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House Agrees To Vote On Ports

Showdown With President Likely

By [Jonathan Weisman](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer

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Efforts by the White House to hold off legislation challenging a Dubai-owned company's acquisition of operations at six major U.S. ports collapsed yesterday when House Republican leaders agreed to allow a vote next week that could kill the deal.

Appropriations Committee Chairman Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.) will attach legislation to block the deal today to a must-pass emergency spending bill funding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A House vote on the measure next week will set up a direct confrontation with President Bush, who sternly vowed to veto any bill delaying or stopping Dubai Ports World's purchase of London-based Peninsular & Oriental Steamship Co.

"Listen, this is a very big political problem," said House Majority Leader John A. Boehner (R-Ohio), explaining that he had to give his rank-and-file members a chance to vote. "There are two things that go on in this town. We do public policy, and we do politics. And you know, most bills at the end of the day, the politics and the policy kind of come together, but not always. And we are into one of these situations where this has become a very hot political potato."

Ron Bonjean, spokesman for House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), said GOP leadership is "endorsing the viewpoint of our members and Chairman Lewis that we do not believe the U.S. should allow a government-owned company to operate American ports."

White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said last night that the administration is "committed to keeping open and sincere lines of communication with Congress." She added, though, that "the president's position is unchanged."

Since the Dubai port issue exploded last month, the Bush administration, GOP leaders and DP World officials have tried to defuse the situation and to buy time to let the issue fade.

In a deal brokered by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), DP World resubmitted its acquisition this week to the administration for a 45-day national security investigation. Frist has said he will hold off any legislation in the Senate until that inquiry is completed, a vow meant to give the administration and the company a chance to present their case.

That agreement appears to have quieted calls in the Senate for immediate action against the deal. Sen. Mel Martinez (R-Fla.), an early critic of the deal, said briefings by port security experts and company officials have eased his concerns. But House Republican aides and Senate Democrats said the Senate will almost certainly have to follow once the House acts.

"This issue is going to go away like the sun's not going to come up in the morning," said Senate Minority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.).



House Republican leaders are trying to block the takeover of operations at six U.S. ports. (By Mike Derer -- Associated Press)

Politics Trivia

Members of the U.S. House of this astrological sign voted against renewal of the Patriot Act more than any other sign:

- Taurus**
- Gemini**
- Sagittarius**
- Cancer**

"There's a lot of politics going on around here," Martinez said.

The House is still boiling. Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), with bipartisan support, introduced legislation yesterday that would scuttle the deal; mandate that the owners of "critical infrastructure" in the United States, including ports, highways and power plants, be American; and demand that cargo entering U.S. ports be screened within six months of passage.

"This is a question at the heart of the security challenges we will be facing in this next century," Hunter said.

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