

For Obama, a frustrating health care rollout (Update)

October 20 2013, by Julie Pace



This Oct. 17, 2013 file photo shows President Barack Obama speaking in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington. Administration officials say about 476,000 health insurance applications have been filed through federal and state exchanges, the most detailed measure yet of the problem-plagued rollout of President Obama's signature legislation. However, the officials continue to refuse to say how many people have actually enrolled in the insurance markets. Without enrollment figures, it's unclear whether the program is on track to reach the 7 million people projecting by the Congressional Budget Office to gain coverage during the six-month sign-up period. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin, File)

President Barack Obama is expected Monday to address the problem-plagued rollout of his signature health care legislation, which has suffered an embarrassing start with a cascade of computer problems plaguing online sign-ups for health insurance.

The rough rollout has been a black eye for Obama, who invested significant time and political capital in his first term getting the law passed, with the goal of insuring millions of Americans without coverage.

Administration officials say more than 476,000 health insurance applications have been filed through federal and state exchanges. The figures mark the most detailed measure yet of the problem-plagued rollout of the insurance marketplace.

However, the officials continue to refuse to say how many people have actually enrolled. And without enrollment figures, it's unclear whether the program is on track to reach the 7 million people projected to gain coverage during the six-month sign-up period.

Obama will directly address the technical problems with the health care websites Monday morning during an event in the White House Rose Garden, according to the White House. Officials said the president finds the glitches unacceptable and will outline for the public steps the administration is taking to address the troubles.

Obama will be joined during the event by people who have already enrolled in insurance programs through the new exchanges. The administration has not said how many people have enrolled during the first three weeks of sign-ups.

Administration officials initially blamed a high volume of interest from ordinary Americans for the frozen screens that many people

encountered. Since then, they have also acknowledged problems with software and some elements of the system's design.

The officials said technology experts from inside and outside the government are being brought in to work on the glitches, though they did not say how many workers were being added.

Officials did say staffing has been increased at call centers by about 50 percent. As problems persist on the federally run website, the administration is encouraging more people to sign up for insurance over the phone.

The officials would not discuss the health insurance rollout by name and were granted anonymity.

Despite the widespread problems, the White House has yet to fully explain what went wrong with the online system consumers were supposed to use to sign up for coverage.

Interest in the insurance markets appears to continue to be high. Officials said about 19 million people have visited HealthCare.gov as of Friday night.

Americans seeking health coverage through the legislation must fill out applications before selecting a specific plan. The forms require personal information, including income figures that are used to calculate any subsidies the applicant may qualify for. More than one person can be included on an application.

An internal memo obtained by The Associated Press showed that the administration projected nearly a half million people would enroll for the insurance markets during the first month.

Officials say they expect enrollments to be heavier toward the end of the six-month sign up window.

Problems with the rollout were largely overshadowed by Republican efforts to force changes to the health care law in exchange for funding the government. That effort failed and the government reopened last week with "Obamacare" intact.

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