***National Federation of Independent Business*** **v. *Sebelius***

000 U. S. 000, 132 S. Ct. 2566, 183 L. Ed. 2d 450 (2012)

In 2010 President Obama signed into law the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Challenges arose immediately to the constitutional validity of two key provisions of the legislation: the individual mandate, which requires individuals to purchase a health insurance policy providing a minimum level of coverage; and the Medicaid expansion, which gives funds to the States on the condition that they provide specified health care to all citizens whose income falls below a certain threshold. The United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit struck down the mandate but left the other provision of the law in tact. While the Court’s decision concerned several related matters, the excerpts below concern mainly those two provisions. [Mandate] Majority: Roberts, Breyer, Ginsburg, Kagan, Sotomayor; Dissenting: Alito, Kennedy, Scalia, Thomas. [Medicaid] Majority: Roberts, Alito, Breyer, Kagan, Kennedy, Scalia, Thomas. Dissenting: Ginsburg, Sotomayor.

**Chief Justice Roberts announced the judgment of the Court and delivered the opinion of the Court with respect to Parts I, II, and III–C, an opinion with respect to Part IV, in which Justice Breyer and Justice Kagan join, and an opinion with respect to Parts III–A, III–B, and III–D.**

Today we resolve constitutional challenges to two provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010: the individual mandate, which requires individuals to purchase a health insurance policy providing a minimum level of coverage; and the Medicaid expansion, which gives funds to the States on the condition that they provide specified health care to all citizens whose income falls below a certain threshold. We do not consider whether the Act embodies sound policies. That judgment is entrusted to the Nation’s elected leaders. We ask only whether Congress has the power under the Constitution to enact the challenged provisions. …

The Federal Government “is acknowledged by all to be one of enumerated powers.”… If no enumerated power authorizes Congress to pass a certain law, that law may not be enacted, even if it would not violate any of the express prohibitions in the Bill of Rights or elsewhere in the Constitution. …

The same does not apply to the States, because the Constitution is not the source of their power. The Constitution may restrict state governments…. But where such prohibitions do not apply, state governments do not need constitutional authorization to act. The States thus can and do perform many of the vital functions of modern government…even though the Constitution’s text does not authorize any government to do so. Our cases refer to this general power of governing, possessed by the States but not by the Federal Government, as the “police power.” …

This case concerns two powers that the Constitution does grant the Federal Government, but which must be read carefully to avoid creating a general federal authority akin to the police power. The Constitution authorizes Congress to “regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes.” Our precedents read that to mean that Congress may regulate “the channels of interstate commerce,” “persons or things in interstate commerce,” and “those activities that substantially affect interstate commerce.” The power over activities that substantially affect interstate commerce can be expansive. …

Congress may also “lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States.” Put simply, Congress may tax and spend. This grant gives the Federal Government considerable influence even in areas where it cannot directly regulate. The Federal Government may enact a tax on an activity that it cannot authorize, forbid, or otherwise control. And in exercising its spending power, Congress may offer funds to the States, and may condition those offers on compliance with specified conditions. These offers may well induce the States to adopt policies that the Federal Government itself could not impose. …

The reach of the Federal Government’s enumerated powers is broader still because the Constitution authorizes Congress to “make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers.” We have long read this provision to give Congress great latitude in exercising its powers….

Our permissive reading of these powers is explained in part by a general reticence to invalidate the acts of the Nation’s elected leaders. … Members of this Court are vested with the authority to interpret the law; we possess neither the expertise nor the prerogative to make policy judgments. Those decisions are entrusted to our Nation’s elected leaders, who can be thrown out of office if the people disagree with them. It is not our job to protect the people from the consequences of their political choices. …

I. [Omitted]

II.

Before turning to the merits, we need to be sure we have the authority to do so. The Anti-Injunction Act provides that “no suit for the purpose of restraining the assessment or collection of any tax shall be maintained in any court by any person, whether or not such person is the person against whom such tax was assessed.” … This statute protects the Government’s ability to collect a consistent stream of revenue, by barring litigation to enjoin or otherwise obstruct the collection of taxes. Because of the Anti-Injunction Act, taxes can ordinarily be challenged only after they are paid, by suing for a refund. [The Chief Justice concludes that the mandate is a penalty, not a tax, so the Anti-Injunction Act does not apply.]

III.

The Government advances two theories for the proposition that Congress had constitutional authority to enact the individual mandate. First, the Government argues that Congress had the power to enact the mandate under the Commerce Clause. Under that theory, Congress may order individuals to buy health insurance because the failure to do so affects interstate commerce, and could undercut the Affordable Care Act’s other reforms. Second, the Government argues that if the commerce power does not support the mandate, we should nonetheless uphold it as an exercise of Congress’s power to tax. According to the Government, even if Congress lacks the power to direct individuals to buy insurance, the only effect of the individual mandate is to raise taxes on those who do not do so, and thus the law may be upheld as a tax.

The Government’s first argument is that the individual mandate is a valid exercise of Congress’s power under the Commerce Clause and the Necessary and Proper Clause. According to the Government, the health care market is characterized by a significant cost-shifting problem. Everyone will eventually need health care at a time and to an extent they cannot predict, but if they do not have insurance, they often will not be able to pay for it. Because state and federal laws nonetheless require hospitals to provide a certain degree of care to individuals without regard to their ability to pay, hospitals end up receiving compensation for only a portion of the services they provide. To recoup the losses, hospitals pass on the cost to insurers through higher rates, and insurers, in turn, pass on the cost to policy holders in the form of higher premiums….

By requiring that individuals purchase health insurance, the mandate prevents cost-shifting by those who would otherwise go without it. In addition, the mandate forces into the insurance risk pool more healthy individuals, whose premiums on average will be higher than their health care expenses. This allows insurers to subsidize the costs of covering the unhealthy individuals the reforms require them to accept. The Government claims that Congress has power under the Commerce and Necessary and Proper Clauses to enact this solution.

The Government contends that the individual mandate is within Congress’s power because the failure to purchase insurance “has a substantial and deleterious effect on interstate commerce” by creating the cost-shifting problem. The path of our Commerce Clause decisions has not always run smooth, but it is now well established that Congress has broad authority under the Clause. …

As expansive as our cases construing the scope of the commerce power have been, they all have one thing in common: They uniformly describe the power as reaching “activity.” …

The individual mandate, however, does not regulate existing commercial activity. It instead compels individuals to become active in commerce by purchasing a product, on the ground that their failure to do so affects interstate commerce. Construing the Commerce Clause to permit Congress to regulate individuals precisely because they are doing nothing would open a new and potentially vast domain to congressional authority. Every day individuals do not do an infinite number of things. In some cases they decide not to do something; in others they simply fail to do it. Allowing Congress to justify federal regulation by pointing to the effect of inaction on commerce would bring countless decisions an individual could potentially make within the scope of federal regulation, and—under the Government’s theory—empower Congress to make those decisions for him.

Applying the Government’s logic to the familiar case of *Wickard* v. *Filburn* shows how far that logic would carry us from the notion of a government of limited powers. In *Wickard*, the Court famously upheld a federal penalty imposed on a farmer for growing wheat for consumption on his own farm. That amount of wheat caused the farmer to exceed his quota under a program designed to support the price of wheat by limiting supply. The Court rejected the farmer’s argument that growing wheat for home consumption was beyond the reach of the commerce power. It did so on the ground that the farmer’s decision to grow wheat for his own use allowed him to avoid purchasing wheat in the market. That decision, when considered in the aggregate along with similar decisions of others, would have had a substantial effect on the interstate market for wheat.

*Wickard* has long been regarded as “perhaps the most far reaching example of Commerce Clause authority over intrastate activity,” but the Government’s theory in this case would go much further. Under *Wickard* it is within Congress’s power to regulate the market for wheat by supporting its price. But price can be supported by increasing demand as well as by decreasing supply. The aggregated decisions of some consumers not to purchase wheat have a substantial effect on the price of wheat, just as decisions not to purchase health insurance have on the price of insurance. Congress can therefore command that those not buying wheat do so, just as it argues here that it may command that those not buying health insurance do so. The farmer in *Wickard* was at least actively engaged in the production of wheat, and the Government could regulate that activity because of its effect on commerce. The Government’s theory here would effectively override that limitation, by establishing that individuals may be regulated under the Commerce Clause whenever enough of them are not doing something the Government would have them do.

Indeed, the Government’s logic would justify a mandatory purchase to solve almost any problem. … To consider a different example in the health care market, many Americans do not eat a balanced diet. That group makes up a larger percentage of the total population than those without health insurance. The failure of that group to have a healthy diet increases health care costs, to a greater extent than the failure of the uninsured to purchase insurance. … Under the Government’s theory, Congress could address the diet problem by ordering everyone to buy vegetables. … That is not the country the Framers of our Constitution envisioned. …

The Government regards it as sufficient to trigger Congress’s authority that almost all those who are uninsured will, at some unknown point in the future, engage in a health care transaction. Asserting that “[t]here is no temporal limitation in the Commerce Clause,” the Government argues that because “[e]veryone subject to this regulation is in or will be in the health care market,” they can be “regulated in advance.”

The proposition that Congress may dictate the conduct of an individual today because of prophesied future activity finds no support in our precedent. We have said that Congress can anticipate the effects on commerce of an economic activity. … But we have never permitted Congress to anticipate that activity itself in order to regulate individuals not currently engaged in commerce. …The Commerce Clause is not a general license to regulate an individual from cradle to grave, simply because he will predictably engage in particular transactions. Any police power to regulate individuals as such, as opposed to their activities, remains vested in the States. …

The Government next contends that Congress has the power under the Necessary and Proper Clause to enact the individual mandate because the mandate is an “integral part of a comprehensive scheme of economic regulation”—the guaranteed-issue and community-rating insurance reforms. Under this argument, it is not necessary to consider the effect that an individual’s inactivity may have on interstate commerce; it is enough that Congress regulate commercial activity in a way that requires regulation of inactivity to be effective….

Applying these principles, the individual mandate cannot be sustained under the Necessary and Proper Clause as an essential component of the insurance reforms. …

Even if the individual mandate is “necessary” to the Act’s insurance reforms, such an expansion of federal power is not a “proper” means for making those reforms effective. …

That is not the end of the matter. Because the Commerce Clause does not support the individual mandate, it is necessary to turn to the Government’s second argument: that the mandate may be upheld as within Congress’s enumerated power to “lay and collect Taxes.” …

The most straightforward reading of the mandate is that it commands individuals to purchase insurance. … Under the mandate, if an individual does not maintain health insurance, the only consequence is that he must make an additional payment to the IRS when he pays his taxes. That, according to the Government, means the mandate can be regarded as establishing a condition—not owning health insurance—that triggers a tax—the required payment to the IRS. Under that theory, the mandate is not a legal command to buy insurance. Rather, it makes going without insurance just another thing the Government taxes, like buying gasoline or earning income. And if the mandate is in effect just a tax hike on certain taxpayers who do not have health insurance, it may be within Congress’s constitutional power to tax. … Granting the Act the full measure of deference owed to federal statutes, it can be so read….

C

The exaction the Affordable Care Act imposes on those without health insurance looks like a tax in many respects. …

It is of course true that the Act describes the payment as a “penalty,” not a “tax.” But while that label is fatal to the application of the Anti-Injunction Act, it does not determine whether the payment may be viewed as an exercise of Congress’s taxing power. It is up to Congress whether to apply the Anti-Injunction Act to any particular statute, so it makes sense to be guided by Congress’s choice of label on that question. That choice does not, however, control whether an exaction is within Congress’s constitutional power to tax….

We have similarly held that exactions not labeled taxes nonetheless were authorized by Congress’s power to tax. … Our cases confirm this functional approach. …

IV

The States also contend that the Medicaid expansion exceeds Congress’s authority under the Spending Clause. They claim that Congress is coercing the States to adopt the changes it wants by threatening to withhold all of a State’s Medicaid grants, unless the State accepts the new expanded funding and complies with the conditions that come with it. This, they argue, violates the basic principle that the “Federal Government may not compel the States to enact or administer a federal regulatory program.”

The Spending Clause grants Congress the power “to pay the Debts and provide for the… general Welfare of the United States. We have long recognized that Congress may use this power to grant federal funds to the States, and may condition such a grant upon the States’ “taking certain actions that Congress could not require them to take.” …

At the same time, our cases have recognized limits on Congress’s power under the Spending Clause to secure state compliance with federal objectives. … Respecting this limitation is critical to ensuring that Spending Clause legislation does not undermine the status of the States as independent sovereigns in our federal system. … Permitting the Federal Government to force the States to implement a federal program would threaten the political accountability key to our federal system. …

Congress may attach appropriate conditions to federal taxing and spending programs to preserve its control over the use of federal funds. In the typical case we look to the States to defend their prerogatives by adopting “the simple expedient of not yielding” to federal blandishments when they do not want to embrace the federal policies as their own. The States are separate and independent sovereigns. Sometimes they have to act like it.

The States, however, argue that the Medicaid expansion is far from the typical case. They object that Congress has “crossed the line distinguishing encouragement from coercion,” in the way it has structured the funding: Instead of simply refusing to grant the new funds to States that will not accept the new conditions, Congress has also threatened to withhold those States’ existing Medicaid funds. The States claim that this threat serves no purpose other than to force unwilling States to sign up for the dramatic expansion in health care coverage effected by the Act.

Given the nature of the threat and the programs at issue here, we must agree.

The Affordable Care Act is constitutional in part and unconstitutional in part. The individual mandate cannot be upheld as an exercise of Congress’s power under the Commerce Clause. That Clause authorizes Congress to regulate interstate commerce, not to order individuals to engage in it. In this case, however, it is reasonable to construe what Congress has done as increasing taxes on those who have a certain amount of income, but choose to go without health insurance. Such legislation is within Congress’s power to tax.

As for the Medicaid expansion, that portion of the Affordable Care Act violates the Constitution by threatening existing Medicaid funding. Congress has no authority to order the States to regulate according to its instructions. Congress may offer the States grants and require the States to comply with accompanying conditions, but the States must have a genuine choice whether to accept the offer. The States are given no such choice in this case: They must either accept a basic change in the nature of Medicaid, or risk losing all Medicaid funding. The remedy for that constitutional violation is to preclude the Federal Government from imposing such a sanction. That remedy does not require striking down other portions of the Affordable Care Act.

The Framers created a Federal Government of limited powers, and assigned to this Court the duty of enforcing those limits. The Court does so today. But the Court does not express any opinion on the wisdom of the Affordable Care Act. Under the Constitution, that judgment is reserved to the people.

The judgment of the Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit is affirmed in part and reversed in part.

*It is so ordered.*

J**ustice Scalia, Justice Kennedy, Justice Thomas, and Justice Alito, dissenting**….

This case is in one respect difficult: it presents two questions of first impression. The first of those is whether failure to engage in economic activity (the purchase of health insurance) is subject to regulation under the Commerce Clause. … The second question is whether the congressional power to tax and spend permits the conditioning of a State’s continued receipt of all funds under a massive state-administered federal welfare program upon its acceptance of an expansion to that program. … Those questions are difficult.

The case is easy and straightforward, however, in another respect. What is absolutely clear, affirmed by the text of the 1789 Constitution, by the Tenth Amendment ratified in 1791, and by innumerable cases of ours in the 220 years since, is that there are structural limits upon federal power—upon what it can prescribe with respect to private conduct, and upon what it can impose upon the sovereign States. Whatever may be the conceptual limits upon the Commerce Clause and upon the power to tax and spend, they cannot be such as will enable the Federal Government to regulate all private conduct and to compel the States to function as administrators of federal programs.

That clear principle carries the day here. The striking case of *Wickard* v. *Filburn*, which held that the economic activity of growing wheat, even for one’s own consumption, affected commerce sufficiently that it could be regulated, always has been regarded as *the ne plus ultra* of expansive Commerce Clause jurisprudence. To go beyond that, and to say the failure to grow wheat (which is not an economic activity, or any activity at all) nonetheless affects commerce and therefore can be federally regulated, is to make mere breathing in and out the basis for federal prescription and to extend federal power to virtually all human activity.

As for the constitutional power to tax and spend for the general welfare: The Court has long since expanded that beyond (what Madison thought it meant) taxing and spending for those aspects of the general welfare that were within the Federal Government’s enumerated powers. Thus, we now have sizable federal Departments devoted to subjects not mentioned among Congress’ enumerated powers, and only marginally related to commerce.... The principal practical obstacle that prevents Congress from using the tax-and-spend power to assume all the general-welfare responsibilities traditionally exercised by the States is the sheer impossibility of managing a Federal Government large enough to administer such a system. That obstacle can be overcome by granting funds to the States, allowing them to administer the program. That is fair and constitutional enough when the States freely agree to have their powers employed and their employees enlisted in the federal scheme. But it is a blatant violation of the constitutional structure when the States have no choice.

The Act before us here exceeds federal power both in mandating the purchase of health insurance and in denying nonconsenting States all Medicaid funding. These parts of the Act are central to its design and operation, and all the Act’s other provisions would not have been enacted without them. In our view it must follow that the entire statute is inoperative. …

The Court today decides to save a statute Congress did not write. It rules that what the statute declares to be a requirement with a penalty is instead an option subject to a tax. And it changes the intentionally coercive sanction of a total cut-off of Medicaid funds to a supposedly noncoercive cut-off of only the incremental funds that the Act makes available.

The Court regards its strained statutory interpretation as judicial modesty. It is not. It amounts instead to a vast judicial overreaching. It creates a debilitated, inoperable version of health-care regulation that Congress did not enact and the public does not expect.

The Constitution, though it dates from the founding of the Republic, has powerful meaning and vital relevance to our own times. The constitutional protections that this case involves are protections of structure. Structural protections—notably, the restraints imposed by federalism and separation of powers—are less romantic and have less obvious a connection to personal freedom than the provisions of the Bill of Rights or the Civil War Amendments. Hence they tend to be undervalued or even forgotten by our citizens. It should be the responsibility of the Court to teach otherwise, to remind our people that the Framers considered structural protections of freedom the most important ones, for which reason they alone were embodied in the original Constitution and not left to later amendment. The fragmentation of power produced by the structure of our Government is central to liberty, and when we destroy it, we place liberty at peril. Today’s decision should have vindicated, should have taught, this truth; instead, our judgment today has disregarded it.

For the reasons here stated, we would find the Act invalid in its entirety. We respectfully dissent.

**Justice Ginsburg, with whom Justice Sotomayor joins, and with whom Justice Breyer and Justice Kagan join in part, concurring in the judgment in part, and dissenting in part….**

Congress passed the minimum coverage provision as a key component of the ACA to address an economic and social problem that has plagued the Nation for decades: the large number of U. S. residents who are unable or unwilling to obtain health insurance. Whatever one thinks of the policy decision Congress made, it was Congress’ prerogative to make it. Reviewed with appropriate deference, the minimum coverage provision, allied to the guaranteed-issue and community-rating prescriptions, should survive measurement under the Commerce and Necessary and Proper Clauses. …

Consistent with the Framers’ intent, we have repeatedly emphasized that Congress’ authority under the Commerce Clause is dependent upon “practical” considerations, including “actual experience.” …Until today, this Court’s pragmatic approach to judging whether Congress validly exercised its commerce power was guided by two familiar principles. First, Congress has the power to regulate economic activities “that substantially affect interstate commerce. This capacious power extends even to local activities that, viewed in the aggregate, have a substantial impact on interstate commerce. … Second, we owe a large measure of respect to Congress when it frames and enacts economic and social legislation. … When appraising such legislation, we ask only (1) whether Congress had a “rational basis” for concluding that the regulated activity substantially affects interstate commerce, and (2) whether there is a “reasonable connection between the regulatory means selected and the asserted ends.” In answering these questions, we presume the statute under review is constitutional and may strike it down only on a “plain showing” that Congress acted irrationally.

Straightforward application of these principles would require the Court to hold that the minimum coverage provision is proper Commerce Clause legislation. Beyond dispute, Congress had a rational basis for concluding that the uninsured, as a class, substantially affect interstate commerce. Those without insurance consume billions of dollars of health-care products and services each year. Those goods are produced, sold, and delivered largely by national and regional companies who routinely transact business across state lines. The uninsured also cross state lines to receive care. Some have medical emergencies while away from home. Others, when sick, go to a neighboring State that provides better care for those who have not prepaid for care. …

The Chief Justice’s novel constraint on Congress’ commerce power gains no force from our precedent and for that reason alone warrants disapprobation. …

Nor does our case law toe the activity versus inactivity line. In *Wickard*, for example, we upheld the penalty imposed on a farmer who grew too much wheat, even though the regulation had the effect of compelling farmers to purchase wheat in the open market. …

In the early 20th century, this Court regularly struck down economic regulation enacted by the peoples’ representatives in both the States and the Federal Government. The Chief Justice’s Commerce Clause opinion, and even more so the joint dissenters’ reasoning, bear a disquieting resemblance to those long-overruled decisions.

This Court, time and again, has respected Congress’ prescription of spending conditions, and has required States to abide by them. …

At bottom, my colleagues’ position is that the States’ reliance on federal funds limits Congress’ authority to alter its spending programs. This gets things backwards: Congress, not the States, is tasked with spending federal money in service of the general welfare. And each successive Congress is empowered to appropriate funds as it sees fit. When the 110th Congress reached a conclusion about Medicaid funds that differed from its predecessors’ view, it abridged no State’s right to “existing,” or “pre-existing,” funds. For, in fact, there are no such funds. There is only money States anticipate receiving from future Congresses. The Chief Justice, however, holds that the Constitution precludes the Secretary from withholding “existing” Medicaid funds based on States’ refusal to comply with the expanded Medicaid program. For the foregoing reasons, I disagree that any such withholding would violate the Spending Clause. Accordingly, I would affirm the decision of the Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit in this regard. …

Justice Thomas, dissenting…[omitted].