

# Sebelius Stands Firm Despite Calls to Resign

By [ROBERT PEAR](#)

Published: October 16, 2013

WASHINGTON — [Kathleen Sebelius](#), the secretary of health and human services, has no intention of bowing to Republican demands that she resign after the troubled rollout of [President Obama's health care law](#), people close to her said Wednesday. And the White House expressed “full confidence” in her.

In the last week, Senator Pat Roberts, Republican of Kansas, a longtime friend of the Sebelius family, said she should take responsibility for the technical problems that have thwarted millions of people eager to buy insurance through the federal exchange that opened on Oct. 1. He accused Ms. Sebelius of “gross incompetence,” saying, “We need new leadership.”

Representative John Fleming, Republican of Louisiana, said Ms. Sebelius should resign or be fired. “Taxpayers should not have to tolerate this kind of waste and incompetence,” he said.

But in an interview, Ms. Sebelius's older brother, Donald D. Gilligan, said, “I don't think you resign in the middle of a fight.”

Moreover, Mr. Gilligan said: “The fact that people are calling for her head does not surprise her or alarm her particularly. People have been calling for her head for a long time, and it's still there. I don't think that fazes her much.”

Mr. Gilligan said Ms. Sebelius was “just digging in on a daily basis and trying to figure out how to fix” the problems that have riddled the insurance exchange.

The secretary's sister, Ellen M. Gilligan, said, “To my knowledge, she is not going to resign,” despite the “wishful thinking” of some Republicans.

“She serves at the pleasure of the president,” she said. “If the president decides that it is her responsibility and that she is ultimately responsible for the failure of the exchanges, then, of course, she will resign.”

But Ms. Gilligan said that was unlikely.

“The White House is smart enough to know that if she steps aside or they ask her to resign, they will never get anybody else confirmed,” Ms. Gilligan said. “Plus, I don’t think they hold her responsible.”

Discussing the new online insurance market during a visit to Cincinnati on Wednesday, Ms. Sebelius acknowledged the problems with the exchanges, but said that fixes were in the works.

“I am the first to admit that the launch was rockier than we would have liked,” she said. But after two weeks, she added, “there are vast improvements,” and people who were frustrated should “come back” and try again.

Some consumers who did so said they were still unable to log in and shop for insurance on Wednesday.

Mr. Roberts was one of nine Republican senators who voted to [confirm Ms. Sebelius](#) in 2009. From 1969 to 1980, he was an aide to her father-in-law, Keith Sebelius, a Republican who represented western Kansas in the United States House of Representatives.

Robert Gibbs, the former White House press secretary, said Monday on MSNBC that the debut of the insurance exchange had been “bungled badly” and had been “excruciatingly embarrassing for the White House and for the [Department of Health and Human Services](#).” After the problems are fixed, he said, “I hope they fire some people.”

But Jay Carney, the current White House press secretary, said Ms. Sebelius had “the full confidence of the president.”

For months, Ms. Sebelius had been projecting optimism and confidence about the exchange, built by her department, with help from dozens of contractors. “I think we’re on target,” she said in a television interview in July, adding, “We are on track to flip the switch on Oct. 1 and say to people come on and sign up.”

A new study by a market research company suggests that traffic on the federal Web site has decreased since Oct. 1 and that relatively few people have signed up for health plans.

The number of visitors to [the Web site](#) declined to 4.1 million in the second week, from 9.5 million in the first week, said Matthew A. Pace, a vice president of the company, Millward Brown Digital, a unit of WPP, a holding company for advertising and market research agencies.

In the first week, he said, 196,000 people began to enroll, and 36,000 completed the process. In the second week, he estimated, 368,000 began enrollment, and 47,000 finished the process.

The Obama administration has not yet disclosed enrollment data.

A version of this article appears in print on October 17, 2013, on page A20 of the New York edition with the headline: Sebelius Stands Firm Despite Calls to Resign.