

Judge extends order blocking travel ban

HONOLULU (AP) — A federal judge in Hawaii decided Wednesday to extend his order blocking President Donald Trump's travel ban.

U.S. District Judge Derrick Watson issued the longer-lasting hold on the ban just hours after hearing arguments.

Hawaii says the policy discriminates against Muslims and hurts the state's tourist-dependent economy. The implied message in the revised ban is like a "neon sign flashing 'Muslim ban, Muslim ban'" that the government didn't bother to turn off, state Attorney General Douglas Chin told the judge.

Extending the temporary order until the state's lawsuit was resolved would ensure the constitutional rights of Muslim citizens across the U.S. are vindicated after "repeated stops and starts of the last two months," the state



AP Photo/Caleb Jones
Hawaii Attorney General Douglas Chin speaks outside federal court in Honolulu, Wednesday.

has said.

The government says the ban falls within the president's power to protect national security. Hawaii has only made generalized concerns about its effect on students and tourism, Department of Justice attorney Chad Readler

told the judge via telephone.

The Trump administration had asked Watson to narrow his ruling to cover only the part of Trump's executive order that suspends new visas for people from six Muslim-majority countries. Readler said a freeze on the

U.S. refugee program had no effect on Hawaii.

Watson rejected that argument, preventing the administration from halting the flow of refugees.

Watson said in court that the government only argued for that narrower interpretation after a federal judge in Maryland blocked the six-nation travel ban but said it wasn't clear that the refugee suspension was similarly motivated by religious bias.

Watson noted that the government said 20 refugees were resettled in Hawaii since 2010.

"Is this a mathematical exercise that 20 isn't enough? ... What do I make of that?" the judge asked Readler.

The government attorney replied that 20 is simply a small number of refugees.

"In whose judgment?" Watson asked.

Hawaii was the first state to sue over Trump's revised ban. The imam of a Honolulu mosque joined the challenge, arguing that the ban would prevent his Syrian mother-in-law from visiting family in Hawaii.

In his arguments, Chin quoted Trump's comments that the revised travel ban is a "watered down" version of the original.

"We cannot fault the president for being politically incorrect, but we do fault him for being constitutionally incorrect," Chin said.

Earlier this month, Watson prevented the federal government from suspending new visas for people from Somalia, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Libya and Yemen and freezing the nation's refugee program. His ruling came just hours before the federal government planned to start enforcing

Trump's executive order.

Trump called Watson's previous ruling an example of "unprecedented judicial overreach."

Hawaii's ruling would not be directly affected by a decision siding with the federal government in the Maryland case, legal experts said. The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals set a hearing for May 8 to consider the administration's appeal.

"What a ruling in 4th Circuit in favor of the administration would do is create a split in authority between federal courts in different parts of the country," said Richard Primus, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Michigan law school.

"Cases with splits in authority are cases the U.S. Supreme Court exists to resolve," he said.

Border wall 'complex,' faces geographic challenges

WASHINGTON (AP) — Geographic and physical challenges — including the Rio Grande and threatened wildlife — will make it difficult to build the "big, beautiful wall" that President Donald Trump has promised on the U.S.-Mexico border, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke said Wednesday.

Building a wall "is complex in some areas," including Big Bend National Park and along the river, which twists through nearly half of the 2,000-mile border, Zinke said.

Hundreds of species live within 30 miles of the border, including threatened jaguars and Mexican gray wolves. The Trump administration is poised to relax protections for the jaguars, which live in northern Mexico and parts of the southwestern United States, to make it easier to build the wall.

Throughout the campaign, Trump energized his crowds with his insistence that a wall will be constructed along the border and that Mexico will pay for it. Zinke's comments, and the administration's budget proposal seeking billions in U.S. taxpayer dollars to finance the project, offer a reality check and a possible sign the president is moving away from his initial plan.

The complications Zinke highlighted were the same faced by Trump's predecessors, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, as they sought to build or complete hundreds of miles of fencing along the border.

Fencing that is already in place is a mixture of various designs, including towering steel bollards designed to keep both people and vehicles from moving north and shorter steel posts aimed only at blocking cars. In parts of Texas' Rio Grande Valley, some stretches of fencing are nearly a mile away from the border in part to accommodate flood plains and an international treaty.

And in Texas, almost all of the land along the border is privately owned. When Bush tried to build border fencing starting in 2006, he



AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd
Tourists kayak through Santa Elena Canyon on the Rio Grande river, along a cliff face that is Mexico, left, at Big Bend National Park in Texas, Monday. Here the Rio Grande slides between two sheer cliff faces, one in Mexico and one in the United States, that tower 1,500 feet above the water.

Trump calls for domestic cuts to finance border wall

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is proposing immediate budget cuts of \$18 billion from programs like medical research, infrastructure and community grants so U.S. taxpayers, not Mexico, can cover the down payment on the border wall.

The White House documents were submitted to Congress amid negotiations over a catchall spending bill that would avert a partial government shutdown at the end of next month. The package would wrap up \$1.1 trillion in unfinished spending bills and address the Trump administration's request for

an immediate \$30 billion in additional Pentagon spending.

The latest Trump proposal, disclosed Tuesday, would eliminate \$1.2 billion in National Institutes of Health research grants, a favorite of both parties. The community development block grant program, also popular, would be halved, amounting to a cut of \$1.5 billion, and Trump would strip \$500 million from a popular grant program for transportation projects. Some of that money would help pay for parts of the wall.

Like Trump's 2018

proposed budget, which was panned by both Democrats and Republicans earlier this month, the proposals have little chance of being enacted.

But they could create bad political optics for the struggling Trump White House, since the administration asked earlier for \$3 billion to pay for the Trump's controversial U.S.-Mexico border wall and other immigration enforcement plans. During the campaign, Trump repeatedly promised Mexico would pay for the wall, a claim the country has disputed.

"The administration

is asking the American taxpayer to cover the cost of a wall — unneeded, ineffective, absurdly expensive — that Mexico was supposed to pay for, and he is cutting programs vital to the middle class to get that done," said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. "Build the wall or repair or build a bridge or tunnel or road in your community? What's the choice?"

The roster of cuts were sent to Capitol Hill as a set of options for GOP staff aides and lawmakers crafting a catchall spending bill for the ongoing budget year, which ends Sept. 30.

faced stiff opposition from local ranchers and farmers, many of whom took the government to court on plans to use their land.

The Department of Homeland Security is

responsible for the border wall, but Zinke said the Interior Department will play a critical support role. According to the Government Accountability Office, federal and tribal lands

make up about 632 miles, or roughly 1/3 of the nearly 2,000-mile border.

"At the end of the day, what's important is American security and to make sure we have a border," Zinke told

reporters on a conference call. "Without a border a nation cannot exist."

An internal report prepared for Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly estimated that a wall

BRIEFLY

Senate intel leaders pledge Russia probe cooperation

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pledging cooperation, the top Republican and Democrat on the Senate intelligence committee said Wednesday they would steer clear of politics in their panel's probe of Russian interference in last year's election. They made a point of putting themselves at arm's length from the House investigation marked by partisanship and disputes.

Richard Burr of North Carolina, the GOP chairman of the Senate committee, told reporters on Capitol Hill he would not even answer questions about the House probe. "We're not asking the House to play any role in our investigation. We don't plan to play any role in their investigation," Burr said

ahead of his panel's open hearing Thursday.

Standing alongside his committee's ranking Democrat, Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, Burr said: "Mark and I work hand in hand on this. ... We're partners to see that this is completed and that we have a product at the end of the day that we can, in bipartisanship, support."

The senators' comments came the same day an attorney for former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn said the retired U.S. Army lieutenant general has not been interviewed by the Senate intelligence committee. One of Flynn's lawyers, Robert K. Kelner, said they have had discussions with committee staff members, but Flynn has not been contacted directly.

So far, the committee has requested 20 individuals to be interviewed. Five have been scheduled, and the

remaining 15 are likely to be scheduled within the next 10 days. Additional witnesses could also be interviewed.

13 killed, 2 hurt when church bus and truck crash

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — A small shuttle bus carrying Texas church members home from a retreat collided head-on with a pickup truck, killing 13 people and injuring two others Wednesday on a two-lane highway in southwestern Texas, officials said.

All of the victims who died were senior adults who attended First Baptist Church of New Braunfels, Texas. A total of 14 senior adults were on the bus and the driver was the only person in the pickup when the vehicles collided about 12:30 p.m. on U.S. 83 outside Garner State

Park in northern Uvalde County, according to Texas Department of Public Safety Sgt. Conrad Hein and a church statement. The area is about 75 miles west of San Antonio.

Hein said two other bus passengers and the pickup driver were injured and hospitalized. It was not immediately clear what caused the collision about 120 miles from the church, where the members were headed.

The National Transportation Safety Board has sent investigators to the scene, NTSB spokesman Terry Williams said.

Photos and video of the crash's aftermath showed heavy damage to the front drivers' sides of both vehicles where it appeared the two had collided. The back of the bus was up on a guardrail, with glass and debris scattered onto the grass below.

2 ex-Christie aides sentenced in bridge traffic revenge plot

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — Two former aides to Republican Gov. Chris Christie were sentenced to prison on Wednesday for creating a colossal traffic jam at the George Washington Bridge for political revenge, a scandal that sank Christie's White House campaign and was attributed by the judge to a venomous climate inside state government.

Bill Baroni, Christie's appointee to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, was sentenced to two years in prison, and Bridget Kelly, Christie's former deputy chief of staff, was sentenced to 18 months at separate hearings in the 2013 lane-closing case. Both must also serve

500 hours of community service.

U.S. District Judge Susan Wigenton said it was clear there was never a legitimate traffic study, as they claimed during the trial, and said the defendants sought to mislead the jury with their testimony.

During Kelly's portion of the hearing, Wigenton also blamed the culture in Trenton, the state capital. Trial testimony described angry tirades by the governor and detailed his subordinates using the Port Authority as a source of political favors for politicians whose endorsements they sought.

Christie was not charged with any wrongdoing in the federal case. State prosecutors have declined to pursue a citizen's criminal complaint lodged against him, but questions remain over how much he knew about the plot.