

# GOP nears Senate OK of tax bill after flurry of final deals

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans used a burst of eleventh-hour horse-trading to edge a \$1.4 trillion tax bill to the brink of Senate passage Friday, as a party starved all year for a major legislative triumph took a step toward giving President Donald Trump one of his top priorities by Christmas.

"We have the votes," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., declared after leaders swayed holdout senators by agreeing to fatten tax breaks for millions of businesses and let people deduct local property taxes.

The Senate was on track to give near party-line approval to the measure by late Friday, setting up negotiations with the House for a final package. The measure focuses the bulk of its tax reductions on businesses and higher-earning individuals, gives more modest breaks to others and would be the boldest rewrite of the nation's tax system since 1986.

Republicans touted the package as one that would benefit people of all incomes and ignite the economy. Even an official projection of a \$1 trillion, 10-year flood of deeper budget deficits couldn't dissuade nearly all GOP senators from rallying behind the bill.

"Obviously I'm kind of a dinosaur on the fiscal issues," said Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., the only



Senate Majority Whip Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, listens to a question from a reporter as he leaves the Senate chamber Friday on Capitol Hill in Washington.

announced GOP opponent, who battled to keep the measure from worsening the government's accumulated \$20 trillion in IOUs.

The Republican-led House approved a similar bill last month in what has been a stunningly swift trip through Congress for legislation that impacts the breadth of American society and is hundreds of pages long.

After spending the year's first nine months futilely trying to repeal President Barack Obama's health care law, GOP leaders were determined to move the measure rapidly

before opposition Democrats and lobbying groups could blow it up. The party views passage as crucial to retaining its House and Senate majorities in next year's elections.

Democrats derided the bill as a GOP gift to its wealthy and business backers at the expense of lower-earning people. They contrasted the bill's permanent reduction in corporate income tax rates from 35 percent to 20 percent to smaller individual tax breaks that would end in 2026.

The bill is "removed from the reality of what the American people

need," said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. He also criticized Republicans for releasing a lengthy, revised version of the bill shortly before the final vote, saying, "The Senate is descending to a new low of chicanery."

"You really don't read this kind of legislation," Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., told home-state reporters, asked why the Senate was approving a bill some senators hadn't read. He said lawmakers needed to study it and get feedback from affected groups.

Congress' nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation has said the bill's reductions for many families would be modest and said by 2027, families earning under \$75,000 would on average face higher, not lower, taxes.

Democrats took to the Senate floor and social media to mock one amended version of the bill that included changes in barely legible handwriting. They also criticized Sen. Patrick Toomey, R-Pa., for a proposed amendment they said would give a tax break to only conservative Hillsdale College in Michigan. Toomey, one of the chamber's more conservative members, acknowledged the language would help Hillsdale but said other schools might benefit, too.

The bill hit rough waters Thursday after the Joint Taxation panel concluded it would worsen federal shortfalls by \$1 trillion over

a decade, even when factoring in economic growth that lower taxes would stimulate.

Trump administration officials and many Republicans have insisted the bill would pay for itself by stimulating the economy. But the sour projections stiffened resistance from some deficit-averse Republicans.

But after bargaining that stretched into Friday morning, McConnell and other leaders said victory was assured in a chamber they control 52-48. Facing unyielding Democratic opposition, Republicans could lose no more than two GOP senators and prevail with a tie-breaking vote from Vice President Mike Pence.

Under the changes leaders agreed to, millions of companies whose owners pay individual, not corporate, taxes on their profits would be allowed deductions of 23 percent, up from 17.4 percent. That helped win over Wisconsin's Johnson and Steve Daines of Montana.

People would be allowed to deduct up to \$10,000 in property taxes, a demand of Sen. Susan Collins of Maine. That matched a House provision that chamber's leaders included to keep some GOP votes from high-tax states like New York, New Jersey and California.

Collins, a moderate and frequent maverick who opposed her party's Obamacare repeal drive, said she'd back the tax bill.

# Flynn pleads guilty, is cooperating in Trump-Russia probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Michael Flynn, the retired general who campaigned at Donald Trump's side and then served as his first national security adviser, pleaded guilty Friday to lying to the FBI about reaching out to the Russians on Trump's behalf and said members of the president's inner circle were intimately involved with — and at times directing — his contacts.

Court papers didn't name the senior officials, but The Associated Press has confirmed that they were Trump's son-in-law and senior White House adviser Jared Kushner and former Deputy National Security Adviser KT McFarland, who is now up for an ambassadorship.

Flynn's plea could be a crucial development in the wide-ranging criminal investigation into possible coordination between the Trump campaign and Russia to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election in Trump's favor because it means Flynn is now required to cooperate with federal investigators.

His plea to a single felony count of false statements made him the first official of the Trump White House to admit guilt so far in the criminal investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller.

Friday's developments don't resolve the paramount question of possible Trump-Russia coordination in the campaign, but they do show that Flynn lied to the FBI about multiple conversations last December with the Russian ambassador to the United States. Court papers make clear that senior Trump transition officials — including Kushner and McFarland — were fully



Former Trump national security adviser Michael Flynn arrives at federal court in Washington, Friday. Court documents show Flynn, an early and vocal supporter on the campaign trail of President Donald Trump whose business dealings and foreign interactions made him a central focus of Mueller's investigation, will admit to lying about his conversations with Russia's ambassador to the United States during the transition period before Trump's inauguration.

aware of Flynn's outreach to Russian officials in the weeks before the inauguration.

McFarland's involvement was confirmed by two former transition officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to publicly discuss the matter. One of the officials confirmed Kushner's involvement.

That revelation moves the Russia investigation, which has shadowed Trump throughout the year, deeper into the White House and raises questions about the accuracy of repeated assertions by the administration

that Flynn had misled Vice President Mike Pence and other officials about the content of his calls with the ambassador, Sergey Kislyak.

Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner had led a transition team effort to defeat a United Nations vote referenced in the court papers, according to former U.S. officials and foreign diplomats.

Though prosecutors also had investigated Flynn lobbying work on behalf of the Turkish government, the fact that he pleaded guilty to just one count, and faces a

guideline range of zero to 6 months in prison, suggest that prosecutors see him as a valuable tool in their investigation and are granting a degree of leniency in exchange for cooperation.

White House lawyer Ty Cobb sought to distance the plea from Trump himself, saying: "Nothing about the guilty plea or the charge implicates anyone other than Mr. Flynn."

Flynn, the longtime soldier, stood quietly during his plea hearing except to answer brief questions from the judge. He

accepted responsibility for his actions in a written statement, though he said he had also been subjected to false accusations. He said, "My guilty plea and agreement to cooperate with the Special Counsel's Office reflect a decision I made in the best interests of my family and of our country."

The Russia investigation has persistently followed Trump the first year of his presidency, angering the president and repeatedly distracting from his agenda. Flynn's plea came as Republican senators labored to pass a far-reaching tax bill, which would be a significant victory for Trump.

On Friday, the president ignored reporters' shouted questions as he welcomed the Libyan prime minister to the White House, and aides canceled media access to a later meeting between the two. He did appear briefly at an afternoon White House holiday reception for the media, where he offered season's greetings and departed without addressing the Mueller investigation.

Early on in his administration, Trump had taken a particular interest in the status of the Flynn investigation. Former FBI Director James Comey, whose firing in May precipitated the appointment of Mueller as special counsel, has said Trump asked him in a private Oval Office meeting to consider ending the investigation into Flynn. Comey has said he found the encounter so shocking that he prepared an internal memo about it.

A former Defense Intelligence Agency chief, Flynn was a vocal Trump surrogate during the campaign and was known for leading crowds in "Lock her up" chants

regarding Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server.

Flynn was interviewed by the FBI days after Trump's inauguration.

He was forced to resign following news reports indicating that the Trump White House had been warned by Obama administration officials that he had discussed sanctions with Kislyak and was therefore compromised and potentially vulnerable to blackmail.

White House officials including Pence, who had declared publicly that Flynn never discussed sanctions, said they had been misled.

The court case Friday concerns a series of conversations that Flynn had with Kislyak during the transition period between the November election and the Jan. 20 inauguration.

Prosecutors say Flynn on Dec. 29 spoke with an unnamed senior transition team official about what, if anything, to say about sanctions that had been imposed on Russia one day earlier by the Obama administration in retaliation for election interference. Flynn then requested the Russian ambassador "not escalate the situation" and respond "in a reciprocal manner," a conversation that prosecutors say he then reported to transition team members.

If the Trump transition made secret back-door assurances to Russian diplomats, that could potentially run afoul of the Logan Act, a 1799 law that bars private American citizens from attempting to intervene in "disputes or controversies" between the United States and foreign powers without government approval.

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