

House OKs \$673 million health plan fix

DIANE DIETZ
STATESMAN JOURNAL

The Oregon Health Plan is likely to survive another two years thanks to hospitals, insurance companies and a single Medford Republican.

On a 36-to-23 vote Thursday, the Oregon House approved a provider tax that will generate \$673 million in 2017-2019. That will allow the state to maintain coverage for about 378,000 Oregonians who gained coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

The vote is also a major step toward closing the \$1.4 billion shortfall in the upcoming budget and moves the Legislature closer to finishing its work by the July 10 deadline.

The measure, House Bill 2391, must still clear the Senate with all the Democrats and at least one Republican providing the three-fifths vote necessary on a revenue measure.

That appears likely because three Republican senators voted yes earlier this week to move the bill out of committee. They were Fred Girod, R-Stayton; Alan DeBoer, R-Ashland; and Jackie Winters, R-Salem.

The measure succeeded in the House because Rep. Sal Esquivel, R-Medford, voted with Democrats. Esquivel didn't speak to the bill or say why he crossed the aisle.

Republicans urged a no vote, largely because the Oregon Health Authority, which manages the Oregon Health Plan,

has had problems with its computer infrastructure and verifying eligibility for health plan recipients.

Republicans also have concerns about the handling of \$19 billion in state and federal dollars that flow through its coffers.

"Right now," Rep. Julie Parrish, R-West Linn said, "that agency is accountable to no one."

Democrats said the bill was the result of a consensus, not only among lawmakers who crafted the bill, but also hospitals and insurers who worked on the proposal.

Under the measure, large hospitals will pay a 6 percent tax and small, rural hospitals a 4 percent tax. Much of the tax would later return to the hospitals in the

form of payments for treating health plan patients. And this is key: The increase in state spending would trigger a match of as much as \$1.9 billion from the federal Medicaid program in the coming biennium.

"This is a small cost to bear so that people in this state can have health care," Rep. Rob Nosse, D-Portland said.

The vote was accompanied by some political high jinks. The vote was moved to Friday then returned to Thursday in a matter of hours. House Speaker Tina Kotek barred the chamber doors until the matter was decided. Republicans delayed proceedings to caucus then attempted a procedural maneuver that could have upset the hospital provider deal.

Tick-caused Lyme disease is up in Oregon

ZACH URNESS
STATESMAN JOURNAL

On the East Coast and Midwest, public health officials are bracing for what they're calling the "worst season ever for tick borne diseases."

Lyme disease, a debilitating infection carried by deer ticks, is expected to reach an all-time high this summer in parts of the country, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The same concern hasn't been raised in Oregon. A normal winter and spring means tick populations aren't expected to skyrocket, officials said.

The number of Lyme disease cases has grown in Oregon — doubling to almost 40 to 50 cases per year from 2008 to 2015 — but it still remains far below the national average.

Still, the disease is making inroads in Oregon and could expand in the future.

"There has been an expansion of deer ticks throughout the United States, and into Oregon," said Emilio DeBess, state public health veterinarian. "We're seeing deer ticks places we'd never seen them before."

The difference in Oregon, DeBess said, is that a lower number of West Coast deer ticks are infected with the bacteria that causes Lyme disease.

"On the East Coast, up to 60 percent of deer ticks test positive for Lyme disease," he said. "In Oregon, it's closer to 3 to 4 percent."



A deer tick carries Lyme disease.

VIKTORCAP, GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

The heaviest concentration of deer ticks in Oregon is west of the cascades and along Columbia River at elevations below 1,200 feet, DeBess said, including the Hood River area.

While cases of Lyme disease are low in Oregon compared to the nationwide average, the disease remains life-altering and hard to detect.

DeBess said prevention was the key to preventing Lyme disease. Here's suggestions on avoiding ticks.

Tick protection

- Avoid Direct Contact with Ticks**
Avoid wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter.
Walk in the center of trails.
- Repel Ticks on Skin and Clothing**
Use repellent that contains 20 percent

or more DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 on exposed skin for protection that lasts several hours.

Always follow product instructions. Parents should apply this product to their children, avoiding hands, eyes, and mouth.

Use products that contain permethrin on clothing. Treat clothing and gear, such as boots, pants, socks and tents with products containing 0.5% permethrin. It remains protective through several washings. Pre-treated clothing is available and may be protective longer.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has an online tool to help you select the repellent that is best for you and your family.

- Find and Remove Ticks from Your Body**
Bathe or shower as soon as possible

after coming indoors (preferably within two hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks that are crawling on you.

Conduct a full-body tick check using a hand-held or full-length mirror to view all parts of your body upon return from tick-infested areas. Parents should check their children for ticks under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, behind the knees, between the legs, around the waist, and especially in their hair.

Examine gear and pets. Ticks can ride into the home on clothing and pets, then attach to a person later, so carefully examine pets, coats, and day packs.

Tumble dry clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing after you come indoors.

If the clothes are damp, additional time may be needed.

If the clothes require washing first, hot water is recommended. Cold and medium temperature water will not kill ticks effectively. If the clothes cannot be washed in hot water, tumble dry on low heat for 90 minutes or high heat for 60 minutes. The clothes should be warm and completely dry.

Zach Urness has been an outdoors writer, photographer and videographer in Oregon for nine years. He is the author of the book "Hiking Southern Oregon" and can be reached at zurness@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsORoutdoors.

Oregon mosquitoes being tested for Zika virus

ZACH URNESS
STATESMAN JOURNAL

The Zika virus didn't make a big impact on Oregon last year, even as the disease spread across multiple countries and became a worldwide health concern in 2016.

Fifty-one Oregonians were infected with the virus last year — all in travel-related incidents — and all recovered, according to officials.

But that doesn't mean officials are

taking chances. Oregon will attempt to trap and test mosquitoes for the Zika virus all summer, said Emilio DeBess, state public health veterinarian.

"Historically, we have not been an area the mosquitos that carry the virus (would be in)," DeBess said. "But our climate is changing, so we have to expect the unexpected. We got funding from CDC to find out if the mosquitoes responsible for Zika virus transmission are present here in Oregon."

The testing is taking place in locations

around Portland, Medford, Klamath Falls and across Eastern Oregon, DeBess said. He said they'd start to get results around July.

"These mosquitoes tend to like warmer weather," he said. "The traps are set up, but probably we will not have information until July when we have a good idea if they are here or not."

While DeBess stressed there wasn't a major concern, he said he wouldn't rule anything out.

"There's always potential based on a

changing climate that new mosquitoes get introduced, get a foothold in and end up staying," he said.

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