

Huge tax bill heads for passage as GOP senators fall in line

WASHINGTON (AP) — After weeks of quarrels, qualms and then eleventh-hour horse-trading, Republicans revealed the details of their huge national tax rewrite late Friday — along with announcements of support that all but guarantee approval to give President Donald Trump the Christmas legislative triumph he's been aching for.

The legislation would slash tax rates for big business and lower levies on the richest Americans in a massive \$1.5 trillion bill that the GOP plans to muscle through Congress next week before its year-end break. Benefits for most other taxpayers would be smaller.

"This is happening. Tax reform under Republican control of Washington is happening," House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin told rank-and-file members in a conference call. "Most critics out there didn't think it could happen. ... And now we're on the doorstep of something truly historic."

According to the 1,097-page bill released late Friday, today's 35 percent rate on corporations would fall to 21 percent, the crown jewel of the measure for many Republicans.



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite
House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady, R-Texas, is pursued by reporters in the Capitol after signing the conference committee report to advance the GOP tax bill on Friday.

Trump and GOP leaders had set 20 percent as their goal, but added a point to free money for other tax cuts that won over wavering lawmakers in final talks.

The legislation represents the first major legislative achievement for the GOP after nearly a full year in control of Congress and

the White House. It's the widest-ranging reshaping of the tax code in three decades and is expected to add to the nation's \$20 trillion debt. The tax cuts are projected to add \$1.46 trillion over a decade.

The bill would repeal an important part of President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act —

the requirement that all Americans have health insurance or face a penalty — as the GOP looks to unravel a law it failed to repeal and replace this past summer.

Only on Friday did Republicans cement the needed support for the overhaul, securing endorsements from wavering senators.

Marco Rubio of Florida relented in his high-profile opposition after negotiators expanded the tax credit that parents can claim for their children. He said he would vote for the measure next week.

Rubio had been holding out for a bigger child credit for low-income families. After he got it, he tweeted that the change was "a solid step toward broader reforms which are both Pro-Growth and Pro-Worker."

Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee, the only Republican to vote against the Senate version earlier this month, made the surprise announcement that he would back the legislation. Corker, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has repeatedly warned that the nation's growing debt is the most serious threat to national security.

"I realize this is a bet on our

country's enterprising spirit, and that is a bet I am willing to make," Corker said.

The White House said Trump "looks forward to fulfilling the promise he made to the American people to give them a tax cut by the end of the year."

The bill embodies a longstanding Republican philosophy that a substantial tax break for businesses will trigger economic growth and job creation for Americans in a trickle-down economy.

Skeptical Democrats are likely to oppose the legislation unanimously.

"Under this bill, the working class, middle class and upper middle class get skewered while the rich and wealthy corporations make out like bandits," said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York. "It is just the opposite of what America needs, and Republicans will rue the day they pass this."

The bill would drop today's 39.6 percent top rate on individuals to 37 percent.

The standard deduction — used by around two-thirds of households — would be nearly doubled, to \$24,000 for married couples.

BRIEFLY

Winds temporarily calm on lines of huge California wildfire

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. (AP) — Calming winds Friday gave firefighters a chance to gain ground against a huge wildfire in coastal mountains northwest of Los Angeles but forecasters warned that conditions would remain dry and warm and the respite from gusts would only be temporary.

Red Flag warnings for the critical combination of low humidity and strong winds expired for a swath of Southern California at midmorning but a new warning was scheduled to go into effect Saturday in the fire area due to the predicted return of winds.

The so-called Thomas Fire, the fourth-largest in California history, was 35 percent contained after sweeping across more than 394 square miles of Ventura and Santa Barbara counties

since it erupted Dec. 4 a few miles from Thomas Aquinas College.

One focus of firefighting was on the eastern flank in canyons where a state firefighter was killed Thursday near the agricultural town of Fillmore.

The death of Cory Iverson, 32, was announced by Chief Ken Pimlott of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection but he released no information about the circumstances, citing an ongoing investigation by an accident review team.

Moore tells supporters 'battle is not over' in Senate race

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama Republican Roy Moore on Friday told supporters that the "battle is not over" in Alabama's Senate race even though President Donald Trump and others have

called on him to concede.

Moore sent a fundraising email to supporters asking for contributions to his "election integrity fund" so he could investigate reports of voter fraud.

"I also wanted to let you know that this battle is NOT OVER!" he wrote.

Democrat Doug Jones on Tuesday defeated Moore by about 20,000 votes, or 1.5 percent, according to unofficial returns. But Moore has not yet conceded the heated Alabama race to fill the seat that previously belonged to U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

Moore told supporters that the race was "close" and some military and provisional ballots had yet to be counted. Those are expected to be counted next week.

Moore said his campaign is collecting "numerous reported cases of voter fraud" to send to the secretary of state's office.

Secretary of State John Merrill has said it is unlikely that the last-minute

ballots will change the outcome of the election or even trigger a recount.

Trump doesn't want to talk about Flynn pardon 'yet'

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump won't say whether he is considering a pardon for former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, who

has pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI.

On Friday, Trump told reporters, "I don't want to talk about pardons for Michael Flynn yet." Trump spoke as he left the White House for a speech at the FBI training academy in Quantico, Va.

Flynn is cooperating with special counsel Robert Mueller's probe into potential collusion between Russia and the

2016 Trump campaign.

Trump avoided a reporter's question about when he knew that Flynn had made false statements to the FBI about his discussion of U.S. sanctions with the Russian ambassador to the U.S.

After the president's comments, White House lawyer Ty Cobb said, "There is no consideration at the White House of any pardon for Michael Flynn."

Designed by Karli Kretschmer, Age 9, La Grande, OR. She was the winner of our annual Holiday Design Contest.

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