

# Trump, GOP congressional leaders to plot agenda in January

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WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Eager for more legislative achievements before Washington's focus shifts to the midterm elections, President Donald Trump plans to start the new year by meeting with Republican congressional leaders to plot the 2018 legislative agenda, the White House said.

After returning to Washington from Florida, where he is spending the holidays, Trump will host House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky at the rustic Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland during the weekend of Jan. 6-7.

Spokesmen for Ryan and McConnell have confirmed they will attend.

The powwow will follow the recent enactment of legislation to cut taxes, beginning next year, for corporations and individuals at an estimated cost of \$1.5 trillion added to the national debt over 10 years.

The bill marked the first



In this Dec. 20, 2017 photo, President Donald Trump congratulates Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Ky., while House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wis., looks on during a ceremony at the White House after the final passage of tax overhaul legislation.

big legislative achievement for Trump and congressional Republicans, who made cutting taxes a must-do this year after the Senate failed to close the deal on another top

GOP promise: to repeal and replace the Obama health care law.

While the tax bill ends the requirement that all Americans buy health insurance

or pay a fine, which is a key component of the Affordable Care Act, it leaves intact other features of the health care law. No Democrats voted for the tax bill, which

Trump signed during a hastily arranged White House ceremony, without any lawmakers present, before he flew to Florida last Friday.

The agenda for next year is already lengthy, and 2018 is still a few days away.

Trump predicted in a tweet earlier this week that Democrats and Republicans will "eventually come together" to develop a new health care plan. The president is also forecasting unity between the parties on spending to upgrade aging roads, bridges and other transportation. The White House has said Trump will unveil his long-awaited infrastructure plan in January.

Ryan, meanwhile, has talked about overhauling Medicaid and Medicare and other welfare programs, but McConnell has signaled an unwillingness to go that route unless there's Democratic support for any changes. Trump has also said he wants to pursue "welfare reform" next year because "people are taking advantage of the system."

Congress, meanwhile, will open the year facing a backlog from 2017.

The list includes agreeing by Jan. 19 on a government funding bill to avert a partial government shutdown and to boost Pentagon spending. Lawmakers also must agree on billions in additional aid to help hurricane victims, lifting the debt ceiling so the United States can pay its bills, extending a children's health insurance program and drafting protections for immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children.

Trump tweeted earlier in the year that he was ending the program for the immigrants. He gave lawmakers until March 5 to come up with a legislative solution, or the individuals will begin to face the risk of being deported.

Much of the work will need to be done before Republicans shift their focus to retaining their House and Senate majorities in midterm elections taking place in November 2018. The GOP's already slim Senate majority will get even slimmer come January, when Democrat Doug Jones of Alabama is sworn in, leaving Republicans with a 51-49 edge in the chamber.

## BRIEFLY

### After record snow, bitter cold ahead for northeastern U.S.

ERIE, Pa. (AP) — Freezing temperatures and below-zero wind chills socked much of the northern United States on Wednesday, even setting a record in a Minnesota city so cold it's called the Icebox of the Nation, and will stay put for days to come as snow-hardened Erie digs out from a record snowfall.

Forecasters warned of hypothermia and frostbite from arctic air settling in over the central U.S. and spreading east.

The National Weather Service reported International Falls and Hibbing, Minnesota, set record low temperatures on Wednesday morning. International Falls, the self-proclaimed Icebox of the Nation, plunged to 37 degrees below zero, breaking the old record of 32 below set in 1924. Hibbing bottomed out at 28 below, breaking the old record of 27 below set in 1964.

Wind chill advisories or warnings were in effect for much of New England, northern Pennsylvania and New York. Those places and states in the northern Plains and Great Lakes were projected to see highs in the teens or single digits and lows below zero for the rest of the week and into the new year.

The National Weather Service said wind chills in many areas Thursday could make temperatures feel below zero.

People in Erie, Pennsylvania, continued to dig out from a storm that brought 34 inches of snow on Christmas Day, smashing the daily snowfall record for the Great Lakes city of 8 inches, and 26.5 more inches on Tuesday. More than 65 inches total fell on the city in just a few days.



Soledad Hernandez stands on the roof of her car as she brushes off snow in Erie, Pa., Wednesday. Snow continues to fall in Erie and surrounding areas that already have seen a record amount of snow over the past few days, prompting a disaster emergency declaration.

### Thousands of Puerto Rico police owed overtime call in sick

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Thousands of police officers are calling in sick every day in Puerto Rico, partly to press demands for unpaid overtime pay for hurricane recovery efforts as concerns grow over people's safety in a U.S. territory struggling to restore power.

The increase in absences recently prompted Puerto Rico Police Chief Michelle Hernandez to recommend that U.S. National Guard soldiers help fill the temporary vacancies.

"We have had an inordinate amount of absences that we haven't seen in years prior," she told The Associated Press, adding that while there has been a drop in major crimes this year, she is concerned that trend could reverse.

However, the administration of Gov. Ricardo Rossello on Wednesday rejected the idea of using the National Guard.

Normally, an average of 550 police officers are absent every day across Puerto Rico, which has one of the largest police departments under U.S. jurisdiction with more than 13,000 officers overall. But recently, more than 2,700 officers on average have been absent daily.

Public Affairs Secretary Ramon Rosario said the government has already made nearly \$15 million in overtime payments since Hurricane Maria hit more than three months ago and \$6.4 million more will be distributed Saturday.

"There are a lot of police officers who are not showing up," he said. "We are trying to address all demands to encourage these police officers to return to their jobs."

### Syria allows some patients to leave besieged area

BEIRUT (AP) — Syria's government is allowing the evacuation of nearly 30 critically ill people from a besieged Damascus suburb, where hundreds requiring medical treatment have been prevented from reaching hospitals minutes away.

The government recently tightened its siege of eastern Ghouta, home to some 400,000 people, leading to severe shortages of food, fuel and medicine as winter sets in.

Ingy Sedky, spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross in Damascus, said four patients were allowed to leave Tuesday and 25 others are expected to be let out in the coming hours.

It is not clear if all will be evacuated in one batch Wednesday or over several days. The ICRC is partnering with the local Syrian Arab Red Crescent to handle the evacuations. SARC spokeswoman Mona Kurdi said the evacuees arrived in hospitals in government-controlled Damascus, just a few minutes' drive away.

The Army of Islam, a prominent rebel group in eastern Ghouta, said the critically ill will be evacuated as part of a deal that was conditional on it releasing an equivalent number of captives.

"There are many more people who need to be evacuated. We hope this will be only the beginning," Sedky said.

### Singer files sex assault complaint against former Trump aide

WASHINGTON (AP) — A singer and potential congressional candidate says she has filed a sexual assault complaint against President Donald Trump's former campaign manager for hitting her twice on her buttocks during a Washington gathering in November.

Joy Villa, a Trump backer who wore a "Make America Great Again" dress at the Grammys this year, said Tuesday she plans to meet with detectives in Washington next week about the complaint against Corey Lewandowski.

In a phone interview from Tampa, Florida, Villa said she was initially reluctant to come forward because she was worried about any backlash. But she said she called Washington's Metropolitan Police Department on Christmas Eve after a friend who witnessed the incident spoke about it publicly, and other friends urged her to come forward.

"I didn't know him at all," Villa said about Lewandowski. "I only knew him by reputation. He broke my trust."

She said she saw him at a gathering at the Trump International Hotel on the day after Thanksgiving, and said Lewandowski struck her "extremely hard" even after she told him to stop. She said she felt it was "disgusting and shocking and demeaning."

### Long lines at tax offices as homeowners try to beat hike

HEMPSTEAD, N.Y. (AP) — Homeowners are lining up in droves at local tax collection offices, hoping for one last chance to take advantage of a major tax deduction before it is wiped out in the new year.

In Hempstead, town Tax Receiver Donald Clavin said "thousands" of people packed his office Tuesday trying to pay their 2018 property and school taxes a year in advance.

"This is almost chaotic," Oyster Bay Tax Receiver James Stefanich told *Newsday*. He said homeowners began lining up in the cold an hour before his office opened.

Similar scenes played out at tax collection offices around the country in places with high local taxes.

The tax overhaul signed last week by Republican President Donald Trump puts a new \$10,000 limit on the amount of state and local taxes people can deduct from their income when calculating their federal tax liability.

That new cap could translate into a tax hike of hundreds or even thousands of dollars in mostly wealthier, high-tax communities in California, Connecticut, New York, Oregon and other states.

People in some communities are trying to effectively delay that hike for a year by paying their 2018 taxes in advance

### California company has pot license, workers still arrested

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The confusing rollout of marijuana regulations in California has been underscored in Mendocino County, where local authorities licensed a company to deliver pot only to have state police arrest two employees who were trying to do just that with nearly a ton of weed.

The workers for Old Kai Distribution were transporting the marijuana from a farm when they were pulled over Friday afternoon by a California Highway Patrol officer on Highway 101 near Ukiah, according to Joe Rogoway, an attorney for the company. They were driving an unmarked van and were stopped for a traffic violation.

The workers showed the officer the company's county license and a manifest for the marijuana, but the officer insisted it was illegal, called backup and arrested the men.

The company argues it can transport marijuana within the county with its local license, and county spokeswoman Sarah Dukett

backed that interpretation. She said Old Kai was issued a distribution license last week that allows it to legally transport marijuana under two local ordinances passed earlier this year.

The workers were cited for unlawful transportation of marijuana and unlawful possession for sale. Investigators also seized all of the marijuana and the company's van.

"It is incomprehensible that this has occurred," said Rogoway, who sent a letter to CHP demanding that the charges be dropped and the marijuana returned to Old Kai.

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