

Editorial: Ruling means Obamacare is staying, and Utah should go along

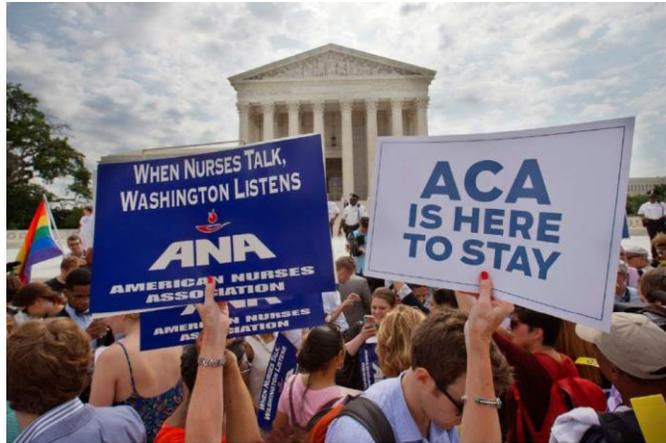
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For the many Utah politicians who were wrong twice — when they thought the Affordable Care Act was a bad thing and when they assumed that, if ignored, it would go away — it is time to return to the real world.

That's the world where thousands of good and decent Utahns, through no fault of their own, do not have access to the kind of health-care coverage that the citizens of every civilized nation on the planet have long taken for granted. Where people suffer and die because of that dark side of American exceptionalism.



The world where that problem could be largely, if not fully, addressed in Utah if the state had quickly gone along with the implementation of the ACA here.

The world where that benefit to vulnerable people, and the hundreds of millions of federal dollars that would have come with it, were unconscionably delayed while state officials wasted precious months cooking up something that they could call a Utah alternative. And, then, didn't even put that alternative in place.

Thursday, [the U.S. Supreme Court ruled](#), for the second time in three years, that the guts of the ACA, or Obamacare, are constitutional and intact. [The ruling](#) by Chief Justice John Roberts properly swept aside a spurious argument that Congress meant to so limit insurance subsidies that the whole scheme would fall apart. The court acted with good, [conservative judicial restraint](#) in refusing to throw out an act of Congress on a technicality.

Thus is it time for Utah's congressional delegation to stop their monotonous attempts to repeal the ACA. And, more important, it is time for Gov. Gary Herbert and the Utah Legislature to stop whistling Dixie and put Healthy Utah, Herbert's face-saving local alternative to Obamacare, in operation.

Herbert had said that he hoped Thursday's ruling, in the case called King vs. Burwell, would go the other way. That's really too bad, because such a ruling would have eviscerated the only

viable method we've come up with, in more than 60 years of trying, for making access to health care a given of modern life. And it would have taken away all hope that Healthy Utah, of which Herbert was supposedly so proud, would ever be implemented.

Now that last straw for those who opposed Obamacare and Healthy Utah is gone. So is the other flimsy reason to be against both, the theory that Obamacare adds to the federal deficit. That argument was recently shot down by the nonpartisan bean-counters at the Congressional Budget Office, who concluded that if the ACA were to go away, a short-term dip in the deficit would be followed by decades of much deeper budget deficiencies.

That's because, in addition to the provisions vastly increasing access to private — not government — health insurance, the law contains effective ways of bending the curve on health-care spending and taxes on high-end insurance plans that add up to a healthier federal balance over time.

Utah lawmakers should read the chief justice's ruling, which begins with praise for Mitt Romney's health-insurance reform in Massachusetts, the model for Obamacare, and goes on to explain that the ACA is not a federal takeover of medicine but a way to make existing health-insurance markets accessible to nearly all of us through consumer-friendly rules and federal tax subsidies.

Preserving private health-insurance markets, rather than obliterating them in favor of a single-payer system, is what makes Obamacare complicated and, until Thursday's ruling, vulnerable.

But now it is here to stay. Utah politicians need to stop dragging their feet and put Healthy Utah in place. Now. Lives are in the balance.