NATION

GOP on the verge of huge tax overhaul

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Jubilant Republicans pushed on Tuesday to the verge of the most sweeping rewrite of the nation's tax laws in more than three decades, a deeply unpopular bill they insist Americans will learn to love when they see their paychecks in the new year. President Donald Trump cheered the lawmakers on, eager to claim his first major legislative victory.

Perhaps emblematic of the stumbles along the way, there was one last hiccup. Speaker Paul Ryan, who has worked years toward the goal of revamping the tax code, gleefully pounded the gavel on the final House vote, but then it turned out it wasn't final after all.

The Senate still expected to pass the legislation Tuesday night, but the plan to send it on to Trump for his signature had to be scrapped. Democrats noted that three provisions violated Senate rules and had to be removed. So the massive bill will be hauled back across the Capitol for the House to re-vote on Wednesday.

GOP House members roared and applauded as their chamber passed the \$1.5 trillion package largely along party lines, 227-203. Ryan declared, "This was a promise made. This is a promise kept," as he and other GOP leaders convened a news conference moments later.

On a conference call with several Oregon reporters on Tuesday afternoon, Rep. Greg Walden of Oregon said that many of the provisions that constituents had been opposed to in the House's original bill had been changed. He credited the more than 2,000 Oregonian who called, emailed and otherwise contacted his office in the last month with helping improve the final product.

"I think we came to a much better place," he said.

Oregonians, for example, were particularly concerned with the original bill's provision doing away with the ability to deduct state and local income taxes, due to Oregon's high income taxes. The version voted on Tuesday allows taxpayers to deduct a combined \$10,000 in state and local income and property taxes.

The newest version of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act also added back the ability to deduct things like adoptions, student loan interest,



Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, R-Wis., joined at right by House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady, R-Texas, meets reporters just after passing the Republican tax reform bill in the House of Representatives on Tuesday. The vote capped a GOP sprint to deliver a major legislative accomplishment to President Donald Trump after a year of congressional stumbles.

medical expenses and private activity bonds.

However, Walden said under the new bill, which doubles the standard deduction and the child tax credit, he expect fewer Oregonians to still need to itemize deductions to save money, which will simplify the process of filing their federal tax returns. He said currently about 70 percent of Oregon residents take the standard deduction instead of itemizing deductions, but he expects that only about one in 10 Oregonians will in the future.

A reporters questioned him about the bill's impact on the federal deficit, Walden said he believes tax breaks for small businesses, farms, middle class families, corporations and others will help the economy grow at fast enough rate to make up for the cuts. He said there were Oregon businesses that told him they would move assets back from overseas or create jobs due to some of the provisions in the bill, but declined to list specific examples. He also touted provisions of the bill that would help Oregon industries, such as reduced excise taxes on small craft brewers and wineries.

Despite the procedural hiccup that means the House will have to re-vote on Wednesday, the Senate was still on track to approve the package that will touch every American taxpayer and every corner of the U.S. economy, providing steep tax cuts for businesses and the wealthy, and more modest help for middle- and low-income families. Despite Republican talk of spending discipline, the bill will push the huge national debt ever higher.

After the delay for a second House vote, the measure then heads to Trump who is aching for a win after 11 months of legislative failures and non-starters.

Congressional Republicans, who faltered badly in trying to dismantle Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act, see passage of the tax bill as crucial to proving to Americans they can govern — and imperative for holding onto House and Senate majorities in next year's midterm elections.

They have repeatedly argued the bill will spur economic growth as corporations, flush with cash, increase wages and hire more workers. But they acknowledge they have work to do in convincing everyday Americans. Many voters in surveys see the legislation as a boost to the wealthy, such as Trump and his family, and a minor gain at best for the middle class.

"I don't think we've done a good job messaging," Walden said. Now, you're able to look at the final product."

Ryan was positive, even insis-tent. He declared, "Results are what's going to make this popular."

Democrats called the bill a giveaway to corporations and the wealthy, with no likelihood that business owners will use their gains to hire more workers or raise wages. And they mocked the Republicans' contention that the bill will make taxes so simple that millions can file their returns "on a postcard" — an idea repeated often by the president.

'What happened to the postcard? We're going to have to carry around a billboard for tax simplification," declared Rep. Richard Neal of Massachusetts, the top Democrat on the Ways and Means Committee.

Tax cuts for corporations would be permanent while the cuts for

individuals would expire in 2026 in order to comply with Senate budget rules. The tax cuts would take effect in January, and workers would start to see changes in the amount of taxes withheld from their paychecks in February.

For now, Democrats are planning to use the bill in their campaigns next year. Senate Democrats posted poll numbers on the bill on a video screen at their Tuesday luncheon.

"This bill will come back to haunt them, as Frankenstein did," said House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi.

The bill would slash the corporate income tax rate from 35 percent to 21 percent. The top tax rate for individuals would be lowered from 20 (manual to 27 39.6 percent to 37 percent.

The legislation repeals an important part of the 2010 health care law — the requirement that all Americans carry health insurance or face a penalty — as the GOP looks to unravel the law it failed to repeal and replace this past summer. It also allows oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The \$1,000-per-child tax credit doubles to \$2,000, with up to \$1,400 available in IRS refunds for families who owe little or no taxes. Parents would have to provide children's Social Security numbers to receive the child credit, a measure intended to deny the credit to people who are in the U.S. illegally.

Disgruntled Republican lawmakers from high-tax New York, New Jersey and California receded into the background as the tax train rolled. They oppose a new \$10,000 limit on the deduction for state and local taxes.

GOP Rep. Peter King conveyed what people in his Long Island, New York, district were telling him about the tax bill: "Nothing good, especially from Republicans. ... It's certainly unpopular in my district."

The bill is projected to add \$1.46 trillion to the nation's debt over a decade.

The bill would initially provide tax cuts for Americans of all incomes. But if the cuts for individuals expire, most Americans those making less than \$75,000

would see tax increases in 2027, according to estimates.

East Oregonian reporter Jade McDowell contributed to this report.

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