

# Audit: More Than 57K Await First VA Appointment

BY MATTHEW DALY  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More than 57,000 U.S. military veterans have been waiting 90 days or more for their first VA medical appointments, and an additional 64,000 appear to have fallen through the cracks, never getting appointments after enrolling, the government said Monday in a report newly demonstrating how deep and widespread the problem is.

It's not just a backlog issue, the wide-ranging Veterans Affairs review indicated. Thirteen percent of schedulers in the facility-by-facility report on 731 hospitals and outpatient clinics reported being told by supervisors to falsify appointment schedules to make patient waits appear shorter.

The audit is the first nationwide look at the VA network in the uproar that began with reports two months ago of pa-

tients dying while awaiting appointments and of cover-ups at the Phoenix VA center. A preliminary review last month found that long patient waits and falsified records were "systemic" throughout the VA medical network, the nation's largest single health care provider serving nearly 9 million veterans.

"This behavior runs counter to our core values," the report said. "The overarching environment and culture which allowed this state of practice to take root must be confronted head-on."

Acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson said Monday that VA officials have contacted 50,000 veterans across the country to get them off waiting lists and into clinics and are in the process of contacting 40,000 more.

The controversy forced VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to resign May 30. Shinseki took the blame for what he decried as a "lack of integrity" through the network. Legislation is being written in both the

House and Senate to allow more veterans who can't get timely VA appointments to see doctors listed as providers under Medicare or the military's TRICARE program. The proposals also would make it easier to fire senior VA regional officials and hospital administrators.

House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said the report demonstrated that Congress must act immediately.

"The fact that more than 57,000 veterans are still waiting for their first doctor appointment from the VA is a national disgrace," Boehner said.

The new audit said a 14-day agency target for waiting times was "not attainable," given poor planning and a growing demand for VA services as Vietnam-era vets age and younger veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars enter the system. The 2011 decision by senior VA officials to set the target, and then base bonuses on meeting it, was "an organizational leadership failure," the report said.

## Cop Killers Had Anti-Government Views

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A husband and wife who went on a deadly shooting rampage in Las Vegas harbored anti-government beliefs and left a swastika and a "Don't tread on me" flag on the body of one of the two police officers they killed, authorities said Monday.

Jerad and Amanda Miller had been kicked off a Nevada ranch where anti-government protesters faced down federal agents earlier this year because they were "very radical," according to the son of rancher Cliven Bundy.

Assistant Sheriff Kevin McMahaill said the Millers had ideology shared by "militia and white supremacists," including the belief that law enforcement was the "oppressor."

Police believe the shootings were an isolated act, not part of a broader conspiracy to target law enforcement, McMahaill said.

Ammon Bundy, one of Cliven Bundy's sons, said by telephone that the Millers were at his father's ranch for a few days this spring before they were asked to leave by militia members for unspecified "conduct" problems. He called the couple "very radical" and said they "did not align themselves" with the beliefs of other protesters, who thwarted a roundup of Cliven Bundy's cattle by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which wants to collect more than \$1 million in grazing fees and penalties.

## New Study Seeks To Thwart Alzheimer's

WASHINGTON (AP) — In one of the most ambitious attempts yet to thwart Alzheimer's disease, a major study got under way Monday to see if an experimental drug can protect healthy seniors whose brains harbor silent signs that they're at risk.

Scientists plan to eventually scan the brains of thousands of older volunteers in the U.S., Canada and Australia to find those with a sticky build-up believed to play a key role in development of Alzheimer's — the first time so many people without memory problems get the chance to learn the potentially troubling news.

Having lots of that gunky protein called beta-amyloid doesn't guarantee someone will get sick. But the big question: Could intervening so early make a difference for those who do?

"We have to get them at the stage when we can save their brains," said Dr. Reisa Sperling of Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, who is leading the huge effort to find out.

Researchers are just beginning to recruit volunteers, and on Monday, a Rhode Island man was hooked up for an IV infusion at Butler Hospital in Providence, the first treated.

## Airport Attack Poses Stark Challenge

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — The Pakistani Taliban threatened more violence Monday after a five-hour assault on the nation's busiest airport killed 29 people — including all 10 attackers — raising a new challenge for a U.S. ally trying to end years of fighting that has claimed thousands of lives.

With recently started peace efforts stalled, the cautious government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif may be dragged closer to a decision on whether to take on the militants in earnest across a country with a long history of ambiguity when it comes to dealing with militancy.

A further weakening of stability in the nuclear power whose tribal regions are already a hotbed of foment could ripple to neighboring Afghanistan as international combat forces prepare to withdraw from that country.

"Everywhere is a threat," warned Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan. "Every area is a target, every building is a potential target."

Such an attack in Karachi, Pakistan's business center, will likely discourage foreign investment at a time when its economy is struggling.

## Egypt: Sexual Assaults Sparks Outrage

CAIRO (AP) — A string of sexual assaults on women during celebrations of Egypt's presidential inauguration — including a mass attack on a 19-year-old student who was stripped in Cairo's Tahrir Square — prompted outrage Monday as a video emerged purportedly showing the teenager, bloodied and naked, surrounded by dozens of men.

Seven men were arrested in connection with the assault and police were investigating 27 other complaints of sexual harassment against women during Sunday's rallies by tens of thousands of people celebrating Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi's inauguration late into the night, security officials said.

Sexual violence has increasingly plagued large gatherings during the past three years of turmoil following the 2011 uprising that ousted autocrat Hosni Mubarak, and women's groups complained Monday that tough new laws have not done enough.

Twenty-nine women's rights groups released a joint statement accusing the government of failing to do enough to address the spiraling outbreak of mob attacks on women. The groups said they had documented more than 250 cases of "mass sexual rape and mass sexual assaults" from November 2012 to January 2014.

"Combating that phenomena requires a comprehensive national strategy," said the statement signed by the women's groups.

# Obama Acts On Student Loan Debt

BY JOSH LEDERMAN  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Dubbing it a "no-brainer," President Barack Obama expanded a program Monday capping monthly student loan payments for 5 million more borrowers at an unknown cost to taxpayers. Obama also threw his support behind legislation that Democrats are using to paint Republicans as blocking relief for Americans inundated by student debt.

With a group of student loan borrowers looking on, Obama put his pen to a presidential memorandum that will allow those who borrowed through the federal government before 2007 to pay no more than 10 percent of their income in monthly payments. Existing programs created by Congress and Obama already offer that benefit to recent borrowers; Obama's memo will make it fully retroactive.

"I'm only here because this country gave me a chance through education," Obama said. "We are here today because we believe that in America, no hard-working young person should be priced out of a higher education."

In Obama's 2015 budget request, the White House projected expanding the program would cost \$7.6 billion in its first year, although the costs decrease in the out years. But Education Secretary Arne Duncan told reporters Monday that the government hasn't gotten that far.

"We actually don't know the costs yet," Duncan said. "We'll figure that out on the back end."

Republican leaders faulted the president for failing to think through the costs of the program, and noted it only affects education financing — not the underlying problem.

"Today's much-hyped loophole closure does nothing to reduce the cost of pursuing a higher education, or



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT

President Barack Obama speaks about an executive order that lets millions of college graduates cap their student loan payments at 10 percent of their income, a move he says will help "open the doors of opportunity for all." Obama signed the order on Monday in Washington.

improve access to federal student loans," said House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio.

Obama, joined by Democratic lawmakers at the White House, also formally endorsed a Senate bill that takes aim at the same problem but could have a more profound effect by allowing by allowing borrowers to refinance their student debt at lower rates currently being offered.

The Senate plans to take up the bill this week, but it faces steep opposition among Republicans because it pays for the lower rates by phasing in a new minimum tax on millionaires. Even so, the bill reinforces a broader economic push by Democrats to portray themselves as the sole advocates for the middle class as the midterm elections draw closer.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., who is championing the bill, said Democrats are "completely flexible" and open to GOP alternatives for how to pay for the bill. She said so far, Republicans haven't offered any.

"This particular pay-for really puts the question squarely: Who does the U.S. government support? It is billionaires who have already made it, or students who are working hard to get their far shot?" Warren said in an interview.

New borrowers can already cap their monthly payments at 15 percent of income, and that level is set to drop to 10 percent next month. But that plan, created by Congress, doesn't help those still digging themselves out of student debt they accrued years ago.

Using another area of existing law, Obama created his "Pay as You Earn" plan in 2011 to offer similar benefits to those who borrowed since 2007. Monday's action eliminates all eligibility limitations based on when a person borrowed.

Obama also announced he is directing the government to renegotiate contracts with federal student loan servicers to encourage them to make it easier for borrowers to avoid defaulting on their loans. And he asked Treasury and Educa-

tion departments to work with major tax preparers, including H&R Block and the makers of TurboTax, to increase awareness about tuition tax credits and flexible repayment options available to borrowers.

The dual strategy — taking modest action on his own while urging Congress to finish the job — has become Obama's signature move this year as he works to stay relevant despite the increasing focus on the midterms and his successor.

Outstanding federal student loan debt in the U.S. has topped \$1 trillion, the Congressional Budget Office estimates, leading economists to warn that student debt can drag on the economy by preventing many young people from buying their first home or starting a family. A Pew Research Center study last month found that households headed by an adult under 40 that took out student loans have an average of \$137,010 in overall debt when credit cards and other debts are factored in.

## School

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"What our librarians do is more than just reshelving books ...," Mitzel said. "Having full-time library aides really has a big footprint on a lot of students."

According to YSD business manager Jason Bietz, each position will cost the district between about \$19,000 and \$22,000, depending on experience level.

Also Monday night, the school board approved the master teacher contract for

the 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years, officially bringing an end to months of negotiations with the Yankton Education Association. A tentative agreement was reached between the two sides last month following a conciliation meeting with the Department of Labor.

According to school board president Jim Fitzgerald, the contract will give teachers a \$1,300 pay raise next school year, followed by a 3 percent increase the second year and a one-time stipend of \$1,850 the third year. He said there were also changes to contract lan-

guage concerning the health insurance plan.

Additionally, future employees will no longer have the option to remain on the district's health care plan at their own expense following retirement. Current employees will continue to have that option.

At Monday's meeting, the board also:

- directed administration to continue negotiations regarding a land lease agreement with SBA Towers V, LLC, for a monopole cellular tower at Yankton Middle School; and
- heard a report from Joyce Wentworth regarding a historical research and index-

ing project for YSD.

You can follow Derek Bartos on Twitter at [twitter.com/d\\_bartos](https://twitter.com/d_bartos). Discuss this story at [yankton.net/](http://yankton.net/).

## MMC

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In 1978, Lorang took a position at O'Gorman High School in Sioux Falls. He was named the school's first lay principal in 1979. He helped organize Sioux Falls Catholic Schools in cooperation with all the parishes in the city in 1991 and became the organization's first - and until now, only - superintendent.

Lorang said he will not be vying for the presidency of MMC.

"If I was younger, maybe," the 70-year-old stated. "But at this time in my life, I see this as an opportunity to help a

mission-oriented school and follow the Lord's calling. Mount Marty is in a position now where they need someone with an education background. I'm available, and I'm happy to jump in."

MMC is a Catholic, Benedictine liberal arts institution. The process for hiring a new president has not been finalized, but Lorang said he estimates it will take seven to nine months. However long it takes, he has assured the MMC board of trustees that he will see it through to the end.

"I've told them they want to take the time to do it right," said Lorang, who recently completed an administrative hiring process for Sioux Falls Catholic Schools. "I will be a part of a strong ad-

ministrative team. I've been impressed. They are really committed. This is a small school with its share of challenges, but it has a great mission and a real niche.

"I'm pleased to be a part of this," he continued. "I hope I can be a part of the team and that, together, we can form a strong strategic plan. Some really great things can happen when you bring a bunch of committed people together that are focused on something higher than themselves and a good plan for achieving it."

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at [twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage](https://twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage). Discuss this story at [www.yankton.net/](http://www.yankton.net/).

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