

Nation & World

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The Top 10 Stories of 2013

President's health care overhaul tops list

By David Crary
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The glitch-plagued rollout of President Barack Obama's health care overhaul was the top news story of 2013, followed by the Boston Marathon bombing and the dramatic papal changeover at the Vatican, according to The Associated Press' annual poll of U.S. editors and news directors.

The saga of "Obamacare" — as the Affordable Care Act is widely known — received 45 first-place votes out of the 144 ballots cast for the top 10 stories. The marathon bombing received 29 first-place votes and the papal transition 21.

Here are 2013's top 10 stories:

1 HEALTH CARE OVERHAUL: The White House had hoped the Oct. 1 launch of open enrollment would be a showcase for the upside of Obama's much-debated overhaul. Instead, the website became a symbol of dysfunction, providing Republicans and late-night comics with ammunition, and worrying the president's Democratic allies. HealthCare.gov gradually improved, but a wave of cancellation notices from insurers undercut Obama's oft-repeated promise that people who liked their existing coverage could keep it.

2 BOSTON MARATHON BOMBING: In seconds, a scene of celebration transformed into one of carnage, as two bombs exploded near the finish line of the Boston Marathon in April. Three people were killed and more than 260 injured, including at least 16 who lost limbs. Authorities soon identified two suspects — 26-year-old Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who died in a shootout with police, and his brother, Dzhokhar, 20, who faces multiple charges, including 17 that carry a possible death penalty. Though jolted by the bombings and a subsequent lockdown, the city rallied under the slogan "Boston Strong."



Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (left) welcomes Pope Francis as they exchange Christmas greetings at the Vatican on Dec. 23.

3 VATICAN CHANGEOVER: Pope Benedict XVI stunned Catholics around the world with his announcement in February that he would resign. The cardinal elected to succeed him, soon known as Pope Francis, proceeded to captivate many Catholics and non-Catholics alike with a new tone of openness, modesty and tolerance. Without challenging core church doctrine, he suggested it was time to rethink policy on divorce, focus more on serving the poor, and devote less rhetoric to condemnations of gay marriage and abortion.

Russia bombings kill 31; raise Olympic concerns

By Vladimir Isachenkov
Associated Press

MOSCOW — Two suicide bombings in as many days have killed 31 people and raised concerns that Islamic militants have begun a terrorist campaign in Russia that could stretch into the Sochi Olympics in February. Russian and international Olympic officials insisted the site of the games, protected by layers of security, is completely safe.

The attacks in Volgograd, about 400 miles from Sochi, reflected the Kremlin's inability to uproot Islamist insurgents in the Caucasus who have vowed to derail the games, the pet project of President Vladimir Putin.

No one has claimed responsibility for Sunday's blast at the Volgograd railway station or Monday's bus explosion in the city, but they came only months after Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov threatened new attacks on civilian targets in Russia.

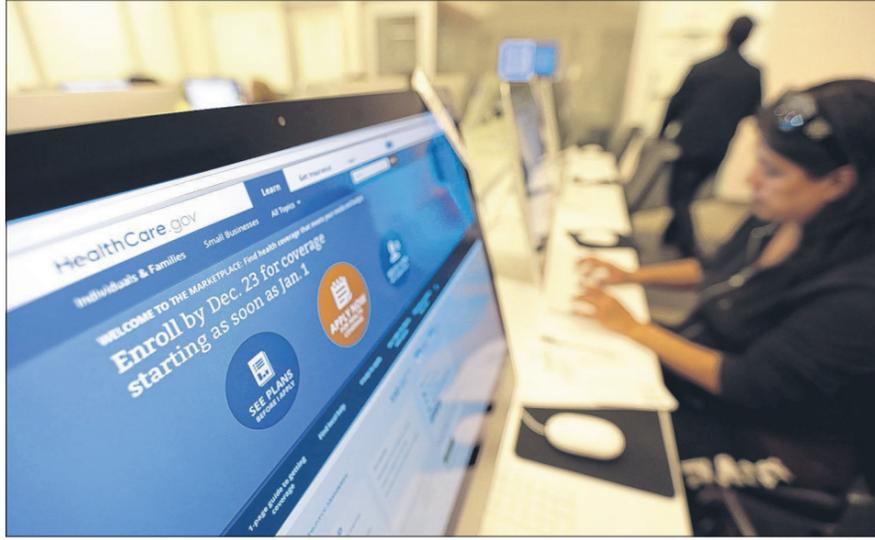
In addition to the dead, the bombings wounded 104 people, according to Russia's Health Ministry. As of late Monday, 58 remained hospitalized, many in grave condition.

Suicide bombings have rocked Russia for years, but the insurgents seeking to create an Islamic state have largely confined their attacks to the North Caucasus region in recent years. The blasts in Volgograd

signaled that militants want to show their reach outside their native region.

Matthew Clements, an analyst at Jane's, said Caucasus militants could be targeting major transportation hubs such as Volgograd to embarrass the Kremlin and discourage attendance at the Olympics.

"The attack demonstrates the militants' capability to strike at soft targets such as transport infrastructure outside of their usual area of operations in the North Caucasus," he said in a note. "Although the very strict security measures which will be in place at the Sochi Games will make it difficult to undertake a successful attack against



Rosemary Cabelo uses a computer at a public library in San Antonio to access the Affordable Health Care Act website in December.



House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, meets with reporters on Capitol Hill on Nov. 21.

4 DIVIDED CONGRESS: Opinion polls showed Congress with historically low approval ratings, and the key reason was seemingly intractable partisan conflict. Among the consequences were the harsh automatic spending curbs known as sequestration, the partial shutdown of the government in October, and bitterness in Senate after the Democrats used their majority to reduce the Republicans' ability to stall presidential nominations via filibusters.

5 NSA SPYING: The ripple effect continues, seven months after the world learned of Edward Snowden. The former NSA analyst leaked vast troves of secret documents detailing NSA surveillance operations, including programs that collected Americans' phone records and eavesdropped on allied leaders. After a stay in Hong Kong, Snowden spent a month in Moscow's airport before obtaining asylum in Russia. The leaks have roiled diplomacy, triggered lawsuits and calls for reform, and prompted warnings that terrorists could benefit from the disclosures.

6 GAY MARRIAGE: Capping decades of activism, the gay-rights movement won a monumental victory in June in the form of two Supreme Court decisions. One cleared the way for ending a ban on same-sex marriages in California, the most populous state. The other struck down a 1996 law passed by Congress that banned federal recognition of same-sex marriages. In subsequent months, Hawaii, Illinois and New Mexico boosted the number of states allowing gay marriage to 17.

7 NELSON MANDELA: A freedom fighter, a political prisoner, a statesman revered for preaching reconciliation in a nation torn by racial strife. Nelson Mandela was all that and more — the icon of the anti-apartheid movement and South Africa's first black president. With his death at the age of 95, his compatriots, world leaders and countless other admirers mourned the loss of a one-of-a-kind hero.

8 PHILIPPINES TYPHOON: There were dire warnings beforehand, but the toll wreaked by Typhoon Haiyan was still stunning in its scope after it struck on Nov. 8. More than 6,000 people died; hundreds more remain missing.

9 SYRIA: The death toll mounted inexorably, past 120,000, as Syria's nearly 3-year-old civil warfare raged on with no signs of resolution. The government of Bashar Assad did agree to eliminate its chemical weapons, but prospects for peace talks were complicated by infighting among anti-government rebels.



Ariel Castro walks into the courtroom on July 24 in Cleveland.

10 MISSING WOMEN FOUND: The call for help came on May 6, and the revelations that followed were gripping and grim. A former bus driver, Ariel Castro, had abducted three women from the streets of Cleveland from 2002 to 2004 when they were 14, 16 and 20. He periodically kept them chained, restricted access to food and toilets, and repeatedly raped and assaulted them until their escape. Faced with life in prison, Castro hanged himself in his cell.

Medicaid growth creates 4.8M gap

■ 25 states did not open the program to more people

By Marc Levy
Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. — About 5 million people will be without health care next year that they would have gotten simply if they lived somewhere else in America.

They make up a coverage gap in President Barack Obama's signature health care law created by the domino effects of last year's Supreme Court ruling and states' subsequent policy decisions.

The court effectively left it up to states to decide whether to open Medicaid, the federal-state program for the poor and disabled, to more people, primarily poor working adults without children.

Twenty-five states declined. That leaves 4.8 million people in those states without the health care coverage that their peers elsewhere are getting through the expansion of Medicaid, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation estimate. More than one-fifth of them live in Texas alone, Kaiser's analysis found.

Among those in the gap is Cheryl Jones, a 61-year-old part-time home-care worker from Erie, Pa., who makes do without health insurance by splitting in half pills for high blood pressure, which she gets from a friend, not a pharmacist.

"There are a lot of us who need medical help now," she said. "I need new glasses, I need to go to a dentist, I need my medicine. ... Think about us working poor. We pay our taxes."

The Medicaid expansion was supposed to work hand-in-hand with tax credits subsidizing private insurance for people with slightly higher incomes, two keys to the law's broader aim of extending health insurance to 30 million more people. As an enticement for states to expand Medicaid, the federal government promises to pay nearly all of the cost.

Without the expansion, the law is unable to help people who are below the income threshold where tax credits start kicking in, about \$11,500 for working adults.

On Wednesday, 24 states and Washington, D.C., will extend Medicaid to more than 4 million adults who would otherwise fall into the same gap as Jones. Access to the care they'll get is similar to what people get with private insurance, said Joan Alker, executive director of Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families.

A 25th state, Michigan, plans to expand in April.



Ambulances line up at the site of a trolley bus explosion in Volgograd, Russia, on Monday.

the main Olympic venues, public transport infrastructure in Sochi and the surrounding Krasnodar territory will face an elevated risk of attack."

Aware of the threat, the Sochi Olympics organizers have introduced some of the most extensive identity checks and sweeping security measures ever seen at an

international sports event.

Anyone wanting to attend the games will have to buy a ticket online from the organizers and obtain a "spectator pass" for access. Doing so will require providing passport details that allow authorities to screen all visitors.

The security zone created around Sochi stretches approximately 60 miles along the Black Sea coast and up to 25 miles inland. Russian forces including special troops will patrol the forested mountains flanking the resort and use drones to keep a constant watch over Olympic facilities. Speedboats will patrol the coast and sophisticated sonar will be used to detect submarines.