

Kathleen Sebelius resigns after Obamacare woes

April 11 2014, by Stephen Collinson

President Barack Obama's Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius is resigning, paying the price for the chaotic initial rollout of his signature health care law, officials said Thursday.

Obama will nominate Sylvia Mathews Burwell, his current budget director, who has a reputation as an accomplished manager, to replace Sebelius on Friday, the officials said.

The administration hopes that the departure of Sebelius will draw a symbolic line under the early implementation period of the law, which had a botched debut due to a malfunctioning sign-up website and other teething problems.

The administration was forced into an emergency effort to fix the site and succeeded to such an extent that 7.5 million people have now signed up for [health insurance](#) under the new law—a figure that defied expectations.

Obama and top aides spent last week declaring victory over skeptics who argued that the law—the most sweeping US social reform in decades—would never work or that Americans would refuse to sign up.

But the stuttering debut of so-called Obamacare provided fresh ammunition to Republicans who are using the law's unpopularity to blast vulnerable Democrats ahead of November's mid-term elections.

"I thank Secretary Sebelius for her service. She had an impossible task: nobody can make Obamacare work," said House Republican majority leader Eric Cantor on Twitter.

Obama will look to Burwell, if she is confirmed, to smooth out remaining glitches with the law before the next registration period opens in November.

'Partisan sniping'

"The president wants to make sure we have a proven manager and relentless implementer in the job over there, which is why he is going to nominate Sylvia," White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough told The New York Times.

The White House apparently decided that the end of the sign-up period on March 31 marked an appropriate time for Sebelius, who has been in the job for five years, to move aside.

Sebelius "thought that it was time to transition the leadership to somebody else," McDonough told the Times.

"She does hope—all of us hope—that we can get beyond the partisan sniping."

And House Democratic Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi insisted that Sebelius's "legacy will be found in the 7.5 million Americans signed up on the marketplaces so far, the 3.1 million people covered on their parents' plans, and the millions more gaining coverage through the expansion of Medicaid."

But Republicans quickly moved to exploit the resignation, previewing what could be a fiery Senate confirmation process for Burwell.

Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus said Obama could name a new health secretary but could not fix endemic problems with his [health care law](#).

"The next HHS Secretary will inherit a mess—Americans facing rising costs, families losing their doctors, and an economy weighed down by intrusive regulations," he said.

"No matter who is in charge of HHS, Obamacare will continue to be a disaster and will continue to hurt hardworking Americans."

Republicans argue that Obamacare forced Americans to ditch existing health plans, will hike the cost of insurance and will hamper small businesses and hurt job creation.

Obama countered earlier this month that the Obamacare law was working, despite early problems, and that it would bed down and remain a part of American life.

He seemed to have the struggle to implement the law in mind when he paid tribute to former president Lyndon Johnson, who passed the Civil Rights Act 50 years ago, and argued that the presidency should be used to promote change and equality.

"What president Johnson understood was that equality required more than the absence of oppression—it required the presence of economic opportunity," Obama said in Texas.

"A decent job, decent wages, [health care](#)—those too were civil rights worth fighting for."

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