

Clinton, Hill Agree On Cuba Sanctions

Measure May Be Enacted Next Week

By Helen Dewar

Washington Post Staff Writer

President Clinton and congressional negotiators yesterday struck a deal on legislation to stiffen sanctions against Cuba, assuring the bill's swift enactment as a bipartisan act of retaliation for Cuba's downing of two civilian aircraft off its coast last weekend.

The bill was overwhelmingly approved by a House-Senate conference and put on a fast track for passage after a compromise was worked out on a critical provision aimed at punishing foreign companies that profit from property expropriated by Cuban President Fidel Castro's regime over the past 36 years.

Final passage could come as early as next week.

"Farewell Fidel, that's the message of this bill," said Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), the bill's chief Senate sponsor, echoing comments of many lawmakers that the tightened sanctions would dry up foreign investment in Cuba and drive Castro from power.

Clinton, who earlier had opposed the measure, "will sign the bill if passed and will encourage members of Congress to support it," White House spokesman Michael McCurry said shortly after the agreement was announced. Another White House official said "we knew we were goners on this legislation" after the planes were shot down but were "pleasantly surprised" by cooperation from Capitol Hill in reaching a compromise.

In announcing U.S. retaliatory moves against Cuba on Monday, Clinton had said he wanted to work with Congress to agree on a bill he could sign. As part of yesterday's compromise, the White House accepted a provision it opposed earlier that would give Cuban Americans and others the right to sue in U.S. courts for compen-

sation from third-country companies that buy, improve or expand property originally expropriated from the exiles by the Cuban government. property

To win Clinton's approval, Republicans and their Democratic congressional allies agreed to allow the president to delay implementation of the provision for unlimited six-month intervals if he determines the delay is "necessary to the national interest" and likely to "expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba." The lawsuits provision was made effective Aug. 1, just as the presidential campaign moves toward its conclusion, making it political-

ly difficult for Clinton to delay implementation.

Clinton also agreed to two other provisions demanded by Republican leaders. One would codify existing executive orders and regulations imposing a trade embargo on Cuba, meaning they could not be lifted or modified without congressional approval. The other would prohibit visas for individuals and family members of individuals who "traffic" in any way in expropriated property after enactment of the legislation, which could include improvements or expansion of existing investments.

The measure would also seek to bar countries from buying Cuban sugar and other products and then reselling them in the United States, cut aid to Russia if Moscow supports an electronic intelligence-gathering facility in Cuba and try to block Cuba from joining international financial institutions. It also calls on the administration to seek an international embargo against Cuba, which was last rejected by the United Nations by 117 to 3 vote.

The sanctions are already stirring opposition among other countries that trade with Cuba, including Canada, and some of the United States' European allies, and opponents of the measure have warned that they could lead to retaliation against U.S. business interests elsewhere. Rep. Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.), one of four Democrats who voted against the bill, argued that it was likely to isolate the Cuban people, precipitate violent upheavals and produce other exodus of refugees to the United States.

The bill's backers argued that the time for caution was over. "We can't retreat because this is disruptive to some of our European allies," argued Sen. Paul Coverdell (R-Ga.). "The United States must stop hiding behind international public opinion and stop wavering. . . ." said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), a Cuban American.

The White House interpreted the waiver provision for lawsuits as giving Clinton enough flexibility to meet his concerns and those of U.S. allies who are upset over the proposal. One official said the visa provisions, while affecting only prospective actions, "will still be a problem with the French and others but they understand the situation we are in." But Canadians and most Europeans do not need visas to enter the United States.

Staff writers Ann Devroy and Anthony Faiola contributed to this report.