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Utah commends court decision, advocates call for affordability

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The Utah Attorney General's Office applauded the 11th U.S. Court of Appeals' rejection of an individual mandate to have health insurance, describing it as a "victory."

"It reaffirms our position that Congress can't force us to buy something we don't want to buy," said Chief Deputy John Swallow, one of the state attorneys involved in the litigation.

However, until the Supreme Court rules on the case, which could happen as early as next spring, the state must continue to move ahead with changes required by the health care law. Former Gov. Jon Huntsman, who has announced his candidacy for president, described the disputed law as an "unconstitutional assault on the individual liberty of the American people," according to a news release. He cited his work during his time in office to create "free market" changes to help small businesses and individuals get health insurance. A draft 2008 bill, developed with the governor's staff, mandated that all Utahns have insurance by 2010, but that approach was soon dropped.

The Utah Health Policy Project argues that without an individual mandate to buy insurance, state officials must address the cost of policies.

"Utah's really excited about this because they don't want to be told what to do," said Shelly Braun, reform initiatives director. "But if you want to get people covered by health insurance, you have to make it affordable."

The lack of health insurance can cost everybody, she said. "When people don't have health insurance, whether public or private, they delay going to the doctor or they don't go to the doctor so they become a more expensive sick person."

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