

Obamacare website vastly improved, bugs fixed: aide

December 1 2013

The troubleshooter appointed by President Barack Obama to overhaul a bungled health care website rollout said Sunday that improvements had made a "night and day" difference in handling online traffic.

The White House has admitted previously that the launch of Healthcare.gov, where people can sign up for health insurance, was a debacle and the Obama administration pledged that the vast majority of potential customers would be able to enroll online by the end of November.

Jeffrey Zients, an Obama advisor recently given the job of finding fixes to end the website woes and get the president's signature policy achievement back on track, said technical problems were being overcome.

"The site now has the capacity to handle 50,000 concurrent or simultaneous users at one time ... so the site will support more than 800,000 consumer visits a day," he said during a conference call with reporters.

"We've doubled the system's capacity and Healthcare.gov can now support its intended volume," he added.

Additionally, the website is up and running successfully more than 90 percent of the time—up from an estimated 42.9 percent through most of October, when people routinely experienced delays or could not gain

online access at all.

"The bottom line: Healthcare.gov on December 1 is night-and-day from where it was on October 1," Zients said, citing improvements that include a technical support center monitoring the website 24 hours a day.

Some 400 bugs that were harming the website's operation have been eliminated, he said, though he did not provide data on how many people were signing up for insurance.

"We developed a prioritized punch-list of software fixes, hardware upgrades and user enhancements with the prioritization based on what has the biggest impact on system stability, capacity, speed and user experience," Zients added.

Julie Bataille, communications director for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said during the call with reporters that 80 percent of users are now able to apply for health insurance successfully on the site.

Healthcare.gov's rollout on October 1 sent Obama's approval rating tanking and pushed some of his fellow Democrats into open revolt, while sparking an opening for gleeful Republicans opposed to healthcare reform.

Only approximately 27,000 people were able to subscribe for insurance via Healthcare.gov in October, according to official figures.

Obama campaigned in 2008 on the promise of insuring some 30 million Americans who lacked health insurance.

On the Sunday morning CBS television show "Face the Nation" Democratic Senator Robert Menendez said the online debacle was "the equivalent of having a great item that you want to buy in the store, but

not being able to get through the front door."

"It sounds like the front door's been opened successfully now," he said, referring to Sunday's website update.

The website has been far from Obama's only hitch while implementing the hotly-contested legislation, which was derided by Republicans and only upheld in the US Supreme Court by a narrow 5-4 vote.

On November 14, Obama agreed to change the law to try to help Americans whose insurance plans were canceled because they did not meet the more stringent requirements under the new reforms, after previous promises that no American would lose their existing coverage.

"We are two months into a sustained outreach and education campaign that will continue through the end of March," Bataille said, alluding to the need to raise awareness and get people back online to sign up for new health plans.

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