

Obama opens health plan sales campaign

December 4 2013, by Steven R. Hurst



President Barack Obama gestures as he speaks about the new health care law, Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2013, in the South Court Auditorium in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House complex in Washington. The president said his signature health care law "is working and will work into the future." Obama said the benefits of the law have "gotten lost" in recent months as attention focused on the widespread problems that crippled the website where people can sign up for health insurance. On stage with the president are Americans the White House says have gained as a result of the Affordable Care Act. (AP Photo/ Evan Vucci)

President Barack Obama has launched a campaign to bombard

Americans daily about the benefits of his health care overhaul, pressing them to give the troubled web sign-up portal a fresh try after two months of emergency repairs while trying to blunt noisy Republican calls to delay or scrap the new health insurance system as an unworkable, big government blunder.

The president is fighting back after seeing his approval rating fall dramatically, trying anew to sell Americans on the massive health care changes that are designed to provide coverage to millions of uninsured Americans and to end [health insurance](#) companies' practice of denying insurance to people who have a pre-existing medical condition or to cancel coverage when they become ill.

While telling critics of the law—some of whom he said were "rooting for it to fail"—that he would work with them to improve the measure, he declared on Tuesday he would not allow the law's repeal.

"If I've got to fight another three years to make this law work, that's what I'll do," said Obama, flanked by a group of Americans who reported being helped by the law. And he challenged Republican foes to present their own plan: "Tell us specifically what you'd do differently." Congressional opponents have not proposed any plan beyond rescinding the law.

Obama and his administration have a huge job as they try to overcome the faulty Oct. 1 roll-out of the government website that was to have provided a simple means of signing up for insurance plans offered by private carriers. The site failed miserably and is only now working reasonably well—but not for everyone. The sign-up period runs through March 31, but people need to enroll in a plan by Dec. 23 in order to have coverage in place by Jan. 1.

But experts say there still remain big problems with the website,

particularly in getting correct information on those who have signed up for coverage to the companies who will be issuing the insurance policies



President Barack Obama speaks about the new health care law, Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2013, in the South Court Auditorium in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House complex in Washington. The President argued that his health law is preventing insurance discrimination against those with pre-existing conditions and is allowing young people to stay on their parents' coverage until age 26. On stage with the president are Americans the White House says have gained as a result of the Affordable Care Act. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

Obama signed the new law in early 2010, but most of its features were not to have gone into effect until Oct. 1. It carries a mandate that all Americans must obtain health insurance or pay a fine. As an enticement,

the law provides income tax credits to low-income Americans to subsidize the purchase of insurance plans. Obama had repeatedly sought to sell the new law by saying that Americans who had health insurance plans they liked would be able to keep that coverage. It turned out, however, that millions of Americans began receiving cancellation notices because their current policies did not meet standards set by the new law. That only compounded growing anger as the website was unable to handle the volume of Americans trying to use it.

Obama's drop in the polls after those problems arose put his presidential legacy in danger even though he has sought to improve the situation in the United States, the only major world economy where citizens do not have health insurance as a universal right guaranteed by the government.

Heavy opposition to the law picked up steam after Republicans regained the majority in the House of Representatives in the 2010 elections. Led by a new crop of small-government, low-tax tea party activists in the House of Representatives, House Republicans have voted more than 40 times to repeal the law. Those efforts have never even reached consideration in the Senate where Democrats hold the majority. But Democrat solidarity has shown cracks since the bungled Oct. 1 roll-out, especially among Democratic senators facing re-election this year in Republican-dominated states.

Republicans oppose the [health care law](#) as an intrusion into the personal lives of Americans and contend that government is incapable of running a program that is essential to the lives of U.S. citizens. The party has not, however, offered any plan of its own that would meet the needs of the more than 40 million Americans without insurance who are either priced out of the market or unable to buy coverage because of health problems.

While the sign-up website is still wobbly, the administration reported Monday that about 1 million people used the portal during the first work

day after the Dec. 1 deadline, the date the administration had set for unsnarling the deep problems that accompanied the start-up.

As part of the health care offensive, the administration released a 50-state report Tuesday morning, saying that nearly 1.5 million people were found eligible for Medicaid, the government health insurance program for low-income Americans, during October. As website problems depressed sign-ups for subsidized private coverage, Medicaid saw a nearly 16 percent increase in states that have agreed to expand it under the new law, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. That increase was registered even though the majority of U.S. states with Republican governors have refused to participate in the expanded program.

Obama had set a Nov. 30 deadline for ensuring that the website was working properly for the vast majority of users. While administration officials declared over the weekend that they had met their goal, counselors helping people use the online health exchange gave the updated site mixed reviews, with some zipping through the application process while others are facing the same old sputters and even crashes.

The website troubles resulted in significantly lower enrollment than what administration officials had hoped for and it's questionable whether the program will reach the 7 million sign-ups predicted by the Congressional Budget Office during the signup period that runs until March 31 for people to enroll without facing a fine.

Also Tuesday, a Treasury Department watchdog warned that government subsidies to help Americans buy insurance under the [health care](#) overhaul may be vulnerable to fraud, the latest indication that the troubles are far from over for Obama's signature domestic policy initiative.

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Citation: Obama opens health plan sales campaign (2013, December 4) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-12-obama-health-sales-campaign.html>

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