

Army To Examine Mental Health Programs

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Army inspector general is conducting a system-wide review of mental health facilities to determine whether psychiatrists overturned diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder to save money, a move that comes as the case of a U.S. soldier suspected of killing 16 Afghan civilians has brought fresh attention to the strains of war.

Army Secretary John McHugh told Congress on Wednesday that the service is trying to determine whether the change in diagnosis was isolated or a common practice. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., who pressed McHugh at a committee hearing, said the forensic psychiatry unit at Madigan Army Medical Center on Joint Base Lewis-McChord is being investigated for reversing diagnoses based on the expense of providing care and benefits to members of the military.

Since 2007, more than 40 percent of the cases involving candidates for retirement had been overturned, according to statistics cited by Murray. Of the 1,680 patients screened at Madigan, more than 690 had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. The psychiatric team reversed more than 290 of those diagnoses.

"The surgeon general (Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho) has asked the inspector general of the Army to go and examine all of the similar facilities and locations," McHugh told Murray and members of the Senate Appropriations defense subcommittee. "To this point, we don't see any evidence of this being systemic. But as you and I have discussed, we want to make sure that where this was inappropriate, it was an isolated case, and if it were not, to make sure we address it as holistically as we're trying to address it at Madigan."

House GOP Charge Ahead With Budget Plan

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans and Democrats on a key House panel squared off Wednesday over a controversial GOP budget plan to sharply cut federal health care spending and safety-net programs like food stamps as the chief means to wrestle trillion-dollar-plus deficits under control.

The GOP plan is nonbinding but calls for repealing President Barack Obama's health care plan while transforming Medicare into a voucher-like system in which the government subsidizes purchases of health insurance on the private market instead of directly paying doctor and hospital bills.

The Medicare proposal won't be the subject of follow-up legislation under the arcane budget process on Capitol Hill. Nor do Republicans plan to pass a detailed proposal to reform the nation's complicated, loophole-ridden tax code this year.

But other elements of the measure are likely to advance this spring — at least in the GOP-dominated House — as a 10-year, \$261 billion package of cuts to replace deep, across-the-board spending cuts slated to hit the Pentagon and domestic agencies in January. Those cuts were required under last year's budget pact because of the failure of the deficit "supercommittee" last fall.

This spring's substitute cuts are likely to target, among other programs, food stamps, federal employee pensions, farm subsidies, and a proposal to require higher-income Medicare beneficiaries to pay higher premiums.

Cells Offer Clue In Quest For Heart Attack Test

WASHINGTON (AP) — Too often, people pass a cardiac checkup only to collapse with a heart attack days later. Now scientists have found a clue that one day may help doctors determine if a heart attack is imminent, in hopes of preventing it.

Most heart attacks happen when fatty deposits in an artery burst open, and a blood clot then forms to seal the break. If the clot is too big, it blocks off blood flow.

The problem: Today's best tests can't predict when that's about to happen.

"We don't have a way to get at whether an artery's going to crack, the precursor to a heart attack," said Dr. Eric Topol, director of California's Scripps Translational Science Institute.

Wednesday, Scripps researchers reported a new lead — by searching people's blood for cells that appear to flake off the lining of a severely diseased artery.

Obama, GOP Vie For Upper Hand On Energy

BY KEN THOMAS
Associated Press

MALJAMAR, N.M. — Wooing a nation of increasingly angry motorists, President Barack Obama and his Republican rivals are all plunging into gas-pump politics, seeking the upper hand as energy becomes a driving issue in the election campaign.

The president is defending his energy agenda this week, traveling Wednesday to a solar panel plant in Nevada and oil and gas fields in New Mexico and the site of a future oil pipeline in Oklahoma that the White House is promising to accelerate. At the same time, GOP opponents from front-runner Mitt Romney on down are vigorously accusing him of stifling domestic production and betting on foolhardy alternative energy methods over traditional oil drilling.

With gasoline reaching \$3.86 a gallon in the U.S. and apparently heading higher, the public is impatient for Obama — or someone in his place — to do something about it.

In truth, a president has little direct control over gas prices, which have risen more than 50 cents a gallon since January in response to a standoff over Iran's nuclear program that has threatened to disrupt Middle East oil supplies.

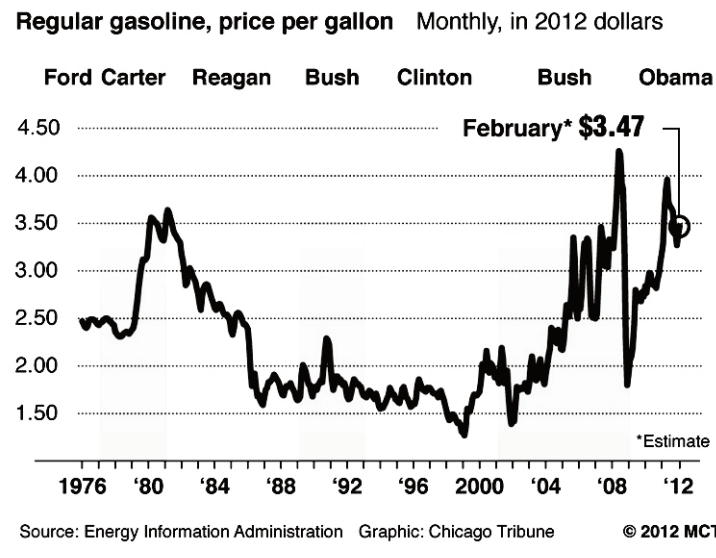
Well aware of Republicans' criticism, Obama's advisers argue that voters take a sophisticated view toward energy and think about it as a problem demanding long-term answers. They know that talk about future solutions may not satisfy people as they endure high prices, but they're betting that voters will side with the candidate they trust the most to deal with the issue — and they're determined that that will be Obama.

"We're drilling all over the place," Obama said in Maljamar, N.M., in a field dotted with oil rigs.

Polls show less certainty about it all. One survey this month by CBS News and The New York Times found that 54 percent of Americans felt the price of gasoline was something a president could do a lot about while 36 percent said it was beyond his control. And a recent Washington Post/ABC poll found 50 percent thought the Obama administration could reasonably do something to bring down gas prices, while 45 percent felt the recent rapid rise has been

Arc points to historic highs

The spiking cost of oil is pushing gas prices to inflation-adjusted levels that could exceed the oil crisis of the late 1970s-early '80s and could top more recent highs.



beyond White House control.

Obama has repeatedly argued that drilling for new oil alone will not solve the nation's energy woes or reduce gas prices. He accuses Republicans of claiming they can "wave a magic wand" to return to the days of cheap gas, and on Wednesday, he mocked them for having a "lack of imagination" about alternative energy.

"You'd think that everybody would be supportive of solar power," Obama said from the Copper Mountain Solar 1 facility in Nevada, the largest plant of its kind in the country, with nearly 1 million solar panels. "And yet if some politicians had their way, there won't be any more public investment in solar energy. There won't be as many new jobs."

Obama carried three of the four states on this week's itinerary — Oklahoma is one of the safest Republican states in the nation — but all four elected Republican governors in 2010. Two of the governors, Brian Sandoval of Nevada and Susana Martinez of New Mexico, have been floated as potential vice presidential choices this year. Obama was making his first visit to Oklahoma as president.

He has been hurt by his administration's decision to pump millions into California solar company Solyndra before it collapsed. And

he's been repeatedly criticized by Republican presidential candidates for blocking the 1,700-mile Keystone XL pipeline, which would carry tar sands oil from western Canada to refineries along the Texas Gulf Coast.

The mere mention of Solyndra and Keystone generate instant reactions at Republican rallies.

Romney has blamed Obama for rising gasoline prices and urged the president to fire Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson, calling them the "gas hike trio."

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich has adopted \$2.50 gasoline as a central tenet of his struggling campaign, criticizing Obama for holding up the pipeline project and mocking him as "President Algae" for highlighting research into developing oil and gas from algae.

Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, meanwhile, regularly notes his grandfather's work as a coal miner. And he detoured his campaign to tour oil fields in North Dakota recently, labeling himself the only ardent supporter of oil drilling.

"Instead of paying two-digit dollars you're now paying three digits," Santorum said in Illinois.

GOP Dollars, Endorsements Shifting Towards Romney

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fresh off a decisive victory in Illinois, Mitt Romney won critical establishment support Wednesday from former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and got new help from former Sen. Bob Dole as he looks to unite the Republican Party behind his candidacy. Romney said he's "almost there" after pursuing the GOP nomination for six years, and there are fresh signs that big GOP donors and other party figures will follow Bush's lead after sitting on the sidelines for much of the primary season.

The son of one president and the brother of another, Bush had stayed out of the race for months.

Some party elders publicly had urged him to become a candidate when it looked like Romney was having trouble closing the deal. On Wednesday, a day after Romney won Illinois by 12 points, Bush signaled that was no longer the case.

"Now is the time for Republicans to unite behind Governor Romney and take our message of fiscal conservatism and job creation to all voters this fall," Bush said in a written statement that suggested the race is all but over. He congratulated the other Republican candidates "for a hard-fought, thoughtful debate and primary season."

Dole, the former Senate Majority Leader and a Romney supporter, suggested that rival Rick Santorum is getting close to a decision point on whether to stay in or surrender his bid for the nomination. Dole, who became the GOP nominee in 1996 on his third try, said former House Speaker Newt Gingrich is "probably finished, or almost finished."

"Rick, I think, he's got a real problem. In every race, Romney is going to pick up delegates," Dole told The Associated Press in a telephone interview Wednesday. "It's getting close to the point where he's got to take a hard look at it."

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