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## 'Disrespected' Obama Appointed the Most Black Judges

By Freddie Allen

NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Despite the unprecedented levels of obstruction from Republicans in the Senate, President Obama has managed to get a higher rate of black judges confirmed than any other president in history, according to a court watchdog group.

Research compiled by the Alliance for Justice, a national organization dedicated to progressive values and the creation of a just and free society, shows that so far during the Obama administration, blacks have accounted for 18.7 percent of the federal judicial confirmations, a sharp increase over the George W. Bush administration, where 7.3 percent of the judicial confirmations were black. During the Clinton administration, 16.4 percent of the federal judicial confirmations were African American. During the Obama administration, 41 percent of the federal judges that have been confirmed are women, compared to 22 percent under George W. Bush and 29 percent for Clinton.

President Obama has also managed to get more Asian Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and gays confirmed to the federal bench than either Bush or Clinton.

"This is the best slate of judicial nominees I've seen from any

president since I've been at the Lawyers' Committee, since 1989," said Barbara Arnwine, president and executive director of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, a nonprofit group that works for equal justice

under the law. "I've never seen a more diverse slate. I've never seen a more highly-rated slate. I've never seen a slate with this kind of deep diversity."

Yet, the current slate of judicial nominees has faced unparalleled delays in the Senate. President Obama's judicial nominees have waited an average of 115 days between judiciary committee vote and confirmation, more than double the average wait time of President Bush's

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Barbara Arnwine sees need for more black judges

## Obamacare: A Midterm Report Card

By Charles Ornstein

Special to the NNPA from ProPublica

The first half of the Obamacare open enrollment period is over, and yesterday, federal health officials announced figures from the first three months.

After a disastrous start, HealthCare.gov (which handles enrollment for 36 states) began functioning properly. It, along with state-run insurance exchanges, netted more than 2.1 million signups between Oct. 1 and Dec. 28.

But are sign-ups on pace to meet the Congressional Budget Office's projection of 7 million this year? And is there an adequate balance between young and old, sick and healthy, to keep costs in line? That's harder to say.

Here's what we know:

**Some states are performing much better than others.**

Connecticut has already exceeded the target the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) wanted it to have by the end of March, according to a signups.net/. New York and Rhode Island are also on pace to beat expectations. But other states are lagging. They include Maryland, Oregon and Massachusetts, which run their own exchanges and continue to be plagued by website problems. Also far behind are New Mexico and Mississippi, which rely on HealthCare.gov.

**Enrollees are skewing older.**

Currently, 33 percent of enrollees are 55 to 64 years old, compared to only 30 percent who are under 35. In Arkansas, Maine, Ohio, West Virginia and Wisconsin, at least 40 percent of enrollees are over 55. A higher proportion of younger enrollees are going to have to be signed up before the end of March in order to help offset the costs of older ones. CMS officials say younger enrollees tend to sign up later in the process, as they did several years ago when Massachusetts implemented its individual mandate.

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President Barack Obama checks in on First Lady Michelle Obama and daughters Sasha and Malia as they prepare burritos while volunteering at the DC Central Kitchen in Washington, D.C., on Martin Luther King Day, January 20, 2014. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza) President Barack Obama talks with Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy of Spain following their bilateral meeting in the Oval Office, Jan. 13, 2014. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza) President Barack Obama holds a baby in the air while talking with patrons during a stop for lunch at The Coupe in Washington, D.C., Jan. 10. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

## White House Seeks to Help Expand Education Opportunity

By Jazelle Hunt

NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Thirty years ago, one year of tuition, room, and board at a nation's four-year, degree-granting institution cost \$8,756 on average (or \$3,499, when adjusted for inflation).

As of 2010, that figure had almost tripled to \$22,092 - and that's just for one year.

To meet this economic hurdle, 39.6 million Americans have turned to the student loan market, taking on more than \$1 trillion in debt of last year, according to the Department of Education's Federal Student Aid office. Higher education, once a pipeline to the American Dream, is quickly becoming just a pipedream for low-income and underserved Americans.

On Thursday, President and First Lady Obama invited education leaders and decision-makers to the White House to announce an intervention to allow more Americans the chance of a degree. The Expanding Education Opportunity summit aims to foster collaboration and brainstorm solutions to the dearth of college opportunities for low-income and disadvantaged students. The summit is part of the President's overall education agenda - which has advanced through Congress in fits and starts.

President Obama addressed the attendees and the press, saying, "The one reason we're here today is we want to make sure more young people have a chance to earn a higher education. Today is a great example of how we can advance this agenda without a bunch of new legislation."

Without a college degree, children born in the bottom 20 percent of income distribution have just a 5 percent chance of getting into the top 20 percent as adults - and only a 55 percent chance of ever making it out of that income bracket, according to a 2008 Brookings Institute study.

But there was a catch: Those invited could only attend the summit if they put their money where their mouths are. Attendees were required to submit (for review) a concise in-house plan of new actions for 2014 to combat the opportunity gap, and publicly commit funds to execute their plan.

"We do not have a more clear ladder of economic mobility than the attainment of a college degree for someone born into a low-income family. And yet the research shows that if you are born in the bottom quartile, by the accident of birth you have only a nine percent chance of graduating from college," says Director of the National Economic Council, Gene Sperling, who organized the summit. "We are a country that does not believe that the outcomes of your life should be overly determined by the accident of your birth. Yet these numbers show that to make good on that, we have to do much more as a country to help more people to succeed in college."

In preliminary efforts, the Department of Education and stakeholders identified four areas of focus that could have the greatest impact in expanding access to higher education: Matching students to their best possible schools and encouraging completion; increasing the pool of college-ready students; reducing inequalities in college advisement and test prep; and making remediation more effective.

An array of secondary institutions are included in the ongoing initiative, such as MIT, College of the Holy Cross, Princeton University, Vassar College, and Navajo Technical University. HBCUs Howard University, Morehouse College, Morgan State University, and Spelman College are also making commitments. Notable organizations involved include the College Board, Posse Foundation, and the American Association of Community Colleges.

Participants were required to focus their plans and resources on improving one or more of these areas. A majority of the schools and organizations involved have made pledges around increasing match and college completion.

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