With the Clinton administration about to launch a full-blown effort to win approval of the three-way trade agreement with Mexico and Canada, the senior House Democrat suggested for the first time Thursday that a vote on the pact may not take place until next year.

"We have a responsibility to act and contended it would be an unfortunate abdication of our responsibility and obligations under the Constitution not to do so," said House Majority Leader Richard A. Gephardt, D-Mo., during the morning session of the House debate. A 30-year veteran from St. Louis, Gephardt is the first Democrat to chair the House since its 30th anniversary in 1973.

Administration officials, including Treasury Secretary Robert E. Rubin, announced Wednesday that "We believe that a solution has been reached" on the tax increases proposed by House Speaker Jim Wright, D-Tex., and Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kans., in exchange for ratifications of the 1994 North American Free Trade Act.

Wright and Dole offered to vote on the GATT, or General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, after semana meeting with White House economic adviser Larry Summers.

"There has been no change on the timing or our commitment to NAFTA," Myers said, although she and other administration officials acknowledged there was likely to be some "back burner.

The Senate Thursday approved a policy on homosexuals in the military, formally ending three decades of bitter conflict, after a lengthy and often hostile debate over the issue.

"This policy, developed in the hopes of achieving a fair and just resolution to a controversial issue, will provide a hopeful course for peace," PLO chairman Yasser Arafat declared in a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

"We believe that there is no other Palestinian partner than the PLO," he said. "You should try to make friends. You make peace with very ugly partners only when you have no friends.

The letters, which were released Thursday night, end an era in which both sides hoped for a five-year process to give autonomy over their homeland to 2 million Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It also may clear the way for Israeli-PLO talks for so long, senior officials hoped to complete the signing Thursday night, but time ran out on the globe-spinning, efforts to implement a peace process.

The events of the past several weeks "are an encouraging sign of peaceful coexistence, free from violence and all other acts which endanger peace and stability," PLO chairman Yasser Arafat declared in a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

After twenty-five years of bitter conflict, the United States had "made this decision," Arafat said.

"We renounce violence, all forms of terrorism, against Israelis," said Israel's police force, their own public, and the white people of the world.

"Once Rabin takes his action, a U.S. administration official, who asked to remain anonymous, said, "We've taken a historic one." A senior official, noting that nations in the Middle East, one of the world's most volatile regions, have been accustomed to playing a leading role in the Middle East, one of the world's most volatile regions, noted that nations in the Middle East, one of the world's most volatile regions, have been accustomed to playing a leading role in the Middle East, one of the world's most volatile regions.

The United States announced Thursday that after the signing of the historic accord, it will sign formal diplomatic recognition agreements with the PLO, broke with Israel.

A second agreement may be signed later this year between Jordan and the Gaza Strip.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who had been shuttling between Oslo, Norway, and Tunis, announced that Clinton would take the United States to the Security Council for "formal approval" of the agreement.

The PLO, long committed to committing to a two-state solution, formally recognized the right of Israel to exist "in peace and dignity".

Israel, for the first time, recognized the Palestinians as a national entity, and the PLO as the "representative of the Palestinian people."

The PLO also said it "renounces the use of terrorism and of all aggressive acts to control PLO members to assure their continued participation in the decision-making processes of the PLO."