



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on November 11, 2013

WH Rejects Request for Healthcare.gov Tech to Appear at Hearing

Suspensions are raised as the White House is refusing to make Healthcare.gov technician Todd Park available for questioning. The House Oversight Committee requested that Park appear for a hearing Wednesday, but the White House has issued a response indicating that Park is far [too busy](#) attending to the needs of the ObamaCare enrollment portal.



House Oversight Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) requested Park's presence to investigate "the operational challenges in the development of Healthcare.gov" and to determine whether best IT practices were followed.

In fact, the committee released a lengthy witness list for the hearing, including HHS Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information Technology Frank Baitman, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Deputy Chief Information Officer Henry Chao, U.S. Chief Information Officer Steve VanRoekel, and David Powner, director of IT management at the Government Accountability Office.

But the request for Park was rejected in a letter to Issa dated November 6. "Mr. Park is open to testifying at a hearing before your committee and to providing an appropriate pre-hearing briefing for you and your staff," [wrote](#) Donna Pignatelli, assistant director for legislative affairs.

"However," she continued, "because Mr. Park is currently occupied full-time on the critically important work of improving the website for the millions of Americans seeking affordable health insurance options, his testimony needs to be scheduled at a time that is less disruptive to that work."

Park is devoting "nearly all of his attention and expertise" to helping CMS, Pignatelli said. "Pulling him away from that work even for a short time at this stage would be highly disruptive and would risk slowing the progress that has been made thus far to fix identified issues with the website."

On October 24 the House of Representatives launched what is expected to be a series of hearings on the failed healthcare website, when the House Energy and Commerce Committee [questioned](#) the technical issues that pervade the website.

Appearing at that committee hearing, senior vice president of CGI Federal (a subsidiary of CGI Federal that developed the back-end administrative software for healthcare.gov), Cheryl Campbell, stated that the Obama administration bears responsibility as the "systems integrator or quarterback on this project." She also indicated that confusion among tech firms, and high demand for health insurance, led to site problems.

Lawmakers raised a number of questions regarding the launch of the website. When the tech contractors were asked by House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton (R-Mich.)



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whether they recommended delaying the October 1 launch of the website to the administration, they indicated it was not up to them.

“It was not our decision to go live,” Campbell said, adding that such a decision would have rested with the CMS. That agency was in charge of leading the project for the Obama administration because of its work with Medicare and Medicaid.

Campbell also stated that another contractor was responsible for the technology that allowed users to create new accounts and claimed that the technology caused the initial issues on the site, calling those glitches a “front-door problem.”

Responding to questions about whether the website was tested, Campbell said it was done throughout the process of building HealthCare.gov. She said CGI’s portion of the site worked when it was tested, but when it was integrated into the entire system, it did not work.

She said the contractors would have preferred more time to test the technology.

Andrew Slavitt of Optum/QSSI (software and IT subsidiaries of United Health Group) also testified that contractors’ concerns, many of which had to do with testing, were shared with CMS officials. “We did fully talk about the risks that we saw, and we passed them along,” he said.

Lawmakers in the House continue to investigate the failures of the healthcare website, but they may have to do it without the help of the White House. Responding to Issa’s latest request for witnesses, including Park, the White House suggested rescheduling the hearing for the beginning of November.



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