

HAWAII BILL WOULD CLASSIFY HOMELESSNESS AS MEDICAL CONDITION

HONOLULU: As an emergency room doctor, Hawaii Sen Josh Green sees homeless patients suffering from diabetes, mental health problems and an array of medical issues that are more difficult to manage when they are homeless or do not have permanent housing. That's why Green says he wants homelessness classified under Hawaii state law as a medical condition. If homelessness is a disease, he reasons, then doctors should be able to write prescriptions for the cure: Housing.

"It is paradigm shift for sure, but the single best thing we can do today is to allow physicians and health care providers in general to write prescriptions for housing," Green said. Green last week introduced a bill in the Hawaii Legislature to classify chronic homelessness as a medical condition and require insurance companies to cover treatment

of the condition. But if a doctor wrote a prescription for six months of housing, where would the patient fill the prescription?

Housing is health care

That's where Green wants Medicaid to step in. He wants to redirect some of Hawaii's \$2 billion annual Medicaid budget to pay for housing. He says the state could spend less Medicaid money by dedicating some of it to housing instead of paying for frequent visits by homeless people to emergency rooms. A recent University of Hawaii survey found health care costs for chronically homeless people dropped 43 percent when they had decent housing for an uninterrupted six-month period.

"Housing is health care, because it does afford a person a much greater chance of sustaining their health," said

Connie Mitchell, executive director for the Institute for Human Services, Hawaii's largest homeless services provider. But she cautioned that choosing who qualifies would be a challenge. "You need to really look at when that's appropriate, because there's a lot of people that become homeless," Mitchell said. "Just because they become homeless doesn't mean it entitles them to write a prescription for a unit."

Rate of homelessness

Hawaii had the highest rate of homelessness of all US states in 2015, with 53 homeless people for every 10,000 residents, according to The National Alliance to End Homelessness. The isolated state's high food and housing costs have prompted thousands of locally-born residents and transplants to erect tents and makeshift structures for homes in parks

and sidewalks on Oahu, the state's most populated island.

Concerned about impacts on tourism, city officials have banned sitting and lying down in public spaces in the beachfront neighborhood of Waikiki and other parts of Honolulu. The prospect of Green's proposal passing is unclear, but Hawaii officials appear receptive to offbeat solutions. State officials last year directed more money than ever to homeless support services.

And this week, 20 state senators proposed issuing \$2 billion in state-backed bonds to build affordable housing, public housing renovations and homeless shelters. Representatives from the state's two largest insurers - Kaiser Permanente and Hawaii Medical Services Association - and the chairwoman of the legislative committee that will first consider the bill declined com-

ment, saying they have not had time to review it. National homelessness experts said they are unaware of any other U.S. state attempt to classify homelessness as a medical condition.

But more than a dozen states - including California, Louisiana, New York and Texas - have found alternative ways to use Medicaid money for social services to help people stay in housing, like employment services or counseling, according to the Corporation for Supportive Housing, a New York based group. And New York is searching for ways to redirect the state-funded portion of its Medicaid budget toward housing payments. "To date, no one is able to pay for rent using Medicaid. That's the line in the sand," said Barbara DiPietro, senior director of policy at the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, referring to federal Medicaid money. — AP



In this August 31, 2016 file photo, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump walks with Mexico President Enrique Peña Nieto at the end of their joint statement at Los Pinos, the presidential official residence, in Mexico City. President Donald Trump and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto spoke for an hour by phone Friday Jan 27, 2017 amid rising tensions over the US leader's plans for a southern border wall. — AP

BY PICKING FIGHT WITH MEXICO, TRUMP SHOCKS A KEY PARTNER

MEXICO CITY: By picking a fight with Mexico, US President Donald Trump is needing a strategic partner that could retaliate with a trade war and less cooperation on immigration and the drug war, analysts say. The neighboring countries face the biggest diplomatic rift in decades over Trump's insistence that Mexico pay for construction of a wall along their 2,000-mile border.

The dispute prompted President Enrique Peña Nieto to scrap a meeting with Trump in Washington that had been scheduled for next week, while the White House raised the possibility of slapping tariffs on Mexico to fund the wall. The two leaders sought to mend fences on Friday as they spoke on the phone for an hour, acknowledging their differences over who should pay for the wall while agreeing to seek a resolution.

The two governments issued a nearly identical statement about the conversation, except for one line that only appeared in the Mexican government's text: "The presidents also agreed for now to no longer speak publicly about this controversial issue." Neither statement indicated whether the two presidents would reschedule their meeting, though they instructed their teams to continue negotiations. For Jesus Velasco, an expert in US-Mexico relations at Tarleton State University in Texas, it is "even worse" than the last major diplomatic crisis in 1985, when a drug cartel tortured and killed a US Drug Enforcement Administration agent, prompting Washington to briefly close the

border. "Trump is cornering the Peña Nieto administration so that there is no room for negotiations," Velasco said.

Countering the 'bully'

Urging Mexico to "defend itself against the bully," former president Felipe Calderon said the government could hit back through its drug war cooperation. The army, for example, could stop checking trucks for narcotics before they cross the border, he said. "Decisions must be made to make them understand that Mexico's support and collaboration (on security) do not come free," Calderon told Radio Formula. The US Congress has appropriated \$2.5 billion for the Merida Initiative, an aid program that has provided equipment and training to Mexican law enforcement agencies. But in his search for wall funds, Trump has ordered officials to scour US government departments and agencies in search of aid to the Mexican government and report back within 30 days.

Duncan Wood, director of the Mexico Institute at the Wilson Center think tank in Washington, said Mexico needs to do a better job of explaining why the country is important for US security. "Now Mexico needs to make the case of, 'Look, you are damn lucky you have a friendly nation on your southern border, and that's worth thinking about,'" Wood said. In a symbol of such cooperation last week, Mexico extradited the man who was considered the world's most powerful drug baron, Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, to New York on the eve of Trump's inauguration. — AP

BRAZIL'S 'CAR WASH' PROSECUTOR SAYS CORRUPTION PROBE TO GROW

CURITIBA: The lead federal prosecutor in a massive corruption investigation roiling Brazil says that recent developments could double the size of the case, a staggering possibility given that the probe has ensnared many of the country's elite, threatens to bring down President Michel Temer and is expanding to other Latin American countries. Nearly three years after the first arrests in March 2014, the so-called Car Wash investigation has no end in sight, said Deltan Dallagnol, coordinator of the task force in the state of Parana, where the operations began and are still largely centered under the jurisdiction of Judge Sergio Moro.

"I would say that the new plea agreements could allow the Car Wash operation to double its size in the future," Dallagnol told The Associated Press on Thursday, declining to go into detail because the cases were ongoing. What started as an investigation into money-laundering has morphed into a corruption scandal so large that it has shocked Brazilians long accustomed to graft in politics. Investigators say more than \$2 billion in bribes were paid out in a kick-back scheme that was centered at state oil company Petrobras and included major construction companies like Odebrecht.

'Lives at risk'

In the last few years, dozens of politicians and top businessmen have been convicted and jailed, and many more are facing charges. In a wide-ranging interview, Dallagnol said the investiga-

tion "lives at risk" because of forces trying to snuff it out. He said the pressures were increasing as the number "of powerful people caught up in it grows by the day."

Dallagnol said the loss of Supreme Court Justice Teori Zavascki, who was overseeing a large part of the investigation and died in a plane crash last week, was a huge blow but ultimately would not derail the many cases in progress. He said that while many believed the investigation was creating a "new Brazil," its long-term impact depended on whether Latin America's largest nation took measures to reform its political and judicial systems. He likened it to an ill patient who goes to the doctor and gets a diagnosis but doesn't act on the medical advice. — AP



CURITIBA: Brazilian Deltan Dallagnol, attorney of the Federal Public Ministry, speaks during an interview in Curitiba, Brazil. — AFP

RICH? SCARED ABOUT THE TRUMPOCALYPSE? TRY NZ

AFTER TRUMP'S ELECTION, 17,000 AMERICANS EYE NEW ZEALAND

WELLINGTON: The elevation of an unpredictable billionaire to the helm of nuclear-armed America has given fresh impetus to the idea of remote New Zealand (NZ) as a bulwark for civilization in the event of a global catastrophe. The idea has pedigree-British science fiction writer John Wyndham's 1955 novel "The Chrysalids" describes a post-apocalyptic landscape where Zealand (or Sealand) is the only place that has not sunk into barbarity.

The fictional Zealand escaped the holocaust because it was "somewhat secluded" and it seems that, in uncertain times, the real New Zealand is attracting interest for the same reason. "The world is heading into a major crisis," German-born internet mogul and alleged online piracy kingpin Kim Dotcom tweeted late last year. "I saw it coming and that's why we moved to New Zealand. Far away & not on any nuclear target list." After Trump's election in November, about 17,000 Americans registered interest online in moving to New Zealand, a 13-fold increase on regular levels. Immigration New Zealand also reported a spike in inquiries from Britain after the Brexit vote.

Just last week it emerged that tech titan Peter Thiel, one of Trump's strongest supporters, quietly obtained New Zealand citizenship in 2011 and owns several properties in the South Pacific nation. Other rich-listers who have either moved

to New Zealand or bought land include Hollywood director James Cameron, Russian steel magnate Alexander Abramov and US financial services guru William Foley. One of China's wealthiest executives, Jack Ma, said last year that at least 20 former colleagues from his Alibaba empire had retired to New Zealand and he was considering purchasing a property himself.

The nation of 4.5 million people is nestled deep in the South Pacific Ocean, some 2,000 kilometers from Australia. It is prosperous, has spectacular landscapes and Transparency International rates it the least corrupt country in the world, alongside Denmark. The New Yorker magazine this month reported it had become the refuge of choice for ultra-rich Americans looking for a bolt-hole if Trump's presidency goes disastrously wrong. Peter Campbell of high-end construction firm Triple Star Management said wealthy Americans wanted help pads in their luxury escapes, but not necessarily underground shelters. "It's not like you need to build a bunker under your front lawn, because you're several thousand miles away from the White House," he told the magazine.

'Sign of success?'

Apocalyptic anxieties will have been heightened Thursday after the symbolic "Doomsday Clock" was moved 30 seconds closer to midnight

on the strength of Trump's comments about nuclear weapons and climate change. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists set it at two-and-a-half minutes to midnight, the closest it has been since the height of the Cold War in 1953. In such a troubled world, New Zealand Prime Minister Bill English has said he can see why his country's political stability and strong economy were attractive. "Around the world now there's quite a lot of anxiety because there's so much uncertainty, whether it's in Europe or the UK or the US," he said. "So I'd expect there would be demand for people to come to New Zealand. That's a measure of success."

New Zealand actively encourages wealthy migrants and has special provisions to grant residency to people who can bring along several million dollars in investments. But the average Kiwi need not necessarily worry too much about rubbing shoulders with an Ivy League fund manager or Russian oligarch next time they tuck into a meat pie at the local rugby match. The country's largest migration consultancy, Malcolm Pacific Immigration, said the post-election surge in interest in New Zealand was yet to translate into actual applications to move halfway around the world. "There is a big difference between making an enquiry and following through," Chris Noakes, a team manager at the firm, told Fairfax New Zealand. — AFP



Syrian children play in the snow, at an informal refugee camp in the eastern Lebanese town of Marj near the border with Syria, Lebanon yesterday. In an executive order on Friday, Trump suspended all refugee admissions to the US for four months and banned the entry of Syrian refugees indefinitely, pending a security review of the admissions program. — AP

THE US REFUGEE PROGRAM, A LIFELINE FOR THOUSANDS

WASHINGTON: The US refugee resettlement program that President Donald Trump suspended on Friday has long been the world's most generous source of sanctuary for victims of conflict. A week after taking office, citing the supposed threat of violent extremists hidden among Muslim refugee arrivals, Trump halted the program for at least 120 days. Even if the program is revived in some form after this period, this will dramatically curtail the world's humanitarian effort to resettle vulnerable refugees.

In 2015, the United States alone was responsible for allowing in and finding homes for 64 percent of those referred to world governments by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Under President Barack Obama in the 2016 US fiscal year-which ran from October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016 - the United States admitted 84,994 refugees from around the world. And already in this fiscal year, another 25,671 have come, as US officials raced to cope with large

numbers fleeing extremist violence and civil war in Syria, Yemen and Libya. Before leaving office, Obama set a target of 110,000 admissions in the 2017 fiscal year that ends on September 30. Trump's order slashes that figure to 50,000.

In its last report to Congress on the subject, the Obama administration said it expected to have just over \$1.5 billion to spend on the refugee program in the 2017 fiscal year. New resettlements did not stop when Trump, who had harsh words for the program on the campaign trail last year, came to office on January 20 and began drawing up executive orders. In fact, in the single week since Inauguration Day, the United States resettled 2,089 people. Crucially, many of these come from countries that Trump's administration has singled out for special scrutiny: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Extreme vetting

The new administration claims that these

mainly Muslim and in some cases unstable nations could be a source of extremist infiltration. But in fact, no refugee who passed through the resettlement program-which involves a thorough investigation by US authorities-has ever been convicted of a terrorist crime. In addition to facing the same suspension in the refugee program as citizens of other states, would-be visitors or immigrants from these countries will not be allowed to seek visas during a 90-day period.

During this time, Trump has ordered senior staff to conduct a review of security procedures for migrants, visitors and refugees with a view to imposing "extreme vetting" on future applicants. Pro-Trump media such as the nationalist site Breitbart, formerly run by the president's chief of strategy Steve Bannon, have criticized the State Department for continuing to welcome new arrivals. But in the week since Trump came to power, 142 Iranians, 218 Iraqis, 211 Somalis, 37 Sudanese, 296 Syrians and a Yemeni have begun new lives in the United States. — AFP