

OPINION

Life-Altering Access to Health Care

Chief Justice elevates stature of the court

BY MARC H. MORIAL

The Supreme Court ruling to uphold the Affordable Care Act represents life-altering access to health care for millions of Americans, particularly African Americans who have been twice as likely to lack health insurance.



League mission, shared by millions of Americans, to build a fairer health care system is not only appropriate and pro-family, but constitutionally valid.

While the Court made the right call, it was once again a narrow 5-4 decision, with the deciding vote surprisingly cast by Chief Justice John G. Roberts. It is no secret that in 2005 the National Urban League sided

with then, Senator Obama in opposing Roberts' nomination as Chief Justice.

Health Insurance can mean the difference between life and death, and even more often it can mean the difference between financial stability and ruin. Health care costs are responsible for a majority of personal bankruptcies in the United States.

The Supreme Court's decision affirmed that the National Urban

Roberts came to the nomination process as a staunch conservative, who had been an outspoken opponent of Affirmative Action, which he had often referred to as "quotas." He had also spoken out against the "effects test" in voting rights enforcement, saying that voting rights violations "should not be made too easy to prove."

Up until last month, there was no indication that Roberts would be the only conservative Supreme Court Justice to side with the four liberals on the court in supporting the most important legislative breakthrough on health care in a generation.

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Roberts' principled decision elevated the stature of the Court by refusing to have it defined as a strictly partisan institution, with justices reliably casting votes along

a rigid liberal/conservative divide.

Contrast this statesmanlike leadership with the comments of conservative Justice Antonin Scalia, who at various times leading up to the decision had trivialized this important national debate. Scalia had said it was "unrealistic" to expect the Justices to read the entire bill, joking that the Eighth Amendment protected them from "cruel and unusual punishment." And he had objected to the individual mandate with a quip that "You can't make people buy broccoli." These comments were unworthy of the seriousness of the debate and unbecoming of a Supreme Court Justice. But thanks to Justice Roberts, common sense and the rule of law prevailed.

The court's ruling means that 31 million more Americans have access to health insurance and senior citizens will pay less for life-saving medications. It means that invest-

ments in preventive health screenings and community prevention efforts like those operated by Urban League affiliates across the country will continue to move forward. But the fight is not over.

Justice Roberts concluded his majority opinion by saying, "The Framers created a Federal Government of limited powers and assigned to this court the duty of enforcing those limits. The court does so today. But the court does not express any opinion on the wisdom of the Affordable Care Act. Under the Constitution, that judgment is reserved to the people."

The Roberts Court has affirmed the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act. It is now up to the political process and the court of public opinion to resolve its final fate.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Score Another Victory for Corporations

Health care ruling won't heal our ailing system

BY DR. MARGARET FLOWERS

As a physician, I find it very odd that the debate over the Affordable Care Act has focused on the affect the law will have on the presidential election rather than the impact it will have on patients, health professionals, and health outcomes.



The Supreme Court case reinvigorated the debate over the Obama administration's 2010

health care reform law. But we're still getting partisan talking points instead of an honest review of the changes that are in store. This will likely worsen as we get closer to Election Day.

The new law is based on concepts developed by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney passed a very similar law for his state when he was the governor of Massachusetts. So while most Democrats are celebrating the Supreme Court decision to uphold the Affordable Care Act, and

Romney is saying he'd repeal it, consider this: had a Republican passed this federal law, we would have the opposite situation.

Let's put politics aside and look at the law from a policy standpoint. The big winners of the Supreme Court decision are the corporations who are profiting from the current health system — private health insurers, pharmaceutical companies, and corporate-owned hospitals and medical practices.

The court has deemed it constitutional for the government to require people to spend up to nine percent of their income to purchase private insurance despite it being a defective product. People with insurance continue to face financial barriers to care. They delay and avoid necessary care because of the cost of co-pays and deductibles.

When patients have a serious medical condition, they risk financial ruin. Illness and soaring medical costs are the greatest causes of bankruptcy in the United States, even though four out of five people experiencing medical bankruptcy have health insurance.

Purchasing private insurance is going to be subsidized with taxpayer dollars. It will cost Uncle Sam an estimated half a trillion dollars between 2014 and 2019 to

pay that tab, according to the Congressional Budget Office. The insurance mandate and these subsidies will create corporate welfare on steroids.

What will the insurance companies do with all that money? They'll hold onto as much as they can by denying and restricting payment for care. And they'll use those dollars to weaken regulations meant to protect patients.

When national health care re-

able when we are already spending nearly twice as much per person on care each year as other industrialized nations with universal health systems and much better health outcomes.

The truth is that we can solve our health care crisis. The fastest way to accomplish this is to drop just two words from the Medicare Act — "over 65" — and immediately expand Medicare to every person. That would create a system that's about

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form is fully implemented in 2019, 26 million people will still lack coverage. And health costs will continue to rise because the law lacks proven cost controls.

While the law does include a few positive provisions, it won't stop the deterioration of our health care system. We'll continue to see unnecessary suffering and preventable death. This is unaccept-

health care, not corporate profits. A universal Medicare system would control costs and improve the quality of patient care.

Let's demand Medicare for all now. The longer we wait, the more people, who will suffer and die needlessly.

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