SALT LAKE CITY — Utah's leaders and citizens responded quickly and mostly negatively to the Supreme Court's complex ruling on the Affordable Care Act, which largely upheld the constitutionality of the law on taxation grounds.

While a majority of the Court could not all agree that the law was constitutional according to the Commerce Clause, five justices did agree that the penalty imposed by the federal government against citizens who chose not to buy insurance is a form of taxation, and that therefore the individual mandate central to the ACA is acceptable.

Reactions were split predictably along party lines, with Republican leaders denouncing the ruling, and Democrats praising the decision and consequent increased coverage.

Sen. Orrin Hatch was quick to voice his opposition to the decision, claiming that most Americans want the law repealed.

"The American people know that this law violates our deepest constitutional principles of limited government, despite the Supreme Court's ruling today," he said.

He called the ACA a "power grab," and complained that it was yet another form of taxation for Americans.

But Utah Democratic Party Chair Jim Dabakis not only supported the High Court's decision, he was able to relish a little bit of irony.

"First, the Utah Democratic Party would like to thank Senator Orrin Hatch for championing of the nomination of Chief Justice John Roberts to the court. It was, after all, Justice Roberts who wrote the opinion," Dabakis said.

"Today is a good day for insured Utahns, who will keep the protections and benefits that they currently enjoy as a result of President Obama's Affordable Care Act - including protection from discrimination based on sex, age, or pre-existing conditions, free or low-cost preventative care, and the ability to keep young people on their parents' insurance until 26."


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Salt Lake County Mayor Peter Corroon strongly supported upholding most of ACA as well, calling it a victory for the American people.

"With the Supreme Court's decision behind us, it is now time for Utah to come up with a local solution that works for the people of our state."

"The Court's decision means people with pre-existing conditions will not be denied coverage. Lifetime caps on coverage will be eliminated, seniors will be covered through the 'donut hole' coverage gap where they were paying 100 percent of costly drugs, and adult children can stay on parents' health insurance until the age of 26," Corroon said.

Mia Love, Mayor of Saratoga Springs and Republican nominee for Utah's 4th Congressional District has recently received national attention as a rising star in the GOP. Her take, like that of other Utah Republicans, was entirely negative, but she also took the opportunity to campaign a little with her response, saying Jim Matheson had "failed" to stand with Utah and repeal the mandate.

"It is unfortunate that ObamaCare even went to the Supreme Court. When Jim Matheson had a chance to stand with Utah and repeal this new mandate and tax, he failed to do so," Love said. "Utahns deserve representatives in Washington who will work to take back control of our healthcare, who will put Utah first in action and not just in words."

Health care organizations and policy groups like the Utah Hospital Association offered more support for the decision, saying in a statement that it will allow hospitals to give care to more Utahns.

"As we have long said, whatever the Supreme Court decision, Utah's hospitals will continue to focus on providing safe, high-quality care to all of our patients at the lowest costs in the nation," said Rod Betit, president and CEO of the Utah Hospital Association.

The Utah Health Policy Project largely concurred, saying "today's ruling means it's time to catch up on state efforts to implement the Affordable Care Act in good faith."

Some medical care providers were very excited about outcome of the supreme court's case as well, like nurse practitioner Debra Sandt.

"Most of the medical providers I know happen to think that the Affordable Care Act is a good thing for our patients," Sandt said. "We were jumping up and down with glee at the results. We don't enjoy seeing the pain on parents' faces when they can't afford their child's prescriptions or the guilt on the children's faces when their parents are losing their homes because they got sick."

Roughly 386,000 Utahns are uninsured, making up almost 14 percent of the state. They are among those who will be most affected by the individual mandate of the ACA now that its constitutionality is no longer in question.

Utah implemented a health insurance exchange before the federal Affordable Care Act was passed to help small businesses obtain insurance coverage for their employees. Utah is among 26 states that sued the federal government over the law.

Gov. Gary Herbert has criticized the individual mandate and the expansion of Medicaid rolls that administration officials say would cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars.
"This law may be constitutional, but its still bad policy," Herbert said Thursday.

On Twitter, several commenters agreed with Utah's approach.

"If Republican senators enacted policy to handle healthcare at the state level (like Utah has been) the ACA would have never been necessary," said Ashlee Yilmaz.

Some Utahns expressed concern over the possibility that the decision gives broader powers to Congress, a sentiment that Sen. Mike Lee has expressed recently.

"This is scary actually. They just decided to consider a requirement to pay private industry, a tax. (What) 'taxes' will they be able to force on us now?" asked Kris Kofoed on ksl.com's Facebook page.

Rep. Bob Bishop emphasized that the GOP battle to get rid of the ACA is not ending.

"While this is certainly not the decision we were hoping to hear, it does not mean this fight is over. This massive tax is the wrong direction for this country and every aspect of this law will continue to be reviewed, scrutinized, and reformed. Leaving the bill as it exists today is simply not an option," he said.

**Contributing:** Associated Press