

# The Portland Press Herald

## Obama's inattention to health law implementation led to chaos

*Worse, the website flaws are minor compared with the dramatically negative effects still to come.*

By: M.D. Harmon – December 13, 2013

If you follow sports, you will hear announcers using pretty much every word in the dictionary – but sometimes they are a half-bubble or so off plumb.

For example, an Internet search found what may be the first use of “nonchalant” as a verb (normally it’s an adjective meaning “coolly unconcerned or indifferent”) in a story in a Michigan newspaper in 1970.

There, a Kansas City loss to Detroit was blamed on left fielder Lou Piniella, who bobbled a routine catch. It was “Piniella’s nonchalanting of Dick McAuliffe’s fly ball,” the story said, that led to a 10-3 rout.

In that sense, it describes a player botching a critical play by assuming he doesn’t even have to make a minimal effort to do it right.

Similarly, the current Obamacare mess seems substantially due to President Obama “nonchalanting” his signature program right from the start.

Politico, an online magazine, reported recently that in the three years between Obamacare’s approval and Nov. 30 of this year, Obama held precisely one private meeting with Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius.

The administration contested that report, saying she often was included in group discussions, while additional private meetings were not recorded on visitors’ logs. However, the magazine said it didn’t rely on those logs, but on the president’s own official calendar, supplemented by other sources.

And Sebelius is conspicuous by her absence there: “Obama’s calendar lists 277 one-on-one meetings between the president and his Cabinet secretaries, including 73 with former Secretary (Hillary) Clinton and 57 with former Secretary (Timothy) Geithner.” It would seem strange to record all those meetings, but miss all but one with Sebelius.

In addition, Politico reported, “If Obama and Sebelius worked together closely and regularly, why did the president publicly state he did not know about the problems with Healthcare.gov (on which Sebelius said she had been briefed)?”

Still, Sebelius let the website’s launch go on as scheduled, resulting in well-documented chaos.

Wait, you say. The media tell us that the problems with the site have been fixed, and it is now purring like a pampered feline.

But even if that were true (and it's not, as it still has widely reported security flaws that leave clients' personal data vulnerable to hackers, and lacks links with insurers that may abandon millions without coverage when Jan. 1 arrives), people would still be signing up for a program that remains radically flawed.

For example:

- Though "only" about 5 million people, mostly in the individual market, have lost their old policies so far because of Obamacare's mandated changes, the big impacts are yet to come, when large and small businesses must decide if they will cover their employees.

There's a reason Obama unilaterally postponed the law's mandates on those businesses (until after the next election, at least): Estimates are that 50 million to 100 million Americans will be dumped on the law's exchanges to find coverage.

- Many current "sign-ups" really aren't for insurance, but for welfare. Michael D. Tanner, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, writes that 1.46 million of about 1.6 million Americans enrolled on federal and state sites have actually signed up for Medicaid.

"If that trend continues," he wrote, "it could bankrupt both federal and state governments. ... Already Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid account for 48 percent of federal spending. Within the next few years, those three programs will eat up more than half of federal expenditures."

- The New York Times reported Monday, "For months, the Obama administration has heralded the low premiums of medical insurance policies on sale in the insurance exchanges created by the new health law."

However, "For policies offered in the federal exchange, as in many states, the annual deductible often tops \$5,000 for an individual and \$10,000 for a couple. ... Higher deductibles are one tool that insurers can use to hold down premiums. Many have also held down premiums on the exchanges by limiting the choices of doctors and hospitals available to consumers in their provider networks."

- Indeed, among the many "counterfactual statements" uttered about Obamacare, including that it would cost less and let you keep your current insurance and physicians if you wanted to, is the lie-by-omission in which young adults weren't told that the program depends on them buying costly policies with benefits they can't use in order to provide the subsidies needed by others to make their policies "cheaper."

- Finally, the man billed as one of "the architects of Obamacare," Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, was repeatedly asked about one of Obama's promises by anchor Chris Wallace on "Fox News Sunday."

"The president guaranteed me I could keep my doctor," Wallace finally demanded.

"And if you want to, you can pay for it," Emanuel replied.

Aren't you glad somebody finally cleared that up?