



WASHINGTON: A former Republican presidential candidate, answers questions about his opinions on the presidential candidates, during a news conference on Capitol Hill. —AP

## GOP CONGRESS' INCOMPLETE: STALLED BILLS, NO SC NOMINEE

WASHINGTON: Congress increasingly is being defined by what it's not doing this election year. The Senate returns this week with a strong majority of Republicans saying no to any consideration of President Barack Obama's nominee to the Supreme Court. No hearings, no vote and, for some lawmakers, not even a meeting with federal appeals court Judge Merrick Garland.

Republicans, led by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, insist that the decision on filling the court vacancy rests with the next president after voters have their say in November's election. A bipartisan bill to aid Flint, Michigan, where the city's 100,000 residents are struggling with lead-contaminated water, is being blocked by Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah. He says he wants to ensure that the money is paid for without adding to the deficit. The dispute over Flint has snagged a far-reaching measure on energy.

In the House, where lawmakers return from their break April 12, conservative opposition probably will make it impossible to pass a budget, in what would be a major embarrassment for Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis. A GOP proposal to aid debt-stricken Puerto Rico has drawn criticism from House Democrats and conservatives, raising doubts about Congress' ability to resolve the issue.

Neither the House nor Senate has done anything with Obama's request for \$1.9 billion in emergency funding to combat the Zika virus. Republican leaders on the House Appropriations Committee have been going back and forth with the White House budget office and agency officials over whether to reallocate money left over from the 2014 fight against Ebola. The latest Gallup Poll shows public approval of Congress at an abysmal 13 percent. Yet, through a half-dozen state primaries, no incumbent lawmaker has lost. A look at the issues in limbo in Congress:

### The fight over Garland

Garland plans to meet with 11 senators in the week ahead, including two Republicans. Democrats are maintaining election-year pressure on the GOP for blocking the usual Senate committee hearings and vote on a high-court nominee. Sens Susan Collins, R-Maine, and John Boozman, R-Ark., are set to sit down with Garland on Tuesday. Collins is one of just two Republicans out of 54 who are open to hearings and a vote on Garland; Boozman is up for re-election this year. Eager to keep the fight in the news, Democrats say there might be 50 more Garland meetings with senators in the coming weeks, and they plan repeated Senate floor speeches on the issue.

Over the Senate's two-week recess, both sides pushed their messages back home, but Democrats were particularly aggressive as senators held news conferences and wrote newspaper columns. Swing-state Republicans facing re-election were top targets, including Sens. Kelly Ayotte of New

Hampshire, Rob Portman of Ohio and Iowa's Chuck Grassley, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, responsible for holding hearings on judicial nominees.

Garland has met with just one Republican: Illinois Sen. Mark Kirk. He is embroiled in a difficult re-election fight and has said the Senate should provide "rational, adult, open-minded consideration" of Garland, an Illinois native. At least 15 GOP senators have said they are willing to meet Garland, though most oppose letting the confirmation process progress.

### Spending

It's been years since Congress approved each of the annual appropriations bills - the 12 measures that fund the budgets of agencies and departments. The new normal is an all-encompassing bill at the end of the year. Republicans leaders such as McConnell want to get the process back on track, and the Senate Appropriations Committee is expected to start with this work during the week of April 11.

It'll be a test for the Senate, and pitfalls await, including potential fights over immigration, environmental regulations, gun rights and display of the Confederate flag. In the House, GOP leaders are still trying to win approval of a broader budget plan that's usually a precursor to action on the spending bills. Chances are iffy at best. The way forward on the appropriations bills is unclear.

### Puerto Rico

House Republicans unveiled a plan to help financially-strapped Puerto Rico with its \$70 billion debt, but a draft bill by the chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, GOP Rep. Rob Bishop of Utah, was rejected by Democrats, GOP conservatives and Puerto Rican officials.

The proposal would create a five-person board designed to audit the territory's government and create fiscal plans and budget measures - steps Republicans say are necessary for Puerto Rico to get its economy back on track. The board would have the authority to enact the plan if the territory's governor and legislature failed to do so.

The draft would not give Puerto Rico the broad bankruptcy authority it has asked for, but would allow the oversight board to facilitate court-supervised debt restructuring in some cases. The House Republican Study Committee, a group of around 170 conservatives, expressed concerns about those debt restructuring provisions, as did the conservative advocacy group Heritage Action for America. Democrats said the oversight board would be too controlling.

Puerto Rico's government has defaulted on \$37 million in interest on bonds issued by Puerto Rico's Infrastructure Financing Authority, as well as nearly \$60 million in Public Finance Corporation bonds. Gov Alejandro Garcia Padilla has warned there is no money for future payments. Bishop said he will continue to work on the bill to gain consensus.—AP

of the President of the United States of America."

President Barack Obama has nominated a number of Latinos to cabinet position during his time in office, two of whom are currently serving: Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro.

Both Clinton and Sanders have already promised comprehensive immigration reform, appealing to Hispanic voters ahead of presidential nominating contests in minority-heavy states. Leading Republican hopefuls Donald Trump and US Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, meanwhile, have promised to tighten up the borders and deport undocumented immigrants.

The responses come as the Democratic contest for the party's presidential nomination is poised to roll into a slate of diverse states - including New York later this month and minority-heavy California in June. The NHLA will use the questionnaires to guide voter engagement ahead of the November election, and to hold the winner to promises made during the campaign, said Hector Sanchez, the chairman of the NHLA. "This is not just a piece of paper that we're going to put out there," Sanchez said. "If they want the Latino vote, they must engage with us." —Reuters

## CLINTON, SANDERS PROMISE TO INCLUDE LATINOS IN CABINET

NEW YORK: Democratic presidential hopefuls Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders vowed to nominate Latinos into key cabinet posts in their administrations if elected, according to their answers to a questionnaire organized by the nation's largest Latino coalition.

The 20-question survey was submitted by the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda to all US presidential candidates on Feb 25, but received responses only from the two Democratic contenders and none from the Republicans, according to the results reviewed by Reuters. Latinos and African-Americans have emerged as key voting blocs in the Democratic race for the White House nomination so far, and are likely to play a large role in the outcomes of big contests looming in New York and California.

"From special assistants to cabinet members, Latinos will play a key role in helping to shape my policy priorities and be effectively represented in our agencies," former US Secretary of State and Democratic front-runner Clinton wrote. US Senator from Vermont Sanders promised to make his administration "reflect the diverse make-up of the country... I can think of no place more vital for such diversity than in the cabinet and the Senior Executive Service

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# TRUMP BACK ON THE 'NEVER A DULL' MOMENT RALLY CIRCUIT

## 'RIGHT NOW I'M CATERING TO THE REPUBLICANS'

RACINE: Donald Trump wants voters to know his message to the disaffected isn't meant for Republicans alone. The party's presidential front-runner told supporters on Saturday that he's out to bring independents and Democrats behind his cause even though "right now I'm catering to the Republicans."

Contenders in both parties bid for an edge ahead of Wisconsin's primaries Tuesday, none more actively than Trump, who's had a rough week and faces a likely struggle against Texas Sen. Ted Cruz in the state. The Republican race is overshadowed by a persistent effort by Trump's rivals in the campaign and the party to force the nomination fight into the July convention - and by his equivocations on whether he will be loyal to the GOP or bolt for an independent candidacy if he feels mistreated.

In Racine, in the first of his three rallies Saturday, Trump said little to suggest his allegiance with the GOP is cast in stone. He offered the critique that the Republican Party had a "falling-asleep reputation" until his campaign caught fire and brought millions of new voters out to primaries and caucuses.

And he sharply challenged Cruz, who appears to have the advantage in the Wisconsin race. "There's such deception and lying," he said of his rival. The outcome in Wisconsin will help determine whether Trump can seize the Republican nomination without a fight at the convention.

### Bitter race

The Democratic race has grown increasingly bitter, too, though it's not matched the GOP contest for raw hostility. Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders were set to attend a Wisconsin Democratic Party dinner,

Their attention will quickly turn to an even more consequential contest, in New York on April 19, where the Democratic front-runner dearly hopes to avoid an upset in the state she served as senator.

Sanders urged rally-goers to come out in droves today. "Here is the political reality," he told a young and pumped-up crowd at the University of Wisconsin's Eau Claire campus. "If there is a large voter turnout - if work-

mary history."

Bundled up in winter jackets and gloves, Sanders supporters waited for hours to hear him. Sophomore Joseph Lehto said he probably will vote for an independent if Sanders doesn't get the nomination. "Hillary Clinton is a conservative disguised by mildly social policies" he said. "She is a more of warmonger than just about anyone."

Trump scheduled two afternoon



WISCONSIN: Republican presidential candidate, Donald Trump, reads The Snake poem during a rally at Nathan Hale High School. —AP

ing people, many of whom have given up on the political process, if young people come, perhaps for the first time - ... we will win on Tuesday."

"But, if there is a low voter turnout, we will probably lose. So, I am here to ask you all, not just to come out to vote, but to bring your friends, your aunts and your uncles - let us have the largest voter turnout in Wisconsin pri-

rallies Saturday and one in the evening, in Racine, Wausau and Eau Claire. In Janesville, Wisconsin earlier in the week, a man pepper-sprayed a 15-year-old girl as Trump opponents and supporters clashed outside his rally. About 1,000 people attended the rally while about as many protested outside. His first rally Saturday went off without disruption.

### Proving ground

Wisconsin has emerged as a proving ground for anti-Trump forces as the front-runner's campaign hit a rough patch. Trump defended his campaign manager after he was charged with battery against a reporter, backtracked from comments that women should be punished for having abortions, encountered a buzz saw of hostile interviews by conservative Wisconsin talk radio hosts and watched Cruz rise in some preference polls in the state.

In an interview Friday, to be broadcast on "Fox News Sunday," Trump left open the question of an independent candidacy when asked about it. "I want to run as a Republican," Trump said. But if he doesn't get the nomination? "I'm going to have to see how I was treated. Very simple."

Cruz has little chance to overtake Trump in the delegate hunt before the convention; Ohio Gov. John Kasich has none. Both hope to deny Trump a delegate majority in what's left of the primary season, forcing the nomination to be settled at a contested convention at which one of them might emerge.

Kasich proposed a novel approach to strengthening Social Security at a town-hall gathering with a few hundred people in Burlington, Wisconsin, on Saturday morning. "Set up a tent city" in Washington, he said, and have mass protests along the lines of the Occupy movement that staged long-lasting demonstrations in the capital, New York and other cities. "Occupy DC to fix Social Security," Kasich said. Heading into the weekend of campaigning, Cruz told a Milwaukee County GOP dinner that Trump as the Republican nominee would be "a train wreck," quipping: "That's actually not fair to train wrecks." —AP