

[By Erin Kelly](#)

The Supreme Court's ruling to uphold the Affordable Care Act ensures that Vermont will continue to receive tens of millions of federal dollars to advance its own health care reform efforts, members of the Vermont congressional delegation said Thursday.

Vermont already has received about \$40 million to implement reforms as the state moves toward a universal, single-payer health care system. The state passed a law last year setting Vermont on a course for a single-payer system, but it depends heavily on federal funding and a federal waiver.

"This ruling puts wind at our back," said Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt. "This is critical financing assistance that we get through the Affordable Care Act. If the court had struck down the law, it would have made our efforts in Vermont much more difficult."

Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said the ruling represented "a good day for Vermont."

"I voted for the Affordable Care Act, but my very strong hope is that Vermont will do better and that we will lead the nation in providing comprehensive health care to every man, woman and child," Sanders said.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said the ruling clears the way for Vermont to go to a single-payer health care system for all the state's residents. The state already provides health care to all low-income children through the "Dr. Dynasaur" program.

"Vermont has always been far ahead of the county as a whole," Leahy said. "That's one of the reasons why Vermont has consistently been ranked as one of the healthiest states in the nation. All the kids in Vermont are covered on basic medical care 'til they're 18, and we have a lot of preventative care. In the long run, it's saved everybody a lot of money. Now people who come to Vermont from other states will have had the advantage of having good health care (because

of the federal law)."

According to statistics compiled by Leahy's office, more than 5,000 young adults under the age of 26 have gained health insurance coverage under their parents' plans as a result of the Affordable Care Act. The law allows young adults without job-based health insurance to stay on their parents' plans.

The law also has helped older Vermonters, Leahy said. More than 7,000 Medicare recipients have received a \$250 rebate to help them pay for prescription drugs since the bill became law in 2010. More than 80,000 Vermont Medicare recipients have received free preventive services or annual checkups.

In addition, about 215,000 Vermonters with cancer and chronic diseases have been freed of having to worry about lifetime limits on their insurance coverage, Leahy said.

The almost \$40 million in federal dollars that Vermont has already received included almost \$11 million to help create community health centers in medically under-served areas and expand the preventive and primary care services they provide. There are 57 centers in Vermont.

The state also received about \$18 million to establish health care exchanges to bring together private insurers and a federal insurance program with the goal of creating competition to benefit consumers.

Republican leaders in the U.S. House said after Thursday's ruling that they will hold a vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act - which they call "Obamacare" - on July 11. The Republican-led chamber already voted to repeal the law early last year. But GOP efforts stalled in the Democratic-led Senate. Next month's vote is little more than political theater, members of the Vermont delegation said.

Still, Welch said he thinks the vote is dangerous because it continues the political polarization over the issue.

"At some point, the politicians actually have to get pragmatic and do something other than just fanning the flames for their base," the congressman said. "There are legitimate health care issues we could be tackling other than going back to fight a battle that has been fought and resolved."