

## BRIEFLY

## Budget deficit hits \$666B, an \$80B spike for the year

WASHINGTON (AP) — The federal budget deficit rose to \$666 billion in the just-completed fiscal year, a spike that comes as Republicans are moving to draft a tax code rewrite that promises to add up to \$1.5 trillion to the national debt over the coming decade.

The sobering deficit numbers, released Friday by the Treasury Department and the White House budget office, followed Senate passage Thursday night of a 10-year budget plan that shoves GOP concerns on deficits and debt in favor of a tax overhaul.

Still, House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin insisted Friday on "CBS This Morning": "We're Republicans. We're sensitive to the deficit."

President Donald Trump and his GOP allies on Capitol Hill promise this year's tax legislation will spark a burst of economic growth — and hope it will pay big political dividends for their party.

Friday's budget figures represent an \$80 billion jump over last year's \$585 billion deficit, which itself was way up over the previous year's \$438 billion. The administration says the sour deficit report shows a need to pass the tax overhaul measure.

"Through a combination of tax reform and regulatory relief, this country can return to higher levels of GDP growth, helping to erase our fiscal deficit," said Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

## Suicide bombings in Afghanistan hit mosques, killing 63

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Suicide bombers struck two mosques in Afghanistan during Friday prayers, a Shiite mosque in Kabul and a Sunni mosque in western Ghor province, killing at least 63 people at the end of a particularly deadly week for the troubled nation.

The Afghan president issued a statement condemning both attacks and saying that country's security forces would step up the fight to "eliminate the terrorists who target Afghans of all religions and tribes."

In the attack in Kabul, a suicide bomber walked into the Imam Zaman Mosque, a Shiite mosque in the western Dashte-e-Barchi neighborhood where he detonated his explosives vest, killing 30 and wounding 45, said Maj. Gen. Alimast Momand at the Interior Ministry.

The suicide bombing in Ghor province struck a Sunni mosque, also during Friday prayers and killed 33 people, including a warlord who was apparently the target of the attack, said Mohammad Iqbal Nizami, the spokesman for the provincial chief of police.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for either attack, the latest in a devastating week that saw Taliban attacks kill scores across the country.

## Somalia's death toll now at 358 as 'state of war' planned

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — Thousands of anguished Somalis gathered to pray Friday at the site of the country's deadliest attack, while the toll rose to 358 and dozens remained missing. Somalia's president will announce a "state of war" against the al-Shabab extremist group blamed for the bombing, the prime minister said.

The United States is expected to play a supporting role in the new offensive that President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed is set to launch on Saturday, a Somali military official told The Associated Press. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters.

Somalia's army spokesman Capt. Abdullahi Iman said the offensive involving thousands of troops will try to push al-Shabab fighters out of their strongholds in the Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle regions where many deadly attacks on Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, and on Somali and African Union bases have been launched.

Also Friday, the U.S. military said it had resumed its fight against al-Shabab with a drone strike.

The extremist group has not commented on Saturday's truck bombing in Mogadishu, which Somali intelligence officials have said was meant to target the city's heavily fortified international airport where many countries have their embassies.

## Charges, insults fly after Trump aide assails congresswoman

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House on Friday rushed to defend chief of staff John Kelly after he mischaracterized the remarks of a Democratic congresswoman and called her an "empty barrel" making noise. A Trump spokeswoman said it was "inappropriate" to question Kelly in light of his stature as a retired four-star general.

The administration also insisted it's long past time to end the political squabbling and insult trading over President Donald Trump's compassion for America's war dead, even as it lobbied fresh vilification at Florida Rep. Frederica Wilson.

She kept the barbed exchanges going, adding a new element by suggesting a racial context.

Taking cues from a president who hates to back down, the administration staunchly defended Kelly, who a day before had denounced Wilson's criticism of Trump — and added his condemnation of past remarks she had made at a Miami event.

Kelly said she delivered a 2015 speech at an FBI field office dedication in which she "talked about how she was instrumental in getting the funding for that building," rather than keeping the focus on the fallen agents for which it was named. Video of the speech contradicted his recollection.

Wilson, in an interview Friday with *The New York Times*, brought race into the dispute.

"The White House itself is full of white supremacists," said Wilson, who is black, as is the Florida family Trump had called in a condolence effort this week that led to the back-and-forth name calling.

Trump, in an interview with Fox Business Network, then called Wilson's criticism of Kelly "sickening." And, in a comment that seems unlikely to be the last word, he said he actually had a "very nice call," with the family of Sgt. La David Johnson.

## Q&amp;A

## GOP effort to overhaul the tax system

By MARCY GORDON  
AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON — Divided Republicans in Congress are tackling an ambitious overhaul of the nation's tax system that would deeply cut levies for corporations and double the standard deduction used by most average Americans.

Despite controlling Congress and the White House, Republicans failed to carry out their years-long promise to dismantle and replace former President Barack Obama's health care law. They say the nearly \$6 trillion tax plan, to bring the first major revamp in three decades, is their once-in-a-generation opportunity. President Donald Trump sets it as his highest legislative priority.

But can they deliver? What are the next steps for Congress? How would the changes affect the average taxpayer? Some questions and answers:

## What does the tax plan do? Why is it important?

Trump and Republican leaders unveiled the proposal last month, pitching it as a boon to the middle class and a needed spark to economic growth and job creation. It's only an outline, with Congress left to put meat on the bones as lawmakers turn it into complex legislation.

The plan calls for reduced taxes for most individuals, slashing the corporate tax rate from 36 percent to 20 percent, and doubling the standard deduction used by most average Americans to \$12,000 for individuals and \$24,000 for families. The number of tax brackets would shrink from seven to three, with tax rates of 12 percent, 25 percent and 35 percent. (Now make that four, with an added bracket for high-income earners, rate to be determined, House Speaker Paul Ryan said Friday.) Inheritance taxes on multimillion-dollar estates would be repealed.

It would bring far-reaching



AP Photo/Julie Jacobson  
Speaker of the House Paul Ryan applauds as attendees to the 72nd Annual Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation dinner are announced Thursday in New York.

changes for businesses large and small, with fallout too for American companies beyond U.S. borders. The American middle-class family could take advantage of a heftier child tax credit and the extra money that could come from the bigger standard deduction.

But there are too many holes in the spare nine-page plan, like the income levels that would fit with each tax bracket and what might happen to other deductions used by middle-class people, to know how it actually would affect individual taxpayers and families. Other looming unknowns are how it would be paid for and how much it might add to the mounting \$20 trillion national debt.

## How do the plan's backers and others say it would affect average people?

The Trump administration is promising that the tax cuts — "which will be the biggest in the history of our country!" — would bring a \$4,000 pay raise annually for the average family. Trump expanded that number even further Friday, telling Fox Business

Network's Maria Bartiromo, "It can be \$5,000 average per individual, per group."

That might sound like the pledge of "a chicken in every pot" that's been attributed to President Herbert Hoover in the 1920s. But Trump's claim is based on fuzzy math, in the view of skeptical tax experts and Democratic lawmakers.

Rather than helping the middle class, Democrats charge, the plan mainly would benefit wealthy individuals — like Trump — and big corporations.

The partisan debate over the plan is all about who's got the middle class's back. You'll be hearing those two words a lot out of Washington in coming weeks.

## What happens next?

Now that Senate Republicans have muscled through a \$4 trillion budget plan, and the House is poised to adopt it, the ground has been laid for serious work to begin on filling in the details and whipping up complex tax legislation. The budget plan provides for \$1.5 trillion over 10 years in debt-financed tax cuts, busting

earlier GOP pledges of strict fiscal discipline.

But the work won't be quick. Strap in for a long slog in separate House and Senate committee hearings, drafting meetings and closed-door negotiations. And a feast for lobbyists descending on lawmakers, especially members of the two tax-writing committees. The swarm depicted in "Showdown at Gucci Gulch," the book chronicling lobbying in the landmark 1986 tax overhaul under President Ronald Reagan, is about to get its second act.

The Republicans are promising to get a final bill to Trump's desk by Christmas — already slippage from the earlier Thanksgiving deadline. The House version of the legislation is expected to come forward by early next month. The Senate has its own ideas and may well craft its own bill, which means the differences would have to be hammered out in a potentially contentious joint conference.

## Are Republicans divided?

Complicating the picture further, the tax plan already has driven a sharp wedge through House Republicans, cracking open regional fault lines within the majority party. The plan would eliminate the federal deduction for state and local taxes, a widely popular break used by some 44 million Americans, especially in high-tax, Democratic-leaning states like New York, New Jersey and California.

Republican lawmakers from those states have revolted, balking at supporting the tax plan when their votes are so critically needed. Their opposition has led the GOP leaders in Congress to hear out the fractious GOP members and seek a compromise with them. At the same time, the White House has made overtures on the tax plan to conservative Democrats in the House and Democratic senators from states that Trump won in the 2016 election.

## AP POLL: Vegas shooting doesn't change opinions on guns

ATLANTA (AP) — The slaying of five dozen people in Las Vegas did little to change Americans' opinions about gun laws.

The nation is closely divided on whether restricting firearms would reduce such mass shootings or homicides, though a majority favor tighter laws as they have for several years, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The massive divide on stricter limits remains firmly

in place.

The survey was conducted from Oct. 12-16, about two weeks after 64-year-old Stephen Paddock fired on a crowded musical festival taking place on across the street from his hotel room, killing 58 and wounding more than 540 before killing himself. It's the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

In this latest survey, 61 percent said the country's gun laws should be tougher, while 27 percent would rather see them remain the

same and 11 percent want them to be less strict. That's similar to the results of an AP-GfK poll in July 2016.

Nearly 9 in 10 Democrats, but just a third of Republicans, want to see gun laws made stricter.

Kenny Garcia, a 31-year-old resident of Stockton, California, and a former gun owner, said he's torn about whether tighter gun laws would lead to a reduction in mass shootings.

"That's the hard part," Garcia said. "How do you control something like that

when you have no idea where it's coming from, whether you control the guns or not?"

Still, he's frustrated by easy availability of some devices — such as the "bump stocks" used by the Las Vegas shooter to make his semi-automatic guns mimic the more rapid fire of automatic weapons.

"They give people access to these things, then they question after something horrible happens, but yet the answer is right there," he said. "It just doesn't make sense."

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