

Rep. Frederica Wilson: Ted Cruz deserves thanks

Rep. Frederica S. Wilson
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I would like to thank Sen. Ted Cruz.

Without his impassioned all-night rant on the Senate floor, fewer Americans would have access to healthcare today.

Seriously.

While only the right-wing fringe agreed with the extremist rhetoric in the Texas senator's anti-Obamacare faux-filibuster, all the media buzz about his antics served as a reminder to millions of Americans that the Obamacare launch was just around the corner.

The Cruz Coalition's ensuing efforts to shut down the government to protest health reform brought further attention to the opening of Obamacare's insurance exchanges. And so, on Oct. 1, such a tremendous number of people visited healthcare.gov to sign up for

insurance that the website malfunctioned due to a traffic overload. The site, which, like many major government and corporate websites, was designed to support 50,000 to 60,000 users at a time, faced up to 250,000 users at any given moment.

More than 10 million people have now visited the website, including 2.8 million people in the first day alone. While the technical glitches are temporary, the benefits of Obamacare are lasting. Obamacare means insurance companies can no longer deny 17 million children with pre-existing conditions health coverage. Obamacare means 105 million Americans with serious diseases no longer have to live in fear of maxing out on their lifetime limits on insurance coverage. It means more than 3 million young people up to age 26 now have healthcare because insurance companies can no

longer remove them from their families' plans.

Under the law, if you have Medicare or employer-provided health insurance, you get to keep your coverage. If you're currently uninsured, you can visit the online marketplaces to find coverage under open enrollment anytime from Oct. 1 through March 31, 2014.

More than half of all Americans who visit the marketplaces are likely to receive discounts on their monthly insurance premiums based on income. The law is making quality healthcare more affordable and more accessible for millions. By reducing the number of uninsured Americans reliant on emergency rooms for care, Obamacare is also reducing long-term expenses for taxpayers.

But nothing this ambitious comes easy. As with Social Security's

rollout in 1935 and Medicare's rollout in 1965, there will be glitches we need to fix. There will also be fierce and persistent opposition.

In the 1930s, Social Security provoked intense backlash from conservatives, including some who even fought to strip domestic workers and agricultural workers of their benefits in order to keep African-Americans out of the system. When Medicare was introduced in the 1960s, Republicans called it a "Soviet-style health model" that threatened our democracy. Then-Gov. Ronald Reagan of California famously said that if we fail to stop Medicare "you and I are going to spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it once was like in America when men were free."

Still, conservative attacks against Obamacare today are far tougher — and more reckless — than any attacks on social safety net expansions in the past. No one ever threatened to shut down the U.S. government or, worse, to default on America's debt obligations to protest 20th Century efforts to expand healthcare and economic security. The whole world economy rests on America's treasury bonds.

When Republicans play with fire on the debt ceiling in order to protest the health reform law, they threaten to burn down the buttress on which Americans' 401Ks, mutual funds, stock portfolios and small businesses rest. But there is a silver lining to the Republican storm over Obamacare: It's raised public awareness about a program that will bring quality affordable health coverage to millions of people who desperately need it.

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