The Supreme Court today upheld the centerpiece of President Obama’s Affordable Care Act, ruling that the individual mandate is constitutional as a tax.

The 5-4 decision allows the country’s historic healthcare overhaul to move forward and is consider a major victory for Obama as he heads into a summer of what will be heated re-election campaign.

The decision ensures that Rhode Island will be able to move forward with its health benefits exchanges and will allow all Americans to have access to comprehensive health coverage. However, the Supreme Court also decided that states will not remove existing Medicaid funding if states choose not to participate.

Lt. Governor Elizabeth Roberts released the following statement:

“I’m extremely pleased that the Supreme Court upheld the Affordable Care Act in its entirety,” she said. “Governor Chafee and I are steadfast in our commitment to forge ahead with reforms to improve access to and affordability of quality health coverage for all Rhode Islanders. That decision has put us ahead of the country in our focus to establish the health benefits exchange and implement other reforms, earning Rhode Island national recognition for our progress and collaboration.

“It has also prepared us for the federal requirements and deadlines ahead. Our priorities include a focus on expanding access to affordable care; supporting innovations in the way we pay for and deliver care; and building on our primary care infrastructure and continuing to develop a home and community-based care workforce.”

Governor Chafee released the following statement:

“I have fully committed to ensuring Rhode Island is a national leader in implementing health reform whatever the Supreme Court decision, and this just reinforces that commitment it is an economic imperative that we address the problem of uninsured Rhode Islanders and rising healthcare costs. I’m confident of the clear path forward that we have marked to achieve universal coverage for Rhode Islanders, and now we can get back to that important work with this decision behind us.

“This ruling also will help to bend the health coverage cost curve for Rhode Island small businesses and their employees. It will ensure the continuation of provisions already in effect—including the small business tax credit on employee premiums paid that can save small businesses up to 35% per year. We are energized by this decision and will work with Rhode Island’s business community to continue to implement health reform in our state.”

Congressman James Langevin issued the following statement:

“Today’s Supreme Court decision affirms the efforts of so many who have fought hard to ensure all Americans have access to a doctor when they’re sick, control rising health costs and adapt our system of care to focus on early detection and prevention.

“One of the driving motivations behind my running for Congress in the first place was the belief that everyone should have access to the same high quality care that has allowed me to overcome significant health challenges in my life. This ruling represents an important victory for tens of millions of Americans without insurance, millions more
struggling to afford it, and for our economy, which cannot continue to withstand the costs of our current system’s inefficiencies.

“It is a victory for individuals with pre-existing conditions, who, under the Affordable Care Act, can no longer be denied coverage; for those with chronic illness who can stop worrying about yearly and lifetime coverage limits; for young people who can still remain under parents’ insurance until age 26; for seniors who are already experiencing prescription savings from our closing the donut hole; and for our Medicare system, which will see costs reduced by $500 million by rewarding quality of care instead of quantity.

“I also continue to take pride in the health insurance exchanges that will force insurance companies to offer coverage in a competitive and transparent way, and in the medical-loss ratio mandating that insurers spend 85 percent of premiums on health care, rather than CEO salaries, profits for shareholders and advertisements.

“Moving forward, I remain dedicated to ensuring that the Affordable Care Act is implemented fairly, correctly and responsibly, and to continuing my long-standing commitment to providing everyone with quality, affordable health care.”

Senator Sheldon Whitehouse released the following statement:

“For the many Rhode Islanders I’ve heard from who are counting on the reforms in the Affordable Care Act to help them gain access to vital health services, the Supreme Court today sent a clear message that those reforms will go forward. By upholding the law, the Court validated the principle that all Americans should have access to health care. Seniors will continue receiving discounts on prescription drugs, children can continue to stay on their parents’ health insurance policy after college, and individuals suffering from chronic illness won’t need to worry about running into lifetime caps.

“Now that these Constitutional questions are behind us, I look forward to working with the Administration to continue implementing the many important provisions of the health care law that will lower costs and improve care for years to come.”

Congressman David Cicilline released the following statement:

“Access to affordable health care is a necessity for all Americans, and I am proud that President Obama’s historic health care reform law, which I strongly support, has been upheld by the Supreme Court – this decision ensures that nearly 15,000 Rhode Island seniors will continue to save on their prescription drug costs, more than 7,500 young adults in our state will be able to stay on their parents’ plans until they are 26, and insurance companies will not be able to deny coverage to as many as 54,000 Rhode Island children who live with pre-existing conditions.

“Today, I’m especially mindful of folks like Rita Manley, a senior living in Central Falls who was recently diagnosed with cancer. This decision means that millions of people like Rita, if they get sick, will not be denied coverage because of a pre-existing condition.

“Now that our nation’s highest court has settled this debate, we should all work together to ensure that that this law is implemented so that it provides real benefits for American families.”

UPDATE: 12:00pm

Eli Y. Adashi, professor of obstetrics and gynecology and former dean of medicine at Brown University's Alpert Medical School, had this reaction to the ruling by the Supreme Court.
The nail biting is over. The Affordable Care Act has been upheld thereby assuring its continued implementation. Rhode Island and other states can now finally move forward without concern that that they might be second-guessed. Imperfect as the Affordable Care Act may be, it is a huge step in the right direction, not to mention a remedy of grave social injustice. Bending the cost curve will fall to the next president(s) to tackle whoever that may be. Any other outcome would have set health care in United States back on an uncertain course. President Obama can and should be proud with this his signature legislative achievement.”

Health economist Judith Bentkover, an adjunct professor of health services, policy and practice and academic director of Brown University’s new masters program in health care leadership offered the following statement:

“I’m delighted that the mandate survived. Now we’re really going to be on our way to insuring all of our citizens, and containing costs and achieving the triple aim which is defined as patients experiencing a high quality of care, the population becoming healthier, and costs being contained. I think this will help the markets work more efficiently. Now people will not be forced to put off necessary care. They will have the insurance to get the care they need. They’ll get preventive care so they won’t end up in high-cost inefficient emergency rooms.

“In Rhode Island we’re leading the way with our health care exchange. The 16 percent of Rhode Island’s non-elderly population who lacked health insurance will be reduced in number, not totally eliminated. Also, 20 percent of all private employment in Rhode Island is in health and social services. This mandate now is going to bring more people into the system and increase the demand for health care workers which will help the Rhode Island economy.”

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island issued the following statement:

"Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI) has a longstanding belief that all Rhode Islanders should have access to high quality, affordable healthcare coverage. Today’s Supreme Court decision does not change our commitment to help moderate the long-term cost of healthcare and health insurance premiums by transforming the delivery system in Rhode Island. Unlike other states who have not aggressively implemented changes over the last few years, we believe that Rhode Island has made great strides moving forward on healthcare reform, but there is still a lot of progress to be made.

"While health insurance reform is important, equally important are efforts to improve quality of care and reform the way providers are paid for healthcare services. BCBSRI is very supportive of other efforts in the state, such as the major health planning initiative designed to assess the state’s current infrastructure and short- and long-term healthcare needs, in order to address the costs that drive premium increases. We have also implemented our own innovative contracts with physicians and hospitals to shift the way we pay for services so that payment is based on quality rather than volume and to coordinate care through patient centered medical home programs. We look forward to our continued work to help improve the quality of life of our customers and the people of Rhode Island by improving their."

Congressional candidate Anthony Gemma issued the following statement:

"All Rhode Islanders, and indeed all Americans, should enthusiastically welcome today’s Supreme Court ruling that upholds the Affordable Health Care Act. I applaud the court for its courage and vision.

"From our state’s senior citizens, whose prescription drug costs will continue to be held down, to nearly 60,000 of our children, who will not be denied access to health care due to pre-existing conditions, to young adults who can stay on their parents’ health plans until age 26, every demographic group in Rhode Island benefits from this landmark decision."
As the founder of the Gloria Gemma Breast Cancer Resource Foundation, I am thrilled by the ruling’s preservation of the Act’s elimination of the pre-existing condition loophole. As a result, Rhode Islanders diagnosed with cancer will have full access to affordable health care. Lives will be saved.

"Rhode Islanders should take pride in the fact that our state stands as a national health care leader in the areas of affordability, accessibility, quality, and rate review. We have combined the best practices from other states with our own best ideas, and this process and its results should and can be a model for our nation.

"As a member of Congress I shall share the Rhode Island model with the entire House. And I vow to fight Republican efforts to cut preventive programs that beyond all doubt save tens of thousands of lives nationally. At the Gloria Gemma Breast Cancer Resource Foundation, every day I see how preventive programs save Rhode Island lives and, in the process, lower health care costs.

"The fight for affordable, accessible health care for all Americans is far from over. If elected, I shall lead the fight in the United States House of Representatives."