

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

House GOP scrambles to rally votes for spending bill

WASHINGTON — House Republicans unveiled a new, stripped-down spending bill early today to prevent a government shutdown this weekend and allow quarreling lawmakers to punt most of their unfinished business into the new year.

The bill would keep the government operating through Jan. 19 and permit lawmakers — Republicans and Democrats — to head home for the holidays. It would delay battles over the budget, health care and immigration into January, denying Democrats wins that they had hoped to score this year.

Failure to pass the measure would trigger a government shutdown at midnight Friday, which would amount to a political pratfall just after the GOP scored a major win on a landmark tax bill. With Republicans controlling Washington, they would not have anyone else to blame for a shutdown debacle.

President Donald Trump still tried to blame Democrats while winning over the frustrated House GOP factions.

The problem for GOP leaders is the party's defense hawks, who had hoped to enact record budget increases for the military this year. The short-term spending bill does contain about \$5 billion to upgrade missile defense to respond to the threat from North Korea and to repair two destroyers damaged in accidents this year in the Pacific.

Underscoring the inability of Congress to complete its work was the failure to reauthorize the health care program for some 9 million low-income children. The program expired on Oct. 1 and the spending bill only includes a temporary spending fix until March.

A vote is likely today and Senate passage is expected to quickly follow.

Triumphant Trump celebrates tax win — but some fear backlash

WASHINGTON — A triumphant President Donald Trump and jubilant fellow Republicans celebrated the passage of their \$1.5 trillion tax overhaul Wednesday as a "historic victory for the American people." The American people, however, will need some convincing.

As Trump and GOP lawmakers gathered at the White House to cheer their first major legislative achievement — and the biggest tax changes in a generation — some Republicans warned that the party could face a painful political backlash against an overhaul that offers corporations and wealthy taxpayers the biggest benefits and was projected to trigger the loss of health care coverage for millions of Americans.

There was no hint of anxiety at the White House, though, as the president and congressional Republicans pushed any qualms aside and reveled in a much-needed win at the end of a year marked by GOP infighting and political stumbles.

"We are making America great again," Trump declared, personally thanking his "little team" of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Paul Ryan, before lawmakers lavished praise upon a president they have often openly criticized.

"I don't know if we'll have bigger moments, but we hope to," Trump said.

Survivors: Myanmar army massacred Rohingya

UKHIA, Bangladesh — For six hours he hid in an upstairs room, listening to the crackle of gunfire and the screams of people being slaughtered outside his Myanmar home.

With every footstep that drew near, every cry that pierced the air, 52-year-old Bodru Duza braced for the soldiers to find him, to kill him like all the others who had fled to his compound that morning seeking a safe place to shelter. They were being blindfolded and bound, marched away in small groups, then butchered and shot as they begged for their lives.

What had started out as a quiet Sunday in northwestern Myanmar had spiraled into an incomprehensible hell — one of the bloodiest massacres reported in the Southeast Asian nation since government forces launched a vicious campaign to drive out the country's Rohingya minority in late August.

By the time it was over, there was so much blood on the ground, it had pooled into long rivulets across the uneven earth, among bits of human flesh and the fragments of shattered skulls.

When Duza finally dared to emerge from his hiding place, he wondered how anyone could have survived.

Car rams into pedestrians in Melbourne; up to 19 injured

SYDNEY — Two men were arrested in Australia after the SUV in which they were traveling rammed into pedestrians on a busy central Melbourne street today, leaving 14 people injured in what police believe was a deliberate act.

Victoria state police said the driver of the vehicle and a second man were in custody after the incident, which occurred on Flinders Street in the city's central business district just after 4:45 p.m. when the area was busy with Christmas shoppers.

Commander Russell Barrett told media that while the motive of the incident was not immediately clear, "at this stage we believe it was a deliberate act."

Asked if police had ruled out terrorism as motivation, Barrett said only: "At this stage it's early days in the investigation and the motivation is unknown."

Barrett confirmed 14 people had been injured in the attack. Several were taken to hospitals, and two were in critical condition, including a preschool aged boy with head injuries. Earlier media reports said up to 19 people had been injured.

UN declares Trump's Jerusalem decision 'null and void'

The U.N. General Assembly has voted 128-9 with 35 abstentions to declare President Donald Trump's declaration of Jerusalem as Israel's capital "null and void."

Today's vote, while a victory for the Palestinians, was significantly lower than its supporters had hoped for, with many forecasting at least 150 "yes" votes. It is noteworthy that 21 countries were absent.

In that sense, it was a victory for the United States, with Trump's threat to cut off U.S. funding to countries that oppose his decision having an impact.

Trump went a step further than U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley, who hinted in a tweet and a letter to most of the 193 U.N. member states on Tuesday that the U.S. would retaliate against countries that vote in favor of a General Assembly resolution calling on the president to rescind his decision.

Haley said the president asked her to report back on countries "who voted against us" — and she stressed that the United States "will be taking names."

At the start of a Cabinet meeting in Washington on Wednesday, with Haley sitting nearby, Trump told reporters that Americans are tired of being taken advantage of and praised the U.S. ambassador for sending the "right message" before the vote.

"For all these nations, they take our money and then vote against us. They take hundreds of millions of dollars, even billions of dollars and then they vote against us," Trump told reporters at the Cabinet meeting. "We're watching those votes. Let them vote against us."

South Korea fires warning shots after North soldier defects

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korean soldiers fired 20 warning machine gun rounds today, turning back North Korean soldiers apparently pursuing a comrade who had earlier dashed across the rivals' shared border, officials said. It is the fourth time this year a North Korean soldier has defected across the world's most heavily armed border.

South Korean military officials said they heard gunfire from the North after South Korea fired its warning shots, but it wasn't clear if the firing was retaliatory. Neither side immediately reported casualties.

North Korean soldiers occasionally flee over the land border, but there have been few defections as dramatic as one that happened nearly 40 days ago, when a northern soldier crossed at a different, very public place — a jointly controlled area that is the only place where troops from the rivals face off only feet away from each other. That soldier was shot five times by his former comrades in an escape caught on video. He has been recovering in a hospital. The site of that defection is familiar to many foreign tourists, who can visit the blue huts that straddle the line between the rivals.

Civil war pushing South Sudan closer to starvation

JIECH, South Sudan — Writhing in agony on the dirt floor of his hut, Bob Wol traced the recent gunshot wounds on his thigh and back with his fingers.

"I was trying to get food and my government tried to kill me," the 29-year-old told The Associated Press.

It's been almost 25 years since more than 1 million people were on the brink of starvation in southern Sudan, a crisis captured in a Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of a vulture poised near a starving little girl. Today, people in what was known as the "famine triangle" say the situation has only deteriorated.

"Before, only the hunger was killing you," said Lony Toang, who survived the earlier famine in Ayod County. "Now it's worse because we have hunger and we're killing people."

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