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WASHINGTON -- Building on the political momentum from the foiled Times Square bombing, a bipartisan, bicameral quartet of lawmakers including Rep. Jason Altmire introduced controversial legislation Thursday to strip U.S. citizenship from terror suspects.

The bill would revise a law on the books since 1940 that gives the State Department the authority to revoke citizenship from someone who performs certain acts "with the intention of relinquishing United States nationality." The new legislation would add supporting or joining a terrorist organization to the list of offenses that includes joining a foreign army at war with the U.S.

Mr. Altmire, D-McCandless, joined Rep. Charlie Dent, R-Allentown, and Sens. Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., and Scott Brown, R-Mass., at a news conference to announce the bill, which they said was just an update on the 1940 bill to reflect the modern war on terror.

"Our enemies today are stateless actors who don't wear uniforms and who plot against Americans abroad and here in the United States, specifically targeting civilians in violation of the laws of war," Mr. Lieberman said.

The lawmakers had been drafting the language for some time, but the arrest of American citizen Faisal Shahzad in connection with a failed attempt to set off a bomb in New York City's Times Square on Saturday brought the issue to the fore.

Under the new law, the State Department could decide to revoke citizenship based on intelligence information showing a citizen is a member of a terrorist group. It would not apply retroactively to Mr. Shahzad.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton expressed general support for the bill Thursday.

"United States citizenship is a privilege -- it is not a right," Mrs. Clinton said. "And people who are serving foreign powers -- or in this case, foreign terrorists -- are clearly in violation, in my personal opinion, of that oath which they swore when they became citizens."

Presidential press secretary Robert Gibbs said he was not aware of anyone in the administration who supported the bill.

The citizenship revocation can come at any time -- not necessarily after an arrest -- and the bill's chief intent is to prevent an American citizen from gaining terror training abroad and returning stateside easily with a U.S. passport, the lawmakers said.

An accused terrorist would have the opportunity to appeal the decision, with the State Department having to prove with a preponderance of evidence that the suspect had terror ties.

Non-citizens would lose protections afforded a U.S. citizen charged with a crime and could be prosecuted in a military tribunal, rather than federal court. Also, Mr. Dent said, they would have a harder time winning a habeus corpus challenge or being released in the U.S.

Mr. Altmire said he had not been in contact with the Democratic leadership and would begin circulating the bill for co-sponsors Thursday. But both House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Minority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio, expressed concern Thursday about the constitutionality of the measure.

Ms. Pelosi pointed out that in the 1940s when the original bill was written, the U.S. government put Japanese-Americans in internment camps because it believed they were aligned with the enemy.

She said the new bill "sounds like a good idea. I don't object to the spirit of it, but I do think it's important to know on what basis they would" have their citizenship removed.

The American Civil Liberties Union forcefully condemned the law as an unconstitutional violation of due process. The 1940 law was upheld by the Supreme Court, but the lines it draws are much clearer than the Lieberman language, said Christopher Anders, senior legislative counsel at ACLU.

For example, "providing material support" to terrorism has been used to go after people who merely write a check, Mr. Anders said, not just those who take up arms against the U.S. Also, ACLU estimates that as many as 1 million people have been on terrorist watch lists at one time or another, many in error.

"It's one thing if the government makes a mistake and you're hassled in an airport and you miss your flight," he said. "It's another thing altogether if your citizenship is stripped away by a bureaucrat."

Mr. Altmire said the bill was crafted with those issues in mind.

"It's impossible to overstate the caution that we used to put this bill together to address these concerns," he said. "Underneath this statute, the individual has to have an intent, a desire to renounce their citizenship. That has not changed. Those are very high bars to cross."