

ROUNDUP

**U.S. CUSTOMS
Border protection agency
may create new crossing**

Some might think the last thing the U.S. needs is a new border crossing with Mexico, given all the uproar about the understaffed and overworked Border Patrol battling bad guys trying to smuggle people, drugs and cash over it. But that's just what the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency is considering for a sparsely settled stretch of Texas. It would be located at Boquillas, Texas, within the confines of rugged and scenic Big Bend National Park.

The agency said the crossing would encourage trade across a large section of the border between Presidio and Del Rio, where no port of entry now exists. It also would foster tourism to the park, the agency said.

Not just anyone could use the crossing — only U.S. citizens, holders of U.S. green cards, those with official nonresident crossing cards and citizens of countries for which no U.S. visa is required. Customs and Border Protection said it would announce its decision sometime next spring. — *Scripps Howard*

**AIR SAFETY
FAA targets laser flashings**

There is an epidemic under way across the country of potentially dangerous laser flashings aimed into aircraft cockpits, the Federal Aviation Administration said. So far this year, pilots have reported 2,795 incidents of lasers being flashed into their cockpits. In 2009, there were 1,527.

Laser attacks pose a significant danger because they can temporarily blind pilots. Alarmed by the rise in attacks, the FAA in June announced a fine of up to \$11,000 for interfering with an airplane's pilot or crew by flashing a laser at them. The FAA says it is investigating 18 cases. Now, the FAA has created a website — faa.gov/aircraft/safety/report/laserinfo — that provides information on laser attacks. — *Scripps Howard*

**WILDLIFE PROTECTION
All chimps could get
endangered classification**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is contemplating classifying all chimps, captive or wild, as endangered. The agency is collecting opinions from the scientific and medical-research community, private industry and the public on whether such a change is warranted.

If all chimps gain that protection, the estimated 1,000 chimps held by U.S. private and government labs could no longer be used in medical testing. They also would be barred from use by the entertainment industry, and forbidden from being kept in private zoos or as personal pets.

Fish and Wildlife is accept-

SPENDING

Balanced-budget amendment back in Congress

By Susan Ferrechio
Chief Congressional Correspondent

For the first time in nearly 15 years, Congress this week will vote on a balanced-budget amendment, and with the nation's economy stalled and Europe's debt crisis rippling across the globe there may be enough impetus for lawmakers to push the amendment through at least one chamber.

The House will take up the constitutional amendment first. If it wins a two-thirds majority there, the Senate would be required to consider an identical version — and need a two-thirds vote to pass it.

If approved, the amendment would prohibit federal spending to exceed revenues the government takes in, unless the extra spending is specifically authorized by a two-thirds vote in each chamber.

Republicans demanded a vote on the constitutional amendment, which would impose a whole new level of fiscal restraint on the federal government, as a condition for allowing President Obama to raise the nation's debt ceiling, the amount the country can continue to borrow to pay its bills.

"I think this is a key time for members of Congress to show that they understand that a big part of the problem we have here is that the Congress, year after year, puts off making the tough decisions," said Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., who introduced the bill on the opening day of Congress this year. "Instead, Congress has replaced those tough decisions with just borrowing more money."

Goodlatte told *The Washington Examiner* he expects nearly every Republican in the House to support the bill, even though many would prefer an amendment that also caps federal spending as a percentage of the gross domestic product and requires a supermajority vote to raise taxes.

Goodlatte, who authored the tougher version, said it would be far



ALEX BRANDON/AP



Goodlatte

For the amendment to pass the House, 290 lawmakers have to support it. Republicans only have 242 votes, so Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., who introduced the bill, needs nearly 50 Democrats to support it.

more difficult to pass such a measure.

"It does not get a lot of Democratic support," he said.

Still, it won't be much easier to pass the less restrictive measure either.

For the amendment to pass the House, 290 lawmakers have to support it. Republicans only have 242 votes, so Goodlatte needs nearly 50 Democrats to support it.

"It's a difficult threshold to meet, 290 votes," Goodlatte said. "But, there are a lot of Democrats, dozens in fact, who are interested in voting for this."

Goodlatte's bill mirrors one the House took up in 1995, the last time it voted on a balanced-budget amendment. At that time, 72 House Democrats voted for the amendment only to have it die in the Senate by one vote.

A second vote in the Senate two years later also failed by one vote.

This time around, far fewer Democrats are expected to back the amendment, despite polls showing bipartisan support for it.

House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer, the No. 2 House Democrat, said recently he will try to convince the chamber's 192 Democrats to vote against it, calling it a political ploy.

Senate Democrats also are likely to balk at the amendment. If the measure passes the Republican House, however, it would prove

thorny for moderate Democratic senators who would have to choose between constituents who favor the amendment and their party, which

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wants it defeated. "You are going to have Democrats in more conservative areas who are going to feel a tremendous amount of pressure to go along with it," said Ted DeHaven, a budget analyst for the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

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