

## Fix it panel

From page A-1

Yes, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius came to Detroit last week in a public relations move to instill confidence that the government is at work. It will take more than just a stop in Detroit to get the health website working.

Apparently, the White House and the entire might of the federal government did not do what was supposed to be done: execute a well coordinated rollout and achieve the maximum impact that the new law would have on people, just as Obama campaigned on it. Or better still, the way the Obama campaign diligently and meticulously executed a massive strategy that had technology front and center and got people listening, contributing to the campaign website and connecting with the campaign.

Even though the federal government is bogged down in bureaucracy, and is not a 24-hour campaign machine, that should not have stopped the White House from planning a rollout with the same effectiveness that the Obama campaign's technological team had.

The president should have appointed a high level panel charged with the responsibility of overseeing the rollout and introducing them to the nation as the ones responsible for the rollout.

That panel, among other things, should have ensured that the capacity of the website was such that it could meet the demands of a certain number of consumers — and that number should be in the millions — because we have 30 million uninsured.

No excuses, a presidential panel ought to have the force, might and resources to carry out the most important domestic change in the last five decades in this country. More importantly, given that this is Obama's domestic policy legacy, much detail and focus should have been placed on ensuring that the rollout was so well executed that the president's skeptics were proved wrong and that his campaign theme promises were met.

I am unable to understand why and how the administration failed on this. We are still yet to know who in the White House was specifically in charge of this rollout.

The preeminence of common sense beckons on us that when something of this magnitude is tied to your legacy or reputation, you want to ensure that all hands are on deck to make it right, with no room for major mistakes.

Obama has enough critics and detractors to force his administration to not give them any reason to explain why their delegitimization campaign against him should hold water.

This blunder by the administration reminds me of Obama's first televised debate with Gov. Mitt Romney, where he appeared drained and tired and uninterested in the issues, which made supporters of his re-election extremely nervous on the night of the debate.

During last week's sudden media briefing, the president appeared bored as if he was unfamiliar with the health law, as he struggled to explain the flaws of the rollout that is supposed to benefit millions who find themselves at the crossroads of either a better insurance or a deductible they can't even afford.

Let's be clear. The intention of the law is to make health care affordable. The moral ground for this is huge. No amount of criticism against the rollout or subterfuge can take that away.

But something must be done about a law that passed and mustered every legitimate test from

the halls of Congress to the U.S. Supreme Court, so that it reaches its eventual goal: insuring the uninsured.

Some have said no need to make a big deal out of a website crash or the unending technical glitches the president said are being addressed. That in the words of William Shakespeare this is "much ado about nothing."

Well, it's easy to say that if you are not the one on the computer shopping for health insurance every day, or receiving a deductible that is several times higher than your mortgage or rent.

No matter how simple the glitches might seem, the consequences are significant. Because in addition to the propaganda machine that is against implementing the new law, the administration has helped that very machine in adding confusion to the ACA.

The Obama we know is one who executes almost flawlessly and does so for the bigger picture and for posterity. Even against the advice of some his advisors, the president pressed on the ACA and got it passed in Congress. The Supreme Court adjudicated it and Obama ran on that for his re-election and won.

The final chapter of the long struggle of this new law was the rollout, which should have marked an era in government efficiency and less bureaucracy. Instead, we were disappointed.

And with this dismal rollout, the White House subconsciously caved in to their critics, giving them more fuel for their propaganda against the law and the president.

On the merits of core competence, the new law deserved a presidential rollout, not the kind we've seen in recent weeks.

The president's approval ratings are tanking in the 40s and 30s. Beyond the politics of polling must lie an Obama who must move quickly to rescue his health care legacy by appointing a team to address the existing and emerging problems, and eventually make this law successfully and lasting.

I recommend that Obama appoint a "Fix It Panel," to further mitigate the damage of the rollout. I have no doubt anyone who receives a call from Obama to serve on such a "Fix It Panel," would see it as an extraordinary honor to serve the nation after receiving a call from the 44th president of the United States.

For a start, here is how the president's configuration "Fix It Panel" should look like.

**Howard Dean**, former Vermont governor and chair of the Democratic National Committee who is a medical doctor, should serve on this panel. Dean, who some say should have been the Health and Human Services Secretary, is an outspoken supporter of the law. A hard-nosed progressive, he has been an advocate for a single-payer health plan. He knows the politics of the issue and understands the crucial patient-doctor relationship.

**Nancy Schlichting**, the CEO of Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, a \$4 billion organization and one of the largest healthcare companies in the country with 23,000 employees, should be on this problem-solving panel.

On a panel like this it is important to have someone like Schlichting who is running a large health care system, not just technocrats, because she brings invaluable human relation experience, pragmatism and business management expertise to bear on this issue based on her knowledge of running a massive health care system. It pays to

see the perspective of the institutional health care providers, not just the professionals.

**Dr. Patricia Berg**, professor of biochemistry and molecular medicine at George Washington University, where she directs the breast cancer research laboratory, would make a strong addition to the panel. In addition to developing vaccines, Berg has been a relentless advocate against government cuts in cancer research.

Dr. Berg has been pushing politicians in Washington, DC and state capitals to see and understand the importance of saving lives with research.

Nurses everywhere are on the front lines of saving lives daily. If success of the law is predicated on the need for better health outcomes, not just processes, then nurses should be at the table.

**Dorothy A. Obuya**, a certified, registered rehabilitation nurse in Texas, a state that has been one of the strongest resistant blocks against Obamacare, would bring the perspective of thousands of nurses across the country who interface daily with patients.

Conversations around fixing the health law needs to go beyond the Washington punditry class to involve hands-on health care professionals like nurses.

The faith community is crucial to the success of the health law, as we've seen the tension between Catholic institutions and the Obama administration over certain provisions of the law.

**Hyepin Im**, CEO of the Korean Churches for Community Development in California, who is already a presidential appointee to the Corporation for National and Community Service, should be on the panel.

Im, who was at the White House last week for a meeting of faith-based leaders with the president, stands at the intersection between faith, family, politics and community development.

The panel will also require a brilliant legal mind that understands how to navigate the media landscape on the most complex legal matters relating to the various provisions of the law, and how they relate to the uninsured and under-insured.

Because, let's face it, apart from the technical issues with the ACA website, the law suffered media appreciation deficiencies (MAD).

**Robert Beatty**, a Florida attorney understands what it will take to negotiate with the media porcupines. A partner at Adorno & Yoss and former general counsel of the Miami Herald, Beatty's experience in a state like Florida, whose political leaders are indifferent to the health care law, will prove helpful to the presidential panel.

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## Democratic

From page A-1

Already some working people are receiving Schauer's plan as realistic and just what the working class needs. Kim Pearce, grocery store employee in Detroit, has embraced the minimum wage proposal from the Democrat.

"Working hard is part of who we are in Michigan," Pearce said. "But no matter how hard we work, families like mine are still struggling to get ahead. Raising the minimum wage would help lift up thousands of families across the state."

The battle for minimum wage increase already is gaining a lot of traction with California passing minimum wage to \$10. In that case the wage will be implemented in two phases: an increase to \$9 per hour in July of next year, followed by a \$1 increase to \$10 in 2016.

"The minimum wage has not kept pace with rising costs. This legislation is overdue and will help families who are struggling in this harsh economy," California Gov. Jerry Brown said in support of the new law.

In Seattle, Washington, voters on Nov. 5 passed Proposition 1 by 54-46 percent, which calls for a \$15 an hour minimum wage for airport, hotel and restaurant workers, the highest in the nation. Called the Sea-Tac initiative, it will affect workers in and near Seattle-Ta-

coma International Airport. The current wage is \$9.19.

The Michigan League for Public Policy is applauding the move by Schauer on the minimum wage.

"No one who works hard should be forced to work for poverty wages, whether they are parents supporting young kids or teenagers who are just starting their working lives," said Gilda Jacobs, president and CEO of the Michigan League for Public Policy. "But this is exactly what we're asking many minimum-wage workers to do — to put in their time at work and still remain poor."

Erica Hill, Detroit political observer and campaign veteran, said while Schauer's minimum wage announcement is a good start, the leader of the Democratic pack for 2014 cannot just rely on traditional supporters.

"He has to identify with newer, non-traditional voters, within the 18-35 demographic, utilize social media, establish a ground game in urban centers early and establish solutions that challenge Gov. Snyder on issues such as emergency management, Right to Work, pension dissolution and public education," Hill said. "He should clearly establish how democracy is currently being undermined and how he can help to restore it."

Hill said minimum wage is not enough to reduce voter apathy and give voters a reason to show up at the polls.

"I believe it is a step in the right direction, as long as the party is prepared to take on the fight by our corporate friends," Hill said. "We don't want to muddy the water like we did in 2012, with an extremely crowded ballot, but taking another stab at the Emergency Manager Law may excite some voters, considering how Detroit is currently fairing under the law."

Democrats have come under fire numerous times for not paying attention to the urban vote.

"Time after time, election year after election year, urban centers only come into play at the end of the election cycle, in both thought and financial investment," Hill said. "The one thing that has not changed about Michigan politics is the fact that as Detroit goes, so does the region. This is the perfect opportunity to allow Detroit to work for the party. Make no assumptions."

She said the streets of Detroit are still "simmering from the mayoral election. Don't let the energy die. Capitalize on it by investing in a solid ground game in urban centers, now."

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## Castaneda-Lopez

From page A-1

Detroit, which has been in the glare of the national and international press for reasons other than celebrating diversity.

"My heartfelt prayer is for the new councilwoman to serve her city with the fear of God, drawing worthy examples from our Lord Jesus Christ, and pleading the pertinent cause of the poor, the weak and the oppressed who really need help," said the Texas minister who is president and founder of the Spring Texas-based Revival Evangelism Institute. He hopes to meet with Castaneda-Lopez during his visit to Detroit.

Rev. Obi, a Black preacher who works primarily in Hispanic communities in North America and South America said he is delighted for what he calls a "well deserved victory" and hopes that Castaneda-Lopez's election "marks the beginning of a new era of resplendent and productive diversity in the city of Detroit."

Jimmy Hernandez, communications director of the Washington, DC-based VotoLatino organization, said in a phone interview that Castaneda-Lopez's election is a strong signal that "Latinos are a growing community in the U.S. with a huge influence," and that by 2050 Latino youth are expected to comprise 29 percent of the entire population of young people in the U.S.

Hernandez cited as an example Election Day (Nov. 5) where he said Hispanic voters helped to elect two governors: Chris Christie of New Jersey and Terry McAuliffe of Virginia.

"It is important for Hispanics to be elected in all of these municipal bodies because these local offices make decisions that impact the everyday lives of their constituents," Hernandez said. "They make decisions when it comes to school boards and that is why every segment of the community should be represented when local bodies are making those types of decisions."

Local elections set the stage for national office, Hernandez said, citing President Barack Obama's rise as an indication given that the leader of the free world was once a community



organizer on Chicago's South Side before he ran for U.S. Senate and eventually president.

"Hispanic business operators like me don't depend on government, but we desire and encourage government policies that promote entrepreneurship and create jobs for people in our multicultural communities," said Ezekiel Serna, owner of Ezekiel Innovation Design and Art in Houston, Texas. "So, I wish and hope that my sister, Raquel, whose Detroit electoral victory I celebrate in far away Houston, will dedicate herself to good policies that help Detroit businesses expand and create much-needed jobs."

Councilwoman-elect Castaneda-Lopez has also touted her community organizing skills during the campaign trail, having honed those skills in several political offices including that of State Rep. Rashida Tlaib and other community and volunteer programs.

"We know that one of the best ways to get people into national office is to look at the local level," Hernandez said. "That type of recruitment at the local level is necessary so we have national figures who can speak on behalf their communities."

Elias Gutierrez, who runs the Latino Press,

Michigan's leading Hispanic newspaper, said he welcomed the political development on the Detroit City Council because "Raquel represents the future, not the division of the past. We hope that other council members work in concert with her to develop our communities and enhance Detroit and its image nationally."

Gutierrez said Castaneda-Lopez's campaign theme has been to serve all of Detroit and that he believes she will keep to that mantra of "working for all of Detroit given the fact that she grew up in a diverse community."

On her campaign website, Castaneda-Lopez prides herself as a "first generation college graduate with a master's degree in social work," who worked tirelessly in the nonprofit sector for 13 years because working for Wayne State University helped underrepresented African American and Native American students.

A volunteer soccer coach with Think Detroit PAL, she has served on the Hispanic Commission of Michigan, chairing its education and health committees as well as being part of its civic engagement committee.

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