

US asks for inspection of flawed Obamacare website (Update)

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Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington, in this Wednesday, Oct. 30, 2013 file photo. Sebelius said in a blog post early Wednesday Dec. 11, 2013 that she is asking the department's inspector general to investigate the contracting process, management, performance and payment issues that may have contributed to the flawed launch of HealthCare.gov. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite, File)

President Barack Obama's top health official Wednesday called for an investigation that could reveal deeper problems lurking behind the

botched rollout of the Obamacare website.

Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said in a blog post early Wednesday that she is asking the department's inspector general to investigate the contracting process, management, performance and payment issues that may have contributed to the flawed launch of HealthCare.gov. The bungled launch has undermined Obama's signature domestic achievement: bringing the United States as close as it's ever come to universal health care under the Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare.

The website was supposed to have been the online portal to coverage under Obama's new health care law, but technical problems turned it into a frustrating bottleneck for millions of consumers. It's working better now after two months of repairs.

Enrollment statistics for the plan showed that 364,682 people have signed up for private coverage as of Nov. 30. Although that's more than three times the October total, it's less than one-third of the 1.2 million people officials had originally projected would enroll nationwide by the end of November.

Sebelius told the House Energy and Commerce committee on Wednesday that the signup trend is turning positive.

"I don't think there is any question that the flawed launch of the website put a damper on people's enthusiasm," Sebelius said. "Having said that, we are seeing very, very positive trends. We are seeing lots of people re-engage

Lawmakers want explanations for dozens of questions about the website's design, workability and security. They also want to know why Sebelius and other top officials repeatedly assured them everything was

on track.

Republicans have called for the resignation of Sebelius, who has been lampooned on late-night American TV for her role in Obamacare's troubled rollout. Even some Democrats have urged Obama to fire those responsible, but the White House has given no indication that a house-cleaning is coming. Instead, it has brought in outside management to help Sebelius and her department cope. The secretary's unusual pre-dawn announcement of an inspector general probe indicates that she realizes she has some explaining to do.

"I believe strongly in the need for accountability, and in the importance of being good stewards of taxpayer dollars," Sebelius said in her announcement. The website has cost taxpayers more than \$600 million so far, according to the congressional Government Accountability Office.

In addition to the inspector general review, Sebelius said she has ordered the hiring of a new "chief risk officer" at the agency that oversees the new programs created to bring health insurance coverage to millions of uninsured Americans under Obama's law. That official will focus on making sure technology programs work as advertised.

Sebelius also said she's ordered a retraining of her department on best practices for outside contracting.

"The launch of HealthCare.gov was flawed and simply unacceptable," Sebelius wrote. "As we continue our relentless efforts to enhance Healthcare.gov—and as we continue to adapt and improve based on the feedback we are getting from customers and issuers—we must take concrete action to prevent these problems in the future."

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