

World News Roundup

HealthCare

Sanders, GOP roll out bills
'Medicare for all' bill lacks details on cost

WASHINGTON, Sept 13, (Agencies): Americans would get health coverage simply by showing a new government-issued card and would no longer owe out-of-pocket expenses like deductibles, according to legislation Sen **Bernie Sanders** released Wednesday.

But the Vermont independent's description of the legislation omitted specifics about how much it would cost and final decisions about how he would pay for it.

Sanders was releasing his bill on the same day Republican senators were rolling out details of a last-ditch effort to repeal and replace president Barack Obama's healthcare law.

In an interview, Sanders said Tuesday that his measure would likely be paid for in a "progressive way." Aides said it would likely be financed by income-adjusted premiums people would pay the government, ranging from no premiums for the poorest Americans to high levies on the rich and corporations.

The measure has no chance of becoming law with President Donald Trump in the White House and Republicans controlling Congress. But it embodies a push to universal coverage that eluded Obama's 2010 law and is a tenet of the Democratic Party's liberal, activist base.

"I think in a democracy, we should be doing what the American people want," Sanders said, citing polls showing growing support for the concept.

His bill would expand Medicare, the health insurance program for the elderly, to cover all Americans. It would be phased in over four years, and people and businesses would no longer owe premiums to insurers.

Expensive

The progressive wing of the Democratic Party backs the bill, which would make healthcare less expensive and less complicated for many people and businesses. It would cover the 28 million Americans remaining uninsured despite Obama's law.

But some Democrats fear Sanders is exposing them to a lose-lose choice.

Don't support Sanders' plan and Democrats risk alienating the party's liberal, activist voters, volunteers and contributors. Back it and they'll be accused by Republicans of backing a huge tax increase and government-run healthcare, and taking away employer-provided coverage for half the country that many people like.

At least 12 other Senate Democrats signed onto Sanders' bill by late Tuesday, including four potential 2020 presidential contenders besides Sanders: Kamala Harris of California, Massachusetts' Elizabeth Warren, New York's Kirsten Gillibrand and Cory Booker of New Jersey.

To cover themselves, several Democrats are introducing their own bills that expand coverage without going as far as Sanders, including possible presidential aspirants Sens. Chris Murphy of Connecticut and Ohio's Sherrod Brown. Several Democrats facing tough re-elections next year in GOP-leaning states say they want to focus on strengthening Obama's existing law, including Montana's Jon Tester and Missouri's Claire McCaskill.

"We welcome the Democrats' strategy of moving even further left," said Katie Martin, spokeswoman for the Senate GOP's campaign organization.

Seven weeks after the GOP drive to uproot Obama's 2010 healthcare law crashed in the Senate, two Republican senators, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Louisiana's Bill Cassidy, were releasing their plan for trying again.

They've struggled for weeks to round up sufficient support for the package. It would cut and reshape Medicaid, disperse money spent under Obama's law directly to states and erase Obama's penalties on people who don't purchase coverage.

No. 3 Senate GOP leader John Thune of South Dakota said Graham and Cassidy would need "a double-double bank shot" to prevail, a joking reference to an impossible basketball shot.

Effort

Like the failed Senate GOP repeal effort in July, the Graham-Cassidy push will get zero Democratic support. That means Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., will need 50 of the 52 Republican senators, a margin he couldn't reach in July and is struggling to reach now.

Despite badgering by Trump that he keep trying, McConnell has expressed no interest in staging yet another vote that produces an embarrassing rejection by the GOP-controlled Senate. Conservatives are wary because the bill falls short in erasing Obama's wide-ranging coverage requirements.

"I don't think this bill will go anywhere," said Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky.

A third effort, a bipartisan attempt to shore up individual insurance markets around the country, is showing early signs that the sides are having problems reaching agreement.

Sens. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., and Patty Murray, D-Wash., hope to reach a deal on continuing for at least a year the federal payments to insurers that Trump has threatened to halt. Republicans are also insisting on easing the Obama law's coverage requirements, which Democrats don't want to do.

Alexander said Tuesday that Republicans want "real state flexibility" to let insurers offer "a larger variety of benefits and payment rules."

Murray said she worried the GOP wants to "wind up increasing out-of-pocket costs for patients and families." That's something Democrats oppose.

McConnell said the Alexander-Murray talks "are underway and we'll see where they go."

The U.S. Congress was wrestling with healthcare again on Tuesday, as lawmakers from both parties considered some approaches beyond simply repealing and replacing Obamacare.

The widened healthcare discussion appeared unlikely to yield dramatic changes soon, but marked a shift from the long-running, Republican effort to gut 2010's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, as Obamacare is formally known.

In one Senate committee, a bipartisan effort was under way on Tuesday to repair Obamacare without repealing it, led by the Republican health committee chairman, Lamar Alexander, and the panel's top Democrat, Patty Murray.

They want to stabilize the Obamacare individual insurance market by protecting its "cost-sharing subsidies."



Sanders



Damaged homes near Marathon, Florida on Sept 12, after Hurricane Irma. Florida is cleaning up and embarking on rebuilding from Hurricane Irma, one of the most destructive hurricanes in its history. (AP)

Evacuees begin long road back to Florida Keys after Irma's devastation

Evacuees from Hurricane Irma returned early Wednesday to parts of the Florida Keys, which remained largely without electricity and communications in the wake of the deadly storm.

Categorized as one of the most powerful Atlantic storms on record when it rampaged through the Caribbean, Irma killed more than 60

people, officials said.

At least 18 people died in Florida and nearby states, and destruction was widespread in the Keys, where Irma made initial US landfall on Sunday and became the second major hurricane to strike the mainland this season.

Authorities barred re-entry to most of the Keys to allow more time to

restore electricity and medical service and bring water, food and fuel.

Irma has also claimed five more lives, patients at a Florida nursing home that lost electricity during the storm that brought widespread flooding and power outages over the weekend, authorities said on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, President Donald

Trump will travel to storm-battered Florida on Thursday to survey damage caused by Hurricane Irma, the White House said.

The White House has been keen to show that Trump is on top of coordinating the federal response to hurricanes Irma and Harvey — which earlier this month flooded Houston, Texas. (Agencies)

Immigration

US won't issue some visas in 4 nations

SC allows ban on most refugees

WASHINGTON, Sept 13, (Agencies): The Supreme Court is allowing the Trump administration to maintain its restrictive policy on refugees.

The justices on Tuesday agreed to an administration request to block a lower court ruling that would have eased the refugee ban and allowed up to 24,000 refugees to enter the country before the end of October.

The order was not the court's last word on the travel policy that President Donald Trump first rolled out in January. The justices are scheduled to hear arguments on Oct. 10 on the legality of the bans on travelers from six mostly Muslim countries and refugees anywhere in the world.

It's unclear, though, what will be left for the court to decide. The 90-day travel ban lapses in late September and the 120-day refugee ban will expire a month later.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Tuesday night: "We are pleased that the Supreme Court has allowed key components of the order to remain in effect. We will continue to vigorously defend the order leading up to next month's oral argument in the Supreme Court."

The administration has yet to say whether it will seek to renew the bans, make them permanent or expand the travel ban to other countries.

Lower courts have ruled that the bans violate the Constitution and federal immigration law. The high court has agreed to review those rulings. Its

intervention so far has been to evaluate what parts of the policy can take effect in the meantime.

The justices said in June that the administration could not enforce the bans against people who have a "bona fide" relationship with people or entities in the United States. The justices declined to define the required relationships more precisely.

A panel of the San Francisco-based 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a district judge's order that would have allowed refugees to enter the United States if a resettlement agency in the US had agreed to take them in.

Border

Meanwhile, Trump will not necessarily insist on including funding for a border wall with Mexico in legislation to address protections for children brought to the United States illegally, a senior aide said on Tuesday.

White House legislative director Marc Short, speaking to reporters at a Christian Science Monitor breakfast, said the administration will lay out its priorities for a fix for the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in the next couple of weeks.

While Trump remains committed to his campaign promise to build the wall along the US border with Mexico, "whether or not that is specifically part of a DACA package or a different legislative package, I am not going to prejudge here today," Short said.

In related news, the top House Democrat and a senior White House official both indicated Tuesday they are open to compromise on border security to expedite legislation to help immigrants brought here illegally as children.

White House legislative director Marc Short said at a Christian Science Monitor breakfast that despite Trump's advocacy for a southern border wall, "I don't want us to bind ourselves into a construct that makes reaching a conclusion on DACA impossible."

Meanwhile, the US State Department on Wednesday will stop issuing certain kinds of visas to some citizens of Cambodia, Eritrea, Guinea and Sierra Leone because the nations are not taking back their citizens the United States wants to deport.

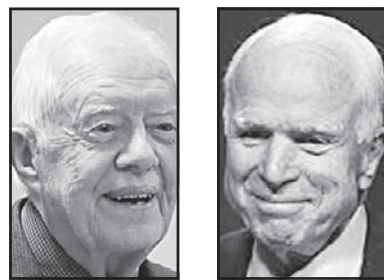
The new policies, laid out in State Department cables sent on Tuesday and reviewed by Reuters, are the latest example of Trump's effort to crack down on immigrants who are in the United States illegally.

The cables, sent by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to consular officials around the world, said the four countries were "denying or unreasonably delaying" the return of their citizens from the United States, and that visa restrictions would be lifted and a country if it accepted its deportees.

The State Department declined comment on the cables, saying it would not discuss internal communications.



This file photo taken on Feb 6, 2017 shows White House Director of Strategic Communications Hope Hicks arriving at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. Hicks has been named White House communication's director, formally taking on one of the most powerful roles in Washington. Hicks — who had been acting director since the spectacular departure of Anthony Scaramucci — confirmed her appointment via email on Sept 12. (AFP)



Carter

McCain

America

Move fast on taxes — Trump:

President Donald Trump is pushing lawmakers to "move fast" on a tax overhaul.

On Twitter Wednesday, Trump says: "The approval process for the biggest Tax Cut & Tax Reform package in the history of our country will soon begin. Move fast Congress!"

Trump had dinner Tuesday with a group of Republican and Democratic senators to talk taxes. The push to overhaul the tax code is a top priority for Trump and Republicans after their effort on health care failed.

Trump has been pushing for changes to the tax code to cut corporate and individual rates and simplify the system, but has offered few specifics.

White House legislative director Marc Short said Tuesday that principles for the tax overhaul will be released "in a matter of days, not weeks." (AP)

US more like oligarchy — Carter:

Former president **Jimmy Carter** says the US functions more like an "oligarchy than a democracy," and he is sharply critical of US foreign policy under President Donald Trump.

The former president says Trump should talk openly with North Korea about a peace treaty, rather than deal in threats.

Carter also says he has no hope Trump can broker peace between Israel and Palestinians. Trump has backed off the long-held US position advocating a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine.

Carter made his remarks Tuesday to several hundred supporters of his post-presidency Carter Center in Atlanta.

The former president's unsolicited advice to Trump is "keep the peace, promote human rights and tell the truth."

(AP)

McCain keeps working: Sen John McCain

will continue with radiation and chemotherapy treatments for brain cancer, while maintaining a regular work schedule in the Senate — following his MRI on

Monday.

The Arizona Republican's office says he had the MRI at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, where he is receiving treatments.

The 81-year-old senator disclosed his diagnosis in July, and returned home for treatment after casting the decisive vote to

kill Republican legislation to repeal and replace the Obama health law.

McCain returned to the Senate following the August recess — and is managing major legislation on the Senate floor, the annual defense bill.

In a weekend CNN interview, McCain said he's confident about beating the challenge but also said, "Every life has to end one way or another." (AP)

American terror trial starts:

A US citizen whose terrorism trial started Tuesday, a day after the 16th anniversary of the Sept 11 attacks, is both a dangerous al-Qaeda operative and someone who has a right to a fair trial in his native country, a federal prosecutor said during opening statements.

Muhanad Mahmoud Al Farekh, who was born in Houston, raised in Dubai and went to college in Canada before ending up in Pakistan, is "an American citizen who turned his back on this country, joined terrorists and lived with them for seven years before he was caught," Assistant US Attorney Saritha Komatreddy said in federal court in Brooklyn.

She also called the defendant "an American who sought to kill other Americans" while working for an arm of the terror network that planned attacks on the West.

In his opening, defense attorney David Runke urged jurors to set aside their feelings about the Sept 11 anniversary, calling his client a "real human being" who deserves a fair and impartial jury. (AP)



New US citizens stand and take an oath at a naturalization ceremony at Alexandria City Hall in Alexandria, Virginia on Sept 12. Each year, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) welcomes approximately 680,000 citizens during naturalization ceremonies across the United States and around the world. (AFP)