

# Congressman, Candidates Comment on Court's Ruling

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Supreme Court ruled Monday that for-profit companies can claim a religious exemption to the Obamacare requirement that they provide health insurance coverage for contraceptives, NBC News has reported.

For-profit corporations — including Conestoga Wood of Pennsylvania, owned by a family of Mennonite Christians, and Hobby Lobby, a family-owned chain of arts and crafts stores founded on Biblical principles — had challenged a provision of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) that requires companies with more than 50 employees to cover preventive care services, which include such contraceptives as morning-after pills, diaphragms and IUDs.

The Obama administration had argued that the freedom of religion applied to the company owners individually, not to the for-profit corporations they operate.

Rep. Leonard Lance (R-7th) applauded the Supreme Court decision.

"As Thomas Jefferson observed in 1809: 'No provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience.' The President's health care law is a dramatic overreach into the personal freedoms and liberties that millions of Americans hold dear. Today's U.S. Supreme Court decision is a welcome victory for religious freedom and I am pleased that the Court has protected this right and also protected the thousands of jobs threatened by the health care law's onerous mandate."

His Democratic opponent in the November General Election, Clinton Mayor Janice Kovach, said the ruling "will allow employers to deny women access to birth control that was recently given to them by means of the Affordable Care Act. *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby's* 5-4 decision, as Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg stated, 'denies legions of women who do not hold their employers' beliefs access to contraceptive coverage.'"

"Today's decision by the Supreme Court is a frightening loss for the future of women and their health care. SCOTUS (Supreme Court of The United States) has essentially given these corporations the authority to play doctor and blindly determine the fate of the health of their female employees. SCOTUS's action ultimately diminishes the power of the Affordable Care Act at the expense of the women of our nation.

"As the former director of the New Jersey Division on Women, I know that we cannot afford to polarize is-

ues that are so crucial to the well-being of our citizens. To mask this attack against the existing health care laws and women as a crusade in protecting 'religious freedom' is equally as wrong as corporation using their ambiguous moral protests as an excuse for refusal to covering contraception," Ms. Kovach said. "Women should be allowed to make their own decisions regarding their health care, and giving corporations the agency to make these decisions for them is intrusive and an overreach into the lives of millions of American women. To say I am seriously disappointed by the Supreme Court's decision is an understatement."

Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-15th, Mercer), the Democratic candidate in the 12th Congressional District said: "Today's Supreme Court ruling sets an extremely dangerous precedent for people throughout the country. The Court has not only enabled a scenario in which women can be denied contraceptive coverage the ACA (Affordable Care Act) would secure based on their employers' religious views. They've also opened the door for employers to contest coverage for medication, blood transfusions and any number of other health care initiatives.

"Frankly, I am shocked and appalled that the Supreme Court would choose to open the door to chaos and confusion around employee health care in the United States. As a woman of strong faith, I fully recognize the importance of religious convictions in an individual's life, but today's decision will prove to be devastating to people everywhere and is simply wrong."

Planned Parenthood released an official statement saying, "It's unbelievable that in 2014, we're still fighting about whether women should have access to birth control. To the majority of American's, birth control is not a controversial issue. Birth control is basic healthcare — and it's only a 'social issue' if you've never had to pay for it."

Republican United States Senate candidate from New Jersey Jeff Bell praised the U.S. Supreme Court decision. "This is a great assurance to the American people and to New Jerseyans that their religious freedoms will not be stripped away by government mandates forcing people to pay for or buy into practices that they believe violates their religious conviction. I was also happy to see that the majority opinion was written by New Jersey native Justice Samuel Alito."



# Peyton's Peek at the Week In Politics

By Paul Peyton of The Leader/Times

## Christie Signs Budget; Vetoes Tax Hikes, Cuts State Pensions

Governor Chris Christie on Monday signed a new, \$32.5-billion state budget, vetoing a package of tax hikes, as promised, passed by the Democratically-controlled State Legislature and cutting payments to the public-worker pension system in an effort to cover a revenue shortfall.

Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D-3rd, Gloucester) said Democrats "presented a budget to the governor that met our obligations while not placing the burden on working people...The governor, however, has decided to continue protecting the state's wealthiest at the expense of the middle class and working poor. His belief in punishing the middle class is one of the reasons New Jersey's economy continues to lag behind that of our neighbors and the nation, while working people suffer the brunt of the consequences."

Assembly Deputy Republican Leader Anthony M. Bucco (R-25th, Randolph), who is a member of the budget committee said: "The Democrats knew the governor would use his red pen on this budget and he didn't disappoint. It's unfortunate that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle chose to revert back to what they do best — raise taxes and spend more. New Jersey couldn't afford those policies before Governor Christie and thankfully we won't have to deal with them now. In this budget, the governor funds the state's core programs without increasing taxes. Fortunately, Governor Christie knows our residents and businesses are taxed enough."

## Judge Rules In Favor of Christie In Cutting State Pensions

State Superior Court Judge Mary Jacobson ruled last week that Governor Chris Christie could use his emergency powers to cut out \$887 million from a payment required by law for public workers' pension funds in the Fiscal Year 2015 state budget, nj.com reported.

More than a dozen public-worker unions went to court to challenge the Governor's budget. The judge ruled that Gov. Christie can cut this year's pension contribution from \$1.58 billion to \$696 million to avert a financial emergency as the administration only had days to find \$1 billion to balance the state's \$33-billion budget as required by the state constitution.

The judge said the administration demonstrated a financial did exist where if the full pension payment could not be made before June 3 without cutting programs that serve the disabled and senior citizens, or hospitals and higher-education scholarships, according to the nj.com report.

Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D-Gloucester) called it a disappointment.

The Democratic-controlled Legislature passed a new budget Thursday that funds pension payment of \$2.25 billion through tax increases on businesses and residents, but Gov. Christie had pledged to veto any tax hikes,

which reduced that pension payment to \$681 million before he signed the budget.

## Christie Comments On Ruling on Pension Cut

Governor Chris Christie released the following statement in response to a ruling from state Superior Court Judge Mary Jacobson, on a lawsuit by employee unions, that he had the authority to reduce money set aside in the Fiscal Year 2015 state budget for public employee pensions:

"This was one of the hard choices the people of New Jersey expect me to make, and I am pleased the court recognized the necessity and urgency of this decision so that we can provide key funding for our schools, our colleges, our hospitals and other essential services. For our state's families who are already overburdened by high taxes, raising taxes even further would not solve a problem created by decades of neglect and irresponsibility."

## Supreme Court: Obama Lacked Authority to Make Appointments

President Barack Obama lacked the authority to make recess appointments to the National Labor Relations Board in January 2012 because he acted when the Senate was holding pro forma sessions, the U.S. Supreme Court last week, according to a *Washington Post* report.

In a unanimous judgment, the court affirmed a ruling of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit that NLRB board lacked a quorum because three of its five members were improperly appointed by the President.

The Supreme Court voted 5-4 on questions about the power of President Obama and future presidents to make recess appointments to positions that normally require the advice and consent of the Senate, *The Post* reported.

## Lance: High Court's Decision A 'Victory For The Constitution'

Rep. Leonard Lance (R-7th) issued the following statement after the United States Supreme Court ruled that President Barack Obama exceeded his authority in appointing three National Labor Relations Board members in January 2012 while the U.S. Senate was in a pro forma session.

"Today's Supreme Court decision is a victory for the Constitution and the rule of law in this country. By invalidating the President's appointments to the National Labor Relations Board, the Court has reaffirmed unanimously that we are a nation of three co-equal branches of government with a system of checks and balances that cannot be subject to continued executive abuse."

Following the President's action in 2012, Rep. Lance co-sponsored H. Res. 509, a measure of disapproval of the President exercising his recess appointment power when the Congress was in fact in session. The resolution expressed the sense of the House of Representatives that those appointments were made in violation of the Constitution, a position the Congressman said was affirmed by the Supreme Court ruling.

# Westfield Woman Drowns While Snorkeling in Hawaii

By SARAH MCGRAIL  
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — A Westfield mother of two has drowned in a tragic accident during a family vacation in Hawaii. Alexa DiGiorgio, 42, died while snorkeling with her husband, Marc, and their two young daughters.

Mr. DiGiorgio was assisting his sister, who was snorkeling for the first time, and lost sight of his wife.

The first they knew of Mrs. DiGiorgio having any difficulty was when lifeguards pulled her from the water and tried to revive her on the beach.

"Alexa and I had snorkeled many times together before we had children. I was helping my sister and watching the children but, when we got back to the beach, I realized I couldn't see Alexa so I went back into the water to look for her. Then I heard the sirens..." Mr. DiGiorgio told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

Mrs. DiGiorgio was pulled from the waters of Hanauma Bay just before 10 a.m. on Sunday, June 22, and was taken to Oahu Hospital, where she died later that day.

Dr. Christopher Happy, Honolulu's chief medical examiner, told *The Leader/Times* Mrs. DiGiorgio had been a victim of accidental drowning. "There are ocean waters around Hawaii and they can be tricky for people who are not familiar with them.

We even have a fair number of natives who find themselves in trouble," Dr. Happy said.

Mrs. DiGiorgio, who came to the United States with her family from the Philippines in 1987, had been a partner at Deloitte & Touche since 2010.

"She was driven to succeed professionally," Mr. DiGiorgio said. "But she was also a wonderful mother who doted on her children. We never went anywhere without the children."

The couple, who would have celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary in November, met on a blind date arranged by a mutual friend. They also owned an IHOP in Neptune which is managed by Mr. DiGiorgio.

Mr. DiGiorgio paid tribute to his parents-in-law, Romulo and Emilia Virata, for their support at such a difficult time.

Mrs. DiGiorgio's body was brought back to Westfield on Friday.

She is survived by her husband; daughters, Christina and Amanda, ages 9 and 4; her parents, Emilia and Romulo Virata; a brother, Jedeon Virata, and a sister, Judith V. Domondon.

A funeral mass was held yesterday, Wednesday, July 2 at St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church in Cranford, with burial at Fairview Cemetery in Westfield.



Alexa DiGiorgio

# Holt Proposals to End Warrantless Surveillance Pass

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. House of Representatives has passed three proposals by U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (D-12th) to help end the warrantless surveillance of innocent Americans. The amendments, offered by Rep. Holt and several other House members, were attached to the annual Department of Defense Appropriations Act, H.R. 4870, which passed the House on a 340-73 vote on June 20th.

One of Rep. Holt's amendments would set aside \$2 million to expand the Intelligence Community Whistleblowing and Source Protection Directorate, which provides employees of the National Security Agency (NSA), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and other intelligence agencies with a safe, legal, and secure way to report abusive or unlawful practices. The amendment passed unanimously.

"Currently, this office is literally a one-man operation," Rep. Holt said. "Given the fact that there are tens of thousands of federal employees and contractors who work for intelligence community elements, it is simply not realistic to expect one person to be able to effectively receive and investigate large numbers of valid complaints from conscientious internal whistleblowers through the work of one investigator, no matter how talented. Moreover, because intelligence agencies are so secretive, Congress cannot perform effective oversight without the help of such whistleblowers. This amendment will help ensure that all employees and contractors in the IC know where and how they should lawfully report po-

tential incidents of waste, fraud, abuse, criminal conduct or whistleblower retaliation."

A second amendment would prohibit funds from being used to subvert or interfere with the integrity of a cryptographic standard proposed, developed, or adopted by National Institute of Standards and Technology.

The third amendment, co-sponsored by Rep. Holt, would prohibit any warrantless search of massive government databases that contain records of the e-mails and phone calls of millions of innocent U.S. citizens. The amendment would also prohibit the NSA and Central Intelligence Agency from compelling companies to install "backdoors" — such as vulnerable software or hardware — into their products.

The legislation passed by a veto-proof bipartisan majority by a vote of 293 to 123.

"This amendment makes a loud and clear point: It's time to stop treating Americans as suspects first and citizens second," Rep. Holt said.

## Fanwood TV Off Air

FANWOOD — Due to technical issues, Fanwood TV was temporarily off the air on both the Verizon and FIOS services as of Tuesday at 7 a.m., according to an e-mail sent by the borough.

"The issues are being addressed but there is no time estimate now on when it may be back in service," the borough said. "In the meantime, coverage of Fanwood events is still available on the video page of the borough's website."

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