

## EUROPE

# US Senators Appeal to Poland Over Property Restitution Bill

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS MARCH 27, 2018, 7:51 A.M. E.D.T.

WARSAW, Poland — Fifty-nine U.S. senators have called on the Polish prime minister to support legislation that would allow Holocaust victims and their heirs to receive compensation for property that was seized by the Germans during World War II and later nationalized by the Communists.

In a letter signed by more than half of the Senate and released Monday, the lawmakers expressed concern about a restitution bill under discussion in Poland that, in its current form, would require that claimants be Polish citizens and limit compensation to spouses, children or grandchildren.

"This draft legislation would adversely affect Holocaust victims and their heirs and is therefore of urgent importance to many of our constituents, millions of Americans, and Holocaust survivors around the world," the senators wrote in the letter to Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki.

The letter was authored by Tammy Baldwin, a Democrat from Wisconsin, and Marco Rubio, a Republican from Florida.

The restitution of prewar property has proven to be a difficult challenge for Poland, which suffered massive destruction during the war and the changes of its borders in the postwar settlement, followed by the nationalization of property by the Communist regime. Those dispossessed included a swath of prewar Polish citizenry,

among them many of the Jews who perished in the Holocaust or who fled Poland after the war.

Since the fall of communism, multiple efforts to pass a law that would offer restitution or partial compensation to prewar owners have all failed, with lawmakers balking at the high cost.

Without a systematic law there have been individual efforts, some of them successful, to regain properties. But the process has been marred by irregularities and fraud, with rightful heirs sometimes cheated out of their rights and tenants evicted by new owners.

With ownership of some properties unclear, especially in Warsaw, some buildings are falling into dilapidation while some plots cannot be developed.

The Polish draft legislation is an attempt to finally settle the matter.

The World Jewish Restitution Organization said it welcomed the call by the senators. Its chair of operations, Gideon Taylor, said: "With fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors alive today, we call on Poland urgently to address this historic wrong."

The law comes as Poland has also seen its ties with the United States and Israel strained over a recently enacted Polish law that would limit some types of Holocaust speech.