

500,000 Signups Were Expected In Oct.

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the first month alone, the Obama administration projected that nearly a half million people would sign up for the new health insurance markets, according to an internal memo obtained by The Associated Press. But that was before the markets opened to a cascade of computer problems.

If the glitches persist and frustrated consumers give up trying, that initial goal, described as modest in the memo, could slip out of reach.

The Sept. 5 memo, for Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, lists monthly enrollment targets for each state and Washington, D.C., through March 31, the last day of the initial open enrollment period under President Barack Obama's health care overhaul.

The new online insurance markets, called exchanges in some states, are supposed to be the portals to coverage for most of the nation's nearly 50 million uninsured people. Middle-class people without job-based coverage can shop for subsidized private plans, while low-income people are steered to an expanded version of Medicaid in states that have agreed to expand that safety net program.

Although the Oct. 1 launch of the markets was a top priority for the White House, the rollout was quickly overwhelmed by computer problems, and many potential customers still have not been able to enroll. Insurers say signups are coming through, but slowly. The administration has refused to release enrollment numbers.

Syrian Groups Separating From Rebels

BEIRUT (AP) — Several dozen rebel groups in southern Syria have broken with the main political opposition group in exile, a local commander said in a video posted Wednesday, dealing a potential new setback to Western efforts to unify moderates battling President Bashar Assad's regime.

The Turkey-based Syrian National Coalition, the political arm of the Free Syrian Army rebel group, has long struggled to win respect and recognition from the fighters. It is widely seen as cut off from events on the ground and ineffective in funneling aid and weapons to the rebels.

In the video, a rebel in military fatigues read a statement with about two dozen fighters standing behind him, some holding a banner with FSA emblems.

FSA spokesman Louay Mikdad told The Associated Press that the video is authentic and identified the man speaking as a captain in one of the rebel groups, Anwar al-Sunna, which posted the video.

The rebel in the video said political opposition leaders have failed to represent those trying to bring down Assad.

People Charting Lives In Large Numbers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ever suspect you do more housework than your spouse? Or that certain tasks at work raise your blood pressure? Maybe you wonder why you're sneezing more lately, or if carbs are really what is making you tired after lunch?

Turns out, there's an app or gadget to test all of that. Advancements in wearable body sensors, mobile applications and other gadgets mean that nearly everything we do can be captured, logged and analyzed. And everyday consumers are jumping at the chance to conduct their own experiments — tracking sleep, caffeine intake, kids' studying habits, household chores, even whether a baby is nursing more frequently on Mom's left breast versus her right.

"I don't know if I'd use the word 'obsessed,'" said Ernesto Ramirez, a self-tracking devotee who helped to organize a two-day conference on the subject last week in San Francisco. Speakers at past "Quantified Self" conferences have included a man who developed his own app to see if he could walk every street in Manhattan and a dad who used trackers on his kids to monitor chores.

"I think there's an overall trend toward curiosity and proving knowledge of one's self in the world," Ramirez said.

When Tim Davis of Beaver, Pa., tipped the scales at 318 pounds two years ago, he bought a Fitbit gadget to track his physical activity and the Lose It! app on his phone to track calories. He bought a Wi-Fi-enabled scale that published his daily weight on his Twitter feed and turned to other apps to track his pulse, blood pressure, daily moods and medications. At one point, Davis said he was using 15 different apps and gadgets, which he said helped him drop 64 pounds by that following year.

JPMorgan To Pay \$100M In Settlement

WASHINGTON (AP) — JPMorgan Chase & Co. has agreed to pay a \$100 million penalty and admitted that its traders acted "recklessly" during a series of London trades that ultimately cost the bank \$6 billion.

The settlement announced Wednesday by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission comes less than a month after JPMorgan, the nation's largest bank, agreed to pay \$920 million and admit fault in a deal with the Securities and Exchange Commission and other U.S. and British regulators.

The stunning trading losses that surfaced in April 2012 shook the financial world and damaged JPMorgan's reputation. The CFTC deal differs from the previous agreement because JPMorgan is formally acknowledging that its traders recklessly distorted prices to reduce the banks' losses at the expense of other market participants. In the SEC agreement, JPMorgan admitted only that it failed to supervise those traders.

The bank "recklessly disregarded the fundamental precept on which market participants rely: that prices are established based on legitimate forces of supply and demand," the CFTC said in a news release.

According to the agency, JPMorgan traders in London sold off \$7 billion in derivatives tied to a price index of corporate bonds in one day — including \$4.6 billion worth in a three-hour span.

Scientists Find Huge Meteorite Chunk

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian scientists have recovered a giant chunk of the Chelyabinsk meteorite from the bottom of the lake it crashed into.

The meteor that blazed across southern Urals in February was the largest recorded strike in more than a century. More than 1,600 people were injured by the shock wave from the explosion as it hit near the city of Chelyabinsk, estimated to be as strong as 20 Hiroshima atomic bombs.

Scientists on Wednesday recovered what could be the largest part of the meteorite from Chebarkul Lake outside the city. They weighed it using a giant steelyard balance, which displayed 570 kilograms (1,256 pounds) before breaking.

Sergei Zamozdra, an associate professor at Chelyabinsk State University, told Russian television the excavated fragment was definitely a chunk of the meteorite.

Deal Lifts Markets, Does Little For Economy

BY CHRISTOPHER S. RUGABER
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — The budget agreement Congress reached Wednesday cheered investors and removed the threat of a catastrophic debt default that could have triggered another recession.

Yet the temporary nature of the deal means a cloud will remain over a sluggish U.S. economy that was further slowed by the government's partial shutdown.

Political fights over taxing and spending will persist over the next few months. The risk of another government shutdown and doubts about the government's borrowing authority remain. Businesses and consumers may still spend and invest at the same cautious pace they have since the Great Recession officially ended more than four years ago.

The agreement, expected to be approved by the House and Senate late Wednesday, will reopen the government but only until Jan. 15. The deal would enable the United States to keep borrowing to pay its bills, but not past Feb. 7.

The deal followed a two-week shutdown and came a day before a Treasury Department deadline to raise the nation's \$16.7 trillion debt limit.

"The good news is that we avoid hitting the debt ceiling and all the risks that entails," said Joel Prakken, co-founder of Macroeconomic Advisers, a forecasting firm. "The bad news is ... this hasn't produced any clarity. We're going to be right back at this again after the turn of the year."

The stock market soared on the news. The Dow Jones industrial average jumped 206 points. Bond investors celebrated, too. They sharply drove down the yield on the one-month Treasury bill, which would have come due around the time a default could have occurred. And the yield on the 10-year Treasury, a benchmark for rates on mortgages and other loans, fell.



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) speaks to the media after Senate leaders announced a deal to end the government shutdown, during a news conference at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, Wednesday.

Investors may now turn to what typically moves stock prices: corporate earnings and economic data. Wall Street is in the midst of earnings season.

"We can go back to focusing on the true reason why stocks are higher: the rebound in housing, rising corporate profits, the resurgence in manufacturing," said Doug Cote, chief investment strategist for ING U.S. Investment Management.

By itself, the partial government shutdown will have only a limited effect on economic growth, analysts said. Most forecast that the shutdown will dent growth by about 0.15 percentage point per week. But federal employees will receive back pay, suggesting that much of the lost spending could be made up.

Standard & Poor's estimated that the shutdown has shaved at least 0.6 percentage point from the economy's annual growth rate in the October-December quarter. It calculated that that means the shutdown took \$24 billion out of the economy.

S&P now expects the

economy to grow at a tepid annual rate of roughly 2 percent this quarter. In September, it had predicted a 3 percent growth rate.

"The U.S. economy dodged a bullet today," said Paul Edelstein, an economist at IHS Global Insight. "But the reprieve will be short. ... The stage is set for another shutdown in January."

IHS lowered its forecast for growth in the October-December quarter to a 1.6 percent annual rate from a 2.2 percent rate.

The new deadlines to fund the government and raise the borrowing limit that are now a few months away could also weigh on growth in the first quarter of 2014.

A study by Prakken's firm found that uncertainty over future government policies tends to raise borrowing costs for businesses and consumers, depress stock markets and lower business and consumer confidence. Uncertainty surrounding government tax and budget policies has remained far above historical norms since 2009,

Prakken said.

Higher borrowing costs typically make companies less likely to invest and hire. Lower stock markets reduce household wealth and can cut into consumer spending. Macroeconomic Advisers estimates that these factors have slowed growth by 0.3 percentage point each year since 2010.

A report from the Federal Reserve on Wednesday offered fresh evidence of the economic impact of the shutdown and debt limit fight. The Fed's report on economic conditions in its 12 banking districts found that employers in several districts were reluctant to hire because of uncertainty surrounding budget policies and the new health care law.

Manufacturing growth slowed in the New Jersey region in October, builders were less confident in the housing recovery and growth slowed in four Fed districts. All the reports cited the federal shutdown and impasse over the debt limit as reasons for the declines.

Democrat Booker Wins U.S. Senate Election In N.J.

BY ANGELA DELLI SANTI AND
SAMANTHA HENRY
Associated Press

TRENTON, N.J. — Newark Mayor Cory Booker won a special election Wednesday to represent New Jersey in the U.S. Senate, giving the rising Democratic star a bigger political stage after a race against conservative Steve Lonegan, a former small-town mayor.

Booker, 44, will become the first black senator from New Jersey and heads to Washington with an unusual political resume. He was raised in suburban Harington Park as the son of two of the first black IBM executives, and graduated from Stanford and law school at Yale with a stint in between as a Rhodes Scholar before moving to one of Newark's toughest neighborhoods with the intent of doing good.

He's been an unconventional politician, a vegetarian with a Twitter following of 1.4 million — or five times the population of the city he governs. With dwindling state funding, he has used private fundraising, including a \$100 million pledge from Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, to run programs in Newark, a strategy that has brought his city resources and him both fame and criticism.

Booker was elected to complete the 15 months remaining on the term of Frank Lautenberg, whose death in June at age 89 gave rise to an unusual and abbreviated campaign. If he wants to keep the seat for a full six-year term — and all indications are that he does — Booker will be on the ballot again in November 2014.



Booker

Gov. Chris Christie, a Republican with a national following of his own, appointed his attorney general, Jeffrey Chiesa, to the Senate temporarily and scheduled a special election for a Wednesday just 20 days before Christie himself is on the ballot seeking re-election. Christie said he wanted to give voters a say as soon as legally possible.

Democrats challenged the timing, saying Christie was afraid of appearing on the same ballot as the popular Booker. But courts upheld the governor's election schedule.

Booker had a running start on the election. Before Lautenberg died, Booker passed up a chance to run against Christie this year, saying he was eyeing Lautenberg's seat in 2014, in part so he could complete a full term as mayor — something he won't do now that he's heading to Washington.

He won an August primary against an experienced Democratic field including two members of Congress and the speaker of the state Assembly in a campaign that was largely about ideas.

The general election was about deeper contrasts, both ideological and personal.

Lonegan stepped down as New Jersey director of the anti-tax, pro-business Americans for Prosperity to run. Lonegan, who is legally blind, got national attention as mayor of the town of Bogota when he tried to get English made its official language.

After two runs in Republican gubernatorial primaries and as the leader of successful campaigns against ballot measures to raise a state sales tax and fund stem-cell research, Lonegan was a favorite of New Jersey's relatively small right wing.

The two candidates portrayed each other as too extreme for the job.

Throughout the campaign, Lonegan was aggressive, criticizing Booker during a string of homicides in Newark, holding a red carpet event in rally to mock the time Booker spent fundraising in California and declaring that "New Jersey needs a leader, not a tweeter."

Lonegan also criticized Booker when a Portland, Ore., stripper revealed a series of not-so-salacious Twitter messages she'd exchanged with Booker, who's single. The topic resurfaced last week when Lonegan fired a key adviser after a profane interview in which the adviser suggested Booker's words were "like what a gay guy would say to a stripper."

Lonegan had called it "strange" that Booker won't say whether he's gay. Booker, for his part, has said his sexuality should not matter to voters and has been elusive on the subject.

At a debate this month, Lonegan responded to Booker's comments about the need for environmental regulations to clean a river through Newark. "You may not be able to swim in that river," he said. "But it's probably, I think, because of all the bodies floating around of shooting victims in your city."

Booker seemed stunned at the remark, and his campaign has criticized Lonegan for it.

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