

Oregon voters to decide on state funding for abortions

By Andrew Selsky
Associated Press

SALEM (AP) — Oregon voters will decide in November whether one of America's most progressive states should keep funding abortions.

Opponents of the funding gathered just enough signatures to put the issue on the ballot, the secretary of state's office said Friday.

"I'm thrilled," said Marilyn Shannon, one of the chief petitioners. "We've been trying to do this since 2012."

The retired schoolteacher and former Republican state senator said she opposes abortion.

Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat, last year signed a bill expanding coverage on abortions and other reproductive services to thousands of Oregonians, regardless of income, citizenship status or gender identity.

The measure going before Oregon voters says the state "shall not spend public funds for any abortion, except when medically necessary or as may be required by federal law."

Similar measures failed in 1978, with 52 percent voting against the move, and in 1986, when 55 percent of voters were opposed.

Emily McLain, executive director of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon, said the new measure

isn't aligned with the values of Oregonians.

"One of the biggest issues for us is it forces the state to set a dangerous precedent by cherry-picking what will and won't be covered by insurance," McLain said.

She said public employees, teachers, nurses and others serving the state would be affected if the measure passes because their insurance would no longer cover abortions. The measure also "targets the most vulnerable and low-income Oregonians," McLain said.

The Oregon secretary of state's website showed Friday that petitioners gathered 117,799 valid signatures, just over the 117,578 needed to qualify for the ballot.

The effort had a year to gather signatures, Shannon said, in contrast to previous efforts when challenges left backers with too little time to gather enough signatures.

Oregon is one of a handful of states that allows public funds to pay for abortions through its Medicaid program, with the full cost paid by Oregon taxpayers.

"We think public funding of abortion is wrong," Shannon said.

In 1969, Oregon became one of the first states to decriminalize abortion, four years before the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision that affirmed a woman's right to abortion.

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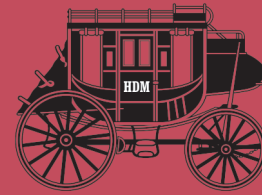
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