Obama vows health website fix, says some rates may rise

October 30 2013, by Michael Mathes

President Barack Obama took the heat Wednesday for his health reforms' bungled rollout, and acknowledged perhaps for the first time that some Americans will pay more for coverage under Obamacare.

One month after the October 1 debut of the online portal, thousands of Americans have signed up for new [health](#) insurance but millions more have been stymied by a cascade of technical problems afflicting HealthCare.gov.

And Republican critics have jumped all over the administration for the law itself, saying millions of Americans were being kicked off current plans because of Obamacare, and that many will end up paying more for new coverage that must comply with the reforms.

Obama took his defense of his signature domestic legislation to Boston, in the state where his 2012 Republican presidential rival Mitt Romney unveiled a universal health coverage plan seven years ago that Obama used as "the model for the nation's law."

"I take full responsibility for making sure it gets fixed ASAP," Obama told a crowd. "We're working overtime to improve it every day."

He also acknowledged that some rate hikes may occur.

"There's a fraction of Americans with higher incomes who will pay more on the front end for better insurance with better benefits and protections

like the patient's bill of rights, and that will actually save them from financial ruin if they get sick," Obama said in what is believed to be the first time he has made such an admission.

"But nobody is losing their right to health care coverage. And no insurance company will ever be able to deny you coverage or drop you as a customer altogether. Those days are over, and that's the truth."

Efforts by critics to scare people into thinking their insurance company was dropping customers without providing equal or better coverage were "grossly misleading," Obama said.

He was immediately hit with criticism from the country's top Republican, House Speaker John Boehner, who recalled the president's promise that Americans could keep their insurance plan if they liked it.

"It wasn't true when he said it years ago, and, as millions of Americans are finding out, it's not true now," Boehner said.

"All across the country, cancellation notices are hitting mailboxes because of the train wreck that is the president's health care law. Millions are being forced to buy new, Washington-approved plans, regardless of whether they liked their old plan or not and often at a higher cost."

Skeleton policies that do not measure up to Obamacare's rules, including not providing free mammograms or charging women 50 percent more than men, will need to be changed to conform to the law.

Republicans have sought for years to repeal or defund Obamacare. With the website glitches, they are now calling for a delay to the so-called individual mandate, which compels nearly all Americans to have insurance by next year or pay a fine.

Obama acknowledged that the rollout was tarnished by the poor functionality of the website, which in the first few weeks prevented many users from enrolling.

"Right now the website is too slow, too many people have gotten stuck. And I'm not happy about it," Obama said.

But he turned to the Romney plan as an example of how early problems and low enrollment numbers could be overcome.

"Today, there is nearly universal coverage in Massachusetts," Obama said.

Back in Washington, Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius regretted that navigating the online portal has been a "miserably frustrating experience" for many.

"Let me say directly to these Americans: You deserve better. I apologize. I'm accountable to you for fixing these problems," Sebelius, the most senior administration official to testify before Congress on the law, told a closely-watched House of Representatives panel.

Energy and Commerce Committee chairman Fred Upton said he has seen little improvement since October 1.

"Sadly here we are now five weeks into enrollment and the news seems to get worse by the day," Upton said.

"After more than three years to prepare, malfunctions have become the norm."

Sebelius appeared at the third hearing in a week addressing the faulty start to Obamacare.

With Republicans seizing on the policy cancellation letters, Sebelius pushed back, saying it was insurance companies altering their inadequate plans in order to conform with Obamacare.

"This market has always been the Wild West," she said of the individual marketplace, in which some five percent of Americans buy [health coverage](link).

Democrats like Henry Waxman rode to Sebelius's rescue.

"The early glitches in this rollout will soon be forgotten," he told the panel, "and then every American will finally have access to affordable [health insurance](link)."

Last week, the lead contractors, which collectively have been paid hundreds of millions of dollars to create and manage the website, said there was insufficient testing of the online portal.

Asked if the two weeks of end-to-end testing was enough, Sebelius replied "clearly not."

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