



Relief for Ohioans getting health-care subsidy

Written by: Anne Saker, June 25, 2015

One jubilant phone call after another came into the Connelly house in Amelia on Thursday morning with the news of the 6-3 U.S. Supreme Court decision on Obamacare.

“Yay!” said Cindy Connelly. “I was on the phone with my friends, and we all have subsidies, and we just kept asking, ‘Did you hear? The subsidies passed!’”

The high court’s ruling keeps in place the federal subsidies that help Cindy Connelly, her husband Mike and more than 160,000 other Ohioans pay for health insurance that they purchased through the healthcare.gov marketplace.

The King v. Burwell case challenged the subsidy program in states such as Ohio that did not set up their own insurance exchanges under the Affordable Care Act. Kentucky set up its own marketplace, one of 16 states to do so, called kynect.

Case turned on ‘state’

Thursday’s decision comes almost exactly three years after the Supreme Court ruled as constitutional the Affordable Care Act’s individual mandate, which required Americans to buy health insurance or pay a penalty.

The party that brought the King v. Burwell lawsuit had argued that federal subsidies could not be available by any health-insurance customer outside the states, like Kentucky, with their own exchanges.

The argument centered on the meaning of four words in the health-care law. The court had to decide whether “established by the state” meant only the individual states or also the federal government, which established its own marketplace. If the court had ruled in favor of King, thousands of Ohioans and more than 11 million Americans could have lost their subsidized health insurance within 30 days.

James O’Reilly, a University of Cincinnati law professor, said the foundation of the King v. Burwell lawsuit on those four words, in a law that ran more than 2,000 words, posed a profound threat to Obamacare.

“It’s extremely odd that their view was so narrow that they found in these thousands of pages these words that they believe totally eviscerate the system that from the very outset was going to be dependent on the system of subsidies,” O’Reilly said.

Ruling a ‘victory,’ says Enroll America



Part of the HealthCare.gov website is photographed in Washington on Nov. 29, 2013.

(Photo: Associated Press file/Jon Elswick)

The Ohio director of Enroll America, which was instrumental in enrolling thousands of Ohioans in the health insurance marketplace, expressed relief about the result in *King v. Burwell* in a statement Thursday.

“Today’s decision from the Supreme Court is a victory for the more than 161,000 Ohioans who receive financial help to pay for their coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace,” said the statement from Trey Daly. “In fact, 85 percent of marketplace enrollees in Ohio receive these tax credits, and the average tax credit in Ohio is \$255 per month.”

“These consumers can now be certain that the promise of that coverage remains there for them and that they can get the care they need. Consumers should know that nothing has changed; financial help to pay for their plans will be available. And for those who remain uninsured, they should know that financial help for health insurance is available and here to stay,” Daly said.

Other Ohio health care nonprofits said they are relieved about the decision. Cathy Levine, co-chair of Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage, issued a statement praising the Supreme Court.

“The ruling confirms what we have known all along – the law was designed to provide a tax credit to any American who qualifies, regardless of the type of Marketplace they use,” Levine’s statement said.

“Now that the U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed the legitimacy of the subsidies in the 34 federally-facilitated marketplace states, including Ohio, it’s time for opponents to stop tying up valuable time and resources fighting against affordable health care for working families.”

Uninsured rate has dropped

Jim Schwab, president and chief executive officer of the regional nonprofit Interact for Health, also issued a statement that the subsidies are helping poorer Ohioans receive health coverage.

“The provision of tax subsidies has enabled thousands in our community and nationwide gain access to affordable health care. Interact for Health commends the Supreme Court of the United States for considering the full scope and intent of the Affordable Care Act in their decision.”

Schwab pointed out that since the introduction of the health-care exchanges, the numbers of uninsured people have dropped significantly: In Ohio, 17 percent of people were uninsured in 2013, but only 11 percent were uninsured a year later. In Kentucky, 25 percent were uninsured in 2013, and a year later, the number dropped to 12 percent.

In Amelia, Cindy and Mike Connolly are retired but not quite old enough to enroll in Medicare. They could not afford health insurance without a subsidy, which was a special concern since Mike Connolly experienced some heart problems. Their monthly premium is about \$1,240, and they receive a subsidy of about \$1,000 a month.”

“Without that subsidy, the premium would have taken my entire Social Security paycheck, plus some,” Cindy Connolly said. “I was worried (about *King v. Burwell*) mainly because of my husband. I feel blessed to have it.”