

# Marin Independent Journal

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TOP STORY: **AFFORDABLE CARE ACT**

# Ruling celebrated

## Marin health leaders: Court's decision ushers in a new era

By **Richard Halstead**  
Marin Independent Journal

Marin County health care leaders celebrated the Supreme Court decision Thursday upholding the Affordable Care Act, saying the law will expand health insurance coverage to thousands of low-income residents in the county and usher in a new era in health care, one more focused on preventative care.

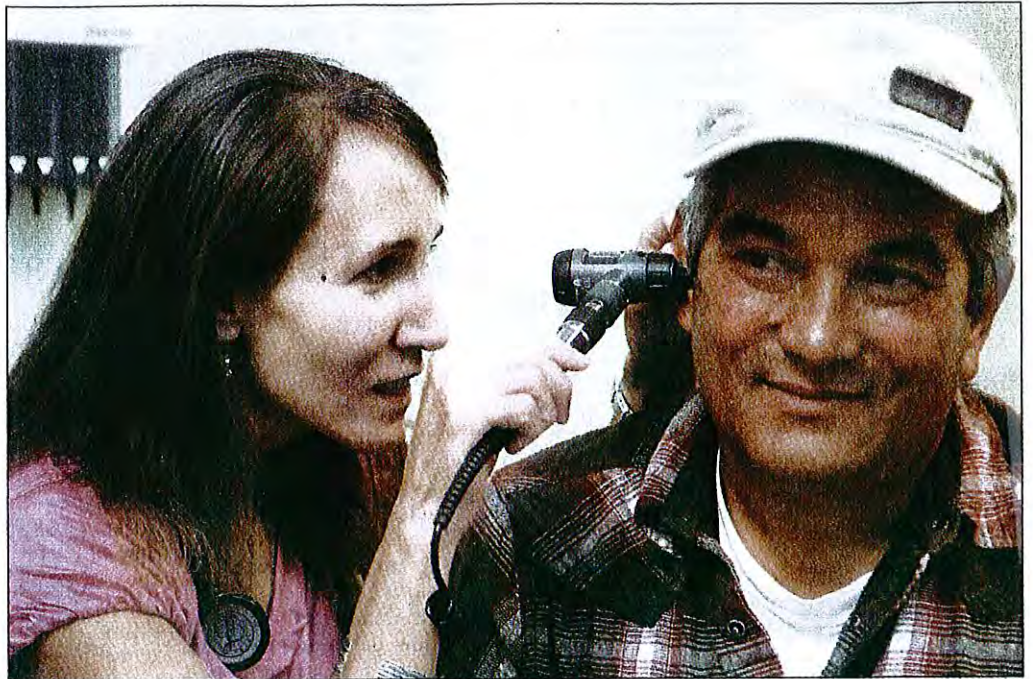
"I think it is a great step forward," said Linda Tavaszi, chief executive of the Marin Community Clinic, a nonprofit that supplies medical care to most of Marin's poor and needy. "We think there are probably between 6,000 and 8,000 people who will be eligible for insurance programs due to the law being upheld that will fall to our care. That is a good thing. These are people who currently aren't getting care."

Dr. Curtis Robinson, executive director of the Marin City Health and Wellness Center, said, "I'm excited to know that a lot of my patients who don't have insurance will now have the opportunity to have health insurance at an affordable price, and I'm also excited that patients will not be denied health insurance because of a pre-existing illness. I believe health care is a right, not a privilege, so I think the courts weighed in on the right side of the law."

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IJ photo/Frankie Frost

Nurse Practitioner Janet Dunnally checks Rito Alvarenga's ears at the Marin Community Clinic on Thursday in San Rafael. The clinic serves low-income patients and will likely see many more since the U.S. Supreme Court decided to uphold the Affordable Care Act.

## What comes next? Coverage for most as states scramble

By **Ricardo Alonso-Zaldívar**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's health care overhaul is on the way to its ultimate jury: the families, doctors, business people and state officials who'll have to grapple with the confusing details while striving to fulfill its promise.

With the Supreme Court hurdle cleared, open enrollment for millions now uninsured is scheduled to begin in just 16 months, in October 2013. Much of the health care industry is ready. People who do have insurance won't have to

worry about the loss of popular new benefits, such as coverage for young adult children or improvements to Medicare's prescription plan.

And, starting in 2014, insurance companies will no longer be able to turn away people with a history of medical problems, or charge them more.

But carrying out the law will be a mad scramble for states, especially Republican-led ones where officials had hoped this day wouldn't come. And the court added a new complication by giving individual states more leeway to turn down the law's expansion of Medicaid, expect-

ed to provide coverage to about 16 million uninsured people.

After the ruling, chances of repealing the entire law appear much slimmer for Republicans, although they will again make it an election rallying cry. However, a targeted repeal strategy aimed at individual components of the law including cost controls, taxes and spending cuts, may still work.

Vicki McCuiston of Driftwood, Texas, who shuttles between two part-time jobs and is uninsured, said the Supreme Court ruling has given her new

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## HEALTH CARE: Marin leaders celebrate court's decision

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Rafael Gomez, executive director of the Coastal Health Alliance in West Marin, said the Affordable Care Act will allow alliance patients who have no health insurance "better access to care outside our walls."

"For many patients we serve, we are their only resource for care," Gomez said. "If there are additional specialty care needs, hospital needs, it is very challenging for them to get the care they need."

It is estimated that under the law more than 400,000 low-income, mostly childless adults in California will be added to the Medi-Cal rolls by 2014.

Marin Community Foundation CEO Thomas Peters said, "I'm on the proverbial cloud nine. I'm thrilled at all levels with this morning's decision."

Peters said that in addition to health coverage for low-income Marin residents, the health care reform act will provide assistance to many Marin seniors. The act will over a period of years close the coverage gap known as the "doughnut hole" in Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage.

Although he was hop-

ing for a different outcome, Dan Roberts, the Tiburon Republican competing with Assemblyman Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, for the 2nd District congressional seat, found a silver lining in the court's ruling.

"I know it will help the conservatives run against the traditional liberal, so-called progressive, tax and spend program, which is going to drive us to insolvency," Roberts said. "It's a winning issue."

Huffman, however, said, "I think it is a win for President Obama and Democrats. It shows that all of these shrill, hysterical arguments we've been hearing from the Tea Party about Obamacare are just bunk."

Esther Wanning, co-chair of Health Care for All-Marin, which advocates government administered health care, said, "I'm relieved with the decision, as the act has some excellent features and will provide some coverage to millions of people. But overall, ACA is a pretty pitiful reform as it maintains a dominant role for the private and profit-making health-insurance industry."

Larry Meredith, director of the Marin County Department of Health and Human Services, said the

new law will do more than just extend health care coverage to the poor.

"It's a dramatic transformation from an illness-based insurance approach to one that is health and wellness based," Meredith said.

The assumption is that as more Americans gain access to primary care physicians, due to medical insurance, fewer will end up in hospital emergency rooms, where medical care is most expensive.

Lee Domanico, Marin General Hospital chief executive officer, said, "With the expansion of the Medicaid program and the mandate for health insurance, that should result in a reduction in our charity care."

Hospitals will, however, see some reductions in revenue due to the Affordable Care Act. The law mandates \$455 billion in spending cuts for Medicare and other federal health programs over the next 10 years.

Domanico said, "The net effect is still positive financially."

The new law also provides an avenue for hospitals to profit by collaborating with doctors to keep their patients healthy. Doctors and hospitals be-

came eligible in January to form "accountable care organizations," or ACOs, that may contract with the government to provide care for a minimum of 5,000 Medicare beneficiaries for at least three years. Organizations that save money while meeting quality of care targets will get to keep some of the savings.

Jennifer Rienks, a Marin Healthcare District board member, said, "Ultimately doctors and hospitals will make money by providing good care, getting people out of the hospital sooner, preventing complications and things like that. Hospitals will move away from just getting paid for volume, which isn't necessarily the best thing for hospitals or the population."

Walter Kopp, a San Anselmo-based health care consultant, said there is wide agreement among health industry insiders that the existing system is "broken and the current incentives for people to get paid more for doing more is not resulting in better outcomes or healthier people."

Kopp said, "It's just costing a lot of money."

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