

Senate Takes a Unanimous Vote That's Heard Around the World

President Obama had said he would likely veto the bill if it were passed by both the House and the Senate, and now Congress has sent him a stunning rebuke.

Tuesday, in a unanimous vote, the U.S. Senate passed the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act. The bipartisan bill holds accountable in U.S. courts foreign sponsors of terrorism that target America by preventing them from invoking "sovereign immunity" in cases involving terrorist attacks on U.S. soil.

The part that had been a sticking point for the Obama administration, as well as George W. Bush's administration, is a provision to allow civil lawsuits to be filed against foreign entities that have aided or abetted terrorists who conduct such attacks. It is largely suspected the 28 classified pages of the 9/11 Commission Report will detail deep connections between the government of Saudi Arabia and the al-Qaida Islamists who committed the 9/11 attacks.

Without the legislation, courts have blocked such civil claims that Congress had always intended to permit, according to Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), who was an original co-sponsor of the bill. The legislation also clarifies the congressional intent to allow cases against foreign entities that raise money for, fund or otherwise assist Islamist operations carried out on American soil.

The Saudi government had threatened to withdraw hundreds of billions of dollars in investment in the U.S. if the legislation were adopted. That prompted the president to say he would veto the bill if it arrived on his desk—but a unanimous vote in the Senate indicates an override of that

veto would be highly likely.