

Veterans Affairs: Why is the system broken?

"In a world of faux outrage," said Kathleen Parker in *The Washington Post*, "finally we have something about which to be scandalized." Officials running the Veterans Affairs Department, the nation has learned, may have systematically falsified records to cover up long, deadly delays in VA hospitals. A backlog of 300,000 veterans have been awaiting treatment for more than four months, and as many as 40 may have died at one Phoenix VA hospital alone while waiting for care. This scandal has caught President Obama flat-footed, as usual, said Michael Gerson in *WashingtonPost.com*. Obama—who pledged to reform the VA while running for president in 2008—rushed to assume his now-familiar role of "outraged bystander" to the dysfunction in his own administration, while leaving VA head Eric Shinseki in his job. It's the same faux outrage Obama expressed over the IRS and Benghazi fiascoes and the meltdown of Obamacare's Web portal. When the president keeps insisting he had no idea that his underlings were so incompetent, it's "more of a self-indictment than a defense."



Shinseki, Obama: Embarrassed

The roots of the VA's current problems "stretch back decades before Obama took the Oval Office," said Jordain Carney and Stacy Kaper in *NationalJournal.com*. President Kennedy's decision to use the toxic defoliant Agent Orange in Vietnam started a decades-long health catastrophe for U.S. troops—one that floods the VA with hundreds of thousands of claims to this day. The VA has been broken for decades, but every president since Richard Nixon has failed to get it truly fixed. Conservatives' hypocrisy on this issue "is truly something to behold," said Alec MacGillis in *NewRepublic.com*. These are the same people who launched disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, sending 2.3 million soldiers into harm's way

over a decade. With more than 970,000 of those soldiers filing a disability claim, many of them for hard-to-verify conditions such as traumatic brain injuries and PTSD, the Bush-era wars overwhelmed the VA. You'd think Republicans would "have enough self-awareness to resist scoring political points."

Obama has been president for six years, so he has no excuses, said Rich Lowry in *Politico.com*. Indeed, he has spent much of his presidency trying to convince Americans that federal bureaucrats can deliver health care more efficiently than the free market. Now his own Veterans Affairs Department—"an island of socialism in American health care"—is proving that government-run health care leads inevitably to long waits, corruption, and rationing of care. During the Obamacare debate, liberals would often point to the VA as a "good example of a single-payer, socialized health system," said J.D. Tuccille in *Reason.com*. Unfortunately for our veterans, it turns out they were right.

Obama's critics have a point, said Paul Waldman in *Washington Post.com*. "If Democrats are going to argue that government can be a force for good, their most basic responsibility is to make government work." That said, there's an opportunity here for Obama. This scandal consists of concrete problems he doesn't need congressional permission to fix. If Obama can make the VA work, he could "redeem the liberal vision of government." As an Iraq veteran with PTSD, I don't care about the politics, said Colby Buzzell in *The New York Times*. I'm just hoping that when I or my comrades go to a VA hospital, we'll see a doctor the same day. After all we've given, "I don't think that'd be asking a lot."

Only in America

■ A South Carolina pizza delivery man has been arrested after allegedly speeding through the streets with flashing emergency lights in order to make his deliveries faster. Thomas Reid, a volunteer with a rescue squad, was busted after a 911 call about a motorist wearing a Pizza Hut shirt using emergency lights and driving recklessly.

■ A Michigan school has sent a flyer home to parents urging that they and their children minimize the "competitive 'urge to win'" at the school's annual field day, so as not to upset the other students. "We believe all of our students are winners," the flyer said. Bennett Staph, a parent of a student, said competitions push kids to do their best. "What are we teaching our students?" Staph said.

Good week for:

Teenagers, who are behaving better than any generation since the 1950s, according to a new survey by the Centers for Disease Control. Today's teens have lower drug, alcohol, and cigarette use, have fewer babies, and exercise more frequently.

Keeping it in the family, after prospect Conrad Gregor's first home run of the season for the Houston Astros' Class A team was caught by a familiar fan—his father, Marty. "He may have to watch every game from out there," said the younger Gregor.

Locavores, after a Norwegian artist cooked and ate the meat from his own hip following an operation to replace it. It tasted like "wild sheep," said Alexander Selvik Wengshoel, 25.

Bad week for:

Roughing it, with the news that some New York City parents are now paying professionals up to \$1,000 to pack their kids' summer camp trunks, and include comforts such as French-milled soaps, 1,000-thread-count sheets, and scented candles.

Guesstimating, after France's national railway operator placed a \$20.5 billion order for 2,000 new trains, only to discover that the locomotives were too wide to fit hundreds of stations. France must now spend \$68 million to narrow train platforms.

Ink-stained wretches, after *Baltimore Sun* reporter Michael Dresser, who has worked there 38 years, was diagnosed with a newsprint allergy, meaning he now has to wear gloves in the office. "People have been more amused than sympathetic," Dresser said. "The irony just overwhelms anything else."

Boring but important

Obama's Cabinet reshuffle

President Obama has nominated San Antonio Mayor Julián Castro to be his next housing secretary, fueling speculation that the rising star could be in the running to be the Democrats' vice-presidential nominee in 2016. Announcing the nomination last week, the president credited Castro with "revitalizing one of our most wonderful cities." The 39-year-old Mexican-American mayor was propelled into the political spotlight in 2012 when he delivered a rousing keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. Current Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan will become head of the White House budget office. "When you're good at your job," Obama said of Donovan, "people always want you to do even more."