



Healthcare's winners and losers for 2014

By [Elise Viebeck](#) - 12/30/14

It was a tumultuous year for the healthcare world, with federal officials, an ObamaCare consultant and even a celebrity doctor coming under fire.

The year began with the Obama administration recovering from the debacle at HealthCare.gov to log more than 8 million enrollments and ended with a new ObamaCare controversy as Jonathan Gruber's controversial videos became a viral sensation.

Here's a look at who won and lost in 2014.

Winners

1) Sylvia Burwell

Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Sylvia Matthews Burwell is helping to usher in a new era for ObamaCare.

Less than a year into her tenure, Burwell has managed to reopen HealthCare.gov for enrollments successfully while avoiding fights with Republicans that dragged down her predecessor, Kathleen Sebelius.

Burwell, a former Clinton administration official, has also addressed problems with implementation head on, issuing a public apology after officials discovered that last year's sign-up numbers for ObamaCare were inflated.

2) ObamaCare challengers

The free-market Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) won a huge victory this year when the Supreme Court agreed to take up their challenge to certain tax subsidies under the healthcare reform law in the case *King v. Burwell*.

The plaintiffs are questioning the validity of subsidies issued on ObamaCare's federally run exchanges, arguing the law stipulates that the money can only be distributed on exchanges set up

by the states. If the justices back that position, the entire healthcare law could come tumbling down.

CEI is funding and organizing the case, which was the brainchild of law professor Jonathan H. Adler and the Cato Institute's Michael Cannon.

3) Jeffrey Zients

Former budget official Jeffrey Zients came to the White House's rescue last fall as HealthCare.gov was melting down.

His work leading the "tech surge" helped lay the foundation for a spike in ObamaCare enrollments that pushed the administration past its sign-up projection for 2014.

4) Hobby Lobby

The Green family, which owns the chain of Hobby Lobby craft stores, won a huge victory at the Supreme Court that reshaped ObamaCare's birth control coverage mandate.

The ruling in June allows some for-profit employers to refuse to cover birth control for their workers on religious grounds.

One dissenting justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, said the decision was one of "startling breadth," while conservatives hailed it as a milestone in the battle to protect religious freedom.

The ruling was also a win for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, a specialty law firm that is now mounting a similar challenge to the mandate on behalf of nonprofit groups.

Losers

1) World Health Organization

The World Health Organization was assailed for its failure to quell the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

A series of blistering assessments from around the world indicted the organization's bureaucracy as confused and shortsighted in the face of the largest ever outbreak of Ebola.

Inadequate coordination and resources led the United States to step in as the major force against Ebola in Liberia, where the number of cases appears to be decreasing.

2) Jonathan Gruber

Gruber became ObamaCare's most infamous adviser when his comment that the "stupidity of the American voter" helped the law pass became a touchstone on the right.

Though he apologized repeatedly to lawmakers, Gruber is expected to remain in GOP sights next year as the party launches a fresh assault on the healthcare law.

Outgoing House Oversight Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) subpoenaed Gruber after he refused to give details about his consulting contracts with the federal and state governments, and Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah) — Issa's successor — has raised the possibility of bringing Gruber back to testify before long.

3) Dr. Oz

The television personality described by some as "America's doctor" had a tough year.

Though Dr. Mehmet Oz remains popular for his daytime health show, his claims related to weight loss are coming under increased scrutiny.

That was most apparent at a Senate hearing in June, where Oz tangled with lawmakers who were less than impressed with his approach to medical advice.

A study released this month concluded that about half of Oz's recommendations are based on "no evidence" or contradict medical research.

4) National Rifle Association

Though it managed to delay the process, the National Rifle Association (NRA) ultimately could not stop the confirmation of Dr. Vivek Murthy as surgeon general.

Murthy was nominated in November 2013 and spent a year in limbo as the NRA and other Second Amendment advocates expressed reservations about his support for gun control.

Senate Democrats renewed their push to confirm Murthy after the Ebola crisis and pushed him through at the end of the congressional session in a 51-43 vote.