

Court decision offers Democrats and Republicans reasons to turn out to the polls

By David Levinsky Staff writer | Posted: Friday, June 29, 2012 12:00 am

The U.S. Supreme Court may have upheld President Barack Obama's signature legislative accomplishment, but the ruling won't give him an edge in the November election, according to New Jersey political watchers.

"I don't think it'll affect the outcome one way or the other," said Dan Douglas, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. "It'll deepen the debate, and overall it's probably a good thing they're talking about it. But come October, I think the main issue will still be the economy."

Douglas said both sides would use the ruling as a rallying cry, an opinion supported by two county leaders.

Dave Hopkins, a Willingboro resident and leader of the progressive group Grassroots4Change, predicted that the ruling would help his organization recruit new members and build support for the president's re-election.

"We were involved for two years trying to support the health care reform law. We did candlelight vigils and rallies in Trenton and marches on Washington," Hopkins said. "To see it upheld, I think it's huge for both the country and the president."

Southampton resident Bill Haney of the West Jersey Tea Party said he was disappointed by the ruling but predicted it would help energize conservatives to support the likely GOP nominee, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, who has pledged to repeal the health care overhaul.

"I think the idea of Obamacare really galvanized conservatives and became their rallying cry over the last few years," Haney said. "This ruling will provide an even greater impetus for conservatives to get these folks out of office."

Although disappointed, Haney said he agreed with the court's legal reasoning that the mandate on individuals to obtain health insurance was actually a tax on those who don't.

"What bothers me is that (the law) was sold to everyone as a mandate and not a tax," he said. "Well, that's what we're left with, and Congress has a right to overturn it."

Ed Gomez, professor of public policy and administration at Rutgers University in Camden, also said the ruling would not likely affect the election.

"The mandate is going to target a lot of the population in their 20s or 30s, which is an important electoral base," Gomez said. "With that said, I don't think young Democrats are necessarily going to penalize (Obama) for this."

He agreed that Romney would try to use the ruling to energize the Republican base.

"Romney is going to jump all over this in a major way," Gomez said.

In addition to the presidential race, health care has been one of the issues at the center of the 3rd Congressional District contest between Republican incumbent Jon Runyan and Democratic challenger Shelley Adler.

Runyan wants to repeal the Affordable Care Act and replace it with smaller reforms that increase competition among insurers.

Adler, whose late husband, John Adler, broke with House Democrats and voted against the reform law in 2010 when he represented the district in Congress, has said she would have done the same because it does not do enough to address the high costs of health care.

Adler campaign spokesman Michael Muller said her position is unchanged after the court's ruling.

"The Supreme Court has had its say. Now the most important thing is to get control of the rising costs of health care, which is a drain on our economy," Muller said.