



AP Photo/Alex Brandon  
**Attorney General Jeff Sessions speaks during a House Judiciary Committee hearing on Capitol Hill, Tuesday.**

## Sessions denies lying on Russia, pleads hazy memory

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Jeff Sessions on Tuesday displayed a hazy memory of the Trump campaign's discussions about and dealings with Russians in the 2016 election, denying he ever lied to Congress about those contacts but blaming the chaos of the race for fogging his recollections.

During more than five hours of testimony to Congress, Sessions sought to explain away apparent contradictions in his earlier accounts by citing the exhausting nature of Donald Trump's upstart but surging bid for the White House. He also denied under repeated questioning from Democrats that he had been influenced by Trump.

But after saying under oath months ago that he was unaware of any relationship between the campaign and Russia, Sessions acknowledged for the first time that the arrest of a low-level campaign adviser reminded him after all of a meeting at which the aide, George Papadopoulos, proposed setting up a get-together between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"After reading his account and to the best of my recollection," Sessions told the House Judiciary Committee, "I believe that I wanted to make clear to him that he was not authorized to represent the campaign with the Russian government or any other foreign government for that matter."

"But I did not recall this event, which occurred 18

months before my testimony of a few weeks ago," he added, "and I would gladly have reported it had I remembered it because I pushed back against his suggestion that I thought may have been improper."

Papadopoulos was arrested by the FBI and pleaded guilty last month to lying to authorities about his own foreign contacts during the campaign. That guilty plea came in a wide-ranging criminal investigation led by former FBI Director Robert Mueller, who as the Justice Department's special counsel is looking into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to sway the outcome of the 2016 presidential election and into whether the firing of James Comey as FBI director was an effort to obstruct justice.

During the Trump campaign, Sessions, then an Alabama senator, led a campaign foreign policy advisory council on which Papadopoulos served. The attorney general has struggled since January to move past questions about his own foreign contacts and about his knowledge of Russian outreach efforts during the election effort.

Each congressional hearing, including Tuesday's, has focused on Sessions' own recollections, and he recused himself in March from the Justice Department's investigation into election meddling after acknowledging two previously undisclosed encounters during the campaign with the Russian ambassador.

# Senate GOP intent on scrapping health mandate in its tax bill

By MARCY GORDON  
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans are intent on scrapping the Affordable Care Act's requirement that Americans get health insurance, targeting a repeal of the individual mandate to help finance deep tax cuts in their tax overhaul.

The surprise renewal Tuesday of the failed effort to scrap the law's mandate came a day after President Donald Trump renewed pressure on GOP lawmakers to include the repeal in their tax legislation. It has sharp political stakes for Trump, who lacks a major legislative achievement after nearly 10 months in office.

The move by Republicans on the Senate Finance Committee upended the debate over the tax measure just as it was inching closer to passage following months of fine-tuning and compromise. It turned the debate into an angry partisan referendum on health care and President Barack Obama's signature law.

Republican efforts to dismantle the law collapsed this past summer as moderate Republicans joined with Democrats in rejecting the repeal — a bitter disappointment for Trump, who lashed out at the Senate GOP for failing. Adding the repeal of the mandate to the tax measure would combine two of Trump's legislative priorities.

Beyond Trump's prodding, the repeal move also was dictated by the Republicans' need to find revenue sources for the massive tax-cut bill, which calls for steep reductions in the corporate tax rate and elimination of some popular tax breaks.

"We are optimistic that inserting the individual mandate repeal would be helpful; that's obviously the view of the Senate Finance Committee Republicans," Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., told reporters.

The "Obamacare" mandate requires most people to buy health insurance coverage or face a fine. Without being forced to get coverage, fewer people would sign up for Medicaid or buy federally subsidized private insurance. Targeting the mandate in the tax legislation would save an estimated \$338 billion over a decade, which could be used to help pay for the deep cuts.

The Congressional Budget Office has estimated repealing the requirement that people buy health coverage would mean 4 million additional uninsured people by 2019 and 13 million more by 2027.

It "will cause millions to lose their



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite  
**Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, a member of the Senate Finance Committee, joins Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., left, and Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., to talk about work on overhauling the nation's tax code, on Capitol Hill in Washington on Tuesday.**

health care and millions more to lose their premiums," Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, the senior Democrat on the Finance Committee, angrily insisted when the panel reconvened to work on the tax bill and word came of the Republicans' move on the mandate.

Feeling ambushed without advance notice, minority Democrats exploded in anger.

The completed House tax bill, pointed toward a vote in that chamber Thursday, does not currently include repeal of the health insurance mandate. Trump plans an in-person appeal to House Republicans before the vote.

To win over moderate Senate Republicans to the tax legislation, the Senate may take up at the same time a bipartisan compromise to shore up health care subsidies, Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., indicated Tuesday. Thune is a member of the Finance panel.

Outside Congress, as word spread of the Senate Republicans' intention, major organizations representing insurers, doctors and hospitals urged lawmakers to keep Obamacare's unpopular requirement that most Americans have health insurance — at least for now.

Ending the "individual mandate" would prompt healthy people to leave the insurance market in droves, driving up premiums, the groups argued in a letter Tuesday to congressional leaders.

Republican Sens. Rand Paul of Kentucky and Tom Cotton of Arkansas had pushed for the repeal in the tax bill just months after GOP efforts to dismantle the 2010 health care law had

collapsed in the Senate.

"Repealing the mandate pays for more tax cuts for working families and protects them from being fined by the IRS for not being able to afford insurance that Obamacare made unaffordable in the first place," Cotton said in a statement.

Congressional Republicans projected confidence earlier in the day about delivering the legislation.

"This bill will make things better for hard-working Americans," House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., told reporters.

House GOP leaders rallied support with the rank-and-file at a closed-door meeting.

Earlier in the Senate panel's work on the bill, the Democrats complained that the bill would enable U.S. corporations with foreign operations and wealthy individuals and families to exploit loopholes to skirt millions in taxes.

On Monday, a nonpartisan analysis of the Senate bill showed it would increase taxes for some 13.8 million moderate-income American households.

Promoted as needed relief for the middle class, the House and Senate bills would deeply cut corporate taxes, double the standard deduction used by most Americans and limit or repeal completely the federal deduction for state and local property, income and sales taxes. Republican leaders in Congress view passage of the first major tax revamp in 30 years as imperative for the GOP to preserve its majorities in next year's elections.

### BRIEFLY

#### Gunman targets people at random in California town

RANCHO TEHAMA RESERVE, Calif. (AP) — A gunman driving stolen vehicles and choosing his targets at random opened fire "without provocation" in a tiny, rural Northern California town Tuesday, killing four people and wounding at least 10 others, including a student at an elementary school, before police shot him dead, authorities said.

The rampage began shortly before 8 a.m. when the gunman fatally shot a neighbor he had been accused of stabbing in January, Tehama County Sheriff Phil Johnston said.

Shortly afterward, the gunman rammed through the gate of Rancho Tehama Elementary School about 2 miles away and spent about six minutes shooting into the building, striking at least one student, Johnston said.

Surveillance video showed the gunman, who was not identified, trying unsuccessfully to enter the school, authorities said.

School officials' swift decision to lock the doors after hearing gunfire was "monumental" in saving the lives of countless children, Johnston said. No one was killed there.

#### GOP boosts pressure on Alabama party on Moore

WASHINGTON (AP) — Washington Republicans tightened pressure Tuesday on Alabama's GOP to keep a defiant Roy Moore from being elected to the Senate next month, with many voicing hope that President Donald Trump could use his clout to resolve a problem that Republicans say leaves them with no easy options.

With Alabama Republicans reluctant to block Moore and enrage his legions of loyal conservative supporters, national GOP leaders were turning to Trump as their best chance of somehow turning the tide. Two women by name have said Moore molested them in the 1970s when one was 14 and the other 16 and he was a local district attorney, and three others said he pursued romantic relationships with them around the same time.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, in all-out warfare with Moore, said there'd be conversations about Moore after Trump returns from Asia.

#### Military now in Zimbabwe's capital after army chief's threat

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — At least three explosions were heard in Zimbabwe's

capital early Wednesday and military vehicles were seen in the streets after the army commander threatened to "step in" to calm political tensions over 93-year-old President Robert Mugabe's possible successor. The ruling party accused the commander of "treasonable conduct."

The U.S. Embassy closed to the public and encouraged citizens to shelter in place, citing "the ongoing political uncertainty through the night." The British embassy issued a similar warning, citing "reports of unusual military activity."

For the first time, this southern African nation is seeing an open rift between the military and Mugabe, the world's oldest head of state who has ruled since independence from white minority rule in 1980. The military has been a key pillar of his power.

The Associated Press saw armed soldiers assaulting passers-by in the early morning hours in Harare, as well as soldiers loading ammunition near a group of four military vehicles. The explosions could be heard near the University of Zimbabwe campus. The developments came several hours after the AP saw three armored personnel carriers in a convoy heading toward an army barracks just outside the capital.

Mugabe last week fired Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa and accused him of plotting to take power, including through witchcraft.

#### Australians endorse gay marriage, ensuring Parliament bill

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australians supported gay marriage in a postal survey that ensures Parliament will consider legalizing same-sex weddings this year.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics said on Wednesday 62 percent of registered voters who responded in the unprecedented survey favored reform.

The conservative government promised to allow a bill creating marriage equality to be considered in Parliament in the final two-week session that is due to end on Dec. 7.

A "no" vote in the survey would have put marriage equality off the political agenda, perhaps for years. Thousands of marriage equality supporters waving rainbow flags gathered anxiously in city parks around the country and cheered when the results was announced.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, a vocal advocate of marriage equality, called on lawmakers to heed the "overwhelming" result and to commit to legislate for gay marriage by next month.

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