

Google Made Driverless Cars Legal

MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif. (AP) — About four years ago, the Google team trying to develop cars driven by computers — not people — concluded that sooner than later, the technology would be ready for the masses. There was one big problem: No state had even considered whether driverless cars should be legal.

And yet this week, Google said it wants to give Californians access to a small fleet of prototypes it will make without a steering wheel or pedals.

The plan is possible because, by this time next year, driverless cars will be legal in the tech giant's home state.

And for that, Google can thank Google, and an unorthodox lobbying campaign to shape the road rules of the future in car-obsessed California — and maybe even the rest of the nation — that began with a game-changing conversation in Las Vegas.

The campaign was based on a principle that businesses rarely embrace: ask for regulation.

Report: Clinton Challenges GOP

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hillary Rodham Clinton dismisses her critics and defends her handling of the deadly 2012 terrorist attack in Benghazi, Libya, in her new book, offering fellow Democrats a guide for how to talk about the fraught issue through the 2016 presidential race.

The former secretary of state's "Hard Choices" is a rebuke to Republicans who have seized upon the Sept. 11, 2012, terrorist attack that killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans.

Should Clinton run for president in 2016, her four years as secretary of state and the Benghazi attack in particular are certain to be the subject of driving criticism from Republicans. She's already trying to blunt the issue.

Republicans have accused the Obama administration of stonewalling congressional investigators and misleading the public about the nature of the attack in the weeks before the presidential election. Republicans used the attack to try to undermine President Barack Obama's re-election and, now, to tarnish the still-uncertain Clinton bid to replace him in early 2017.

"Those who exploit this tragedy over and over as a political tool minimize the sacrifice of those who served our country," Clinton writes in a 34-page chapter, obtained by Politico.

Syria Bomber Was An American Citizen

WASHINGTON (AP) — The State Department confirmed Friday that a U.S. citizen from Florida launched a suicide bombing against Syrian government troops earlier this week in what is believed to be the first time an American has been involved in such attacks since the start of the Syrian civil war.

Opposition forces fighting Syrian President Bashar Assad had earlier claimed that Abu Hurayra al-Amriki was, in fact, an American fighter who carried out a May 25 truck bombing outside a restaurant in the government-held northwestern city of Idlib. Al-Amriki means "the American."

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters on Friday that he was an American. Psaki said it appeared to be the first time an American citizen was involved in a suicide bombing since the start of the three-year civil war in Syria that has killed at least 160,000.

Psaki had no other details. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., told reporters in Miami Friday that Al-Amriki is from Florida but did not provide any further details.

It's unknown how many people al-Amriki killed in the bombing. Opposition rebels with the al-Qaida-linked insurgency al-Nusra Front said his truck was laden with 16 tons of explosives to tear down the al-Fanar restaurant in Idlib, a gathering site for Syrian troops.

Insurgency Leadership In Question

DONETSK, Ukraine (AP) — The scruffy rebels who normally wander about the headquarters of the separatist Donetsk People's Republic were mostly out of view on Friday, replaced by a disciplined new faction who showed up a day earlier with an armored personnel carrier and anti-aircraft gun.

The separatists' so-called prime minister said nothing has changed — but something has clearly shifted in Ukraine's troubled east.

The balance of power in the region has teetered wildly this week. After Ukrainians elected Petro Poroshenko as the country's president and Russia said it would respect the vote, hopes rose for a resolution to the conflict between the central government and the insurgents who want Donetsk to be part of Russia.

But a day later, the rebels launched an exceptionally bold assault, seizing Donetsk's airport. Ukraine's military responded with previously unseen ferocity, launching airstrikes and sending in paratroopers to retake the airport.

To some, the rebel operation looked like a desperate last stand. But on Thursday, insurgents shot down a Ukrainian military helicopter, killing 12 soldiers, including a general. The same day, the murky Vostok Battalion militiamen took over rebel headquarters in the 11-story Donetsk regional administration building, demanding it be evacuated because of what they said was the presence of looters.

Grieving Father Takes Center Stage

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Richard Martinez says he never set out to be a face of the gun-control movement and has no interest in taking deer rifles and shotguns from the hands of hunters. After all, he used to be one.

But Martinez plans to do whatever he can to keep guns out of the hands of people who use them for mass killings, the latest of which took the life of his 20-year-old son and five other students at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Martinez, a 60-year-old criminal defense lawyer, took center stage in the gun debate when he showed up uninvited before a sheriff's news conference a day after the May 23 killings, stepped before a bank of microphones and in a voice filled with rage and grief blamed the death of Christopher Michaels-Martinez on "craven, irresponsible politicians" who won't pass stricter gun-control laws.

"They talk about gun rights. What about Chris' right to live?" he wailed. "When will this insanity stop?"

On Thursday, an exhausted Martinez said he had hardly slept since that day, his hours filled with planning his only child's funeral while fielding calls from all over the world. News organizations from Canada, Great Britain and Australia want to interview him. Other people just want to say they're sorry.

VA Chief Steps Down

BY JULIE PACE
AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Beset by growing evidence of patient delays and cover-ups, embattled Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki resigned from President Barack Obama's Cabinet Friday, taking the blame for what he decried as a "lack of integrity" in the sprawling health care system for the nation's military veterans.

Obama, under mounting pressure to act from fellow Democrats who are worried about political fallout in the fall elections, praised the retired four-star general and said he accepted his resignation with "considerable regret." But the president, too, focused on increasingly troubling allegations of treatment delays and preventable deaths at veterans hospitals around the country.

Emerging from an Oval Office meeting with Shinseki, a stone-faced Obama said the secretary himself acknowledged he had become a distraction as the administration moves to address the VA's troubles, and the president agreed with him.

"We don't have time for distractions," Obama said. "We need to fix the problem."

One of Shinseki's last acts as secretary was to hand the



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT
U.S. President Barack Obama makes comments on accepting the resignation of Eric Shinseki as Secretary of Veterans Affairs on Friday.

president an internal accounting that underscored just how big the problems have become. It showed that in some cases, VA schedulers have been pressured to fake information for reports to make waiting times for medical appointments look more favorable.

"It is totally unacceptable," Obama said. "Our vets deserve the best. They've earned it."

The president appointed Sloan Gibson, the No. 2 at the Veterans Affairs Department, as temporary secretary as the search for a permanent successor began. Obama also asked Rob Nabors, a top White House aide who has been dispatched to the VA to

oversee a broad review, to stay for the time being.

Gibson, who has been Shinseki's deputy for about three months, was formerly president and chief executive officer of the USO, the nonprofit organization that provides programs and services to U.S. troops and their families. Gibson is the son of an Army Air Corpsman who served in World War II and grandson of a World War I Army infantryman.

Republicans in Congress said the shake-up wasn't enough to solve problems at an agency that has been struggling to keep up with a huge demand for its services — some 9 million enrolled now compared to 8 million in 2008.

The influx comes from returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, aging Vietnam War vets who now have more health problems, a move by Congress to expand the number of those eligible for care and the migration of veterans to the VA during the last recession after they lost their jobs or switched to the VA when their private insurance became more expensive.

"One personnel change cannot be used as an excuse to paper over a systemic problem," said House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, who had held off in calling for Shinseki's resignation. "Our veterans deserve better. We'll hold the president accountable until he makes things right."

The massive bureaucracy at the VA has come under intense scrutiny over the past month, following allegations that 40 patients died while awaiting care at a Phoenix hospital where employees kept a secret waiting list to cover up delays. On Wednesday, the VA inspector general reported that 1,700 veterans seeking treatment at the Phoenix facility were at risk of being "forgotten or lost."

After that scathing report, a cascade of Democrats on the ballot in the fall midterm elections joined dozens of Republicans in calling for Shinseki to step down.

Thai Coup Chief: Elections Could Occur In 1 Year

BY THANAYARAT DOKSONE
Associated Press

BANGKOK — In his first address to the public since taking control of Thailand in a bloodless coup, the head of the military junta said Friday that it could take more than a year for new elections to be held because peace and reforms must be achieved first. Army commander Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha repeated warnings against protests or resistance to the army's May 22 takeover, saying they would slow the process of bringing back "happiness" to the Thai people.

A return to democracy will not happen if there are still "protests without a true understanding of democracy," he said.

The speech was meant to reassure Thais that the army has a plan to keep the country stable and restore democracy.

But it was unlikely to win favor among supporters of the ousted civilian government because it laid out broadly the same program advocated by anti-government protesters who demonstrated aggressively for seven months to try to topple it, clashing with police and occupying government offices.

Prayuth said it would take the junta, called the National Council for Peace and Order, at least two to three months to achieve reconciliation in the deeply divided country, then take about a year to write a new constitution and set up an interim government. Only then could elections be held, he said.

"Give us time to solve the problems for you. Then the soldiers will step back to look at Thailand from afar," he said.

The United States, a longtime ally of Thailand, said it believed elections should be held sooner.

"Certainly we don't want anything to end in chaos. But we think setting a timeline for early elections is something that is not just possible, but it's what the appropriate step is and that that should be what their focus is on," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters in Washington.

Prayuth did not mention former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, whose political

machine was the protesters' main target. Thaksin, who is at the center of Thailand's political divide, was overthrown in a 2006 military coup after being accused of corruption and abuse of power. His sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, was prime minister of the government that was besieged by protesters. Her government won a landslide election victory three years ago.

Prayuth explained the reasons for the army's action, and the junta's plans for administering the country, emphasizing financial stability and transparency.

"The reason NCPO has taken control of national administration was because of the prolonged political deadlock, protests, and violence,"

he said. "The caretaker government was unable to perform their duties effectively," and the situation risked hurting the economy, he said.

International reaction to the coup has been largely negative. English-language subtitles accompanied Prayuth's speech, which was broadcast on all television stations.

"The NCPO does understand the feelings of the foreigners," he said. "We do understand the world's order, that at the moment, it's the world of democracy. But let us have time to change our attitudes, values and several other things to solve Thailand's democracy to make it match with the international standards."

In the past week, the junta

has moved to silence its critics and warned that it will not tolerate dissent.

It has summoned more than 250 people, including members of the ousted government and other leading political figures, journalists, scholars and activists seen as critical of the regime. Roughly 70 people are still in custody.

On Friday, the military sealed off a major Bangkok intersection for a second day to prevent a possible protest. The massive show of force — involving hundreds of troops during the evening rush hour — came in response to small but near daily demonstrations that have raised tension and concerns the army will crack down on protesters.



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