

October 29, 2013

Mark Steyn notes some of the background of the Canadian company picked by Sebelius to design the healthcare site.

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*But there's always America! "We continue to view U.S. Federal Government as a significant growth opportunity," declared CGI's chief exec, in what would also make a fine epitaph for the republic. ...*

Who's at fault if the healthcare site crashes and burns? Asked and answered by Michael Barone.

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*Politico reports that his “universal health care” promise was first made when his press secretary and speechwriter need a rousing ending to a 2007 campaign speech to a liberal group.*

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*But if Obamacare’s software crashes, the consequences will be catastrophic — for the nation and for the Democratic Party.*

**Barone** offers a reader's comments on his column above.

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*"1. The integration aspect is most difficult. In this case, the integration of various Federal Systems to determine subsidies is proving a daunting task. You are dealing with legacy systems that don't integrate very well. Also the integration with the insurers consisting of sending an insurance application to the insurance company, a much easier task, was also screwed up.*

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Turns out Kathleen Sebelius has a record of failure at government website projects. Or course! That's why she's at the highest levels of this administration. **Daily Caller** with the story.

*Obama administration Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius’ failure at designing websites to provide government services began during her term as governor of Kansas, long before the Obamacare website debacle, Kansas political insiders told The Daily Caller.*

*Sebelius oversaw numerous costly and disastrous government website projects during her six-year governorship (2003-2009), including a failed update of the Department of Labor's program to provide unemployment pay and other services and similar updates pertaining to the Department of Administration and the state's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) services.*

*The Department of Labor's overhaul of its computer programs was a notable boondoggle, according to 14-year former Kansas state senator and former state Labor Secretary Karin Brownlee. ...*

**Daily Caller** also tells us an exec at CGI, the failed website designer is a class mate of Michelle's.

*First Lady Michelle Obama's Princeton classmate is a top executive at the company that earned the contract to build the failed Obamacare website.*

*Toni Townes-Whitley, Princeton class of '85, is senior vice president at CGI Federal, which earned the no-bid contract to build the \$678 million Obamacare enrollment website at Healthcare.gov. CGI Federal is the U.S. arm of a Canadian company. ...*

And, **The Daily Caller** found out CGI has been put in charge of part of Hurricane Sandy relief. The country is in the best of hands.

*CGI Federal Inc., the mastermind behind healthcare.gov, is assisting the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the distribution of \$1.7 billion in relief for Hurricane Sandy.*

*In a memo obtained by FreedomWorks titled, "Minutes of the 295th meeting of the members of the Housing Trust Fund Corporation held on May 9, 2013, at 8:30 a.m.," CGI Federal is tasked with implementing the Disaster Housing Assistance Program. Additionally, they are asked to aid in the implementation of the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program, an assistance program that had recently obtained \$1.7 billion.*

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*Mr. Nelson presented that the State received a \$1.7 billion allocation in CDBG Disaster Recovery aid from HUD to aid impacted businesses and residences. He stated that the State's Action Plan was approved on April 26, 2013 and HTFC is currently in a phase of implementing the program. He stated that in this phase, the corporation needs to stand-up its recovery programs as soon as possible to deliver critical resources, and in order to do so, the corporation requires immediate access to consultant services to assist in policy and procedure development, training, surge capacity, and call center assistance, and stated that CGI Federal Inc. could provide such services.*

*The resolution was passed and scheduled to "take effect immediately."*

*The Associated Press revealed Tuesday that a mere \$700 million of the \$60 billion federal aid package – 1.2 percent of the total funds – has been given to victims of super storm Sandy.*

*Nearly a year after the devastating storm, a majority of the 24,000 families that have requested monetary assistance have yet to receive a penny from the federal aid package.*

Our look at the healthcare mess is summarized by [John Fund's](#) column today in the National Review.

*So we now have a date. “We’re confident by the end of November, Healthcare.gov will be smooth for a vast majority of users,” Jeff Zients, the point man in charge of the “tech surge” the White House is unleashing to fix the site’s problems, told reporters last week. “The Healthcare.gov site is fixable. It will take a lot of work, and there are a lot of problems that need to be addressed.”*

*But the commitments might hinge on what the word “fixable” really means. ...*

*... The administration may also know less than it is claiming to know. It is astonishing that Zients, after only three days on the job, could make the assurances he did without having conducted a full technical review of the system, including requirements, architecture, design, and implementation. The scope of Healthcare.gov is staggering. Its 500 million lines of code dwarf the size of almost all known IT projects. According to CNN Money, it took just half a million lines of code to send the Curiosity rover to Mars. Microsoft’s Windows 8 operating system has some 80 million lines of code. And a typical online-banking system might feature between 75 million and 100 million lines. ...*

*... We are on the verge of seeing dark catch-phrases such as “Kafkaesque” and “Catch-22” recede in favor of a new one to describe bureaucratic nightmares: “Healthcare.gov.” A true Halloween horror story. ...*

... So we now have a choice. We can believe the Obama administration’s happy talk that the website will be “fixed” — whatever that means — in five weeks, or we can look to the general consensus of outside IT experts who are highly dubious. Given the administration’s track record and lack of transparency to date, it’s not even a close call as to who has the greater credibility.

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## **Orange County Register** **[Don't insult DMV by comparing it to Obamacare](#)**

by Mark Steyn

If you’re looking for an epitaph for the republic (and these days, who isn’t?) try this – from August 2010 and TechCrunch’s delirious preview of [healthcare.gov](#):

“We were working in a very very nimble hyper-consumer-focused way,” explained Todd Park, the Chief Technology Officer of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “all fused

in this kind of maelstrom of pizza, Mountain Dew and all-nighters ... and, you know, idealism. That kind of led to the magic that was produced.”

Wow. Think of the magic that Madison, Hamilton, and the rest of those schlubs could have produced if they'd only had pizza and Mountain Dew and been willing to pull a few all-nighters at Philadelphia in 1787. Somewhere between the idealism and the curling slice of last night's pepperoni, Macon Phillips, the administration's Director of New Media, happened to come across a Tweet by Edward Mullen of Jersey City in which he Twitpicced his design for what a health-insurance exchange could look like. So Phillips printed it out to show his fellow administration officials: “Look, this is the sort of creativity that is out there,” he said. “One thing led to another, and he left Jersey City to come to D.C. and helped push us through an information architectural process.”

Don't you just love it! This is way cooler than the decline and fall of the Roman Empire: The only “architectural process” they had was crumbling viaducts. I think we can all agree that Barack Obama is hipper than all other government leaders anywhere, ever, combined. Unfortunately, the dogs bark and the pizza-delivery bike moves on, and, in the cold grey morning after of the grease-stained cardboard box with the rubberized cheese stuck to it, Obamacare wound up somewhat less hipper and, in fact, not even HIPAA – the unpersuasively groovy acronym for federally mandated medical privacy in America. Appearing before Congress on Thursday, the magicians of Obamacare eventually conceded that, on their supposedly HIPAA-compliant database, deep in the “information architectural process” is a teensy-weensy little bit of “source code” that reads, “You have no reasonable expectation of privacy regarding any communication of any data transmitted or stored on this information system.”

Democrat members of the House committee professed to be bewildered at why anyone would be either surprised or upset to discover that his information can be shared with anyone in the federal government, including a corrupt and diseased IRS that uses what confidential information it can acquire to torment perceived ideological enemies. And, at a certain level, the more blasé of the people's representatives, such as New Jersey's Frank Pallone, have a point: Obama thinks nothing of tapping Angela Merkel's cellphone (as she had cause to complain to him Wednesday, in what was said to be a “cool” conversation, and not in the hepcat sense), why would he extend any greater privacy rights to your Auntie Mabel?

Incidentally, do you think we need a congressional oversight committee to look into the effectiveness of congressional oversight committees? Every time I'm stuck at Gate 37 and glance up at the 24/7 Wolf Blitzer channel, there's somebody testifying about something: Benghazi ... Lois Lerner ... Obamacare ... No one gets fired, no agency gets closed, nothing changes.

The witness who coughed up the intriguing tidbit about Obamacare's exemption from privacy protections was one Cheryl Campbell of something called CGI. This rang a vague bell with me. CGI is not a creative free spirit from Jersey City with an impressive mastery of Twitter, but a Canadian corporate behemoth. Indeed, CGI is so Canadian, their name is French: *Conseillers en Gestion et Informatique*. Their most famous government project was for the Canadian Firearms Registry. The registry was estimated to cost in total \$119 million, which would be offset by \$117 million in fees. That's a net cost of \$2 million. Instead, by 2004 the CBC (Canada's PBS) was reporting costs of some \$2 billion – or a thousand times more expensive.

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But there's always America! "We continue to view U.S. Federal Government as a significant growth opportunity," declared CGI's chief exec, in what would also make a fine epitaph for the republic. Pizza and Mountain Dew isn't very Montreal, and, on the evidence of three years of missed deadlines in Ontario and the four-year overrun on the firearms database, CGI don't sound like they're pulling that many all-nighters. Was the Government of the United States aware that CGI had been fired by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario (and the Government of New Brunswick)? Nobody's saying. But I doubt it would make much difference. Asked by Mother Jones to explain why Obama the candidate uses the Internet so effectively but Obama the government is a bust, his 2008 tech maestro, Clay Johnson, put it this way: "The first person that you need in order to start a web company would be a web developer; the first person you need to start a government contracting firm is an attorney." The problem with Obamacare isn't the website design, it's the nature of government procurement in an unaccountable bureaucracy serving 300 million people.

Despite the best efforts of President Obama and doting Tweeters in Jersey City, government isn't groovy. The standard rap on Obamacare is that it's turned America's health system into the DMV. If only. I had cause to go to the DMV in Twin Mountain, New Hampshire, the other day. In and out in 10 minutes. Modest accommodations, a little down-at-heel, nothing cool about it at all. But it worked just fine. Friendly chap, no complaints. Government can do that at the town level, county level, even (more sparingly) at the state level.

But a national medical regime for 300 million people? Not in a First World country. And, when you're mad enough to try it, the failure is not the insignificant enrollment numbers, but the vaporization of the existing health plans of 119,000 Pennsylvanians, 160,000 Californians,

300,000 Floridians, 800,000 in that tech Tweeter's New Jersey. That's the magic that happens when you disdain the limits of prosaic, humdrum, just-about-functioning government. Perhaps things will get so bad the coolest president ever will no longer seem quite so hip. But, alas, you'll have to wait three years for a hip replacement. That's government health care for you.

## Examiner

### [What if Obamacare software crashes and burns?](#)

by Michael Barone

Amid all the tussling over the [government shutdown](#) and the [debt ceiling](#), a couple of bombshells went off in the blogosphere that may prove of more enduring importance.

They suggest that there is a nontrivial possibility that Obamacare may implode.

The first bombshell went off on Tuesday, from [Ezra Klein](#) of the Washington Post's Wonkblog.

Klein was one of those young writers who formed JournoList a few years ago so that like-minded Obama fans could coordinate their lines of argument. It was like one of those college sophomore clubs, not really necessary in an age of ready contact through email, but it shows him as a guy inclined to play team ball.

So it's noteworthy when he writes, "So far, the Affordable Care Act's launch has been a failure. Not 'troubled.' Not 'glitchy.' A failure."

Klein notes that the rollout of the Medicare prescription drug program was also rocky two weeks into the process. But later it got smoothed out.

Klein fears Obamacare won't. It's not just a problem of overloaded servers. Everyone knew there would be lots of traffic in a nation of 312,000,000 people. Information technology folks say it's easy to add servers.

It's harder to get software systems to communicate. And as Klein quotes insurance consultant Robert Laszewski, "the backroom connection between the insurance companies and the federal government is a disaster."

The reconciliation system isn't working and hasn't even been tested, Klein reports. Insurers are getting virtually no usable data from the exchanges.

Bloomberg.com columnist [Megan McArdle](#), who unlike most Obamacare architects actually worked at an IT firm for a couple of years, sees the possibility of even more trouble ahead.

She points out that the administration delayed writing major rules during the 2012 campaign to avoid giving Republicans campaign fodder.

The biggest contractor did not start writing software code until spring 2013. They were still fiddling with the healthcare.gov website in September.

Instead of subcontracting the responsibility for integrating the software of the multiple contractors, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services decided to do it in-house — “a decision,” she writes, “equivalent to someone who has never even hung a picture deciding they should become their own general contractor and build a house.”

“If the exchanges don’t get fixed soon,” she writes, “they could destroy Obamacare.” You need the exchanges to enroll enough young healthy people to subsidize those who are sick and old, which is one of the central features of Obamacare.

Otherwise premiums shoot up and up, pushing others out of the system — a death spiral that can continue year after year.

“At what point,” she asks, “do we admit that the system just isn’t working well enough, roll it back and delay the whole thing for a year?” She suggests that if the system can’t enroll 50 percent of its users by November 1, such a hugely drastic step would be in order.

That sounds like a nightmare of the first order — for individuals, for insurers, for employers and for the Obama administration. A far worse nightmare than when Congress in 1989 repealed the Medicare prescription drug plan it passed the year before because of widespread dissatisfaction.

Of course it’s possible this nightmare will not happen. Things will get ironed out somehow.

But if they don’t, who’s responsible? First, a president who is not much interested in how government works on the ground. As a community organizer he never did get all the asbestos removed from the Altgeld housing project.

Politico reports that his “universal health care” promise was first made when his press secretary and speechwriter need a rousing ending to a 2007 campaign speech to a liberal group.

Second, lawmakers and administrators who assume that, in an Information Age, all you have to do was to assign a task to an IT team and they will perform it. Cross your fingers and it gets done.

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## Washington Examiner

### [A software installer's view on the Obamacare IT mess](#)

by Michael Barone

Poor design choices and a compressed development timetable spelled disaster for Healthcare.gov...

A reader who says that he has done large software installations for one of the big accounting firms wrote the following in an email. It seems to validate the concerns discussed in my [Washington Examiner column](#) on the Obamacare IT mess.

1. The integration aspect is most difficult. In this case, the integration of various Federal Systems to determine subsidies is proving a daunting task. You are dealing with legacy systems that don't integrate very well. Also the integration with the insurers consisting of sending an insurance application to the insurance company, a much easier task, was also screwed up.
2. The software architecture used to build the website was all wrong. Using Java scripts for a heavy duty production website was a bad move from a software design point of view. Obama has liberal buddies in Silicon Valley like Eric Schmidt at Google who should have advised him on how to implement a website with the latest technology.
3. Not having a set of specifications until 2013 and not actually coding until spring 2013 and making changes in specification into the summer is asking for disaster. Finally, allowing 4-6 weeks for testing when they should have allowed 4-6 months is another sign of impending disaster.
4. How could this happen? Years ago I was involved in implementing a Medicaid Management System at a state level. The management people from the state were bleeding liberal types you find in health and human services government agencies who have no idea on how to implement a computer system. And yet, to put HHS in charge of project management was the final nail in the coffin. Federal IT types are a disaster. That is why there are the Beltway Bandits to do the job.
5. Finally, you use a phased approach in implementing a system of this magnitude. What if you had put up an information website with an interface with an insurance agent who could take your application and complete the processing much like buying an auto policy? The agent goes online and checks out your driving record, etc., before giving you a quote and completing the application. A phased approach would have worked and not trying to do everything at once.
6. I'm an admirer of Amazon who revolutionized how we buy a lot of stuff. But they didn't do it all at once. Perhaps they should have hired Amazon and not a Canadian IT Integrator with a ID/IQ contract.

My prediction is that the December 15 drop dead date will come without these problems solved. The Republicans offered a lifeline. Make the individual mandate optional.

So what happens on December 15? A real mess unless the insurers could extend the old individual policies they are phasing out for one year and make signup optional. But that would screw up getting the insurance pools large enough to float this ship.

## Daily Caller

### [Lawmakers: Sebelius failed at government website projects prior to serving in Obama administration](#)

by Patrick Howley

Obama administration Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius' failure at designing websites to provide government services began during her term as governor of Kansas, long before the Obamacare website debacle, Kansas political insiders told The Daily Caller.

Sebelius oversaw numerous costly and disastrous government website projects during her six-year governorship (2003-2009), including a failed update of the Department of Labor's program to provide unemployment pay and other services and similar updates pertaining to the Department of Administration and the state's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) services.

The Department of Labor's overhaul of its computer programs was a notable boondoggle, according to 14-year former Kansas state senator and former state Labor Secretary Karin Brownlee.

"In the Kansas Senate, I chaired the Commerce committee. We had oversight over the Department of Labor. For years, we watched as the Department of Labor under Sebelius worked on that computer program. After seven years and \$50 million, something should work," Brownlee told TheDC.

"In Kansas if you have a 40 or 50 million dollar project, that's a lot of money," Brownlee said, noting that the Labor Department project was funded by federal money while other Sebelius website projects sucked up state taxpayer dollars. "They started and stopped that project with at least 3 different major contractors."

When Brownlee was appointed to head the state's Department of Labor under new Republican governor Sam Brownback in 2011, she was tasked with cleaning up Sebelius' technical mess.

"When I walked in the door at Labor [the computer update] was half-done. There were about 240 errors in work-around. It was not functional," Brownlee said.

"The agency was spending more than \$1 million per month on contractors and other things. So as soon as we found out how much was going out per month we had to shut that down. That wasn't workable," Brownlee said. "In the private sector, that would never be acceptable."

**[\(RELATED: GOP senator to Sebelius: RESIGN\)](#)**

"The computer [program update] was supposed to help deliver unemployment insurance benefits, which is critical, obviously, during a recession, because unemployment was much higher at the time. But the agency kept hiring more people because the computer system didn't work. The Obama administration provided the money to fund it, and the money ended when I got there so we had to downsize considerably," Brownlee said. "I brought in a consultant who fixed everything so that what we had was somewhat usable."

“To Brownback, it was important to him that things worked. The point of a computer system is not to have one in and of itself. It’s to facilitate services for constituents. And that’s impossible when the system doesn’t work,” Brownlee said.

Sebelius’ other government website projects, funded with state taxpayer money, also created considerable headaches.

“Under Sebelius there were a number of computer projects. At the Department of Administration, there was a SMART system for [tracking] financial data about agencies and a system for HR information. The performance on it was extremely poor. The Department of Revenue re-did their DMV programs. That started under Sebelius,” Brownlee said, adding that Brownback was “saddled with that [DMV] contract” when he took office.

Kansas constituents were left waiting days to obtain DMV services.

“In government, these computer transactions are a black hole for tens of millions of dollars,” Brownlee said. “People worked around it and worked the other way pretty much. I don’t know that [Sebelius] was ever personally held responsible for any of this...when you’re trying to serve your citizens somebody has to be responsible.”

Other lawmakers acknowledged the failures of Sebelius’ tech projects.

“We heard several excuses for IT failures under Sebelius. Especially towards the end of her administration. The legislature was often frustrated with the Labor Department, Department of Administration, and also Pharmacy claims. It was hard to get clear answers back then too,” Kansas state Rep. Scott Schwab told The Daily Caller.

“We pretty much expected HealthCare.gov to fail, because she has a pattern of failing on these big initiatives. We thought that was why she was not nominated originally,” Schwab said.

Whether or not President Obama knew about Sebelius’ website track record when he put her in charge of overseeing the Obamacare website remains unclear.

“When you consider that Obamacare is the pinnacle of president Obama’s presidential career, why would he not have been informed?,” Brownlee said. “Why is it that the private sector can do these projects and do them in a timely way and they work and government can’t?”

The White House and the Department of Health and Human Services did not return requests for comment.

### **Daily Caller**

#### **[Michelle Obama’s Princeton classmate is executive at company that built Obamacare website](#)**

by Patrick Howley

First Lady Michelle Obama’s Princeton classmate is a top executive at the **company** that earned the contract to build the failed Obamacare website.

Toni Townes-Whitley, Princeton [class](#) of '85, is senior vice president at CGI Federal, which earned the [no-bid contract](#) to build the \$678 million Obamacare enrollment website at Healthcare.gov. CGI Federal is the U.S. arm of a Canadian company.

Townes-Whitley and her Princeton classmate Michelle Obama are both members of the [Association of Black Princeton Alumni](#).

[Toni Townes](#) '85 is a onetime policy [analyst](#) with the General Accounting Office and previously served in the Peace Corps in Gabon, West Africa. Her decision to return to work, as an African-American woman, after six years of raising kids [was applauded](#) by a Princeton alumni publication in 1998

[George Schindler](#), the president for U.S. and Canada of the Canadian-based CGI Group, CGI Federal's parent company, became an Obama 2012 campaign donor after his company gained the Obamacare website contract.

As reported by the Washington Examiner in early October, the Department of Health and Human Services reviewed only CGI's bid for the Obamacare account. CGI was one of 16 companies qualified under the Bush administration to provide certain tech services to the federal government. A senior vice president for the company testified this week before The House Committee on Energy and Commerce that four companies submitted bids, but did not name those companies or explain why only CGI's bid was considered.

On the government end, construction of the disastrous Healthcare.gov website was overseen by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), a division of [longtime failed website-builder](#) Kathleen Sebelius' Department of Health and Human Services.

## Daily Caller

### [Company behind Obamacare website in charge of nearly \\$2 billion in Sandy relief](#)

by Allison Coyle

CGI Federal Inc., the mastermind behind healthcare.gov, is assisting the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the distribution of \$1.7 billion in relief for Hurricane Sandy.

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Nearly a year after the devastating storm, a majority of the 24,000 families that have requested monetary assistance have yet to receive a penny from the federal aid package.

### **Can This Website Really Be Saved?**

**Obama’s “tech surge” fixers say all will be well in five weeks, but IT experts are dubious.**

by John Fund

So we now have a date. “We’re confident by the end of November, Healthcare.gov will be smooth for a vast majority of users,” Jeff Zients, the point man in charge of the “tech surge” the White House is unleashing to fix the site’s problems, told reporters last week. “The Healthcare.gov site is fixable. It will take a lot of work, and there are a lot of problems that need to be addressed.”

But the commitments might hinge on what the word “fixable” really means. It could mean that the final product will be a stripped-down version that won’t have the functionality promised of the original website. But, in the meantime, the mainstream media will probably be placated by White House assurances that the “best and brightest” in the IT sector are working on the project.

But who are these geniuses? HHS won’t say which individuals, aside from Zients, are part of the “tech surge.” It recalls the moment in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when Indiana Jones and Brody ask Major Eaton about the fate of the ark.

Brody: The ark is a source of unspeakable power, and it has to be researched.

Major Eaton: And it will be, I assure you, Dr. Brody, Dr. Jones. We have top men working on it right now.

Indiana: Who?

Major Eaton: Top . . . men.

The HHS stonewall has led the *Washington Post’s* Ezra Klein, a supporter of Obamacare, to wonder whether “the scope of the surge is less impressive, and more insider-focused, than the administration is implying.”

Numerous IT experts have expressed worry, including some who, according to *USA Today*, concluded that “the federal health care exchange was built using ten-year-old technology that may require constant fixes and updates for the next six months and the eventual overhaul of the entire system.”

The administration may also know less than it is claiming to know. It is astonishing that Zients, after only three days on the job, could make the assurances he did without having conducted a full technical review of the system, including requirements, architecture, design, and implementation. The scope of Healthcare.gov is staggering. Its 500 million lines of code dwarf the size of almost all known IT projects. According to CNN Money, it took just half a million lines of code to send the *Curiosity* rover to Mars. Microsoft’s Windows 8 operating system has some 80 million lines of code. And a typical online-banking system might feature between 75 million and 100 million lines.

Whoever is leading the “tech surge” will have to pore over millions of lines of code to see why people are blocked from completing applications, and why errors and gobbledygook are corrupting the personal data the site does manage to send to insurance companies. Just getting a handle on what needs to be fixed would normally take about five weeks, but the administration claims to have completed its review in days. So far that appears to be the only thing associated with the website that has been finished in record time.

Josh Barro of *Business Insider* is suspicious about all of HHS’s assurances. “The administration is still behaving like it is trying to get Obamacare enacted, and therefore its top public relations task is to bury negative stories about the law and emphasize the upside,” he wrote. “There’s no reason not to level with the public right now, unless the truth is so horrible and the website is so un-fixable that Obama administration officials can’t bring themselves to discuss the matter publicly.”

Bruce Webster, an IT expert with 30 years of experience consulting with dozens of private companies, says that in restructuring a massively troubled project such as Healthcare.gov, there are typically four approaches:

- 1) adding time to the schedule;
- 2) reducing (or accepting reduced) functionality — i.e., scaling back on the features and capabilities of the system;
- 3) reducing (or accepting reduced) performance, such as the number of simultaneous users, the speed of response, and so on;
- 4) reducing (or accepting reduced) quality, that is, allowing known defects to persist while documenting workarounds.

“If the administration really wants to declare this ‘fixed’ by the end of November, they will likely do it by reducing functionality, performance, and possibly even quality,” Webster says. “The push to end of November represents some adding of time to the schedule; the qualifier ‘vast majority of users’ suggests both reduced functionality and possible additional schedule relief (for instance, some users won’t be handled until later).”

In an effort to convince Americans they can still sign up for Obamacare right now, the president urged people to mail in paper applications, find an Obamacare “navigator” to assist them, or apply by answering questions over a phone helpline.

But all of those methods will still require that the data from the applications be “entered into the same lousy website that is causing the problems in the first place,” as *Politico* put it. “And the people processing the paper and calls don’t have any cyber secret passage to duck around that.”

Ben Simo, a former president of the Association for Software Testing, says he now has “zero trust” in Healthcare.gov. He had started an application on the site for a family member but abandoned the application, he wrote on his blog. The status screen showed that the application was left “in progress,” but then he received a notification that his application had been processed and his eligibility results were available. “How is it that my application was processed when I did not submit the application?” he asked, adding:

I had explicitly selected the option at the end of the application stating that I do not agree to the terms for submitting the application. However, it appears that the system ignored my telling it that I do not want them to pull the necessary info to process the application and processed my application anyway. Not only did they process an application I did not submit, the letter says they referred my application to a state agency — a state agency with which I did not authorize them to share any information.

Such problems “may represent humans treating intentionally abandoned applications as ones that stalled due to technical problems and are finishing them to ‘help’ people out,” says Bruce Webster, the IT consultant. “Plus, the administration is now touting application numbers, so this may represent a behind-the-scenes effort to drive those numbers up.”

If so, “clients” such as Ben Simo are less than amused. “The decision letter I received says that I have ten days to appeal any decisions or I will be ineligible for coverage in the future,” Simo says. “Now, they’ve put me in a position that I have to get Healthcare.gov and a state agency to collaborate to withdraw the application I never submitted.”

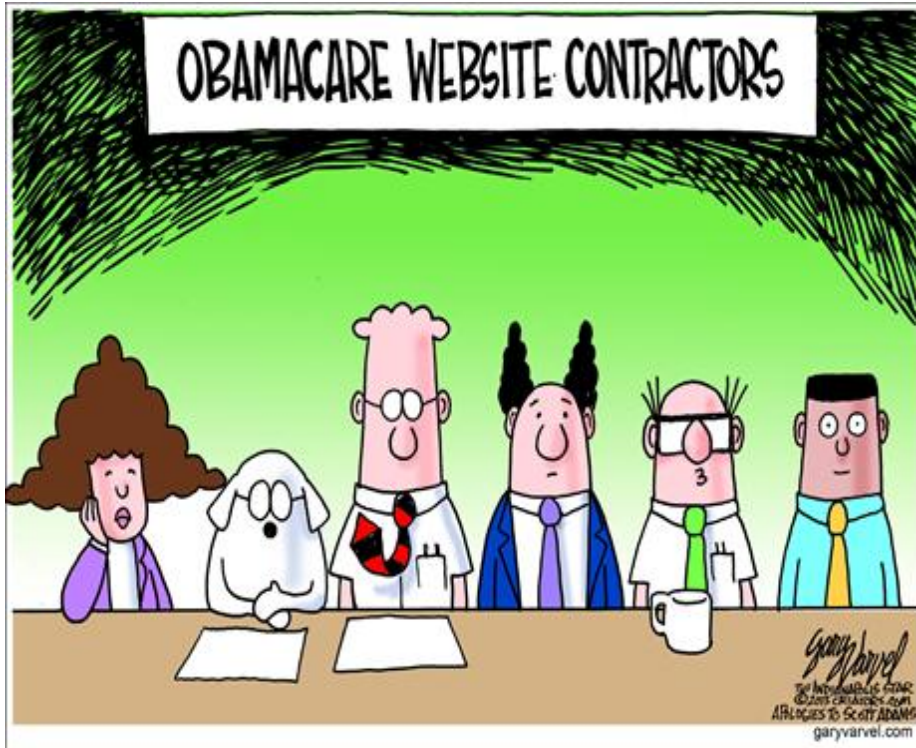
We are on the verge of seeing dark catch-phrases such as “Kafkaesque” and “Catch-22” recede in favor of a new one to describe bureaucratic nightmares: “Healthcare.gov.” A true Halloween horror story.

The tragedy is that there really was a path not taken in designing the website. “We would have done this” for a fraction of the price, “and it would have been working perfectly,” Marc Benioff, founder and CEO of Bay Area global cloud provider Salesforce.com, told *Politico*. “But we were turned away.”

Even veterans of Obama’s campaigns, which garnered such praise for their tech-savvy approach, were ignored. Clay Johnson, a founder of Blue State Digital, the company that developed Obama’s 2008 campaign website, turned down a chance to work on Healthcare.gov last year, during the time he was a Presidential Innovation Fellow. “It was a project I wanted to steer clear of,” he told the *New York Times*.



So we now have a choice. We can believe the Obama administration's happy talk that the website will be "fixed" — whatever that means — in five weeks, or we can look to the general consensus of outside IT experts who are highly dubious. Given the administration's track record and lack of transparency to date, it's not even a close call as to who has the greater credibility.



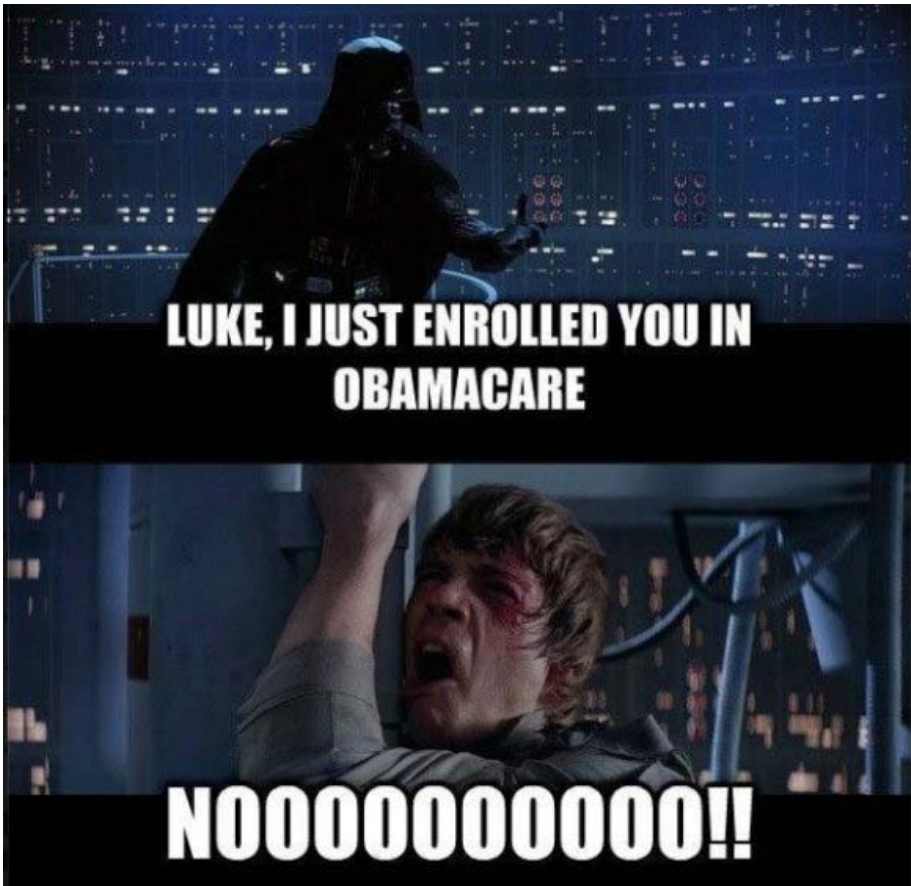


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