

Adding Fuel To The Fight

Analysts Say Health Care Law Will Mean Fewer People On The Job

BY ANDREW TAYLOR
AND RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Several million American workers will cut back their hours on the job or leave the nation's workforce entirely because of President Barack Obama's health care overhaul, congressional analysts said Tuesday, adding fresh fuel to the political fight over "Obamacare."

The workforce changes would mean nationwide losses equal to 2.3 million full-time jobs by 2021, in large part because people would opt to keep their income low to stay eligible for federal health care subsidies or Medicaid, the Congressional Budget Office said. It had estimated previously that the law would lead to 800,000 fewer jobs by that year.

Republican lawmakers seized on the report as major new evidence of what they consider the failures of Obama's overhaul, the huge change in U.S. health coverage that they're

trying to overturn and planning to use as a main argument against Democrats in November's midterm elections.

It's the latest indication that "the president's health care law is destroying full-time jobs," said Republican Rep. John Kline of Minnesota, chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee. "This fatally flawed health care scheme is wreaking havoc on working families nationwide," he said.

But the White House said the possible reduction would be due to voluntary steps by workers rather than businesses cutting jobs — people having the freedom to retire early or spend more time as stay-at-home parents because they no longer had to depend only on their employers for health insurance.

The law means people "will be empowered to make choices about their own lives and livelihoods," said White House Press Secretary Jay Carney.

"This fatally flawed health care scheme is wreaking havoc on working families nationwide."

JOHN KLINE

CBO Director Douglas Elmendorf said the top reasons people would reduce work would be to qualify for subsidized coverage and an expanded Medicaid program but that lower wages — because of penalties on employers who don't provide coverage and looming taxes on generous health care plans — would also be a factor.

The agency also reduced its estimate of the number of uninsured people who will get coverage through the health care law. The budget experts now say 1 million more people will be uninsured this

year than had been expected, partly because of the website problems that prevented people from signing up last fall.

However, it wasn't all bad news for the Obama administration. The CBO's wide-ranging report predicted that the federal budget deficit will fall to \$514 billion this year, down from last year's \$680 billion and the lowest by far since Obama took office five years ago.

The new estimates also say that the health care law will, in the short run, benefit the economy by boosting demand for goods and services because the lower-income people it helps will have more purchasing power. The report noted that the 2014 premiums that people pay for exchange coverage are coming in about 15 percent lower than projected, and the health care law, on balance, still is expected to reduce the federal deficit.

However, the budget experts see the long-term federal deficit picture

worsening by about \$100 billion a year through the end of the decade because of slower growth in the economy than they had previously predicted.

As for health care signups, the website woes have largely been cleared up, but the nonpartisan congressional analysts estimated that about 1 million fewer people will enroll through the new insurance exchanges than had been expected this year, for a total of 6 million.

Enrollment is predicted to pick up, topping 20 million in 2016. The exchanges, or online marketplaces, offer subsidized private coverage and cater mainly to middle-class people who don't have health care on the job.

The Congressional Budget Office also revised its Medicaid enrollment projection downward by about 1 million, for a new total of 8 million signups in 2014. About half the states have accepted the health law's Medicaid expansion.

Syrian Video Shows Aftermath Of Bomb

BEIRUT (AP) — Men pull a girl from the rubble and haul her onto a dirty sheet of plastic, while another child, coated in white dust save for a red streak of blood from his nose, lies with his crushed leg dangling off a gurney — the grisly aftermath from the dropping of a crude "barrel bomb" by Syrian forces on the city of Aleppo.

The bombing — one of at least seven such attacks in Aleppo on Tuesday — struck a mosque that was being used as a school, killing at least 11 people, activists said. A video supplied by activists contained scenes of the carnage.

It was the latest example of the heightened use of barrel bombs, devices packed with fuel, explosives and scrap metal that are hurled from helicopters, often indiscriminately.

Since Thursday, around 80 people have been killed by barrel bombs used by Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces to try to dislodge rebels from Aleppo, according to figures provided by the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which relies on a network of activists on the ground.

The video uploaded from the rebel-held Masaken Hanano district showed the aftermath of the explosion at or near the Uthman Bin Affan mosque, where adults were teaching children the Quran, said activist Hassoun Abu Faisal of the Aleppo Media Center.

Groups Join In Pushing For Oil Pipeline

WASHINGTON (AP) — An unusual coalition of lawmakers from both parties, labor and business leaders, veterans groups and Canada's ambassador to the United States joined forces Tuesday to push for quick approval of the Keystone XL oil pipeline.

Five Democrats joined Republicans at a Capitol news conference to urge President Barack Obama to approve the pipeline following a State Department report last week that raised no major environmental objections. The \$7 billion pipeline would carry oil from tar sands in western Canada to refineries along the Texas Gulf Coast. The project has lingered for more than five years and has become a symbol of the political debate over climate change.

Canadian Ambassador Gary Doer also spoke at the news conference, along with labor union officials and a retired Navy admiral. A top oil industry lobbyist attended the event but did not speak.

Environmental groups that oppose the pipeline have been making a lot of "noise," Doer said, but polls show most Americans remain in favor of the project. Pipeline opponents, including many Democratic lawmakers, say the pipeline would carry heavy oil that contributes to global warming. They also worry about a spill.

Doer urged Obama to "choose blue-collar workers over Hollywood celebrities" and accept crude oil from Canada — the closest U.S. ally — over oil from Venezuela. Robert Redford and Daryl Hannah are among scores of celebrities that have spoken out against the pipeline.

Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., said the time to build the pipeline "is now," adding that pipelines are safer and more environmentally friendly than oil that is transported by trains or trucks.

Keystone XL, proposed by Calgary-based TransCanada Corp., not only would create jobs and boost her state's economy, it also would "connect two of the strongest allies in the world," Landrieu said.

"I would swap Canada for Venezuela any day of the week and twice on Sunday," added Rep. John Barrow, D-Ga., another pipeline supporter.

A report released Friday by the State Department cited no major environmental objections to the 1,179-mile pipeline, which would carry oil through Montana and South Dakota to a hub in Nebraska, where it would connect with existing pipelines to get the oil to refineries on the Texas Gulf Coast.

Pipeline supporters say it will create thousands of jobs and move the U.S. toward North American energy independence.

Foes say the pipeline would carry "dirty oil" that contributes to global warming. The State Department report says oil derived from tar sands in Alberta generates about 17 percent more greenhouse gas emissions than traditional crude. But the report makes clear that other methods of transporting the oil — including rail, trucks and barges — would release more greenhouse gases than the pipeline.

Facebook Turns 10 Years Old

NEW YORK (AP) — It has been 10 years since a Harvard sophomore named Mark Zuckerberg created a website called Thefacebook.com to let his classmates find their friends online.

They did. And in the decade since, so have more than a billion people, not just American college students but also farmers in India, activists in Egypt and pop stars in South Korea.

Facebook has transformed how much of the world communicates. Zuckerberg's insistence that people use real identities, not quirky screen names, helped blur, if not erase entirely, the divide between our online and offline worlds. Long-lost friends are no longer lost. They are on Facebook.

From its roots as a website with no ads, no business plan and a hacker ethic, Facebook has grown into a company worth \$150 billion, with 6,337 employees and sprawling headquarters in the heart of Silicon Valley. Born in the age of desktop computers, three years before the iPhone's debut, Facebook is now mainly accessed on mobile devices. Many of these mobile users never had a PC.

"People often ask if I always knew that Facebook would become what it is today. No way. No way," Zuckerberg wrote — where else — on his Facebook page Tuesday. "I remember getting pizza with my friends one night in college shortly after opening Facebook. I told them I was excited to help connect our school community, but one day someone needed to connect the whole world."



Michael Angelo Chavez has fun while his mother Ana runs a snowblower outside of their Wichita, Kan., home on Tuesday. TRAVIS HEYING/WICHITA EAGLE/MCT

Communities Seeing Salt Shortages, Steeper Prices From Long Winter

BY DON BABWIN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — As piles of snow grow taller during this seemingly endless winter, the mounds of salt for spreading on the nation's icy, slushy roads are shrinking, forcing communities to ration supplies or try exotic new ice-melting substances.

Cities have already gone through most of their salt well ahead of the time they traditionally really need it — when the coldest part of winter gives way to temperatures just warm enough to turn snow into freezing rain and sleet and roads into ribbons of ice.

"If we don't get the salt, at some point people are going to be sliding all over the place like what you saw in Atlanta," said Julius Hansen, public works director in the Chicago suburb of Glen Ellyn, citing last week's television images of thousands of motorists getting stranded on ice-covered roads in the South.

So far this year, Glen Ellyn's snow-removal crews have responded to 31 storms. "In an average winter, we have 20," Hansen said.

A community the size of Glen Ellyn, population 27,000, might use 50 to 100 tons per storm. A bigger community such as Waukesha, Wis., which has about 70,000 residents, could use 300 tons or more. The same storm in Chicago would call for more than 13,000 tons.

Demand is so high that salt gets more expensive every day. Communities are trying to decide what to do. They could buy a little more salt now, when it costs twice or three times more than earlier in the season, and hope it doesn't snow too much more. Or they could wait until it does snow more and risk paying even higher prices.

In some areas, there has been so much snow that cities have had to find creative ways to stretch their supplies: spreading salt only on intersections and major roads and mixing it with sand. In Indiana's Morgan County, there is so little salt left that what is on hand will be mixed with sand and used only on the hills.

"We can only do what we can do," county engineer Larry Smith said.

In Pennsylvania's Butler County, they're trying out a product called Beet Heet, made of processed sugar beet molasses, for anti-icing purposes.

Milwaukee road crews are experimenting with liquid cheese brine, mixing it in with rock salt before it goes on the road to make the salt wetter "so it will stick in place instead of bouncing away," said Sandy Rusch Walton, a spokeswoman with Milwaukee's Public Works Department.

Elsewhere, communities have cut back. "As the season goes along, we become stingier," said Fred Abadi, the public works director in Waukesha.

Motorists have noticed. When Emira Palacios got into her car in

Wichita, Kan., Tuesday, as another storm rolled in, "none of the streets had salt," she said. "It is a little scary."

Wichita has received only about 800 tons of the 3,000 tons of salt it ordered. So salt is being mixed with sand and road crews are given just enough of the mixture to cover emergency routes. When the salt runs out, road crews will use sand alone.

But sand has its limitations and can even create problems.

"Sand gives you some traction to get started, to stop, but it doesn't do any melting," said Joseph T. Pajor, deputy director of the city's public works and utilities department.

Some communities have been told by suppliers that they must make do with the salt they have; no more is coming. Others have found salt for sale, but it must be transported by train from as far away as Utah or Canada.

Or they have been offered salt that is on barges, but that salt must be loaded onto trucks because the barges are stuck on frozen rivers and waterways.

"So the municipalities that could buy bulk salt early in the year at \$53 a ton are now paying \$130 a ton a week ago," said Tom Breier, general manager of Ice Melt Chicago, which sells salt to cities and school districts. "And I heard the prices have gone up to \$175 to \$180 a ton. It could easily go to \$200 a ton or more."

Navy Probing Alleged Cheating On Nuke Work

BY ROBERT BURNS
AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON — The Navy said Tuesday it is investigating about 30 senior sailors linked to alleged cheating on tests meant to qualify them to train others to operate naval nuclear power reactors. Representing roughly one-fifth of the reactor training contingent, sidelining 30 may put a pinch on the Navy's training program, senior officials said.

It is the second exam-cheating scandal to hit the military this year, on top of a series of disclosures in recent months of ethical lapses at all ranks in the military.

Unlike an Air Force cheating probe that has implicated nearly 100 officers responsible for land-based nuclear missiles that stand ready for short-notice launch, those implicated in the Navy investigation have no responsibility for nuclear weapons. The Air Force probe is centered on Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont., but could spread to its two other nuclear missile bases in North Dakota and Wyoming.

The Navy said the impli-

cated sailors are accused of having cheated on written tests they must pass to be certified as instructors at a nuclear propulsion school at Charleston, S.C. The Navy uses two nuclear reactors there to train sailors for duty aboard any of dozens of submarines and aircraft carriers around the world whose on-board reactors provide propulsion. They are not part of any weapons systems.

The accused sailors previously had undergone reactor operations training at Charleston before deploying aboard a nuclear-power vessel. In the normal course of career moves, they returned to Charleston to serve as instructors, for which they must pass refamiliarization exams.

Adm. John Richardson, director of the Navy's nuclear propulsion program, said an undisclosed number of senior sailors are alleged to have provided test information to their peers. He was not more specific, but one official said the information was shared from the sailors' home computers, which could be a violation of security rules because information about nuclear reactors

operations is classified. "That'll be an active part of the investigation to fully understand" the extent of any security rule violations, Richardson said.

Richardson said the alleged cheating came to light Monday when a senior enlisted sailor at the Charleston training site reported the cheating to higher authorities. Richardson said the unidentified

sailor "recognized that this was wrong" and chose to report it.

The matter was still under investigation by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.



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