

Yes, We Can Wait

Want medical insurance? Get in line.

Wall Street Journal

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By James Taranto

April 1, 2014

In a way it's the oddest bit of [ObamaCare](#) propaganda we've seen so far. "This Is What an #ACASurge Looks Like" was the title of a Saturday post on the White House Blog by senior communications adviser [Tara McGuinness](#).

"The line started forming at 5 a.m. in front of an enrollment center in Miami," McGuinness boasts.

"The final deadline to get covered in 2014 is in just two days, and Americans are literally lining up at grassroots events across the country to make sure they're covered. This is what momentum looks like."

A line in Venezuela. Correction: McAllen, Texas. WhiteHouse.gov To McGuinness's credit, she does mean "literally" literally. The post includes photos of people literally waiting in line in outside drab, institutional-looking buildings in Las Vegas and two Texas cities, El Paso and McAllen. There are also shots from Tampa, Fla., and Houston, where rows of people sit in classrooms in front of computers. Two people in Houston are standing at the



back of the room, allowing McGuinness to hype the scene by saying "it was standing-room-only." But it was the line photos that we found arresting. And it's clear McGuinness was advancing a White House line. Press secretary [Jay Carney](#) opened his daily briefing yesterday with the following gasconade: "As you can see by the lines around the country this weekend, we are seeing a surge in enrollment."

The first thing we thought of when we saw the pictures was the photos we've recently seen on Twitter of Venezuelans waiting in bread lines. Waiting in line to purchase necessities is a characteristic not of a prosperous free society but of command economies under repressive regimes. Closer to home, one doubts even the Transportation Security Administration would be so tone-deaf as to advertise long airport lines as an indication it's doing a great job.

So what in the world could the White House have been thinking? Here's a guess: They look at the [ObamaCare](#) lines and think not of communist subjects queuing up for bread or toilet paper, or Americans for driver's licenses, but something more like the lines of consumers eager to be the first to get the new [iPhone](#) or the latest Harry Potter book. Affluent people often wait in line for things

about which they have a particular enthusiasm--or for special experiences, like an amusement park ride, concert or meal at a favorite restaurant.

One obvious difference is that whereas the [iPhone](#) and Harry Potter queuers are eager to get the new thing first, the ObamaCare ones are presumably anxious not to miss the deadline (even if it's not rigorously enforced). ObamaCare lines might have been impressive if they'd begun to form in the last days of September. At the end of open enrollment, the White House boast is akin to the IRS's citing a "surge" in filing of tax returns two weeks from now as evidence that the income tax system is popular and well designed.

Or, as Jason Stevenson, who works for a Utah nonprofit that acts as a marketing arm for insurance companies, tells the [Associated Press](#): "This is like trying to find a parking spot at Wal-Mart on Dec. 23." Note that Wal-Mart's marketing emphasizes its "everyday low prices." The chain doesn't boast, à la the White House: "Our prices are so low, people wait in interminable lines to pay them!" Best of the Web Today columnist James Taranto on the White House's spin on ObamaCare enrollment figures. Photo credit: Associated Press.

Under normal circumstances buying insurance is an act of prudence, not passion. But there is something abnormal about the circumstances here, such that the White House may not be totally off base in seeing the ObamaCare lines as a sign of enthusiasm. A subset of "special experience" category is the *political* experience. People wait in line to vote, or to attend a rally, or to see a favorite candidate or officeholder speak. The attraction is not the expectation that one will make a difference--one usually won't, especially at the highest levels of government--but the feeling that one is part of a political movement, or a witness to history.

It may be that the people who waited in line to buy ObamaCare were doing so primarily to express their allegiance to Obama. McGuinness suggested as much when she referred to the enrollment events as "grassroots" gatherings. Even Salon's [Brian Beutler](#) concedes that point, writing that "the [ObamaCare] outreach bears striking resemblance to effective Democratic campaign operations." But ObamaCare was supposed to be a *comprehensive* reform of the health-insurance market to achieve *universal* coverage. The notion that one can build a functioning insurance market around affiliation to one party or politician in a divided country is preposterous. Thus especially if the people in the ObamaCare lines were there out of genuine passion, they are not a sign of a successful policy.

[The Power of the Press](#)

There once was a man named Agler
Who wrote to a guy called the Haggler

It sounds like a limerick

But it isn't

Because nothing rhymes with "limerick," and no other common noun rhymes with "Haggler" Even so, it's an amusing story, if a maddening one. Richard Agler of Tavernier, Fla., wrote to David Segal, a New York Times advice columnist who intervenes to help solve readers' problems. Agler had signed up for an ObamaCare policy in November. But in January his wife, Mindy, a cancer survivor, "was denied a benefit from the pharmacy and was told she was not listed on the policy."

Agler had made "numerous calls" to the insurance exchange and "established that Mindy's name was, in fact, on the application I submitted and that for some inexplicable reason her name was not communicated to our insurer." He was told his complaint had been "elevated" and "expedited," but nothing happened. He contacted his congressman's office (Rep. Joe Garcia, a Democrat, represents Tavernier). Still no luck. "Is the Haggler ready for a big-time challenge?" asked Agler.

It turned out not to be much of a challenge. Segal emailed Aaron Albright, a spokesman for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. "A day or two" later, Albright emailed back saying, "I think we had good news." A few days after that, "Mr. Agler said that someone from the federal Department of Health and Human Services called, apologized for the problems and smoothed the way for the purchase of a policy."

So the New York Times carries some weight at HHS, and the Haggler got results. What he couldn't get was information. Here's his account of his effort to report on what happened:

Mr. Albright of C.M.S. said that he could not discuss the matter because doing so would compromise the Aglers' privacy rights.

Fine. Mr. Agler promptly wrote an email to C.M.S. waiving those rights.

So. One more time. What happened?

"Unfortunately, I can't discuss individual cases," Mr. Albright wrote in an email. . . .

"Here's a question that perhaps you can answer," the Haggler wrote back. "Why can't you discuss the Aglers' case?"

"We do not discuss individual cases," Mr. Albright responded.

"You mentioned that," quoth the Haggler. "My question is, why can't you discuss individual cases?"

"It's our office policy not to discuss individual cases," came the reply.

"I get that," the Haggler wrote, warming to the game. "Your office has a policy. My question is, what is the reason for this policy? If you don't want to answer that question, then just say you don't want to answer that question. But please, don't keep repeating 'Our office has a policy.' " There was silence for a few days. When the Haggler tried one final nudge, Mr. Albright took to his keyboard again.

"We don't comment on individual cases," he wrote.

It's unusual to see somebody who's as obvious--and thus in a sense as honest--about begging the question as Albright is. As for the Haggler, he may have a future ahead of him as an ObamaCare navigator.

[Seek and Yee Shall Find?](#)

Twitchy.com noted Friday a tweet from @TheINDYPundit: "Curious that the Leland Yee story appears nowhere on @CNN's website. What say you, @CNNWriters?" Yee, in case you missed our [Friday column](#), is the California state senator arrested last week in a spectacular sting operation. The CNN writers replied, and here's the ensuing exchange:

@CNNWriters: It's in line with us covering state senators & state secretary of state races just about never. You see another conspiracy?

@TheINDYPundit: Not a conspiracy. Just a fascinating story. Undercover FBI, Gun-Running, Bribery, Corruption from pro-gun control legislator.

@CNNWriters: Apologies, @TheINDYPundit. Thought you were alluding to reluctance to chase on our part. We'll make sure politics crew is across it. Thanks!

Four days later, the latest reference to Yee on [CNN.com](#) remains a September 2011 piece citing his opposition to legislation banning the sale of shark fins.

CNN's reference to "conspiracy" is a familiar straw man; what the pundit meant to suggest was bias, not conspiracy. And CNN's claim of "covering state senators . . . just about never" doesn't hold up either. A search for [Wendy Davis](#) turns up 168 stories--though to be sure, a few of them involve an actress with the same name.

[Homer Nods](#)

We've updated yesterday's column to account for a discovery and fix an error. The discovery is that, as this 1932 [Associated Press](#) dispatch notes, the first name of the appellee in *New State Ice Co. v. Liebmann* was Ernest and thus was not "lost to history." The error is the misattribution of a Fox Butterfield quote. It came from Esther Perel, not Hanna Rosin, who was interviewing Perel.

Out on a Limb

- "Australian PM: 'Overwhelming' Evidence That MH370 Is Lost"--headline, [Agence France-Presse](#), March 31
- "Ratings May Sink Ronan Farrow's Show on MSNBC"--headline, [Daily News](#) (New York), March 31

We Blame George W. Bush

- "Murderous Tyrant? William the Conqueror's Fearsome Reputation Is the Result of an ACCOUNTANCY Error, Claims Historian"--headline, [Daily Mail](#) (London), March 31
- "Republican Elites Felled by Horrible New Sickness: Jeb Bush fever!"--headline, [Salon.com](#), March 31

[His Wife Must Be Very Annoyed](#)

"Judge Refuses to Throw Out Pink Slime Suit"--headline, FoodNavigator-USA.com, March 28

[Long-Distance Relationship](#)

"After 12 Years Together, Anna Kournikova Has Yet to Meet Enrique Iglesias' Father!"--headline, TennisWorldUSA.org, April 1

[Hey, Kids! What Time Is It?](#)

"Obamacare Fails to Collapse. Time to Move On, Folks."--headline, Washington Post website, March 31

Question and Answer--I

- "Infections. Heart Problems. Even the Menopause: What Your Nightmares Reveal About Your Health"--headline, [Daily Mail](#) (London), March 31
- "Senator: 'There's No Such Thing as Obamacare' "--headline, [WeeklyStandard.com](#), March 30

Question and Answer--II

- "What Really Killed William Henry Harrison?"--headline, [New York Times](#), April 1, 2014
- "Former U.S. Rep. William Henry Harrison, a descendant of two presidents and an opponent of excessive federal power, has died at age 94. Harrison died Monday of heart failure."--[Associated Press](#), Oct. 10, 1990

[It's Always in the Last Place You Look](#)

"Kurtz: Where's the Coverage of Washington's Role in GM's Mess?"--headline, National Review Online, April 1

[Breaking News From 9500 B.C.](#)

"Beer to Make Its Debut at London Wine Fair"--headline, TheDrinksBusiness.com, April 1

[News You Can Use](#)

"If You Play One Goat Simulator in 2014, Make It This One"--headline, TheVerge.com, April 1

Bottom Stories of the Day

- "Police Find Pellet Gun at Stevenson U., No Sign of a Shooting"--headline, [Washington Post](#), April 1
- "Fournier Repents: Put Obama on Rushmore"--headline, [NationalJournal.com](#), April 1

U.S. Out of Austro-Hungaria!

[Barack Obama](#) is taking some criticism from the pacifist left. At issue is not the use of drones or the continuing U.S. presence in Afghanistan or the intervention in Libya, but--well, we'll let Matthew Rothschild, a senior editor of The Progressive, explain it:

President Obama just went to Flanders Field in Belgium to pay homage to those who lost their lives in World War I.

But rather than use the occasion to point out the idiotic hideousness of that war, he whitewashed it, praising "the profound sacrifice they made so that we might stand here today." He saluted their "willingness to fight, and die, for the freedom that we enjoy as their heirs."

But this was not a war for freedom. It was a triumph of nationalism, pitting one nation's vanity against another. It was a war between empires for the spoils.

They say generals always fight the last war. Progressives, it would seem, are several conflicts farther behind.

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