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ATFP Welcomes Reports Congress on Track to Release All US Aid to the PA

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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The American Task Force on Palestine today warmly welcomed reports that following a year of holds and delays, Congress appears to be preparing to release all outstanding US aid, totaling more than \$500 million, to the Palestinian Authority. This aid is essential for the PA budget, to meet the payroll for public employees, fund crucial institution-building programs and finance the PA security services. ATFP thanks the Obama administration and leaders in Congress for taking the initiative to release this vital assistance to the Palestinian people.

Below please find more details of the impending release in a CQ Roll Call report by journalist Emily Cadei.

CQ NEWS – POLICY Feb. 14, 2013 – 6:23 a.m.

Dropping Holds, Lawmakers Clear Path for Palestinian Aid

By Emily Cadei, CQ Roll Call

After a year of resistance, Congress appears on track to release all U.S. foreign assistance to

the Palestinian government in the West Bank, which is struggling to maintain stability amid an economic crisis.

The State Department notified lawmakers in recent weeks that it wants to send more than a half-billion dollars, almost entirely economic aid, to the Palestinian Authority. In the last Congress, two House Republicans — Kay Granger of Texas, the chairwoman of the Appropriations subcommittee that funds the State Department and foreign aid, and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida, the then-chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee — put holds on the majority of those funds, which were from fiscal 2012.

But given worsening conditions in the West Bank and the prospect for a new push on Middle East peace talks, Granger decided not to renew her holds this Congress, an aide confirmed. And Ros-Lehtinen's successor on Foreign Affairs, Ed Royce, R-Calif., indicated Wednesday that while he has concerns about some Palestinian Authority behavior, he is inclined to let the money out the door, with certain conditions attached.

“There are television and radio programs run out of the West Bank that actively encourage prejudice and hate and incite violence, and they're run by the Palestinian Authority. There are also textbooks that incite violence” against Jews and Israel, Royce said. Instead of holding up aid funds, however, he has been in talks with the State Department about conditioning all U.S. assistance to the West Bank on Palestinian efforts to stamp out anti-Semitic activity. That would fall along the lines of a 2012 bill Royce introduced with California Rep. Howard L. Berman, the since-retired ranking Democrat of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

“We tie it to the package in a way that allows the State Department to utilize this as a tool in order to end the incitement,” Royce said in an interview. “I would like to see some effort, some serious effort on the part of the Palestinian Authority to cease supporting this type of counterproductive activity because it makes reconciliation all the more difficult and creates conditions which are conducive to violence.”

At issue is more than \$500 million in assistance to the Palestinians Authority for fiscal 2012 and 2013. In its notification to Capitol Hill, the State Department indicated it wants to deliver \$495 million to fund economic aid programs and another \$200 million in direct budgetary support for the West Bank government. Another \$100 million for security and law enforcement programs had already been released, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said Monday.

“We are continuing to work with the Congress to get appropriated money released for the Palestinian Authority, because we think it’s very, very important that they remain effective in supporting the needs of the Palestinian people,” she told reporters.

There is a growing sense of urgency about the funding, given rising unemployment and general restiveness in the territory, which is largely dependent on international donors to support government functions and pay its employees.

In that regard, Israel’s decision late last month to transfer tax revenue to the Palestinian Authority — after threatening to withhold it in response to the Palestinians’ successful push to upgrade its status at the United Nations in December — was a particularly important signal.

“The Palestinian Authority is about to collapse financially, and that’s the last thing Bibi wants,” said a Democratic House aide with knowledge of the matter, referring to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Both President Barack Obama and newly installed Secretary of State John Kerry are slated to travel to the region in the coming months to discuss efforts to restart the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel and the West have incentives to prop up the moderate government in the West Bank, which has indicated at least some interest in reaching a peace agreement, as opposed to the militant Hamas-led government in the Palestinian territory of Gaza. Israel and the United States both label Hamas a terrorist organization.

“This is a matter of stability,” agreed a Republican House aide involved in deliberations on the release of aid. “If the Palestinian Authority is not in a stable economic situation, then they’re less inclined to come back to the negotiating table.”

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