NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Editorial: Upheld health care law a blessing for the U.S.

NCR Editorial Staff | Jun. 28, 2012

Health care law supporters rally on the sidewalk in March outside the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington. (CNS/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)

The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the most important piece of legislation enacted in past years, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, resisting pressure from conservative ideologues to overturn a law that was passed by a majority of the U.S. House of Representatives, a supermajority in the U.S. Senate, and signed by a duly elected president.

The grounds for the decision were less important than the fact that the court understood it had to take seriously its frequently cited, but often ignored, commitment to judicial restraint.

There were a variety of ways to justify the most contentious provision of the law, the individual mandate. The Commerce Clause was one, the power to levy taxes another. The court ruled the mandate could "be read to do more than impose a tax. This is sufficient to sustain it."

Standing behind any particular constitutional provision was the recognition that Congress and the president have the obligation to "promote the general welfare" and that such general welfare is not promoted by a system that left almost 50 million Americans without affordable access to health care.

Most Americans do not share the tea party's hostility to federal government programs that bind us together. Americans love Medicare.

We all appreciate the free market, but we also think some things, like health decisions, should not be tied to anyone's ability to pay for them. It is, after all, against the law for an emergency room to decline treatment to a person who cannot pay.

In reaching its decision, the high court did nothing more than recognize what we all know: Of course, the government is involved in health care, that Congress has the right to regulate it, and of course the broken system needs to be fixed.

There is no doubt how the U.S. Catholic bishops should respond. Although they opposed the law initially, believing its anti-abortion provisions were insufficient, they have never once called for the law's repeal.

Court rulings since the Affordable Care Act was passed have said the law, on its face, does not provide for taxpayer-funded abortions. Yes, the U.S. bishops' conference should continue to press for a resolution on the federal mandate requiring coverage of contraceptives in health care plans that too narrowly outlines the definition of a religious employer.

But that issue cannot blind the bishops, or any Catholics, to the blessings the act will bring. The U.S. bishops have supported universal health care for decades. They should not -- they cannot -- back away now.

The U.S. bishops' own teaching document "Faithful Citizenship" rightfully points out: "A lack of health care [is] a serious moral issue that challenges our consciences and require[s] us to act."

The goal of universal and affordable health care has been one of the most frustratingly elusive policy objectives of the Catholic bishops and others committed to social justice for decades.

Harry Truman tried. Lyndon Johnson tried. Richard Nixon tried. Bill Clinton tried. Only Barack Obama got a bill through Congress and signed it.

However complicated the intricate policy aspects of the Affordable Care Act, however confusing the actuarial tables, however conflicting the legal principles at stake, the moral issue is as clear as day: Every industrialized country in the world has found a better fix to the issue of health care than has the U.S.

Only the U.S. is so beholden to powerful, entrenched corporate interests that we have failed to achieve universal access to health care. It is time for the nation to find the political will to defend the principles that defined the Affordable Care Act.

Affordable care for all. Access for all. Lower costs for all. That is the recipe for a decent society and any continued obstruction is properly called indecent.

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-31 02:49*): http://www.ncronline.org/news/politics/editorial-upheld-health-care-law-blessing-us