

# OPINION

OUR VIEW

## A step in the right direction

An audit of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs shows Minnesota is better than other states, but has some work to do.

Congressional reforms of the system should be a step in the right direction.

The wait times at the two Veterans Affairs medical centers in Minnesota are lower than the worst trouble spots in the VA system, shows new audit data released Monday.

That's good news from the state, but doesn't negate the need to seek changes in the VA's system nationwide.

The average wait time for a patient seeking preliminary care for the first time is 28 days at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center and 25 days at the St. Cloud center. The waits are much shorter for established patients already in the VA system.

Deplorably, nationwide, the longest average wait for new patients is 145 days in Honolulu.

Waits for new patients seeking specialty care in the state are longer: 50 days for new patients in Minneapolis and 47

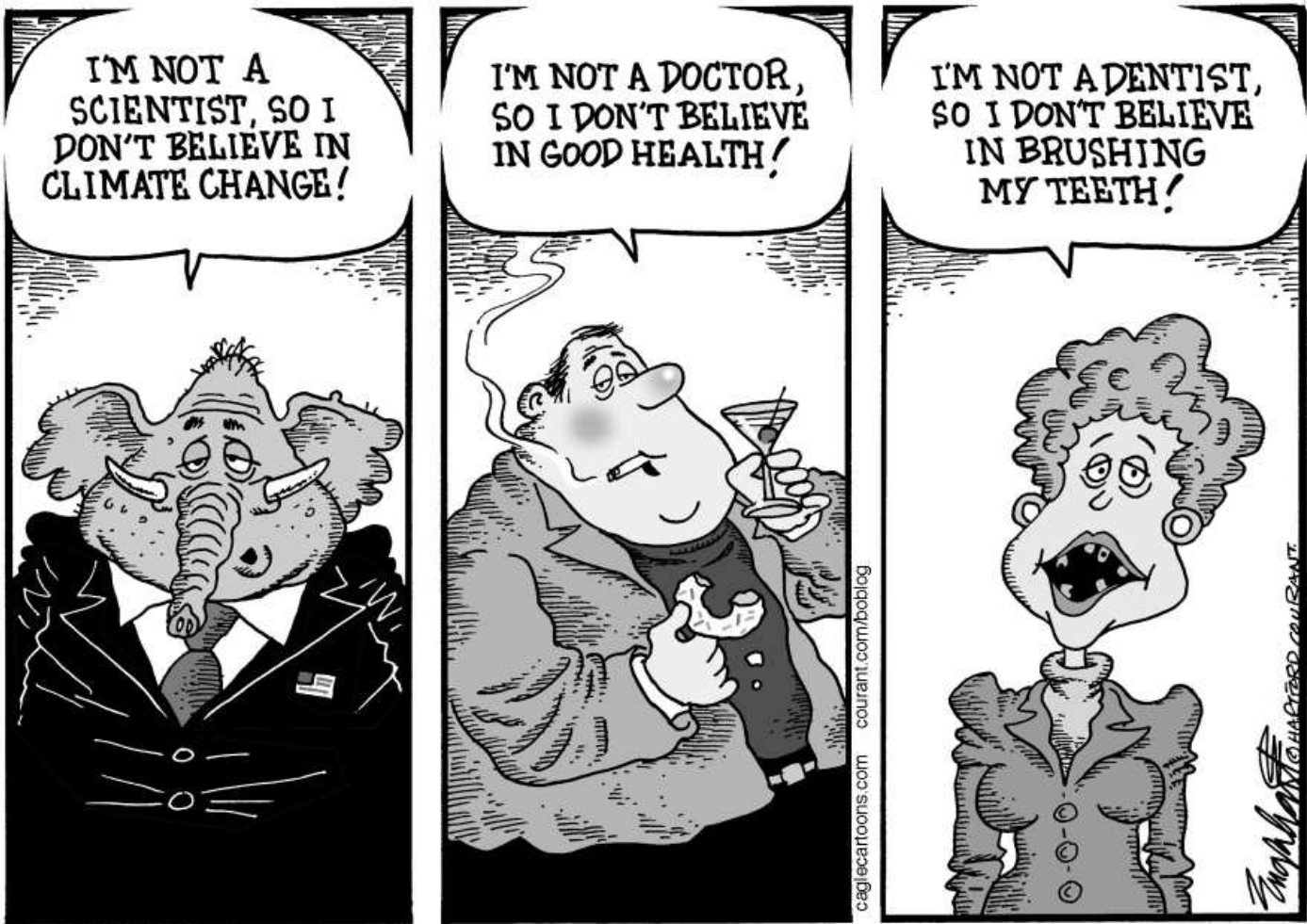
days in St. Cloud. That compares to four days and five days, respectively, for established patients at the two centers.

The longest average wait for new patients nationwide is 145 days in Harlingen, Texas.

But hold on, Minnesota. We're not all clean and squeaky when it comes to taking the best care possible of our veterans. We have work to do. The data show that 25 veterans have been waiting for more than 90 days for first appointments in Minneapolis, while 10 have been waiting for more than 90 days for first appointments in St. Cloud.

The data also show something that should never be allowed to happen and must be fixed. It shows 1,396 veterans who've enrolled in the VA system and requested appointments in Minneapolis over the past decade have never been seen there, while the figure is 472 for St. Cloud, and that is an outrage.

We owe veterans better care, and we look to proposals now in Congress to help us provide just that.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Inactions on border another outrage

**To the editor,**  
The outrages that emanate from the Obama administration never cease. The most recent ones have to do with the unending invasion chiefly over our southern border and the actions and inactions by the administration in dealing with those among us who are here illegally.

Tragically, “illegal” means nothing these days in regard to immigration status and frustration builds among the populace when we have to endure “press one for English” while on the telephone, or hear the recent quote by Biden: “illegals(sic) are already American.” Obama has been bragging about all the deportations his

administration has conducted, but they are counting immediate turn-backs at the border as “deportations” which only pads the numbers for Obama to look like he is enforcing the immigration laws.

In May it was reported that in 2013, Immigration and Customs Enforcement released over 36,000 illegal aliens with criminal records. Criminal violations included murder, rape, burglary, robbery and other assorted crimes. That story came from internal memos from ICE itself quoted in a report by the Center for Immigration Studies. The book, “Impeachable Offenses: The Case to Remove Barack Obama from Office,” cites ICE documentation of over

7,000 illegal aliens released from custody from 2009 to 2011. Of those released, 19 committed murder, three attempted murder, 142 committed sex crimes, with thousands of other crimes committed.

Recently southern Texas has been overwhelmed in dealing with the invasion on our southern border. Our country is enduring a dramatic increase of border crossings probably in anticipation on congressional “immigration reform” actions, (better known as amnesty). Things are so out of control in southern Texas that ICE is flying and busing those who are there illegally to El Paso and Phoenix and simply dropping them off to fend for themselves. This

has to be very taxing on social services and the communities in general to have this influx of illegal people.

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson recently appeared before a House committee and had the audacity to say that he sees “legal ambiguity” in regard to the status of illegal aliens in this country. When pressured by a committee member to rationalize that kind of view, the incompetent, out of place Johnson would not relent, instead reemphasizing the party line of this administration which in effect is open border and chaos for American society.

**Jerry Shuster**  
Gheen, MN

## Veterans deserve to be honored year around

**To the editor,**  
Here we are at the beginning of summer, after the long Memorial Day weekend. Two days that we, as a whole country, honor our veterans; Memorial Day and Veterans Day. What about the other 363 days of the year?

Our veterans truly know the price of the freedoms we all enjoy in this country. On Memorial Day we remember those who have died in service to our country; the ultimate sacrifice. But what about those who come home and struggle day to day with physical, mental and emotional conditions?

A huge disservice to

our local veterans is our lack of local health care that is covered her at our health facilities by the VA vouchers.

Those veterans with failing health, either physically or mentally, need to go out of town for medical care. The closest VA clinics and hospitals being in Hibbing, and some having to travel all the way to Minneapolis.

The closest VA homes for long term care are Silver Bay and Fergus Falls, Minn. That is a long way to travel for those families that can't afford to pay the extra money if Medicaid hasn't kicked in yet and VA vouchers are the only source of income; or you could pay privately

if you could afford it to stay locally. There is not any long term services locally that accepts VA vouchers.

A short while ago a relative had significant health issues needing to be hospitalized, though being a veterans and not of age for Medicare to kick in, went to our local hospital, only to have to wait for the Grand Rapids ambulance (which is contracted by the VA – ours not available for that long) to come up and get him to relay him to Fort Snelling VA Hospital in Minneapolis.

There are many stories that go this way. Imagine waiting this long while very ill and needing

treatment. These are our veterans that fought for us.

In bringing this issue out in the open in this letter, I am hoping that as the county seat as well as the rural location International Falls is away from services, talks will start with our commissioners as well as board members as to brainstorming finding a place for our veterans for short and long term care. (The old Good Samaritan building?)

What an honor and privilege it would be to provide for them as they have fought for us. Let's now fight for them.

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