



## Parties await Supreme Court ruling on health care

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The U.S. Supreme Court could decide as early as Monday whether to strike down President Obama's health care reforms, a decision virtually certain to remake the landscape of the upcoming presidential and congressional elections no matter how the justices rule.

No one knows yet whether the court will overturn the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the \$1 trillion signature achievement of Obama's first term that requires everyone to purchase health insurance or pay a fine.

The court promised to rule this month, and that decision could range from upholding the health care law completely to declaring the entire thing unconstitutional. Legal observers believe the court will at least strike down the provision requiring people to buy insurance, the law's most critical component.

While the nation awaits that decision, both parties are scrambling to devise strategies to capitalize on it politically.

A ruling upholding the reforms would be seen as a victory for Obama, but it would also likely energize Republicans, who have made repealing those reforms a central part of their case to oust Obama.

Republicans have been campaigning to "repeal and replace" the law since it passed Congress in 2010, but they have yet to propose a replacement acceptable to the entire party, particularly the Tea Party-affiliated lawmakers who favor very little government involvement in health care.

If the law is struck down, the public's attention will shift to congressional Republicans and presumptive Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney, who implemented an insurance mandate very similar to Obama's when he was governor of Massachusetts but who says he opposes the federal law.

If the court strikes down just part of the law, Republicans will push to repeal the rest of it, House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said last week. He proposed no specific replacement, though Republicans have discussed pushing through several limited reform bills rather than sweeping legislation to match Obama's.

"I think at the end of the day this backfires for Republicans politically," Democratic strategist Christopher Hahn told The Washington Examiner. "They have no plan, because this has been all about demagoguery."

The court could void just the individual mandate requiring people to buy insurance, which would preserve part of the health care law but kill most of its funding. That could put pressure on Republicans to either kill off provisions of the law that have grown popular -- like allowing children to remain on their parents' insurance until age 26 -- or find new ways to fund them.

"For Republicans, the problem is that the mandate is the only part of the bill that is not popular," Hahn said. "Without it, we would have to figure out a way to pay for the rest of it. Have fun, John Boehner."

Obama and Democrats would have problems of their own should the court strike down part or all of the law. At a minimum it would extend what has been a bumpy stretch for Obama following a jump in the unemployment rate and a failed effort to recall the Republican governor of Wisconsin.

"He's on a losing streak right now," said Michael Tanner of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, "and it would fit the narrative of overreach and that he's been working on this health care plan instead of the economy. You would have this feeling that Obama really blew it."