

GOP senators pledge help if court bars health law subsidies

March 2 2015, by Alan Fram



In this photo taken Feb. 19, 2015, Ariana Jimenez is seen in her home in Aurora, Ill. Jimenez, 23, works part time as a nursing assistant at a community health center. The Supreme Court will hear arguments next week over whether millions of people covered by the nation's health care law can legally continue to get financial help to pay for their insurance. If the court says no, millions of consumers across more than 30 states could lose federal subsidies for their premiums. (AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh)

Three leading Republican senators are promising to help millions of people who may lose federal health insurance subsidies if the Supreme Court invalidates a pillar of President Barack Obama's health care law.

But in a Washington Post opinion article posted online late Sunday, GOP Sens. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, John Barrasso of Wyoming and Orrin Hatch of Utah provide no detail on how much assistance they would propose, its duration or how they would pay for it. Nor do they address how they would overcome GOP divisions or Democratic opposition to weakening the law.

The article appeared days before Wednesday's oral arguments in a case brought by conservatives and Republicans that could upend the functioning of the 2010 [health care law](#) by invalidating the subsidies that help millions afford required health coverage. A decision is expected in June.

The senators' article is the latest political salvo that seems aimed as much at the court's nine justices as at the public. Last week, Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell said nullifying the subsidies would cause "massive damage to our [health care](#) system."

Congressional Republicans unanimously opposed the law's creation and have long worked on plans to weaken and replace it. They have not united behind a specific proposal.

In their column, the three senators acknowledge that if their side prevails in court, 6 million Americans could lose subsidies and many would no longer afford coverage. They call the case "an opportunity" to reshape the law and say they "have a plan to protect these people and create a bridge away from" the statute.

"First and most important, we would provide financial assistance to help Americans keep the coverage they picked for a transitional period," they wrote.



In this photo taken Feb. 24, 2015, Kimberly Davis talks about the medications she now takes to slow the progression of her multiple sclerosis, at her home in Jackson, Miss. The Supreme Court will hear arguments next week over whether millions of people covered by the nation's health care law can legally continue to get financial help to pay for their insurance. If the court says no, millions of consumers across more than 30 states could lose federal subsidies for their premiums. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

Without saying how, they wrote that they would also give states more flexibility to create their own [health insurance](#) marketplaces. And they blame the [health](#) law for problems like forcing many Americans to surrender their previous insurance and doctors.

"People do not deserve further disruption from the law," they wrote.

Democrats say the law has forced insurers to cover more benefits and cite figures showing a dramatic reduction in the number of uninsured Americans.

Plaintiffs in the case say the Obama administration has unlawfully given federal tax credits to Americans who have bought [health coverage](#) from federal insurance marketplaces serving 37 states, which are mostly run by Republicans. They say the [law](#) as written only permits that aid in the 13 states running their own marketplaces.

Democrats say people in all states qualify for assistance.

Alexander chairs the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee, Hatch heads the Senate Finance Committee and Barrasso is in the Senate Republican leadership.

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