

Afordable Health Care

# Builders Of Website Saw Red Flags

BY JACK GILLUM AND JULIE PACE  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Crammed into conference rooms with pizza for dinner, some programmers building the Obama administration's showcase health insurance website were growing increasingly stressed. Some worked past 10 p.m., energy drinks in hand. Others rewrote computer code over and over to meet what they considered last-minute requests for changes from the government or other contractors.

As questions mount over the website's failure, insider interviews and a review of technical specifications by The Associated Press found a mind-numbingly complex system put together by harried programmers who pushed out a final product that congressional investigators said was tested by the government and not private developers with more expertise.

Meanwhile, the White House said that President Barack Obama's longtime adviser Jeffrey Zients will

provide management advice to help fix the system. White House press secretary Jay Carney says Zients will be on a short-term assignment at the Health and Human Services Department before he's due to take over as director of Obama's National Economic Council Jan. 1.

Carney cited Zeints' expertise as a longtime management consultant and his "proven track record" since coming to the White House in 2009, both as interim budget director and as chief performance officer, when he headed an effort to streamline government and cut costs. "We're engaged in an all-out effort to improve the online experience," Carney said.

Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said in a post on HealthCare.gov that her agency is also bringing in more experts and specialists from government and industry, including top Silicon Valley companies.

"This new infusion of talent will bring a powerful array of subject matter expertise and skills,

including extensive experience scaling major IT systems," she said. "This effort is being marshaled as part of a cross-functional team that is working aggressively to diagnose parts of HealthCare.gov that are experiencing problems, learn from successful states, prioritize issues, and fix them."

Project developers for the health care website who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity — because they feared they would otherwise be fired — said they raised doubts among themselves whether the website could be ready in time. They complained openly to each other about what they considered tight and unrealistic deadlines. One was nearly brought to tears over the stress of finishing on time, one developer said. Website builders saw red flags for months.

A review of internal architectural diagrams obtained by the AP revealed the system's complexity. Insurance applicants have a host of personal information verified, including income and immigration

status. The system connects to other federal computer networks, including ones at the Social Security Administration, IRS, Veterans Administration, Office of Personnel Management and the Peace Corps.

Obama on Monday acknowledged technical problems that he described as "kinks in the system." But in remarks at a Rose Garden event, Obama offered no explanation for the failure except to note that high traffic to the website caused some of the slowdowns. He said it had been visited nearly 20 million times — fewer monthly visits so far than many commercial websites, such as PayPal, AOL, Wikipedia or Pinterest.

"The problem has been that the website that's supposed to make it easy to apply for and purchase the insurance is not working the way it should for everybody," Obama said. "There's no sugarcoating it. The website has been too slow. People have been getting stuck during the application process. And I think it's fair to say that nobody is more frustrated by that

than I am."

The online system was envisioned as a simple way for people without health insurance to comparison-shop among competing plans offered in their state, pick their preferred level of coverage and cost and sign up. For many, it's not worked out that way so far.

Just weeks before the launch of HealthCare.gov on Oct. 1, one programmer said, colleagues huddled in conference rooms trying to patch "bugs," or deficiencies in computer code. Unresolved problems led to visitors experiencing cryptic error messages or enduring long waits trying to sign up.

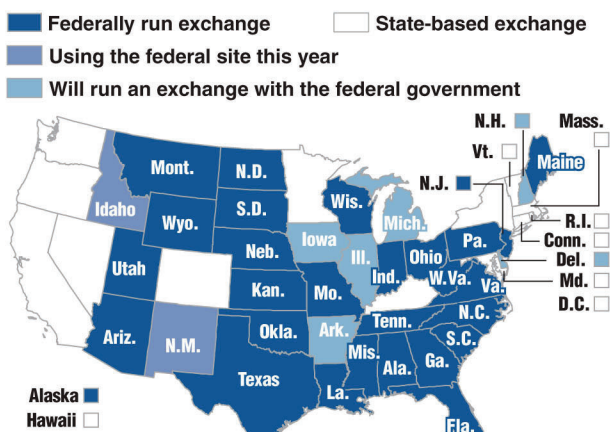
Congressional investigators have concluded that the government's Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, not private software developers, tested the exchange's computer systems during the final weeks. That task, known as integration testing, is usually handled by software companies because it ferrets out problems before the public sees the final product.

## Federal insurance website plagued by problems

Healthcare.gov, the federal website designed to allow people to buy health insurance under the Affordable Care Act, has been hampered by technical problems since Oct. 1, when consumers could first try to buy insurance through the site. President Barack Obama said Monday there is "no excuse for the problems."

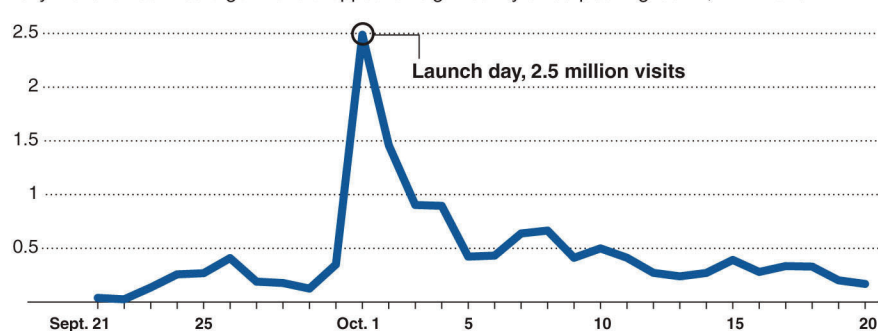
### States served by Healthcare.gov

Thirty-six states are served by the federal site; number includes the 34 states that elected to let the federal government run their exchanges as well as Idaho and New Mexico, which are using the site for the first year



### Web traffic to Healthcare.gov

Daily visits to healthcare.gov have dropped off significantly since peaking Oct. 1, in millions

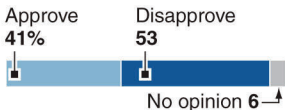


### What Users Did

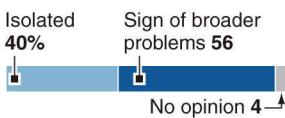
Unique visitors for week ending:	Click on "Get insurance"	Create account, attempt login	Last step of account creation	Successful login to account	Identification verification pre-application
Oct. 6	2.7 million	2.2 million	272,815	125,544	115,302
Oct. 13	1.2 million	1.1 million	497,816	423,593	286,561
Oct. 20	617,752	652,678	170,762	352,961	154,941

### Poll: Health care law

Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Obama is handling implementation of the new health care law?



Q: Do you think (website problems) are an isolated incident or a sign of broader problems in implementing the health care law?



NOTE: Washington Post-ABC News poll Oct. 17-20, of 1,002 adults; margin of error: +/-3.5 percentage points

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## Officers Caught Leaving Blast Doors Open

WASHINGTON (AP) — Twice this year alone, Air Force officers entrusted with the launch keys to nuclear-tipped missiles have been caught leaving open a blast door that is intended to help prevent a terrorist or other intruder from entering their underground command post, Air Force officials have told The Associated Press.

The blast doors are never to be left open if one of the crew members inside is asleep — as was the case in both these instances — out of concern for the damage an intruder could cause, including the compromising of secret launch codes.

Transgressions such as this are rarely revealed publicly. But officials with direct knowledge of Air Force intercontinental ballistic missile operations told the AP that such violations have happened, undetected, many more times than in the cases of the two launch crew commanders and two deputy commanders who were given administrative punishments this year.

The blast door violations are another sign of serious trouble in the handling of the nation's nuclear arsenal. The AP has discovered a series of problems within the ICBM force, including a failed safety inspection, the temporary sidelining of launch officers deemed unfit for duty and the abrupt firing last week of the two-star general in charge. The problems, including low morale, underscore the challenges of keeping safe such a deadly force that is constantly on alert but is unlikely ever to be used.

The crews who operate the missiles are trained to follow rules without fail, including the prohibition against having the blast door open when only one crew member is awake, because the costs of a mistake are so high.

## Libya Marks 2 Years Since Gadhafi

TRIPOLI, Libya (AP) — Libya marks two years since the fall of Moammar Gadhafi on Wednesday, but instead of the freedom and development Libyans had hoped for, the country has fallen deeper into anarchy. Rival Islamist and Western-backed factions are melding with the country's dizzying array of militias, turning political feuds into armed conflict.

Militias that include Islamic extremists are lining up with Islamist politicians in parliament, who have been trying to remove Western-backed Prime Minister Ali Zidan and bring stricter Islamic rule. Other armed groups support Zidan's non-Islamist allies. The result is a fractured system where political rivalries have the potential to erupt into civil war.

In recent months, the militia chaos has only escalated. Zidan was briefly kidnapped by militia men this month. Over the summer, eastern militias seized control of oil exporting terminals, sending production plunging from 1.4 million barrels a day to around 600,000, robbing the country of its main revenue source. Other militias in the south cut off water supplies to the capital for days.

Zidan's office manager, the defense minister's son and several judges have been kidnapped. Activists and clerics who speak out against militias have been gunned down, as have at least 100 security or military officers.

## Student Describes Fear During Shooting

SPARKS, Nev. (AP) — Students cowered in fear and pleaded for their lives as a 12-year-old Nevada boy went on a schoolyard rampage with a handgun he brought from home, waving the weapon at frightened classmates and shooting a math teacher in the chest on a basketball court.

The boy opened fire Monday morning on the Sparks Middle School campus, wounding two boys and killing the teacher before he turned the gun on himself.

Washoe County School District police revealed Tuesday that the seventh-grader brought the 9mm semi-automatic Rugger handgun from his home, but authorities were still working to determine how he obtained it. The student's parents were cooperating with authorities and could face charges in the case, police said.

Eighth-grader Angelo Ferro recalled burying his face in his hands as the boy waved the gun and threatened to shoot. Another seventh grader and Ferro's math teacher, Michael Landsberry, lay gunned down nearby.

"The whole time I was hoping Mr. L was OK, we'd all get through it, it was a bad dream," Ferro told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

## Introducing Dr. Hathaway

### Board Certified Urologist

Yankton Medical Clinic, P.C. is pleased to announce the addition of Board Certified Urologist, Christopher A. Hathaway, MD, PhD, to our physician staff.

Dr. Hathaway completed his undergraduate degree at Mount Marty College, Yankton, SD; his Doctorate degree from the University of South Dakota, Vermillion, SD; and his post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA. Dr. Hathaway graduated from the University of South Dakota School of Medicine, Vermillion, SD. His urology residency was completed in Augusta, Georgia at the Medical College of Georgia.

Dr. Hathaway joins Dr. George Fournier, Jr. in the medical and surgical treatment of urologic conditions for adult and pediatric patients. He will provide care for concerns, conditions and diseases associated with the kidneys, bladder, prostate, urinary incontinence, and male sexual dysfunction.

Dr. Hathaway will begin seeing patients at Yankton Medical Clinic, P.C. on October 28, 2013.

**Appointments can be made by calling 605-664-2742.**

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