



In this 2015 file photo, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents enter an apartment complex looking for a specific undocumented immigrant convicted of a felony during an early morning operation in Dallas.

Detentions spike, border arrests fall in Trump's first year

WASHINGTON (AP)— President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown has produced a spike in detentions by deportation officers across the country during his first months in office. At the same time, arrests along the Mexican border have fallen sharply, apparently as fewer people have tried to sneak into the U.S.

Figures released by the Department of Homeland Security on Tuesday show Trump is delivering on his pledge to more strictly control immigration and suggest that would-be immigrants are getting the message to not even think about crossing the border illegally.

Even as border crossings decline, however, Trump continues to push for his promised wall along the border — a wall that critics say is unnecessary and a waste of cash.

The new numbers, which offer the most complete snapshot yet of immigration enforcement under Trump, show that Border Patrol arrests plunged to a 45-year low in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, with far fewer people being apprehended between official border crossings.

In all, the Border Patrol made 310,531 arrests in

fiscal 2016, down 25 percent from a year earlier and the lowest level since 1971.

Officials have credited that drop to Trump's harsh anti-immigration rhetoric and policies.

"There's a new recognition by would-be immigrants that the U.S. is not hanging up a welcome sign," said Michelle Mittelstadt, of the non-partisan Migration Policy Institute think tank. She pointed to Trump's rhetoric, as well as his policies.

But Mittelstadt also stressed that the numbers are part of a larger trend that began well before Trump's inauguration: Mexico's improving economy and more opportunities at home have stemmed the tide of people flowing across the border for work.

"You've really had a realignment in migration from Mexico," she said, noting that the numbers of Mexicans apprehended in 2017 fell by 34 percent from the previous year.

The decline in border crossings continues a trend that began during the Obama administration, and marks a dramatic drop from 2000, when more than 1.6 million people were apprehended crossing the southwest border alone.

Q&A: Tax bill impacts 'Obamacare' and Medicare

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The tax overhaul Republicans are pushing toward final votes in Congress could undermine the Affordable Care Act's health insurance markets and over time add to the financial squeeze on Medicare.

Lawmakers will meet this week to resolve differences between the House- and Senate-passed bills in hopes of getting a finished product to President Donald Trump's desk around Christmas. Also in play are the tax deduction for people with high medical expenses, and a tax credit for drug companies that develop treatments for serious diseases affecting relatively few patients.

The business tax cuts that are the centerpiece of the legislation would benefit many health care companies, but there's also concern among hospitals, doctors and insurers about the impact on coverage. Here are some questions and answers on how the tax bill intersects with health care:

Q: Trump has said he won't cut Medicare, and the program doesn't even seem to be mentioned in the tax bill. Why is AARP saying that health insurance for seniors could be jeopardized?

A: The tax bill would increase federal deficits by about \$1 trillion over 10 years, even after stronger economic growth expected from tax cuts. More red ink means higher borrowing costs for the government, and that would reduce options for policymakers when Medicare's long-postponed financial reckoning comes due.

Medicare's giant fund for inpatient care isn't expected to start running out until 2029, more than a decade away. But an anti-deficit law currently in effect could trigger automatic cuts as early as next year — about \$25 billion from Medicare.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wisc., and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said in a joint statement last week that such speculation is unfounded. "This will not happen," the GOP leaders said. Congress has previously waived such cuts, they explained, and there's no reason to think this time would be different.

Nonetheless others see an increased risk to Medicare.

"The greater concern is even if the automatic cuts don't take place, the tax bill just exacerbates the pressure on the federal deficit and Republicans have been pressing for cuts in Medicare for some time," said Paul Van de Water, a policy expert with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, which advocates for low-income people.



In this Dec. 4 photo, part of the Republican Senate bill "Tax Cuts and Jobs Act" is photographed in Washington.

Other safety net programs, including Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance would also come under greater pressure.

Q: How did "Obamacare" wind up in the tax bill?

A: The Senate version repeals the Affordable Care Act's tax penalties on people who don't have health insurance. That actually saves the government money, since fewer consumers would apply for taxpayer-subsidized coverage. GOP tax writers got nearly \$320 billion over 10 years to help pay for tax cuts.

Repealing the fines would deal a blow to "Obamacare" after a more ambitious Republican takedown collapsed earlier this year.

Q: Those fines have been very unpopular, so how could repealing them undermine the health law? Other parts of the ACA will remain on the books.

A: Premiums will go up, and that's never popular.

The fines were meant to nudge healthy people to get covered. Because insurance markets work by pooling risks, premiums from healthy people subsidize care for the sick.

Without some arm-twisting to get covered, some healthy people will stay out of the pool.

That's likely to translate to a 10 percent increase in premiums for those left behind, people more likely to have health problems and need comprehensive coverage, says the Congressional Budget Office.

The CBO also estimated that 13 million more people would be uninsured in 2027 without the penalties. If they have a serious accident or illness, uninsured people get slammed with big

bills, and taxpayers wind up indirectly subsidizing the cost.

Q: So just taking away an unpopular penalty would destabilize the health insurance law?

A: Repealing the fines is part of a broader context.

The Trump administration slashed the advertising budget for ACA sign-ups this year, while also cutting the enrollment window in half. The administration is working on rules that would allow broader sale of skimpy insurance plans with lower premiums. That, too, would also draw healthy people away from the health law markets.

"The program would still exist, but it would be quite hobbled at this point," said Larry Levitt of the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

A separate bipartisan bill to stabilize health insurance markets is still pending in the Senate, and it remains unclear where the markets will settle out.

Q: Taxes and health care are connected. Anything else to flag in the GOP bills?

A: The House bill repeals the tax deduction for people with high medical expenses not covered by insurance. The Senate bill would make the deduction more generous than what's currently allowed. People could deduct amounts that exceed 7.5 percent of their income. The differences would have to be resolved in conference.

In order to raise money to pay for lower tax rates, the House bill eliminates a tax credit available to drug companies that develop medications for people with rare diseases; the Senate bill scales back the tax credit. Organizations representing patients are pushing to keep the credit intact.

BRIEFLY

Conyers resigns from Congress amid harassment allegations

DETROIT (AP) — Democratic Rep. John Conyers resigned from Congress on Tuesday after a nearly 53-year career, becoming the first Capitol Hill politician to lose his job in the torrent of sexual misconduct allegations sweeping through the nation's workplaces.

The 88-year-old civil rights leader and longest-serving member of the House announced what he referred to as his "retirement" on Detroit talk radio, while continuing to deny he groped or sexually harassed women who worked for him.

"My legacy can't be compromised or diminished in any way by what we're going through now," said the congressman, who called into the radio show from the hospital where he was taken last week after complaining of lightheadedness. "This, too, shall pass. My legacy will continue through my children."

He endorsed his son John Conyers III to succeed him. Conyers, who was first elected in 1964 and went on to become a founding member in 1971 of the Congressional Black Caucus, easily won re-election last year to his 27th term in his heavily Democratic district in and around Detroit.

GOP leaders now backing Moore, despite allegations

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican leaders in Washington are coming to grips with the possibility — perhaps even probability — that Alabama's Roy Moore will win his election next Tuesday and join them in the capital.

Looking past allegations of sexual misconduct with Alabama teenagers, President Donald Trump formally endorsed Moore, and the Republican National Committee quickly followed suit, transferring \$170,000 to the Alabama Republican Party to bolster Moore's candidacy.

"I think he's going to do very well. We don't want to have a liberal Democrat in Alabama, believe me," Trump said Tuesday during a lunch with Republican senators. "We want strong borders, we want stopping crime, we want to have the things that we represent and we certainly don't want to have a liberal Democrat that's controlled by Nancy Pelosi and controlled by Chuck Schumer, we don't want to have that for Alabama."

Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell, who once called on Moore to get out of the race, changed his rhetoric over the weekend to say that Alabama voters should decide.

Trump forges ahead on Jerusalem-as-capital despite warnings

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump forged ahead Tuesday with plans to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital despite intense Arab, Muslim and European opposition to a move that would upend decades of U.S. policy and risk potentially violent protests.

Trump also told the leaders of the Palestinian Authority and Jordan in phone calls that he intends to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. It remains unclear, however, when he might take that physical step, which is required by U.S. law but has been waived on national security grounds for more than two decades.

Trump is to publicly address the question on Wednesday. U.S. officials familiar with his planning said he would declare Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a rhetorical volley that could have its own dangerous consequences. The United States has never endorsed the Jewish state's claim of sovereignty over any part of Jerusalem and has insisted its

status be resolved through Israeli-Palestinian negotiation.

The mere consideration of Trump changing the status quo sparked a renewed U.S. security warning on Tuesday. America's consulate in Jerusalem ordered U.S. personnel and their families to avoid visiting Jerusalem's Old City or the West Bank, and urged American citizens in general to avoid places with increased police or military presence.

Mueller details \$6.7M spent in early months of Russia probe

WASHINGTON (AP) — The special counsel investigation into possible coordination between President Donald Trump's campaign and Russia during the 2016 presidential election has cost more than \$6.7 million so far, according to a financial report released Tuesday.

The release of the report by special counsel Robert Mueller's office comes as the investigation appears to be gaining steam: Prosecutors have gained a key cooperator in their investigation and revealed that they are keenly focused on the actions of the president and his inner circle.

Of the overall price tag, only about \$3.2 million was spent directly by the special counsel's office. An additional \$3.5 million was paid out by the Justice Department to support the investigation, though the special counsel's office says that money would have been spent on ongoing probes anyway, even if Mueller had not been appointed.

Mueller incorporated several active investigations within the Justice Department including those of Trump campaign contacts with Russia, former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort's business activities and former national security adviser Michael Flynn.

Freedom Caucus deals brush-back pitch to House GOP leaders

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Freedom Caucus has been on its best behavior these past few months. The group of about three dozen hard-right Republicans has a penchant for fighting with GOP leaders over tactics and strategy, and helped topple Speaker John Boehner. But it has played nice in the party's drive this fall to cut taxes.

Not anymore. Washington's agenda has shifted to the budget, immigration and other contentious issues — and that has set off alarm bells inside the Freedom Caucus, which fears being on the losing end as GOP leaders and President Donald Trump turn to Democrats to resolve those issues.

So on Monday night several members in the group, including its chairman, Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., threw a brush-back pitch. On what normally would have been a routine — but crucial — vote to send the all-important tax bill to a House-Senate conference committee, Meadows and about a dozen other Republicans held back their support.

The conservatives were trying to get the attention of House leaders, who were marching ahead with a plan for a pre-Christmas budget agreement that has the potential for dealing conservatives losses on immigration, health care, and money for domestic agencies and hurricane recovery.

In Europe, Tillerson carries on, but with diminished standing

BRUSSELS (AP) — What do you do when you're America's top diplomat, fourth in line to the presidency, and the White House makes it publicly known you're living on borrowed time? If you're Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, you brush it off, pack a suitcase and hop a flight to Europe,

as if nothing had happened.

On the surface, at least, Tillerson carried on in ordinary fashion Tuesday on his first day in the Belgian capital, stoically sauntering from meeting to meeting in his characteristically subdued style. He praised President Donald Trump repeatedly for holding Iran to account and demanding equal contributions from NATO allies, even as he acknowledged getting "a little criticism" over his management of his agency.

Arriving at NATO headquarters for a gathering of foreign ministers, Tillerson ignored a question from a journalist about whether he still spoke for the president.

Tillerson's tenuous future in the Trump administration has followed him to Europe days after the White House signaled he might be fired — possibly soon. White House officials told multiple news organizations last week a plan was afoot to replace Tillerson with CIA Director Mike Pompeo, a humiliating disclosure that cast a shadow over the secretary as he tries to sell Trump's policies to the rest of the world.

Protesters decry corruption in Ukraine, prevent arrest of opposition leader

MOSCOW (AP) — Hundreds of protesters clashed with police in Kiev and called for the ouster of Ukraine's president following a botched attempt Tuesday by authorities to arrest Mikheil Saakashvili, a former Georgian president-turned-Ukrainian opposition leader.

The turmoil is just the latest challenge for the Ukrainian government, which has been weakened by months of political infighting and accused of not halting official corruption.

Tuesday's standoff began when officers of Ukraine's Security Service went to Saakashvili's home to detain him. Trying to resist the arrest, he climbed onto the roof and threatened to jump off, but SBU agents took him down and put him into a van. Several hundred protesters then surrounded the vehicle and blocked it from moving. They clashed with police, who unsuccessfully tried to disperse the demonstrators with tear gas.

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