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## Gov't Diagnosis: HealthCare.gov On The Mend

WASHINGTON (AP) — Computer crashes should be giving way to insurance coverage — if the government's diagnosis of its health care website is correct.

The Health and Human Services Department released a progress report Sunday on its effort to get the troubled HealthCare.gov website on the mend. Administration officials said the worst of the online glitches, bugs and delays may be over.

"The bottom line — HealthCare.gov on Dec. 1 is night and day from where it was on Oct. 1," said Jeff Zients, the White House's troubleshooter tasked with making the website function properly.

Yet officials acknowledged more work remains on the website, which made its national debut two months ago with hundreds of software flaws, inadequate equipment and inefficient management. Federal workers and private contractors have undertaken an intense reworking of the system.

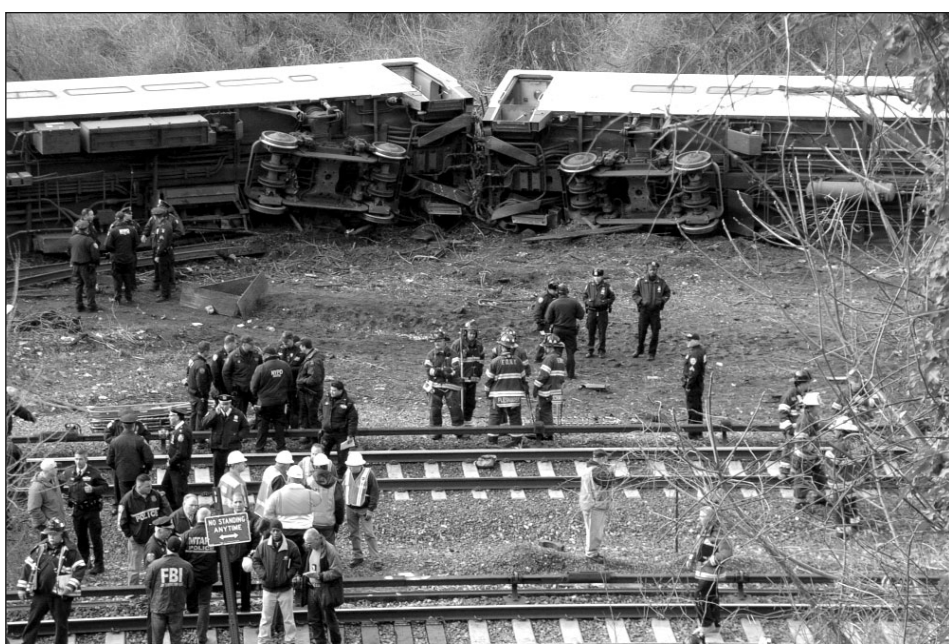
One problem that consumers can't see — at least not yet — is quickly moving up to the top of the White House priority list. Insurers complain that much of the enrollment information they have gotten through the system's back-room operation is practically useless: erroneous, duplicative or garbled.

That raises the possibility that a patient could go to use their new coverage next January at the pharmacy or doctor's office only to be told they are not in the system.

"In addition to fixing the technical problems with HealthCare.gov the significant 'back-end' issues must also be resolved to ensure that coverage can begin on January 1," said Karen Ignagni, president of America's Health Insurance Plans, the largest industry trade group. "In particular, the ongoing problems with processing... enrollment files need to be fixed."

The next crucial deadline for the system is Dec. 23, two days before Christmas.

Consumers must be enrolled by that date so their coverage can kick in on the first of the year.



DAVID TORRES/XINHUA VIA ZUMA PRESS/MCT

A New York commuter train derailed on Sunday in the Bronx borough. Federal investigators said Monday the train was estimated to be going 82 miles per hour at a curve with a 30 mph speed limit.

# NTSB: Train Going Too Fast At Curve

BY JIM FITZGERALD AND FRANK ELTMAN  
Associated Press

YONKERS, N.Y. — A commuter train that derailed over the weekend, killing four passengers, was hurtling at 82 mph as it entered a 30 mph curve, a federal investigator said Monday. But whether the wreck was the result of human error or brake trouble was unclear, he said.

Asked why the train was going so fast, National Transportation Safety Board member Earl Weener said: "That's the question we need to answer."

He would not disclose what the engineer operating the train had told investigators. Weener said investigators were examining the engineer's cellphone — apparently to determine whether he was distracted.

Weener said the information on the locomotive's speed was preliminary and extracted from the Metro-North train's two data recorders, taken from the wreckage after the Sunday morning accident in the Bronx.

He said the throttle went to idle six seconds before the derailed train came to a complete stop — "very late in the game" for a train going that fast — and the brakes were fully engaged five seconds before the train stopped.

Asked whether the tragedy was the result of human error or faulty brakes, Weener said: "The answer is, at this point in time, we can't tell."

He said investigators are not aware of any problems with the brakes during the nine stops the train made before the derailment.

As investigators mined the data recorders for information, workers righted the fallen cars along the curve, a bend so sharp that the speed limit during the approach drops from 70 mph to 30 mph.

It takes about a mile for a train going 70 mph to stop, according to Steve Ditmeyer, an adjunct professor of railway management at Michigan State University and a former official with the Federal Railroad Administration.

The wreck came two years before the federal government's deadline for Metro-North and other railroads to install automatic-slowdown technology designed to prevent catastrophic accidents caused by human error.

Metro-North's parent agency and other railroads have pressed the government to extend the deadline a few years because of the cost and complexity of the Positive Train Control

technology, which uses GPS, wireless radio and computers to monitor locomotives' position and speed and stop trains from colliding, derailed or going the wrong way.

"Assuming the braking system was working normally, this crash would not have happened" if a PTC system had been in place, said Grayd Cothen, a former safety official with the Federal Railroad Administration.

He said the system would probably have alerted the engineer to the speed of the train and the approaching curve, and if the engineer had failed to brake manually, the PTC would have probably forced the train to stop.

"This incident, if anything, heightens the importance of additional safety measures, like that one," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, which is also served by Metro-North. "And speaking for myself, I'd be very loath to be more flexible or grant more time."

Margie Anders, a spokeswoman for Metro-North's parent, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, said that the agency began planning for a PTC system as soon as the law was put into effect.

"It's not a simple, off-the-shelf solution," she said.

The engineer, William Rockefeller, was injured and "is totally traumatized by everything that has happened," said Anthony Bottalico, executive director of the rail employees union. He said Rockefeller, 46, was cooperating fully with investigators.

"He's a sincere human being with an impeccable record that I know of. He's diligent and competent," Bottalico said. Rockefeller has been an engineer for about 11 years and a Metro-North employee for about 20, he said.

While the train's seven cars and locomotive were gradually returned to their tracks Monday, the 26,000 weekday riders on the railroad's affected Hudson Line faced a complicated commute.

Many used shuttle buses and cars to get to work. But no major delays were reported during the early rush hour.

On Sunday, the train was about half full, with about 150 people aboard, when it ran off the rails around 7:20 a.m. while rounding a bend where the Harlem and Hudson rivers meet. The lead car landed inches from the water. In addition to the four people killed, more than 60 were injured.

Many victims had been released from hospitals by Monday afternoon.

## Justices Won't Hear Appeal Of NY Internet Taxation

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Monday refused to consider throwing out New York state's taxes on Internet purchases on websites like Amazon.com, a move that could change the way Internet commerce works.

The high court refused without comment to hear appeals from Amazon.com LLC and Overstock.com Inc., in their fights against a state law that forces them to remit sales tax the same way in-state businesses do.

Web retailers generally have not had to charge sales taxes in states where they

lack a store or some other physical presence. But New York and other states say that a retailer has a physical presence when it uses affiliates — people and businesses that refer customers to the retailer's website and collect a commission on sales. These affiliates range from one-person blogs promoting the latest gadgets to companies that run coupon and deal sites.

Amazon and Overstock both use affiliate programs. Amazon has been collecting sales tax in New York as it fights the state over a 2008 law that was the first to consider local affiliates enough of

an in-state presence to require sales tax collection. Overstock ended its affiliate program in 2008 after the law passed.

The Supreme Court refusal to hear the websites' appeal likely will prompt more and more states to attempt to collect taxes from website purchases. Around 20 states, including New York, already have similar laws on the books. The National Council of State Legislatures estimated that states lost an estimated \$23.3 billion in 2012 from being prohibited from collecting sales tax from online and catalog purchases.

## Cyber Deals Have Their Day Monday

NEW YORK (AP) — Power up and shop. Millions of Americans took advantage of online deals ranging from free shipping to hundreds of dollars off electronics and half-price clothing Monday, which was expected to be the busiest online shopping day of the year.

The spending surge on so-called Cyber Monday came after a disappointing holiday weekend in stores. And it showed that Americans are increasingly comfortable buying items on tablets and smartphones.

Early results showed online shopping was up 18.7 percent compared with the same time last year, according to figures by IBM Benchmark. Mobile traffic, which includes smartphones and tablets, accounted for 30 percent of all online traffic.

Brandon Harris, 27, from Memphis, Tenn., started shopping at midnight Sunday and by Monday had spent around \$300 and completed half of his Christmas shopping, including a Barbie doll for his niece and a TV for his mother.

## Amazon.com Considering Drones

NEW YORK (AP) — Amazon is working on a way to get packages to customers in 30 minutes or less — via self-guided drone.

Consider it the modern version of a pizza delivery boy, minus the awkward teenager.

Amazon.com Inc. says it's working on the so-called Prime Air unmanned aircraft project but it will take years to advance the technology and for the Federal Aviation Administration to create the necessary rules and regulations.

The project was first reported by CBS' "60 Minutes" Sunday night, hours before millions of shoppers turned to their computers to hunt Cyber Monday bargains.

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos said in the interview that while his octocopters look like something out of science fiction, there's no reason they can't be used as delivery vehicles.

## Army To Handle Security In Lebanon City

TRIPOLI, Lebanon (AP) — The government authorized the army Monday to take charge of security in Lebanon's second-largest city of Tripoli for six months following deadly sectarian clashes by rival sides stemming from the civil war in neighboring Syria.

Many fear that the violence in Tripoli — only 18 miles (30 kilometers) from the Syrian border — could tip the rest of Lebanon back toward chaos. At least 12 people were killed and more than 100 wounded in the latest fighting that broke out Saturday.

The decision by caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati after a high-level security meeting at the presidential palace is meant to allay fears that the fighting was spreading out of control in the northern port city. But the army is weak and has been largely unable to stop the violence. Dozens of soldiers have been killed and wounded in Tripoli this year, often caught in the crossfire between rival gunmen.

Sectarian clashes linked to the war in Syria often flare in Tripoli between supporters and opponents of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Lebanon is divided into a patchwork of sects, including Sunnis, Shiites and Christians. Syria's rebels are dominated by its Sunni Muslim majority, and Lebanese Sunnis mostly support their brethren across the border, while Lebanese Shiites have staked their future with the Assad regime. The Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah has played a critical role in recent battlefield victories for forces loyal to Assad.

## Egypt: Military Powers Raise Concern

CAIRO (AP) — Extensive amendments of the constitution adopted under Egypt's ousted Islamist president give the military more privileges, enshrining its place as the nation's most powerful institution and the source of real power, while removing parts that liberals feared set the stage for the creation of an Islamic state.

The new draft constitution is a key first step in implementing a political transition laid down by the military after it removed Mohammed Morsi from power. A 50 member panel declared the draft finished Monday, paving the way for a nationwide referendum within 30 days to ratify the document.

The military-backed government has heralded the draft charter as a step toward democracy — seeking to prove the credentials of the post-Morsi system amid continuing protests by Islamists furious over the coup against the country's first freely elected president.

The amended document enshrines personal and political rights in stronger language than past constitutions. But rights experts express fears that the political power carved out for the military could leave those rights irrelevant.

One key clause states that for the next two presidential terms, the armed forces will enjoy the exclusive right of naming the defense minister, an arrangement that gives the military autonomy above any civilian oversight and leaves the power of the president uncertain.

## Ukraine Head Asks To Resume EU talks

KIEV, Ukraine (AP) — Facing huge anti-government demonstrations after spurning a deal with the European Union, Ukraine's embattled president sought Monday to quell public anger by moving to renew talks with Brussels.

The opposition, meanwhile, scrambled to secure enough votes in parliament to oust the Cabinet and try to force an early presidential election, in the biggest unrest in the country since the 2004 Orange Revolution.

President Viktor Yanukovich struggled to reaffirm his grip on power as thousands of demonstrators besieged government buildings in Kiev, his party suffered defections and three cities in the west of the country openly defied the central government.

The protests were sparked by Yanukovich's decision to ditch the political association and free trade pact with the EU, followed by the violent dispersal of a small peaceful rally in Kiev over the weekend.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who strongly opposed the EU deal, denounced the opposition protests in Kiev as "pogroms."

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