

BRIEFLY

Obama: Oceans key to protecting planet from climate change

WASHINGTON (AP) — Creating the Atlantic Ocean’s first marine national monument is a needed response to dangerous climate change, oceanic dead zones and unsustainable fishing practices, President Barack Obama said Thursday.

The new Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument consists of nearly 5,000 square miles of underwater canyons and mountains off the New England coast. It’s the 27th time that Obama has created or enlarged a national monument.

The White House said the designation will lead to a ban on commercial fishing, mining and drilling, though a seven-year exception will occur for the lobster and red crab industries. Others, such as whiting and squid harvesters, have 60 days to transition out. Recreational fishing will be allowed within the monument.

Supporters of the new monument say protecting large swaths of ocean from human stresses can sustain important species and reduce the toll of climate change. Fishermen worry it will become harder for them to earn a living as a result of Obama’s move.

“This is deplorable,” said Grant Moore, president of the Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen’s Association, in describing the designation.

White House officials said the administration listened to industry’s concerns, and noted the monument is smaller than originally proposed and contains a transition period for companies. Obama said helping oceans become more resilient to climate change will help fishermen.

Witness says Philippine president ordered killings of 1,000

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A former Filipino militiaman testified before the country’s Senate on Thursday that President Rodrigo Duterte, when he was still a city mayor, ordered him and other members of a liquidation squad to kill criminals and opponents in assaults that left about 1,000 dead.

Edgar Matobato, 57, told the nationally televised Senate committee hearing that he heard Duterte order some of the killings, and acknowledged that he himself carried out about 50 deadly assaults as an assassin, including a suspected kidnapper fed to a crocodile in 2007 in southern Davao del Sur province.

Rights groups have long accused Duterte of involvement in death squads, claims he has denied, even while engaging in tough talk in which he stated his approach to criminals was to “kill them all.” Matobato is the first person to admit any role in such killings, and to directly implicate Duterte.

Human Rights Watch late Friday urged the Philippine government to order an independent investigation into the “very serious allegations” of direct involvement by Duterte “in extrajudicial killings.”

The Senate committee inquiry was led by Sen. Leila de Lima, a staunch critic of Duterte’s anti-drug campaign that has left more than 3,000 dead.

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Behind health law’s ‘growing pains,’ more serious problems?

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama told insurers this week his health care overhaul has had some growing pains. But with premiums rising and marquee insurers bailing, could the real diagnosis be “failure to thrive?”

The medical term refers to when patients, often youngsters but also adults, fail to achieve or maintain proper weight. This is the fourth election cycle in which the Affordable Care Act has been in play, struggling for political traction and a healthy level of acceptance from a divided public.

“Progress has not been without challenges,” Obama wrote insurers. “Most new enterprises have growing pains and opportunities for improvement.” He asked for help with the fourth sign-up season, which starts Nov. 1.

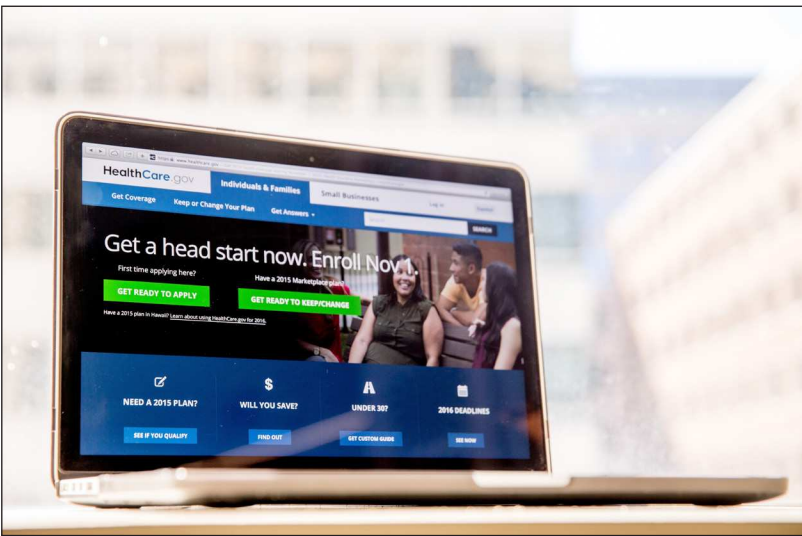
Here’s a look at key indicators for the health of “Obamacare.”

UNINSURED: IN REMISSION, BUT NO FULL CURE

The uninsured rate is 8.6 percent, a historic low, according to the most up-to-date government numbers. That means at least 21 million fewer people uninsured since the law passed in 2010, reversing decades-long coverage losses. Experts credit the law for nearly all the progress.

That’s to be expected when the government requires most people to have health insurance, provides tens of billions of dollars a year to subsidize premiums, and imposes fines on holdouts remaining uninsured. The law also bars insurers from turning away those in poor health.

The concern now is that so many remain uninsured — about 27 million people. Of those, the administration has estimated that nearly half would be eligible for private coverage through insurance markets like HealthCare.gov, where most consumers qualify for subsidies.



AP Photo/Andrew Harnik, File

In this 2015, file photo, the HealthCare.gov website, where people can buy health insurance, is displayed on a laptop screen in Washington. President Barack Obama told insurers his health care overhaul has some growing pains.

More customers would help stabilize premiums.

Prognosis: Slower progress; risk of relapse.

COST: TEMPERATURE RISING

So far, the Affordable Care Act has actually cost taxpayers less than what nonpartisan congressional experts estimated when it passed. That’s because fewer people than expected are covered, and also the average subsidy has been lower than originally projected.

But the story on costs looks different from the perspective of the 11 million customers in the law’s insurance markets. Premiums in many communities are expected to go up significantly for 2017. Not a big worry, says the administration, because subsidies will also rise, shielding most consumers. Yet some may have to switch plans, or settle for a higher deductible.

Medicare chief Andy Slavitt, who oversees the health care law, says part of the problem is that insurers set their premiums too low and are

now having to correct that. “Once these one-time effects kick in, our expectation is we will see a very normalized rate of growth,” Slavitt said.

But if higher premiums cause some consumers to drop out, or turn off prospective customers, the remaining pool will be more expensive to cover. That could start a vicious cycle.

The cost of covering low-income beneficiaries through the law’s Medicaid expansion also has increased faster than expected.

Prognosis: Frequent monitoring needed.

QUALITY AND CHOICE: STILL SEEN AS A PLUS

Sixty-eight percent of consumers who have a plan through the health law’s marketplaces rate their overall coverage as excellent or good. A recent survey by the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation also found high satisfaction with choice of hospitals and doctors, and with copays. But only about half were satisfied with their annual deduct-

13-year-old with BB gun killed by police in Columbus, Ohio

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A black boy. A white Ohio police officer. A pellet gun that looked like a real weapon. And a deadly shooting.

In a killing with unavoidable echoes of the Tamir Rice case out of Cleveland, a Columbus officer responding to a report of a \$10 armed robbery shot a 13-year-old boy Wednesday night after the youngster pulled a BB gun from his waistband that looked “practically

identical” to the weapon police use, authorities say.

On the morning after Tyre King’s death, Mayor Andrew Ginther appeared to choke up as he called for the community to come together and questioned why an eighth-grader would have a replica of a police firearm.

“There is something wrong in this country, and it is bringing its epidemic to our city streets,” Ginther

said Thursday. “And a 13-year-old is dead in the city of Columbus because of our obsession with guns and violence.”

While the case is still under investigation, police and city authorities rejected comparisons to the 2014 killing of 12-year-old Tamir in Cleveland.

“The only thing similar in nature is the age, race and outcome,” police spokesman Sgt. Rich Weiner said.

“The facts are not similar, and that must be reiterated.”

Dozens of people attended a Thursday evening vigil near the scene of the shooting. Some carried signs calling for justice for Tyre. Among those participating were several members of Tyre’s youth football team. Their coach described the first-year player as someone with a “smile that could light up the room.”

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