

Senate advances \$36.5B in disaster relief

By ANDREW TAYLOR
Associated Press



AP Photo/Gerald Herbert, File

In this Sept. 28 file photo, debris scatters a destroyed community in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in Toa Alta, Puerto Rico.

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Monday gave a preliminary OK to a \$36.5 billion hurricane relief package that would provide Puerto Rico with a much-needed infusion of cash and keep the federal flood insurance program from running out of money to pay claims.

The 79-16 procedural vote set the stage for a final vote, most likely Tuesday.

The measure also provides \$18.7 billion to replenish the Federal Emergency Management Agency's rapidly dwindling emergency disaster accounts. On Monday, FEMA announced more than \$500 million in aid to Puerto Rico, including \$285 million to help restore power and water services to the devastated island. An additional \$16 billion would permit the financially troubled federal flood insurance program to pay an influx of Harvey-related claims.

But the bill rejects requests from the powerful Texas and Florida congressional delegations for additional money to rebuild after hurricanes Harvey and Irma. Florida Democrat Bill Nelson, whose state's citrus industry endured significant losses during Irma, sought to add \$3 billion in immediate agriculture assistance to the measure, but was denied by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who said money for crop losses would be in

subsequent aid measures.

Senate passage on Tuesday would send the measure to President Donald Trump for his signature.

There was urgency to move the measure swiftly — rather than add more money to it at this time — because the government's disaster response and flood insurance reserves are running out. Democrat Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont said that would happen "in a matter of days" without action.

Still, members of the Texas and Florida delegations in Congress are unhappy because the measure failed to address extensive requests for addi-

tional hurricane rebuilding money. Texas, inundated by Harvey in August, requested \$19 billion, while Florida sought \$27 billion.

"I'm pretty disappointed with what the House sent over," Texas GOP Sen. John Cornyn said last week. But later, after speaking to both Trump and White House budget director Mick Mulvaney, Cornyn said he was promised that the White House would issue another disaster aid measure next month for Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. A fourth, and perhaps final, measure is likely to anchor a year-end spending bill.

"The victims of these

hurricanes can continue to count on our support," said McConnell said.

Up to \$5 billion of the measure's total could be used to assist Puerto Rico's central government and various municipalities that are suffering unsustainable cash shortfalls as Maria has choked off revenues and strained resources. An additional \$150 million would help Puerto Rico with the 10 percent match required for FEMA disaster relief.

More than one-fourth of the island's residents don't have potable running water and only 17 percent have electricity, according to FEMA. Just 392 miles of Puerto Rico's 5,073 miles of roads are open. Conditions in the U.S. Virgin Islands are bad as well, with widespread power outages.

But Trump last week graded his response to the Puerto Rico disaster a 10 on a scale of 10.

"President Trump seems more concerned about claiming credit for a job well done than the actual situation on the ground deserves, particularly in Puerto Rico," Leahy said. "This is the hard part of governing," he added. "We dig in for the long haul, we stop patting ourselves on the back."

The measure currently before the Senate contains \$577 million for wildfires in the West that forced agencies to tap other reserves for fire-fighting accounts and FEMA money.

Trump shoots down retirement limit to pay for GOP tax cuts

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump shot down a possible approach for raising revenue to finance tax cuts in politically must-do legislation for the Republicans, promising Monday the popular 401(k) retirement savings program will be untouched.

Still, the head of the House's tax-writing committee indicated that changes to the 401(k) structure may still be on the table as Republicans push an ambitious timetable to get tax legislation written. Asked about the issue, Ways and Means Committee Chair Rep. Kevin Brady said: "I don't want to get ahead of the committee. That will all be part of the tax reform bill."

And in response to whether Trump's tweet changes in any way what the panel was planning to do, Brady replied only, "no."

Republicans are scrambling to find new revenue sources to pay for anticipated tax cuts exceeding \$1 trillion. A proposal to eliminate the widely-used federal deduction for state and local taxes has run into heavy opposition from GOP House members from high-tax states, threatening the enactment of tax legislation that Republicans deem essential to retaining their majority in next year's elections.

Trump pledged in a tweet there will be "no change" to tax incentives for the 401(k) retirement programs.

The No. 2 Republican in the Senate, Majority Whip John Cornyn of Texas, said he's "sympathetic" to Trump's opposition to curbing 401(k)s because "we don't want to discourage people from saving."

But he cautioned against ruling out ideas at this stage of the legislative process. "I do think we need to be careful because there are going to be a lot of different trial balloons, and what counts is how you put all this together," Cornyn said.

The plan crafted by Trump and Republican leaders calls for steep tax cuts for corporations and potentially individuals, a doubling of the standard deduction used by most Americans, shrinking the number of tax brackets from seven to three or four, and the repeal of inheritance taxes on multimillion-dollar estates. The child tax credit would be increased and the tax system would be simplified; most Americans would be able to file their income taxes on a postcard, according to the plan.

Crucial details of the plan have yet to be worked out, notably what income levels would fit with each tax bracket.

Trump awards Medal of Honor to Vietnam-era Army medic

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Monday turned a Medal of Honor ceremony for a Vietnam-era Army medic who risked his life to help wounded comrades into a mini homework tutorial for the boy and girl who came to watch their grandfather be enshrined "into the history of our nation."

Every Wednesday, retired Army Capt. Gary M. Rose's grandchildren — Kaitlyn and Christian — head to his Huntsville, Alabama, home for "homework night" with him and Margaret, their grandmother, Trump said. "I think that Kaitlyn and Christian will agree this fieldtrip is their best homework assignment yet. Right?"

Trump said he had been told that Christian recently asked Rose about the Medal of Honor. Then he proceeded to explain.

"It's the award given to America's bravest heroes who earn our freedom with their sacrifice," said Trump, whose lack of military service has drawn renewed attention during the debate over the fate of four service members who were killed this month in an ambush in Niger.

"Those who receive the Medal of Honor went above and beyond the call of duty to protect their fellow service members and defend our nation," he said.

He said Rose is a "patriot who never gives up, never gives in, and always stands strong for God, for family, and for country."



AP Photo/Susan Walsh

President Donald Trump bestows the Medal of Honor to retired Army Capt. Gary M. Rose during a ceremony Monday.

BRIEFLY

Angry soldier's widow says Trump didn't know husband's name

WASHINGTON (AP) — A fallen soldier's angry widow joined the stormy dispute with President Donald Trump on Monday over his response to her husband's death, declaring that his failure to remember the soldier's name in last week's condolence call "made me cry."

He retorted that the call was "very respectful" and her accusation about her husband's name simply wasn't true.

Though Trump refused to let the new round of complaints go unanswered, he steered clear of the insults he exchanged last week with a congresswoman who had overheard the sympathy call.

The president spoke in public at two events during the day — including his awarding of the military Medal of Honor to a Vietnam-era Army medic — and made no mention of the case of Sgt. La David Johnson, one of four soldiers killed Oct. 4 in a firefight with militants tied to the Islamic State group in Niger.

In addition to criticizing Trump, Myeshia Johnson, the sergeant's widow, also complained bitterly that she had not been able to see her husband's body.

"I need to see him so I will know that that is my husband," she said. "I don't know nothing, they won't show me a finger, a hand."



Myeshia Johnson

U.S. general lays out Niger attack details; questions remain

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. special forces unit ambushed by Islamic militants in Niger didn't call for help until an hour into their first contact with the enemy, the top U.S. general said Monday, as he tried to clear up some of the murky details of the assault that killed four American troops and has triggered a nasty political brawl.

Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters that the American people and the fallen soldiers' families deserve answers about the deadly

ambush in the west African nation. But he said he still lacks many of the details about how the attack unfolded, and he asked for patience as the military investigation continues.

Dunford's description of the incident, however, underscored how long the mid-morning attack dragged on, and that it was many hours before the wounded and killed were evacuated. He said that "within minutes" after the unit called for assistance, a U.S. drone was moved into position overhead, providing surveillance and full-motion video. He declined to say if it was armed, but said it did not fire.

Another hour went by before French fighter jets arrived, but the wounded weren't taken out until later in the afternoon when French helicopters arrived along with additional Niger troops. The bodies of the three Green Berets who were killed were evacuated that evening, he said.

"I make no judgment as to how long it took them to ask for support," Dunford said. "I don't know that they thought they needed support prior to that time. I don't know how this attack unfolded. I don't know what their initial assessment was of what they were confronted with."

ISIS came with a hit list, left Syria town in a trail of blood

BEIRUT (AP) — The Islamic State militants came into the Syrian town with a hit list. By the time they left three weeks later, more than 70 civilians had been killed — shot or beheaded, their bodies dumped in farms and ditches.

The apparent revenge killings in the town of Qaryatayn underscore the ability of the extremists to inflict heavy losses even when they're in retreat — and portend more violence as they fight to hang on to their last strongholds in Syria.

News of the gruesome slayings began to emerge late Sunday, after IS militants were driven out by advancing government troops.

Terrified residents said they watched the slaughter from their windows or in the streets.

One former resident said his surviving family members walked for miles to find cell phone coverage so they could tell him of the deaths of his uncle, two cousins and a fourth relative. Another uncle remains missing.

"They came into town with a hit list," said Abdullah Abdulkarim, adding that 35 of the 50 militants who overran the town late last month were originally from Qaryatayn.

EAST OREGONIAN **Hermiston Herald**

Celebrate your loved ones in our
VETERANS DAY TRIBUTE

Honoring those who have served and those who are currently serving our country!

They've served our country with courage and honor. They've left behind loved ones to risk their lives while protecting our country. They've defended our freedoms and ideals. They make us proud to be Americans. Help us honor them.

Free Example:

**Staff Sergeant
Joel Davis**
US Marines
Veteran

This special section will print in the Hermiston Herald on Nov. 8 and in the East Oregonian on Nov. 11, 2017. There is **NO CHARGE** to be included. Bring us or send in photos of servicemen, servicewomen or veterans, along with the information in the form to the right, by **November 2.**

For more information, call 1-800-962-2819

2x3 EXAMPLE

JOSEPH B. DAVIS

We are so proud of you for serving your country.

Love Evelyn, Joe and Cheryl

1x4 EXAMPLE

JOSEPH SMITH

Thank you for your service!

Love always Marcy, Julie & Emily

If you'd like to purchase a larger space to include a special message, border, flags, or stars and stripes, rates are \$40 for a 1x4" space or \$55 for a 2x3" space. Private party only. Please call 1-800-962-2819.

Service Person's Name _____

Military Branch _____ Military Rank _____ Currently Serving Veteran (Check One)

Your Name _____

Your Address _____

Your Phone Number _____

Deliver to:
East Oregonian | Hermiston Herald
211 SE Byers Ave. | 333 E. Main
Pendleton, OR 97801 | Hermiston, OR 97830
or e-mail to classifieds@eastoregonian.com