

Obama health care nominee withdraws

June 6 2014, by Matthew Daly



Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., right, speaks with Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis. as they take an escalator to the Senate on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, June 4, 2014. Sanders proposed legislation this week that would allow veterans who can't get timely appointments with VA doctors to go to community health centers, military hospitals or private doctors. The bill also would authorize the VA to lease 27 new health facilities in 18 states and give the VA secretary authority to remove senior executives within 30 days of being fired for poor job performance, eliminating lengthy appeals. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

President Barack Obama's choice to be the top health official at the embattled Veterans Affairs Department has withdrawn his nomination.

The news comes amid a firestorm over long patient waits at [military veterans' medical facilities](#) and covering up delays, a headache for Democrats ahead of November congressional elections.

Murawsky now oversees seven VA hospitals and 30 clinics, including one in suburban Chicago where there are allegations that its staff used secret lists to conceal long patient wait times for appointments.

The White House said in a statement that Murawsky feared a prolonged fight over his confirmation, adding that he believes the role is too important not to be filled quickly.

Obama accepted Murawsky's withdrawal and will move quickly to find a replacement, the White House statement said.

Murawsky's withdrawal comes as the Senate reached agreement for a bipartisan bill expanding [veterans'](#) ability to get government-paid medical care outside Veterans Affairs hospitals and clinics.

The framework agreement was announced Thursday on the Senate floor by Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders and Republican Sen. John McCain.



Senate Armed Services Committee member Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz. speaks with reporters on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, June 4, 2014. Sen. McCain and three other GOP senators introduced bill Tuesday that would give veterans more flexibility to see a private doctor if they are forced to wait too long for an appointment at a Veterans Affairs hospital or clinic. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

The bill would allow veterans who experience long waits for VA appointments or who live at least 40 miles (64 kilometers) from a VA hospital or clinic to use private doctors enrolled as providers for Medicare or other government programs.

The bill's goal is to address an uproar over veterans' [health care](#) following reports veterans have died while waiting to see a VA doctor.

Acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson said Thursday an additional 18 veterans in the Phoenix area whose names were kept off an official

electronic Veterans Administration appointment list have died. Gibson said he does not know whether the 18 new deaths were related to long waiting times for appointments but said they were in addition to the 17 reported last month by the VA's inspector general.

The 18 veterans who died were among 1,700 veterans identified in a report last week by the VA's inspector general as being "at risk of being lost or forgotten." The investigation also found broad and deep-seated problems with delays in patient care and manipulation of waiting lists throughout the sprawling VA health care system, which provides medical care to about 9 million veterans and family members.

Gibson took over the VA temporarily last Friday after former Secretary Eric Shinseki, an ex-Army general, resigned under pressure. Taking care of the 1,700 veterans left off the Phoenix list is his top priority as VA chief, Gibson said during a tour of VA facilities in Phoenix, where the furor started.

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