



The Palm Beach Post

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BOYNTON OKS USE OF PLATE READERS

TAX LEGISLATION

Republican tax bill sent to Trump to sign into law



President Donald Trump, joined by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (far left) of Kentucky, Vice President Mike Pence (left), Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (right, over the president's shoulder), R-Wis., Sen. Tim Scott (right), R-S.C., and other members of Congress, acknowledges final passage of tax overhaul legislation by Congress. CAROLYN KASTER / AP

House OK follows Senate approval, with Democrats solidly against overhaul.

By Damian Paletta and Jeff Stein
Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The House on Wednesday approved a massive Republican plan to overhaul the tax code, clearing the bill's final hurdle in Congress and sending it to President Donald Trump

ALSO INSIDE
» GOP works to avert a government shutdown Friday, **A10**
» Trump expected to arrive here for holidays on Friday morning, **A4**

to be signed into law. The House vote comes after the Senate approved an identical measure early Wednesday morning. In a 51 to 48 vote, Democrats unanimously opposed the bill while all Republicans present sup-

ported it. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., supports the plan but was unable to attend the vote as he is being treated for brain cancer.

The plan would permanently drop the corporate tax from 35 percent to 21 percent, while also rewriting the individual tax rules to lower rates and restructure deductions. The plan would cut taxes in 2018 for the vast majority of households, with by far the largest

Tax bill continued on **A10**

POST ON ECONOMY HOME SALES

Median price for homes at \$330,000; inventory low

Pace of sales slows after summer; area homes average 57 days on market.

By Jeff Ostrowski
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

The typical price of a Palm Beach County house sold in November was \$330,000, down a bit from summertime highs but up 10 percent from a year ago.

Realtors sold 1,243 houses in November, a total that was little changed from the previous month or from November 2016, the Realtors of the Palm Beaches and Greater Fort Lauderdale said Wednesday.

With little new construction during the past decade and owners staying in their homes longer, the inventory of houses for sale remains tight. There are just more than 7,000 houses for sale in Palm Beach County, a 4.9-month supply.

"If you are a seller, now is the time to list your property, as there is less competition from competing sellers," said Jeffrey Levine, president-elect of the Realtors of the Palm Beaches and Greater Fort Lauderdale.

The pace of sales slowed a bit after a scorching

Home sales continued on **A10**

IN BUSINESS

» U.S. home sales climb 5.6 percent, **B6**

POST IN-DEPTH MINORITY CONTRACTS

Waste contracts postponed to get deeper bid pool

Plan to help women-, minority-run firms means fee hikes of 17% to 29%.

By Wayne Washington
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

WEST PALM BEACH — Palm Beach County commissioners voted Wednesday to delay the awarding of garbage-hauling contracts so new programs can be established to give minority- and women-owned firms a better chance of winning bids from the Solid Waste Authority.

That means property owners in the unincorporated areas of the county likely will see an increase in their county garbage pickup rates come October, depending on how much money from its reserves the authority decides to use to extend its current hauling contracts.

The SWA had initially planned to award hauling contracts in February worth as much as \$450 million. On Wednesday, the four haulers who currently service the county agreed to extend their contracts for a year — in exchange for about \$7.5 million more in fees from taxpayers.

The county expects to cover some of those costs

Waste continued on **A8**

POST IN-DEPTH PALM BEACH COUNTY VEGETABLE CROP

Most county crops rebound from Irma

By Susan Salisbury
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

BELLE GLADE — Palm Beach County's vegetable farming industry is largely recovered from Hurricane Irma, which ripped through the area in September, destroying early plantings and delaying the plantings of sweet corn, green beans and other holiday favorites.

Florida citrus growers were harder hit and could take years to recover. On Sept. 10, Irma moved through the center of the state pounding Florida's major citrus producing regions with up to 110 mph winds and 15 inches of rain.

The hurricane blew fruit off the trees and caused widespread tree damage. A Florida Citrus Mutual survey of growers con-



Green beans are harvested in western Palm Beach County. Vegetable planting schedules are back to normal months after Hurricane Irma. But Florida citrus growers could take years to recover. CONTRIBUTED

ducted after Irma pegged total fruit loss at almost 60 percent with some reports of 100 percent fruit loss in the southwest part of the state. Since then, fruit has continued to drop and some

root systems have rotted. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has forecast this season's Florida orange crop to be the

Crops continued on **A10**

OUR CHANGING FARMS

Florida's iconic orange crop is in continued decline. Technology and science are helping to experiment with new crops — and to plant the seeds for the Sunshine State's 21st-century agriculture economy. Read our full coverage at myPalmBeachPost.com/ourchangingfarms.

POST COVERAGE WILLIAMS CRASH REPORT

Venus Williams won't be charged in fatal collision

By Hannah Winston
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

PALM BEACH GARDENS — Tennis star Venus Williams will not be charged in a June crash in which a man was fatally injured, according to a Palm Beach Gardens police report released Wednesday.

City police released their final report into the fatal June 9 crash investigation and stated neither Williams nor Linda Barson, the 68-year-old Acreage woman whose car crashed into the passenger side of Williams's car, will be charged in the wreck. Instead, police said a third vehicle seen on surveillance-camera video



A police report said Venus Williams did not violate the right of way in the collision.

caused a chain reaction that led to the crash.

On June 9, Williams collided with a Hyundai Accent driven by Barson at an intersection near her home at BallenIsles Country Club off Northlake Boulevard. Linda Barson's husband, Jerome, 78, was a passenger in the car and

Crash continued on **A8**

LOCAL, B1

Man slain in shooting pursued hip-hop career

Jair Major, 25, who used the name Jay Montana, was a funny, laid-back person, friend says; no arrests in Lantana-area incident.

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Tax bill

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benefits going to the wealthy. Many of the tax breaks are set to expire at the end of 2025, leaving a large section of the middle class to pay more in taxes. But Republicans promise a future Congress will intervene to prevent that tax hike from happening.

Congressional Republicans went to the White House to celebrate the bill's passage Wednesday afternoon. Trump pushed Republicans to send him a tax overhaul by Christmas, and he touted the measure Wednesday.

"This bill means more take-home pay," Trump told reporters at the White House. "It will be an incredible Christmas gift for hardworking Americans."

Trump may wait until January to sign the tax bill into law, according to Gary Cohn, director of Trump's National Economic Council.

Waiting until January could help the White House avoid triggering a 2010 law known as "PAYGO," or "pay-as-you-go." The budget law requires spending cuts to Medicare and other programs if legislation is approved that's projected to add to the deficit.

If Trump signed the tax bill into law before Congress adjourns in December, lawmakers could be forced to vote on the PAYGO waiver measure as soon as next month to avoid allowing the spending cuts to kick in. The reductions would cut spending on Medicare by \$25 billion in 2018, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Signing the tax bill into law in January would likely defer those spending cuts until 2019, giving Congress almost a year to come up with a solution.

The PAYGO rules can be waived if 60 senators vote in favor, but Republicans will only control 51 Senate seats next year and all Democrats voted to oppose the tax bill.

And with a year to work on a waiver, Democrats could use these spending cuts as a political cudgel for much of 2018, as they square off with Republicans over the federal budget.

The tax plan will lead to a number of changes next year, though the impact will not be clear for months.

The White House believes most Americans will begin seeing higher paychecks in February, once employers have adjusted the amount of money that is withheld.

In April, Americans will file their taxes for the last time under the old rules, as they will be accounting for income they earned before the tax changes went into effect.

The White House and Republicans have promised the tax cuts will lead to more hiring and higher wages. They also have said the tax changes will lure many corporations back to the United States, incentivize them to manufac-



President Donald Trump (second from left) and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., acknowledge GOP members of the House and Senate at the conclusion of an event celebrating passage of the tax bill by both houses of Congress. CHIP SOMODEVILLA / GETTY IMAGES

THE TAX BILL AT A GLANCE

BUSINESS CUTS ARE PERMANENT, NOT SO FOR INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES:

The legislation permanently slashes the tax rate for corporations from 35 percent to 21 percent. But the tax cuts for individuals and families are temporary, expiring in 2026.

THE DEFICIT WILL GROW: Despite Republican talk of fiscal discipline, the legislation is projected to add \$1.46 trillion to the nation's \$20 trillion debt over a decade.

STATE AND LOCAL TAX DEDUCTION FOR SOME: The bill imposes a new \$10,000 cap on the federal deduction that millions use in connection with state and local income, property and sales taxes.

CHILD TAX CREDIT GOES UP: The current \$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.

RESTORED TAX BENEFITS: The final legislation restores some tax benefits that had been stripped in the House-passed bill, including the deduction for medical expenses not covered by insurance, the deduction for interest paid on student loans and the \$7,500 tax credit for electric vehicles.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT PROVISION: The legislation repeals an important part of the "Obamacare" health care law, the requirement that all Americans carry health insurance or face a tax penalty.

OIL DRILLING: The bill opens Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling.

— ASSOCIATED PRESS

ture more goods domestically and make U.S. companies more competitive with foreign firms.

U.S. companies are expected to react in many different ways

under the new tax regime. Some already have announced plans to use excess cash to repurchase stock, a boost for shareholders. Others have announced plans to expand and hire more workers.

Trump said Wednesday that the vast tax cut for corporations is "probably the biggest factor in our plan."

The scope of these changes could determine whether the tax bill is seen as a benefit for the U.S. economy or a windfall for the wealthy, a narrative that will attract more attention as the November midterm elections near.

The Joint Committee on Taxation estimates that the tax cuts in 2018 will amount to \$135 billion, a change that many economists believe will boost growth, at least temporarily.

But it will also add to the deficit, which was projected to be \$563 billion next year without factoring in either the revenue loss or the economic growth from the plan. Multiple nonpartisan analyses have found the plan would add up to \$1 trillion to the deficit over a decade, and far more if the individual tax cuts are extended.

Democrats have attacked the plan throughout the process, saying it gives only limited benefits to the middle class while favoring the wealthy and corporations.

In 2018, taxpayers earning less than \$25,000 would receive an average tax cut of \$60, the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center found. Those earning between \$49,000 and \$86,000 would get an average cut of about \$900; those earning between \$308,000 and \$733,000 would receive an average cut of \$13,500; and those earning more than \$733,000 would receive an average cut of \$51,000.

The bill also would reduce the estate tax, a levy on inheritances charged only to the wealthiest Americans. Under the bill, a couple could pass on up to \$22 million in assets without their legates having to pay the tax.

FEDERAL SPENDING

GOP near spending deal as shutdown clock keeps ticking

By Andrew Taylor
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With a shutdown clock ticking toward a Friday midnight deadline, congressional Republicans scrambled on Wednesday to finalize a must-pass spending bill. A major obstacle evaporated after key GOP senators dropped a demand to add health insurance subsidies for the poor.

The No. 2 House Republican, California Rep. Kevin McCarthy, said party leaders have scrapped plans to combine a short-term spending bill with \$81 billion worth of disaster aid and a \$658 billion Pentagon funding measure. Instead, Republicans are likely to schedule a separate vote on the disaster package, he said.

The strategy for averting a government shutdown appeared to be coming into focus, though it looks like many items on Capitol Hill's list of unfinished busi-

ness could be pushed into next year. It also appears the upcoming short-term measure will fund the government through mid-January, giving lawmakers time to work out their leftover business.

"I think if this all comes together we can vote and leave," McCarthy said in anticipation of a House vote today.

Hopes for a bipartisan budget deal to sharply increase spending for both the Pentagon and domestic agencies appeared dead for the year and Democrats were rebuffed in their demands for protections for young immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children.

Sens. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., and Susan Collins, R-Maine, announced Wednesday that they would not seek to add the insurance subsidies, which are designed to stabilize the Affordable Care Act's markets. The tax bill repeals the requirement that individuals purchase insurance.

IMMIGRATION

Flake says McConnell sees vote in January on young immigrants

By Matthew Daly
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The fate of hundreds of thousands of young immigrants living here illegally and facing deportation will be decided next year, a Republican senator says.

Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake said Wednesday he received assurances from Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., that the Senate will vote in January on bipartisan legislation. The promise came in talks with the GOP leader on Flake's backing for the tax bill.

"While I would have written a much different bill, this bill lowers the corporate tax rate in a manner that makes us globally competitive," Flake said in a statement. He said McConnell has made a commitment for a vote on the measure now being negotiated.

The White House and lawmakers are working out details of the bill, but Flake said in an interview with The Associated Press that the legislation will broadly address border security, asylum

policy and a fix for certain young immigrants.

At issue is President Donald Trump's decision to rescind an Obama-era executive order that created the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which gave protected status to about 800,000 of those immigrants who are in the United States illegally. Many were brought here as infants or children and have known no other country except the U.S.

In scrapping the order, Trump gave Congress until March to come up with a legislative solution.

Flake said he and other lawmakers have worked with White House chief of staff John Kelly and other administration officials. Kelly outlined a list of White House priorities at a meeting Tuesday and pledged to present a detailed list by Friday of border security and other policy changes it wants as part of a broader deal on the immigrants, Flake said.

Flake, a frequent Trump critic, said he has been impressed by Trump's commitment to protect the young immigrants.

Home sales

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summer. Palm Beach County houses that sold in November were on the market for 57 days before going to contract. In July, houses needed just 37 days to find a buyer.

Entry-level houses are still moving fast. Single-family homes priced at \$200,000 to \$250,000 needed just 34 days to find a buyer. By contrast, mansions priced at \$1 million and above sat for 201 days before going to contract.

The condo and townhouse market showed similar trends. The median price of condos and townhouses sold in November was \$172,000, a bit below levels earlier in the year but up 7.5 percent from a year ago.

Condos priced at \$150,000 to \$200,000 were the hottest movers. Units in that price range went under contract in just 37 days. Condos priced at \$1 million and up needed nearly a year to find a buyer.

Some Realtors say Palm Beach County remains attractive to buyers moving from more expen-

sive areas.

Maryland Realtor Creig Northrop recently opened Northrop Realty on Datura Street in downtown West Palm Beach. His strategy: Many of his clients who sold houses in Maryland were moving to Palm Beach County. Rather than turn the buyers over to another brokerage, he decided to follow them here.

"One out of every three sellers moved to Florida," Northrop said. "It's an absolutely amazing thing."

The federal tax package set to take effect in 2018 will only make Florida more attractive, he said.

Changes championed by President Donald Trump will boost the standard deduction but limit the deductibility of state and local taxes to \$10,000, reducing a valuable break for residents of high-tax states.

"It's going to push more people out of Maryland down to Florida," Northrop said.

Nationally, home sales climbed to their highest level since 2006, the peak of the housing bubble. Sales volumes hit a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 5.81 million in November, the National Association of Realtors said Wednesday,

the swiftest pace since December 2006's 6.42 million.

NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun credited the combination of a growing economy, a booming stock market and improving job opportunities.

Meanwhile, the U.S. housing market is in a severe supply squeeze that's pushing prices up. Nationally, there was just a 3.4-month supply of homes for sale, an inventory Yun called "staggeringly low."

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Sweet corn is harvested in western Palm Beach County. Known as the nation's winter vegetable capital, the county is a major producer of leafy greens and vegetables. CONTRIBUTED

Crops

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smallest since 1945 at 46 million 90-pound boxes. The crop could be smaller than California's.

Florida agriculture could receive \$2.6 billion in disaster assistance if an \$81 billion disaster spending bill proposed in the U.S. House of Representatives comes to fruition. The citrus industry alone suffered \$760 million in Irma-related losses.

Irma also dumped excess rain on the fields around Lake Okeechobee in the Everglades Agricultural Area. Then more rain arrived during the next few weeks, drenching and flooding

fields. Farmers couldn't get crews or equipment into the soggy fields to plant the crops.

"It kept raining every three or four days in October. It was a real trial," said Paul Allen, vice president and co-owner of 8,000-acre R.C. Hatton Farms in Pahokee.

Allen said sweet corn is being harvested at his farm, but green bean supplies are limited.

While farmers are receiving about twice the normal price for green beans, the vegetable is going for an average of \$1.69 a pound at supermarkets in the Southeast, up from \$1.33 at the same time a year ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service reports.

Allen said Glades area fields

are being planted with crops to be harvested in March.

"We are into our winter production that goes through January, February and March," Allen said.

Known as the nation's winter vegetable capital, Palm Beach County is a major producer of leafy greens and vegetables. It has more than 450,000 acres in agricultural use, the majority of it in sugar cane.

Brett Bergmann, president and co-owner of grower-shipper Branch: A Family of Farms, headquartered in South Bay, said Tuesday, "Things are back to normal."

Produce supplies were delayed, but now are on par with last year, Bergmann said. Branch grows, ships and packs corn and beans from Florida, Georgia and other

places and also grows and ships leafy greens, radishes and celery.

Gene Duff, vice president and general manager of Pioneer Growers Cooperative, Belle Glade, said green bean and sweet corn crops were delayed, but those are now being shipped to retailers along with radishes and cabbage.

Pioneer Growers is a grower-owned marketing cooperative specializing in fresh sweet corn and mixed vegetables including green beans, radishes and cabbage.

"Supplies should return to normal later this month or the first of the year," Duff said.

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PALM BEACH COUNTY FARMING AN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

■ With an estimated \$1.42 billion in total agricultural sales for 2016-17, Palm Beach County leads the state and all counties east of the Mississippi River and is one of the 10 largest agricultural producers among counties in the United States.

■ Palm Beach County leads the nation in the production of sugar cane, fresh sweet corn and sweet bell peppers. It leads the state in the production of rice, lettuce, radishes, Chinese vegetables, specialty leaf and celery.

SOURCE: PALM BEACH COUNTY AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE