

80,000 Utah residents to keep getting health subsidies

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By Michelle L. Price, Associated Press

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SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — More than 80,000 Utah residents will keep receiving federal help to pay for health insurance after the U.S. Supreme Court on Thursday upheld tax subsidies that are at the heart of President Barack Obama's signature health care law.

The court ruled the Affordable Care Act allows consumers to receive subsidies through online insurance marketplaces regardless of whether the marketplace is run by the state or the federal government.



Utah is one of 34 states where consumers risked losing federal help because the federal government is running the insurance websites.

Thursday's ruling also settles a key hang-up for Utah officials debating whether to expand Medicaid to help more low-income residents get insurance.

GOP officials negotiating if and how Utah will help its uninsured had worried that losing the subsidies would balloon the number of people in need and push the cost of expanding Medicaid even higher.

Here's how Utah consumers, insurers and elected officials reacted to the ruling:

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CONSUMERS

The subsidies allow James Phillips, a 52-year-old from Midvale, Utah, to pay \$150 a month for insurance instead of \$750. Several years ago, Phillips lost his job and came down with a neurological disorder that causes physical problems, including an inability to swallow food.

Phillips, who identifies as a Democrat, said he worried that if the court ruled against the subsidies, he'd have to find a new way to pay for supplies and treat his illness.

"I was even looking at a point of possibly even having to sell my car to make ends meet," he said.

Salt Lake City resident Paige Preece receives a subsidy through the online marketplace that allows her to get insurance for \$137 a month, which she calls "a godsend."

The 50-year-old Republican has health problems and complications from several surgeries two years ago that left her disabled and unable to keep her job as a medical researcher, where she had been paying \$700 to \$800 a month for insurance.

"I don't particularly care for Obama. I didn't vote for him," Preece said. "But honestly, if it weren't for this, I would be absolutely lost."

REPUBLICANS

Utah Gov. Gary Herbert, a Republican, said in a statement that the ruling was disappointing and the court appeared to be ignoring the plain text of the Affordable Care Act. Herbert said he'll continue to support a GOP push in Congress to repeal the law.

Utah Speaker of the House Greg Hughes, a Republican, said the health care law is failing taxpayers and consumers.

"This administration's damaging health care policy continues to undermine real insurance markets and drive up the cost of health care, resulting in less access to care for many of our nation's most needy."

With Thursday's ruling, Hughes said GOP lawmakers in the House who are contemplating Medicaid expansion will try to find an affordable way to help the state's uninsured. About 60,000 Utah residents are without insurance and ineligible for the subsidies because of a law in the health law.

Hughes, Herbert and other GOP state officials have pledged to come up with a deal by August.

DEMOCRATS

Utah Democrats celebrated Thursday's court's decision, arguing it clears the way for GOP-dominated Utah to expand Medicaid as Democrats and the Obama administration have called for.

"The Supreme Court protected the right of millions of Americans to access affordable health coverage today, and it's time for our state legislature to do the same by passing and implementing Medicaid expansion in Utah," state Democratic Party chairman Peter Corroon said in a statement.

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