

World News Roundup

Immigration

Projects affected

Pentagon OKs \$3.6b to fund 'border wall'

WASHINGTON, Sept 4, (AP): Defense Secretary Mark Esper approved the use of \$3.6 billion in funding from military construction projects to build 175 miles (282 klm) of President Donald Trump's wall along the Mexican border.

Pentagon officials would not say which 127 projects will be affected but said details will be available Wednesday after members of Congress are notified. They said half the money will come from military projects in the US and the rest will come from projects in other countries.



Esper

Esper's decision Tuesday fuels what has been a persistent controversy between the Trump administration and Congress over immigration policies and the funding of the border wall. And it sets up a difficult debate for lawmakers who refused earlier this year to approve nearly \$6 billion for the wall but now must decide if they will refund the projects that are being used to provide the money.

Elaine McCusker, the Pentagon comptroller, said the now-unfunded projects are not being canceled. Instead, the Pentagon is saying the military projects are being "deferred." The Defense Department, however, has no guarantee from Congress that any of the money will be replaced, and a number of lawmakers made it clear during the debate earlier this year that they would not fall for budget trickery and sleight of hand to build the wall.

Slap

"It is a slap in the face to the members of the Armed Forces who serve our country that President Trump is willing to cannibalize already allocated military funding to boost his own ego and for a wall he promised Mexico would pay to build," said Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York. He said the funding shift will affect the US Military Academy at West Point.

Congress approved \$1.375 billion for wall construction in this year's budget, same as the previous year and far less than the \$5.7 billion that the White House sought. Trump grudgingly accepted the money to end a 35-day government shutdown in February but simultaneously declared a national emergency to take money from other government accounts, identifying up to \$8.1 billion for wall construction.

The transferred funds include \$600 million from the Treasury Department's asset forfeiture fund, \$2.5 billion from Defense Department counterdrug activities and now the \$3.6 billion pot for military housing construction announced Tuesday.

The Pentagon reviewed the list of military projects and said none that provided housing or critical infrastructure for troops would be affected, in the wake of recent scandals over poor living quarters for service members in several parts of the country. Defense officials also said they would focus on projects set to begin in 2020 and beyond, with the hope that the money could eventually be restored by Congress.

Security

"Canceling military construction projects at home and abroad will undermine our national security and the quality of life and morale of our troops, making America less secure," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat.

The government will spend the military housing money on 11 wall projects in California, Arizona and Texas, the administration said in a filing Tuesday in a lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union. The most expensive is for 52 miles (84 kilometers) in Laredo, Texas, at a cost of \$1.27 billion.

The Laredo project and one in El Centro, California, are on private property, which would require purchase or confiscation, according to the court filing. Two projects in Arizona are on land overseen by the Navy and will be the first to be built, no earlier than Oct. 3. Seven are at least partly on federal land overseen by the Interior Department.

The 175 miles (282 kilometers) covered by the Pentagon funding represents just a small fraction of the 1,954-mile (3,145-kilometer) US-Mexico border.

Army Lt Gen Andrew W. Poppas, director of operations for the Joint Staff, told reporters that shoring up the wall could eventually lead to a reduction in the number of troops who are deployed along the border. About 3,000 active-duty troops and 2,000 members of the National Guard are being used along the border to support Homeland Security and border patrol efforts. About 1,200 of the active-duty troops are conducting surveillance in mobile truck units.



Glynn County school resource officer Mark Hooper (left), and school support staff member Sheree Armstrong (right), help Elizabeth Scales board a special needs bus at Lanier Plaza as hundreds of local residents evacuate the area under mandatory evacuation ahead of Hurricane Dorian on Sept 2, in Brunswick, Georgia. (AP)

America

Fire blocked escape: Flames roared through a boat of sleeping scuba divers so quickly that it appears none of the 34 people below deck could escape, authorities said Tuesday as they ended their search without finding anyone who was missing still alive from the Labor Day tragedy off the Southern California coast.

It's not known what started the fire early Monday aboard the Conception, which carried scuba diving enthusiasts on a three-day excursion. It spread rapidly and flames blocked both exits out of the lower deck, where passengers and one crew member were sleeping in tight quarters, Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown said.

The captain and four crew members awake on the upper decks jumped off the front of the vessel, swam to an inflatable boat at the back and steered it to a ship anchored nearby. Authorities have interviewed them but haven't said what efforts they made to help the 34 people trapped aboard before abandoning ship.

Twenty bodies have been pulled from the sunken vessel that had been anchored close to the shore of Santa Cruz Island, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) off the coast and northwest of Los Angeles. Four to six other bodies have been spotted underwater, and divers are looking for the remaining people who are missing.

Among those believed to be dead are five members of one family and the marine biologist leading the diving tour. DNA will be needed to identify all the victims, and authorities will be using the same rapid analysis tool that identified victims of the deadly wildfire that devastated the Northern California town of Paradise last year, the sheriff said. (AP)

'Work saved me': Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said Tuesday night that her work on the bench saved her during her cancer treatments, as the judge was given a rock-star reception in the home state of the president who nominated her to the nation's highest court.

Ginsburg told a packed arena that she was "feeling very good tonight," following the 86-year-old's disclosure last month that she had completed three weeks of outpatient radiation therapy for a cancerous tumor on her pancreas and is now disease-free. It was the fourth time over the past two decades that Ginsburg, the leader of the court's liberal wing, has been treated for cancer. She had colorectal cancer in 1999, pancreatic cancer in 2009 and lung cancer surgery in December.

"I think my work is what saved me because instead of dwelling on my physical discomforts if I have an opinion to write or a brief to read, I know I've just got to get it done so I have to get over it," she said during a one-hour interview on stage with NPR Reporter Nina Totenberg at Verizon Arena. About 13,000 attended the event, which was hosted by the Clinton Foundation and the University of Arkansas' Clinton School of Public Service, and more had been on a waiting list to attend.

The lecture had been moved to the arena to accommodate the crowd and was sandwiched between a concert by "Weird Al" Yankovic over the weekend and KISS on Thursday. Former President Bill Clinton praised Ginsburg as he introduced her Tuesday night.

"I liked her and believed in her. I just knew she was the right person for the court," Clinton said. "But I have to say over the past 26 years she has far exceeded my expectations."

Clinton added he never expected Ginsburg to achieve the pop culture status she has, including a movie and a documentary released about her last year and products ranging from t-shirts to coffee mugs featuring her. (AP)



Ginsburg

Florida, Georgia bracing for Dorian's approach

MARSH HARBOUR, Bahamas, Sept 4, (RTS): The wreckage of pulverized homes, beached boats and floodwaters covered miles of the Bahamas in Hurricane Dorian's wake on Wednesday, as rescuers searched for survivors of the worst storm to ever strike the island nation.

The scope of the damage and humanitarian crisis was still unfolding as aerial video of the Abaco Islands in the northern Bahamas

showed wide swaths of destruction and officials warned the current death toll of seven was likely to rise. Aid agencies estimated that tens of thousands of people would need food and other support.

After rampaging through the Caribbean as one of the most powerful hurricanes ever recorded, Dorian wind speeds dropped on Tuesday to make it a Category 2 storm on the five-step Saffir-Simpson intensity scale. It maintained that

level on Wednesday, but forecasters warned it was still dangerous.

Residents of coastal Florida, Georgia and South Carolina were bracing for Dorian's approach on Wednesday, with the National Hurricane Center warning the slow-moving storm could make landfall in South or North Carolina Thursday or Friday.

More than a million people have been ordered to evacuate.

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