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WV health care leaders applaud Supreme Court decision

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By Whitney Burdette - [email](#)

"Thrilled, "delighted" and "extremely pleased" are just a few of the terms West Virginia's health care leaders have used to describe the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to uphold the Affordable Care Act.

Speaking at a June 28 news conference, members of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care applauded the high court's decision, saying it provides a sense of security for all Americans, particularly those who are uninsured.

"The Affordable Care Act provides greater security for American families," said Perry Bryant, executive director of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care. "If you lose your job, you're not going to lose your health insurance. You'll have access to health insurance in the future."



Sam Hickton, of the National Association of Social Workers West Virginia chapter, said one provision in the Affordable Care Act hits close to home. He said he has a 25-year-old son who does not have his own health insurance. A provision in the law allows children to remain on their parents' insurance plans until age 26, so Hickton said he and his wife can breathe a little easier knowing their son can stay on their plan.

"At least we've got some sense of security," he said.

Dr. Raul Gupta, executive director of the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department, said the court's decision is "happy news" for West Virginians.

"If not ACA then what?" he asked. He pointed out that tens of thousands of West Virginians die because they don't have access to affordable health care.

One provision of the law that has drawn attention is Medicaid expansion. State Sen. Dan Foster, D-Kanawha, who is also a physician and member of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, said data have indicated states will save money

"Data from several months ago ... indicates clearly that states will save money under that statute," he said. "The savings ... will more than make up for what it costs."

Jennifer Plymale, executive director of the Robert C. Byrd Center for Rural Health, said the Medicaid expansion could mean more West Virginians would qualify for care.

The court, in its decision, found the individual mandate is constitutional under the taxing clause, meaning people who do not purchase health insurance for whatever reason will be subject to a tax. Jane Cline, an attorney with Spilman, Thomas and Battle and former chief executive officer for West Virginia Offices of the Insurance Commissioner, the agency that oversees licensing and regulation of the insurance industry, said the court's decision is important.

"This decision is important because it maintains both the concept of universal coverage and the market reforms that are popular among Americans, such as guaranteed issue, prohibition of preexisting condition exclusions and inclusion of children on parents' policies to age 26, to name a few," Cline told the State Journal. "Expansion of coverage to our previously uninsured population promotes stability in the insurance market and is good for the American people, enabling the insurance industry to continue to meet the needs of individuals and families."

Kenny Perdue, president of AFL-CIO, said the court's decision is an opportunity to educate people about health care and the importance of having health insurance.

"Some people say this is a victory. I say it's an opportunity," Perdue said at the news conference. "The Supreme Court saw what needed to be done, and I say they ruled the way it should have been."

Questions will remain in the days and weeks following the decision, Cline said, but the decision means decision makers can move forward.

"While significant issues remain with parts of the legislation and its implementation, the court's decision allows the insurance industry and policy makers to move toward meaningful solutions to expand coverage and address affordability," she said.