

# US asks contractor to lead health website repairs

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In this Aug. 1, 2012 file photo, Jeffrey Zients testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington. President Barack Obama is calling Zients to help correct problems with the new federal health care website. The White House says Zients will assist a team that is said to be working around the clock on the site, [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov). (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite, File)

The Obama administration said Friday that dozens of problems had been found in the website at the center of a landmark health care overhaul, and a private company has been asked to lead the repairs. Officials said most of the issues will be fixed by the end of November.

It will take a lot of work, but "HealthCare.gov is fixable," management consultant Jeffrey Zients said, but he stopped short of saying the problems will go away completely. He told reporters his review found issues across the entire system. One of the website contractors, Quality Software Systems, Inc., will take on the role of "general contractor" leading the fixes.

HealthCare.gov was supposed to be the online portal for uninsured Americans to get coverage under the signature initiative of Barack Obama's presidency, which requires most Americans to have coverage by Jan. 1. The website was promoted as the equivalent of Amazon.com for health insurance, but it became a huge bottleneck when it launched Oct. 1 and an embarrassment for the administration.

The U.S. has been the only major developed country without a national health care system, and the overhaul was supposed to change that. The system is not the centralized, government-run setup seen in places like Britain and instead uses various ways to require or encourage Americans to get private or, for the poor or elderly, government-provided insurance.

What's known as Obamacare is the closest the U.S. has ever come to universal health care after a century of efforts, and it has been under heavy attack by opposition Republicans from the start.

Now, with congressional elections coming next year, Republicans are using the administration's handling of the troubled website launch to regain momentum after their effort to defund Obamacare led to a 16-day partial government shutdown.

Obama has said he's as frustrated as anyone and has promised a "tech surge" to fix the website.

The briefing from Zients came a day after contractors told Congress that the government didn't fully test the system until the last couple of weeks before the launch and ordered last-minute changes that contributed to clogging the system.

Next week, the head of the department responsible for the rollout, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, is scheduled to testify.

Administration officials are still refusing to release any numbers on how many people have successfully enrolled for health insurance. Although 700,000 have applied for coverage online, it's believed only a fraction managed to sign up. Prior to the website going live, the administration estimated that nearly 500,000 people would sign up in October alone.

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