

# Senate Passes Myanmar Sanctions Bill

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WASHINGTON -- The Senate passed legislation Wednesday to tighten sanctions against the ruling junta in Myanmar by banning the importation of that country's rubies and high-quality jade.

The bill aims to bring more pressure against the junta to restore democratic civilian government in Myanmar, also called Burma. U.S. officials say Myanmar has been evading earlier gem-targeting sanctions by laundering the stones in third countries before they are shipped to the United States.

Democratic Sen. Joe Biden, a sponsor of the bipartisan legislation and a long-shot candidate for president, said in a statement: "The message to the people of Burma today is clear: the United States stands with you as you seek a peaceful, negotiated transition to democratic civilian rule."

The House already passed its version of the bill but must act again on the Senate-passed version to approve minor differences.

President Bush is eager to sign the bill, which will extend and harden sanctions Congress first passed in 2003. Bush's wife, Laura, has emerged in recent months as a strong proponent of democratization in the Southeast Asian country.

Myanmar has been under military rule since 1962. The current junta took power in 1988 after brutally crushing pro-democracy demonstrations at a cost of an estimated 3,000 lives. Its soldiers similarly put down democracy demonstrations led by Buddhist monks in September. Human rights observers put the death toll among demonstrators in the hundreds.

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