-Semitism in Europe and the Middle East.

It requires the State Department to document acts of physical violence against Jews, their property, cemeteries and places of worship abroad, as well as government responses to such acts.

"We did support a bill that was introduced in the Senate by Senator George Voinovich [Ohio Republican], which only required a one-time report and didn't establish a new office for this purpose," Mr. Boucher said.

He noted that the State Department has been "very active against anti-Semitism," and that Secretary of State Colin L. Powell has either personally attended or sent representatives to various conferences on the subject.

"We've put years of efforts into these issues - Holocaust issues, religious freedom issues - and we feel that anti-Semitism is one of the important priorities that we have sustained," Mr. Boucher said.

Some Jewish groups have criticized the State Department for opposing Mr. Lantos' bill.

The Anti-Defamation League, a 91-year-old private organization that combats racism, including anti-Semitism, supported Mr. Lantos' bill for providing "an additional tool for the United States to continue its leadership effort to hold governments accountable for past failures and to encourage and note progress."

Last month, more than 100 prominent Americans sent a letter to Mr. Powell endorsing the measure. "The fight against anti-Semitism deserves specific, focused attention," said the letter signed by Jeane Kirkpatrick, President Reagan's ambassador to the United Nations, former Republican Rep. Jack Kemp and others.

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