

# WH: 16M Have Gained Health Insurance

BY RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR  
AND JULIE PACE  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More than 16 million Americans have gained coverage since President Barack Obama's health care law took effect five years ago, the administration said Monday.

But measuring a different way, an independent expert who took into account insurance losses during some of those years had a much lower estimate: 9.7 million.

The Department of Health and Human Services estimated that 16.4 million adults have gained health insurance since the law's major coverage provisions began taking effect in 2010.

The lower independent estimate is based on a large daily survey called the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index.

There seems to be no dispute that Obama's law has significantly reduced the number of uninsured Americans. The question is, by how much?

It will take time for authoritative statistics to emerge, particularly when the government and outside experts are using different estimating methods.

The HHS estimate comes as the administration prepares to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the law's signing on Mar. 23, 2010. The Affordable Care Act has been politically divisive from the start.

HHS Secretary Sylvia M. Burwell said it's brought about "the largest reduction in the uninsured in four decades."

Democrats hailed the law's passage as the culmination of decades of effort to guarantee health coverage for all Americans, including people with health problems who

previously could be turned away by insurance companies.

Republicans called it government overreach, and haven't stopped trying to repeal or roll back what they dismiss as "Obamacare." That opposition has helped the GOP win control of Congress.

The health care law offers subsidized private coverage for people who don't have health insurance on the job, along with an expanded Medicaid program that a majority of states have accepted.

According to the HHS estimate, 14.1 million adults got their insurance after the law's big expansion began at the end of 2013. HHS said it used Gallup-Healthways data to arrive at that figure.

Even before that, another 2.3 million people had gained coverage under a provision that lets young adults stay on a parent's plan until

age 26, the administration said. HHS reached that estimate using data from a different source, a government survey.

The administration says that means 16.4 million people gained coverage since Obama's law took effect. The White House said that's the total number of people who would likely have been uninsured were it not for the law.

Gallup's lower number was computed in a different way.

Dan Witters, research director for the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, said his survey shows the uninsured rate declined from 16.3 percent in early 2010 to 12.3 percent this year among adults 18-64. That translates to about 9.7 million fewer uninsured adults over that time period.

Witters said he has not had time to review the government's methodology.

But he noted that the uninsured rate has fluctuated during the past five years. On balance, fewer young adults went without coverage starting in 2010. However, older adults saw coverage losses until 2013 and the opening of the health care law's insurance markets.

Witters added he would want to know more about how HHS combined its two separate estimates to arrive at the figure of 16.4 million gaining coverage.

HHS official Richard Frank, in charge of the government report, said the two numbers "can be added together as coverage gains associated with our policy."

But asked if the overall figure represents a net reduction in the US uninsured rate in the five years since the law's passage, Frank responded "that is not precisely what they represent."



KELLY HERTZ/P&D

This image shows where vegetation was able to grow last year in the exposed lakebed of Beaver Lake, sometimes called State Lake. Residents say a new spillway was built too low, and it has created abnormally low lake levels.

## Lake

From Page 1

did not fill to normal conditions as what have occurred before construction."

Loest said from there, GF&P investigated and some more potential solutions were discussed.

"GF&P hired a second engineering firm to confirm the height of the overflow matched the measurements they took prior to the bridge being demolished," she said. "Property owners met with GF&P in October 2014 to discuss the findings. GF&P was confident the spillway was within tolerances of the previous spillway based on two of three construction pins that were installed before construction began. One pin was destroyed during construction. Property owners disagreed with these findings. Property owners also made suggestions for how to raise the weir — or barrier meant to alter water flow — level to get the level of the lake back to where it should be. ... Game, Fish & Parks stated they would further investigate options with the intent to reconvene in November or December."

A suggestion was made to add a weir in front of the bridge which is higher than the current weir, which is unable to be altered.

Following the October meeting, property owners filed an action that was interpreted as the beginnings of a lawsuit, which Loest said is not the case.

"During that time, several property owners with lake-front property filed a claim for damages with the state because the lake did not fill to pre-construction levels, resulting in a loss of property value," she said. "This is not an intent to sue the state, but per state law, it had to be filed within 180 days of the first claim. Their time was running out and they had to file the paperwork."

The *Press & Dakotan* attempted to contact GF&P for a story on the lake and the issues discussed by the residents that appeared in Saturday's edition, but did not receive a reply.

District 18 state Sen. Bernie Hunhoff, who has been acting as a middleman between the property owners and the state, said this rule may be muddying the waters between the two parties.

"The problem is that there's a law that says if you're going to sue the state, you have to do it within six months of being damaged — that's the whole problem, that's a bad law," Hunhoff told the commission. "I don't think anybody had any intention of really doing a lawsuit; they just felt that to protect their future rights, maybe they should file. Well, the Game, Fish & Parks talked to their administration's lawyers and said, 'Whoa! We're being sued. So don't talk to those guys anymore, we're in a lawsuit.' We're not in a lawsuit and I tried to impress that on them and press on them that they could at least talk to those of us who haven't filed suit. And they're still debat-

ing whether they can continue to have some conversations, even though it could end up in court."

The commission chambers at the Yankton County Government Center were nearly full with lake-area residents while Loest presented a number of before-and-after photos during a PowerPoint presentation. Photos depicted historic waterlines etched into rocks that had once been the lake's shoreline and outcroppings of vegetation that had once been in water too deep for any vegetation to grow. Other photos showed docks that had existed prior to construction that are now well away from the water's edge.

Loest said they've noticed an estimated 12-inch drop in the water levels.

She said this has led to a number of concerns for the area's property owners.

"The resulting shallow lake level allows vegetation to grow in places it didn't before construction," she said. "The reeds that have overtaken the shoreline pose a fire hazard to the property owners along the lake and lower the property values through the loss of shoreline. During spring thaws, large ice and vegeta-

tion chunks ... go toward the bridge. These chunks could become lodged between the weir and the bridge trusses."

Loest said the lake's property owners only have a single goal, "and that is to have the lake level returned to pre-construction levels," she said. "We have no desire for a lawsuit. We are not asking for personal damages. We only want the lake returned to its normal level."

The commissioners took no formal action on the lake during Monday's meeting, but said they'd explore contacting GF&P with a formal letter.

Commissioner Don Kettering was not present for Monday's meeting.

In other business Monday, the commission:

- Approved a seasonal ambulance employee.
- Heard a presentation from District III on their impact on the community.
- Confirmed Johnson Engineering to conduct yearly inspections on Fleeg's Bridge.
- Elected members to the Planning Commission.

You can follow Rob Nielsen on Twitter at [twitter.com/RobNielsen-PandD/](https://twitter.com/RobNielsen-PandD/). Discuss this story at [www.yankton.net/](http://www.yankton.net/).

## House Vets Chairman Says VA Is Impeding Congressional Oversight

BY MATTHEW DALY  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee on Monday accused the inspector general and other officials at the Department of Veterans Affairs of withholding reports from his panel, despite pledges to be transparent.

Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., said the VA's actions were impeding the ability of Congress to oversee a department rocked by a scandal over long wait times for veterans seeking medical care and falsified records covering up delays.

At a hearing Monday night, Miller said more than 100 requests for information from the VA remain outstanding, including 63 that are months past due. VA officials have challenged the need for some of the information he has requested, Miller said, and withheld others based on "unfounded fears" that the information might be publicly released.

Miller said he won't tolerate anyone interfering with a congressional investigation.

"Let there be no mistake or misunderstanding: When this committee requests documents, I expect production to be timely, complete and accurate," Miller said.

While he is willing to work with VA Secretary Robert McDonald and other officials to implement needed reforms, Miller said he is not willing to let McDonald or anyone else "dictate how the committee conducts oversight or performs investigations."

Leigh Bradley, the VA's general counsel, said the agency is committed to accommodating congressional requests "as fully and quickly" as possible.

"I cannot overstate how deeply we are committed to providing you responsive and timely information," she told Miller.

Miller said he was especially disappointed that the VA's Office of Inspector General has withheld crucial information from the committee, including a report on excessive wait times at the Phoenix VA hospital, the epicenter of the scandal that erupted last year.

## Sirens

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neers in the tailwaters area near Gavins Point Dam.

"They are looking at putting sirens in their campgrounds down on Corps property," he said.

He added these sirens would also be coordinated with Cedar County, but there's a lot of discussion to go through.

"When I met with the

Cedar County emergency manager, the idea was if we put sirens out there, we want to be able to blow them rather than having Hartington blow them," he said. "We've got to work out those details because it would be kind of difficult for them to blow their sirens and we're not. ... We've got to do more paperwork on that."

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## NOTICE

**South Dakota Soybean Research & Promotion Council Director Election**

Director Election voting for District 5 members of the South Dakota Soybean Research & Promotion Council (SDSRPC) will be May 13, 2015 through June 12, 2015. District 5 consists of Bon Homme, Charles Mix, Douglas, Hutchinson and Yankton counties.

If you are interested in serving on the board of directors for SDSRPC, petitions for nomination as a candidate for District 5 may be obtained from the SDSRPC office. Contact: South Dakota Soybean Research & Promotion Council, 5000 South Broadband Lane, Suite 100, Sioux Falls, SD 57108, 605.330.9942, or visit [www.sdssoybean.org](http://www.sdssoybean.org) for more information.

A candidate must be a participating grower in the soybean checkoff and a resident of the district he or she wishes to represent. Petitions must be completed and returned to the SDSRPC office by 4:30 pm on April 13, 2015. The SDSRPC is the soybean checkoff organization in South Dakota.

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