

Obamacare's unimpressive first two weeks

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

October 15, 2013

Week before last, I wrote [this](#):

I've always supported the health-care reform law, and I remain mostly optimistic about it (despite [this week's tech glitches](#)). But the point I take from [Obamacare convert Butch] Matthews isn't that people will agree with me about stuff once they have the facts. It's that if Obamacare's coverage expansions *don't* work out as well as we supporters expect them to, we should acknowledge this—rather than going down the endless path of confirmation bias and doubling down on existing loyalties.

In that spirit: I was wrong when I dismissed the problems with the Obamacare exchange rollout as mere "glitches" confined to a parenthetical aside. Clearly the issues are considerable. People are being nonsensically enrolled, unenrolled, re-enrolled, [etc](#). Tech experts point to [bad site code and possible larger issues](#) lurking beneath it. The CEO of Aetna—a company that's intimately involved with the exchanges—[says](#) that "there's so much wrong, you just don't know what's broken until you get a lot more of it fixed." A former Obama administration official [hopes people get fired](#) over the whole thing.

Also true: this is an extremely complex web-development undertaking, unprecedented at this scale. The federal government can't just find some scrappy whiz-kid coders and get 'er done; it's required to go through not-so-nimble processes for choosing and working with vendors. Two weeks of rollout issues doesn't mean the whole thing's a permanent disaster—just ask [the Medicare prescription drug benefit](#). [State exchanges are working better](#). And even if they have to chuck the whole thing and start over, to the tune of major delays, that doesn't reflect badly on the policy itself, just on the implementation.

But oh, the implementation. The administration's had years to try to get this right, and it just didn't.

[Here's an interesting read](#): Byron York considers what the political situation might look like right now if House Republicans had been focused on exploiting the actual shortcomings of Obamacare instead of going nuclear over the thing generally. Of course, the failure of the Obamacare rollout is not the same kind of failure as the shutdown and potential debt-limit breach; it's the difference between attempting something constructive and coming up short vs. actively, recklessly destroying stuff. House Republicans deserve every bit of the beating they're taking in the polls.

But they're also eclipsing an awfully unimpressive episode in Obama's tenure. The technocratic presidency's singular accomplishment is struggling under the weight of its own technical requirements. His people need to get it fixed, and fast—not just for the administration's political fortunes but for the welfare of Americans who need health insurance and are counting on having it come January.