

Vets Group Gives Political Capital to India Nuke Treaty

By Shawn Zeller, CQ Staff

How do you get Congress to approve a nuclear technology treaty with India — a country that has yet to sign the 1970 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons?

Very creatively, it turns out. You begin with a Democratic Indian-American fundraiser who's keen to promote trade between the and the world's most populous democracy, add a former GOP congressional aide now in the grass-roots advocacy business, and then the pièce de résistance: the endorsement of one of the nation's most venerable veterans' groups, the 2.4 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Shortly after the VFW's recruitment to the cause was announced, House members last week voted — by a 5-to-1 ratio — to waive the usual requirement that the United States sell nuclear technology only to countries that have signed the non-proliferation treaty, putting the deal on the fast track to approval.

At the center of the unusual strategy is **Ramesh Kapur**, a Massachusetts businessman who runs the Democratic National Committee's outreach efforts in the Indian-American community. He's been touting the deal since President Bush and Indian Prime Minister **Manmohan Singh** signed it last March.

Kapur had been working with some big-time business supporters of the deal — but he also caught the attention of some detractors, who said he was promoting commercial alliances at the expense of national security interests.

That's where **Jack Bonner** came in. Last spring, Kapur hired Bonner, an advocacy consultant and a onetime aide to the late GOP Sen. **John Heinz** of Pennsylvania . Bonner began talking to vets' groups, arguing that is an important regional ally, a counterweight to and , and would allow monitoring of its civilian nuclear programs.

Bonner soon found an enthusiastic convert in VFW's director of national security and foreign affairs, **Michael Wysong**. "Our stance addresses the national security aspect of the agreement," he says. "We're not at all like the special interests, like the business groups thinking about how much can we sell to."

Kapur concurs — and indeed, insists — the VFW proved critical to winning over the House. "It made the difference because the veterans have no personal interest" in the nuclear treaty, he says. "People can look at me and say, 'Yes, he's Indian, that's why he's doing it.' But they have no axe to grind."