

PRESIDENT TRUMP'S FIRST BUDGET

Boost to the military, cuts domestically

By MATTHEW DALY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has finalized his first budget for the federal government, a blueprint that would make deep cuts in the Environmental Protection Agency and other domestic programs while significantly increasing spending on the military.

The budget, to be submitted to Congress on Thursday, was widely expected to cause political pain for Republicans and Democrats, who will have the final say on spending in the arduous budget process.

Trump has promised a spending plan that fulfills his campaign promises to boost national security, from spending more on defense to building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Though he repeatedly promised that Mexico would pay for the wall, U.S. taxpayers will foot the bill.

“We are proposing a budget that will shrink the bloated federal bureaucracy — and I mean bloated — while protecting our national security,” Trump told supporters at a campaign rally late Wednesday in Nashville, Tennessee.

He boasted that the expected increase for the military will be “one of the single largest increases in defense spending history in this country.” He also predicted that under his leadership the armed forces will become “bigger, better, stronger than ever before.”

Republicans have groused about some of the preliminary plans, including elimination of the \$3 billion community development block grant program that’s popular among local GOP officials; a 25 percent cut to the EPA and elimination of 3,000 jobs; and the scuttling, essentially, of a \$300 million per-year program to clean up the Great Lakes.

Trump’s plan to eliminate community development



President Donald Trump speaks during a rally Wednesday in Nashville, Tenn.

AP Photo/Evan Vucci

Trump’s allies melting away on wiretap claims

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump’s explosive allegation that Barack Obama wiretapped his New York skyscraper during the presidential campaign has left him increasingly isolated, with allies on Capitol Hill and within his own administration offering no evidence to back him up.

On Wednesday, Attorney General Jeff Sessions said he had not given Trump any reason to believe he was wiretapped by President Obama. Republican Rep. Devin Nunes, chairman of the House intelligence committee, said he had seen no information to support the claim and then went further. He suggested the U.S. president’s assertion, made in a series of March 4 tweets, should not be taken at face value.

“Are you going to take the tweets literally?” Nunes said. “If so, clearly the president was wrong.”

But Trump, in an interview Wednesday with Fox News, predicted there would be “some very interesting items coming to the forefront over the next two weeks.”

Trump’s allegations have put him in a potentially perilous position as congressional investigations into Russia’s involve-

ment in the 2016 election — and possible Russian contacts with Trump associates — ramp up. The FBI is also investigating.

If no evidence of wiretapping at Trump Tower emerges, his credibility would be newly damaged. If there is proof that the Obama administration approved monitoring of Trump or his associates, that would suggest the government had reason to be suspicious of their contacts with Russia and a judge had approved the surveillance.

The president, who appears to have made his allegation in a burst of anger, has asked lawmakers to investigate the claim. Lawmakers have since turned the question back toward the administration, asking the Justice Department to provide evidence of wiretapping activity.

The Justice Department missed a Monday deadline for providing the information to the House and was given a one-week extension.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who heads the Judiciary Committee’s crime and terrorism subcommittee, said the FBI will provide a classified briefing on the matter “at some time in the future.”

block grants was dismissed on Capitol Hill by those who remember how a modest cut to the program sank a spending bill not long ago.

The United States spends more than half a trillion dollars on defense, more than the next seven countries combined. But Trump has signaled he would make the Pentagon the big winner with a \$54 billion boost to defense spending.

The State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development faced a budget cut of about 31 percent, according to several officials.

Democrats are unlikely to support the cuts, and Republican defections raise the possibility of a congressional train wreck and a potential government shutdown when the 2018 budget year begins Oct. 1.

The budget, known as a “skinny budget,” was unlikely to have many of the

details expected on Capitol Hill. It will be limited to the discretionary, \$1 trillion-plus portion of the \$4 trillion annual federal budget that pays for Cabinet agencies and departments.

The remainder of Trump’s budget — proposals on taxes, mandatory spending and deficits and projections on the economy — won’t come out until May.

Preliminary reports on the budget show some domestic Cabinet agencies, such as the departments of Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs, would see increases, including \$3 billion for Trump’s promised wall on the U.S.-Mexico border.

People familiar with the budget who spoke on condition of anonymity in advance of the public release say the White House is seeking a 30 percent cut from an Energy Department office that promotes energy efficiency and renewable energy. The office has funded research on projects such as LED light bulbs, electric trucks, advanced batteries and biofuels.

The Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy is targeted for at least \$700 million in cuts from its current \$2.1 billion budget, said Scott Sklar, chairman of the steering committee of the Sustainable Energy Coalition.

The Energy Department could see steep cuts for its 17 national laboratories, which conduct cutting-edge research on topics from nuclear power to advanced materials for energy generation, storage and use.

Trump’s preliminary budget, delivered in secret to agencies last month, had proposed a 37 percent cut to the State Department and foreign aid budgets. Those cuts and others were subject to revision in the back-and-forth the White House had with agencies leading up to the release, and the pain was eased for the State Department.

GOP leaders acknowledge health bill changes, may delay vote

WASHINGTON (AP) — Their health care overhaul imperiled from all sides, the White House and top House Republicans acknowledged Wednesday they would make changes to the legislation in hopes of nailing down votes and pushing the party’s show-piece legislation through the chamber soon.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., declined to commit to bringing the measure to the House floor next week, a fresh indication of uncertainty. Republican leaders have repeatedly said that was their schedule, but opposition mushroomed after a congressional report concluded this week that the measure would strip 24 million people of coverage in a decade.

Ryan told reporters that GOP leaders could now make “some necessary improvements and refinements” to the legislation, reflecting an urgency to buttress support. The measure would strike

down much of former President Barack Obama’s 2010 overhaul and reduce the federal role, including financing, for health care consumers and is opposed uniformly by Democrats.

“We’re going to arbitrate, we’re all going to get together, we’re going to get something done,” President Donald Trump promised a crowd at a rally in Nashville.

At an all-hands meeting Wednesday evening of House GOP lawmakers, Vice President Mike Pence and party leaders urged their rank-and-file to unite behind the legislation.

“It’s our job to get it out of here and get it to the Senate,” Pence told the Republicans, according to Rep. Dennis Ross, R-Fla. That would let Trump pressure “Democrats in these red states to come on board,” Ross said, referring to Republican-leaning states where Democratic senators face re-election next year.

Health secretary Tom Price was using phone calls to lobby Republican governors, some of whom — with home-state GOP members of Congress — oppose the bill’s phase out of Obama’s expansion of Medicaid to 11 million additional lower-income Americans.

Amid the maneuvering, a government report said more than 12 million people have signed up for coverage this year under the very statute that President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans want to repeal. That figure underscored the potential political impact of the GOP’s next move.

Pence met repeatedly with House Republicans but rebels still abounded. Conservatives were unhappy the measure doesn’t erase enough of Obama’s law while at the other end of the party’s spectrum, moderates were upset the bill would strip millions of health coverage.

“Oh heck, yes,” said one conservative leader, Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, asked if the GOP legislation needed changes to win his support.

Conservatives want to end Obama’s expansion of Medicaid to 11 million additional low-income people next year, not 2020 as the bill

proposes. They say a GOP proposed tax credit to help people pay medical costs is too generous, and they want to terminate all of Obama’s insurance requirements, including mandatory coverage of specified services like drug counseling.

Underscoring the push-pull

problem GOP leaders face in winning votes, moderates feel the tax credits are too stingy, especially for low earners and older people. They oppose accelerating the phaseout of the Medicaid expansion and are unhappy with long-term cuts the measure would inflict on the entire program.

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- Salmon/Potato Bar Combo** - \$11.50
- Clam Chowder Bread Bowl** - \$4.25
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DEADLINES:
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