

Clinton pick favors Oregon plan



NORTHWEST

WASHINGTON (AP) — Health Secretary-designee Donna Shalala is "favorably disposed" to a federal waiver for Oregon's plan to ration health care services to the poor, Sen. Bob Packwood said.

Packwood, ranking Republican on the Senate Commerce Committee, met with President-elect Clinton's appointee Friday in preparation for her confirmation hearing scheduled before the committee next week.

The senator has been sharply critical of the Bush administration's rejection last year of Oregon's waiver request. The state has submitted a revised plan, which is awaiting consideration by the Department of Health and Human Services.

"She was reasonably familiar with the issue. She had been briefed well. She is favorably disposed toward it," Packwood told the Associated Press after the meeting in his office Friday.

"It is not an irrevocable commitment, but she knew the subject well and said she thought what Oregon was trying to do was very worthy," he said.

The state's novel health plan would have Medicaid cover more low-income people by restricting the number of services paid for by the federal-state health insurance program.

Using a priority list created by Oregon's Legis-

lative Emergency Board, the Legislature would decide how many services would be covered according to how much money was available for the program.

Waivers of federal Medicaid regulations are needed before the state can launch the experiment. The plan would extend Medicaid coverage to an estimated 120,000 additional Oregonians.

Packwood said Shalala pointed out that Clinton had said during his campaign that he supported the Oregon waiver. However, Packwood said he was worried that Clinton's position could change because of opposition from Vice President-elect Al Gore.

The senator said Friday he gave Shalala "an inch-thick packet of editorials" from newspapers nationwide advocating the waiver.

Shalala said she understood that objections voiced by Bush's Health Secretary Louis Sullivan were being addressed in Oregon's revised plan, Packwood said.

The new list has 688 health services ranked by priority, and 568 would be covered by Medicaid with the money now available. The former list included 709 services.

The state also has done away with a telephone survey that asked respondents to rate the seriousness of various health conditions. Critics argue that unscientific poll discriminated against the disabled.

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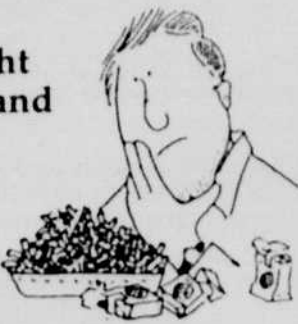


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