

## Affordable Care Act

## New Website Security Issues Surface

BY RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR AND LAURIE KELLMAN  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama claimed “full responsibility” Wednesday for fixing his administration’s much-maligned health insurance website as a new concern surfaced: a government memo pointing to security worries, laid out just days before the launch.

On Capitol Hill, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius apologized to frustrated people trying to sign up, declaring that she is accountable for the failures but also defending the historic health care overhaul. The website sign-up problems will be fixed by Nov. 30, she said, and the gaining of health insurance will make a positive difference in the lives of millions of Americans.

Obama underscored the administration’s unhappiness with the problems so far: “There’s no excuse for it,” he said during a Boston speech to promote his signature domestic policy achievement. “And I take full responsibility for making sure it gets fixed ASAP.”

The website HealthCare.gov was still experiencing outages as Sebelius faced a new range of questions at the House Energy and Commerce Committee about a security memo from her department. It revealed that the troubled website was granted a temporary security certificate on Sept. 27, just four days before it went live on Oct. 1.

The memo, obtained by The Associated Press, said incomplete testing created uncertainties that posed a potentially high security risk for the website. It called for a six-month “mitigation” program, including ongoing monitoring and testing.

Security issues raise major new concerns on top of the long list of technical problems the administration is grappling with.

“You accepted a risk on behalf of every user ... that put their personal financial



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT

**Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of Health and Human Services, appears before the House Energy and Commerce Committee on Wednesday, to answer questions about problems with the launch of the government’s web site for enrolling in healthcare plans based on the Affordable Care Act.**

information at risk,” Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich., told Sebelius, citing the memo. “Amazon would never do this. ProFlow-ers would never do this. Kayak would never do this. This is completely an unacceptable level of security.”

Sebelius countered that the system is secure, even though the site’s certificate, known in government parlance as an “authority to operate,” is of a temporary nature. A permanent certificate will be issued only when all security issues are addressed, she stressed.

Spokeswoman Joanne Peters added separately: “When consumers fill out their online ... applications, they can trust that the information they’re providing is protected by stringent security standards and that the technology underlying the application process has been tested and is secure. Security testing happens on an ongoing basis using industry best practices.”

The security certificate is required under longstanding federal policy before any government computer system can process, store or transmit agency data. The temporary certificate was approved by Medicare chief Marilyn Tavenner, the senior HHS official closest to the rollout. No major security breaches have been reported.

The memo said, “From a security perspective, the aspects

of the system that were not tested due to the ongoing development, exposed a level of uncertainty that can be deemed as a high risk for the (federal marketplace website).”

It recommended setting up a security team to address risks and conduct daily tests, and said a full security test should be conducted within two to three months of the website going live.

A separate page stated that “the mitigation plan does not reduce the risk to the (website) itself going into operation on October 1, 2013. However, the added protections do reduce the risk to the overall Marketplace operations and will ensure that the ... system is completely tested within the next 6 months.”

That page was signed by three senior technical officials below Tavenner at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. All the officials deal with information security issues.

Republicans opposed to Obama’s health care law are calling for Sebelius to resign. She apologized to people having trouble signing up but told the committee that the technical issues that led to frozen screens and error messages are being cleared up on a daily basis.

Sebelius’ forthright statement about her ultimate

accountability for problems with the sign-up rollout came as Rep. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., peppered her with questions about the “debacle.”

“Hold me accountable for the debacle,” Sebelius responded. “I’m responsible.”

Rep. Henry Waxman of California, the ranking Democrat on the committee, scoffed at Republican “oversight” of a law they have repeatedly tried to repeal.

“I would urge my colleagues to stop hyperventilating,” said Waxman. “The problems with HealthCare.gov are unfortunate and we should investigate them, but they will be fixed. And then every American will have, finally have, access to affordable health insurance.”

The website HealthCare.gov was intended to be the online gateway to coverage for millions of uninsured Americans, as well those who already purchase their policies individually. Many people in the latter group will have to get new insurance next year, because their policies do not meet the standards of the new law.

Throughout the 3 1/2-hour hearing, Sebelius was respectful, often addressing lawmakers as “sir” or “congresswoman.” She kept her cool as some lawmakers repeatedly cut off her answers. But she did not shy a few times from tersely interjecting her views while a member was speaking.

The standing-room-only hearing room was silent when she swore an oath to tell the truth and began her opening statement.

Addressing consumers who’ve tangled with the confusing system, Sebelius added, “So let me say directly to these Americans, you deserve better. I apologize.”

Lawmakers also wanted to know how many people have enrolled in plans through the health insurance marketplaces. Sebelius stuck with the administration response, promising to release the data in mid-November.

## Obama’s Knowledge Both Risk &amp; Reward

WASHINGTON (AP) — Confronted with missteps in his own administration, President Barack Obama has frequently pleaded ignorance — suggesting he could not be at fault about things he did not know.

It’s an argument with clear benefits but also inherent risks for the White House. Used too often, the tactic emboldens critics who claim the president is incompetent, detached and not fully in control.

Eager to protect Obama’s time and concentration, his aides deliberate intensively about what to tell the president, current and former White House officials said. His advisers act as a triage team for an endless flood of information coming into the White House, continually making decisions about which snippets of data Obama might need.

What makes the cut: Information that’s likely to require a presidential decision, come up during a public appearance or inform Obama’s longer-term thinking, as well as major developments relating to national security or Obama’s domestic priorities.

Everything else, including most of the myriad details of how policies and laws are carried out, remains with staff and agencies. If and when things go wrong, as they invariably do in the sprawling federal government, the White House can seek to sidestep uncomfortable questions by saying the issue never rose to the presidential level.

## Israel Promises 1,500 Settlement Homes

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel announced plans Wednesday to build more than 1,500 homes in Jewish settlements in east Jerusalem and the West Bank, dealing a setback to newly re-launched peace efforts hours after it had freed a group of long-serving Palestinian prisoners.

The construction plans drew angry condemnations from Palestinian officials, who accused Israel of undermining the U.S.-led talks by expanding settlements on the lands where they hope to establish an independent state. U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon also condemned the Israeli decision, and Washington said it would not create a “positive environment” for the negotiations.

Israel had freed the 26 Palestinian prisoners as part of a U.S.-brokered agreement to restart the talks. The construction was meant to blunt anger over the release of the prisoners, all of whom had been convicted of murder in the deaths of Israelis.

Israel’s Interior Ministry said 1,500 apartments would be built in Ramat Shlomo, a large settlement in east Jerusalem, the section of the holy city claimed by the Palestinians as their capital. It also announced plans for archaeology and tourism projects near the Old City, home to Jerusalem’s most sensitive holy sites.

Wednesday’s decision is the final approval needed, and construction can begin immediately, officials said.

## Report: NSA Broke Into Yahoo, Google

WASHINGTON (AP) — The National Security Agency has secretly broken into the main communications links that connect Yahoo and Google data centers around the world, The Washington Post reported Wednesday, citing documents obtained from former NSA contractor Edward Snowden.

A secret accounting dated Jan. 9, 2013, indicates that NSA sends millions of records every day from Yahoo and Google internal networks to data warehouses at the agency’s Fort Meade, Md., headquarters. In the last 30 days, field collectors had processed and sent back more than 180 million new records — ranging from “metadata,” which would indicate who sent or received emails and when, to content such as text, audio and video, the Post reported Wednesday on its website.

The latest revelations were met with outrage from Google, and triggered legal questions, including whether the NSA may be violating federal wiretap laws.

The new details about the NSA’s access to Yahoo and Google data centers around the world come at a time when Congress is reconsidering the government’s collection practices and authority, and as European governments are responding angrily to revelations that the NSA collected data on millions of communications in their countries.

## Iraq Seeking New U.S. Aid After Pushing Out Troops

BY LARA JAKES  
AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON — Nearly two years after pushing out the U.S. military, Iraq is asking for more American weapons, training and manpower to help fight a bloody resurgence of al-Qaida that has unleashed a level of violence comparable to the darkest days of the nation’s civil war.

The request will be discussed during a White House meeting Friday between Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and President Barack Obama in what Baghdad hopes will be a fresh start in a complicated relationship that has been marked by victories and frustrations for each side.

“We know we have major challenges of our own capabilities being up to the standard. They currently are not,” Lukman Faily, the Iraqi ambassador to the U.S., said in an interview with The Associated Press. “We need to gear up, to deal with that threat more seriously. We need support and we need help.”

He added: “We have said to the Americans we’d be more than happy to discuss all the options short of boots on the ground.”

“Boots on the ground” means military forces. The U.S. withdrew all but a few hundred of its troops from Iraq in December 2011 after Baghdad refused to renew a security agreement to extend legal immunity for Americans forces that would have let more stay.

At the time, the withdrawal was hailed as a victory for the Obama administration, which campaigned on ending the Iraq

war and had little appetite for pushing Baghdad into a new security agreement. But within months, violence began creeping up in the capital and across the country as Sunni Muslim insurgents lashed out at Shiites, angered by a widespread belief that Sunnis have been sidelined by the Shiite-led government, and with no U.S. troops

to keep them in check. More than 5,000 Iraqis have been killed in attacks since April, and suicide bombers launched 38 strikes in the last month alone.

Al-Maliki is expected to ask Obama for new assistance to bolster its military and fight al-Qaida. Faily said that could include everything from

speeding up the delivery of U.S. aircraft, missiles, interceptors and other weapons.

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**Introducing Dr. Hathaway 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 began seeing patients at the Yankton Medical Clinic, P.C. October 28, 2013.

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