

# Signatures submitted for health tax

## If entries are validated, measure to fill funding gap will be put on ballot for special election

CONNOR RADNOVICH  
STATESMAN JOURNAL

Petitioners took another step toward allowing voters to decide the fate of a new health care tax meant to fill a funding gap in Oregon's Medicaid program after submitting signatures to the Secretary of State by Thursday's deadline.

If 58,789 signatures are validated by the Elections Division out of the 84,367 submitted, the measure will be on the ballot for a special election Tuesday, Jan. 23.

"I've personally talked to thousands of Oregonians this summer who are incredibly frustrated that the state has not worked harder to better use its health-care resources," Rep. Julie Parrish, R-West Linn, a chief petitioner for the referendum, said in a statement.

Referendum 301 refers to voters sections of the health care tax law — House Bill 2391 — that passed in the 2017 legislative session. It applies taxes to health insurance premiums and some hospitals. The bill was a compromise between health care providers, insurance companies and lawmakers, aimed at maintaining funding and participation levels for the Oregon Health Plan.

Enrollment in the program was expanded under the Affordable Care Act, which required the federal government to pay for newly eligible enrollees. But

states must bear more of the burden past 2016 if they want to maintain enrollment levels.

Oregon needed to pick up 5 percent of the tab this year, which will grow to an expected 10 percent in 2020.

At a rally in Portland Thursday morning, the Coalition of Community Health Clinics launched the de facto first step of their campaign for the current law. Assuming that petitioners would have enough valid signatures to get the referendum on the ballot, patients and health care providers spoke out in support.

"The Medicaid expansion and Oregon Health Plan changed my life," said Nico Serra, an Oregon Health Plan recipient and member of Health Care for All Oregon.

"All Oregonians, especially those contending with disabilities, need access to care that they can afford."

If voters reject the referendum, the plan will lose hundreds of millions in state funding (plus billions in federal matching funds) and lawmakers would likely be forced to take up this issue once more during the 2018 shortened legislative session.

In fact, that was the stated intent when they decided during session to schedule the vote for January.

Lawmakers could make up the shortfall by cutting other programs, raising revenue in another manner or removing

up to 350,000 people from Medicaid.

The latter point is the one many lawmakers and the Yes campaign have focused on, but Parrish and Rep. Cedric Hayden, R-Roseburg, another petitioner, said during a press conference Thursday that isn't going to happen.

The state can't afford to lose the billions in federal money, Parrish said, so the lawmakers are sure to come up with another solution if the law goes down. She advised her fellow representatives to be more creative with funding solutions.

"If we believed people would lose health care, we wouldn't have referred this," Parrish said.

Hayden and Parrish said they are going to campaign against the law focusing on what they consider a propping up of special interests by average citizens and small business owners.

"This is not fair. That's going to be our message," Hayden said.

On the other side, Patty Wentz, spokeswoman for the Oregon Health Care Coalition, said removing the law and putting the health care of hundreds of thousands of Oregonians in doubt would be "incredibly risky." Organizations across the state worked on this law, and this was the solution they came up with.

"If there was another way, that's what would have happened after months of work," Wentz said. "There isn't another way."

Their message to voters, including at Thursday's rally, will focus on the personal impacts of the law — stories of peo-

ple who can afford sometimes life-changing treatment now, which they couldn't before the Medicaid expansion.

"We will be making sure voters understand that people need to remain covered," Wentz said.

But before making it to the ballot, the referendum has found its way to the courts.

Petitioners have appealed the wording of the ballot title to the Oregon Supreme Court, upset, in part, that the title doesn't include the word "tax." The current title calls the revenue gathering process an "assessment," because that is consistent with language used in the law. Petitioners argue that wording obfuscates the law's purpose, and Parrish implied it was intentional.

The other brewing legal challenge revolves around which portions of the law are being referred.

In September, legislative counsel Dexter Johnson indicated that one of the central taxes being referred — a 0.7 percent tax increase on some hospitals — only applied to the section instituting the tax for the end of 2017. This means the referendum doesn't apply to this tax in 2018 and beyond.

Parrish said at the time that, if voters rejected the referendum and the state still tried to implement the hospital tax, she would look at taking it to court. She reiterated that intention Thursday.

Contact the reporter at [cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com](mailto:cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com) or 503-399-6864, or follow him on Twitter at @CDRadnovich.

# Fights at state, national levels on redistricting

CONNOR RADNOVICH  
STATESMAN JOURNAL

Ostensibly trying to limit political manipulation of a historically political undertaking, a task force organized by the Oregon Secretary of State has called for an independent commission to take the responsibility of drawing district lines away from lawmakers.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Supreme Court heard a challenge on Tuesday of the political map in Wisconsin and will have to decide if Republicans in the state took an unfair advantage during redistricting in 2011.

Together, these actions could limit, at the state level, the long-standing and frequently condemned tradition of a majority political party drawing districts to keep themselves in power — a process known as gerrymandering.

Secretary of State Dennis Richardson's office is pushing for the legislature to take up the issue in 2018 and, because it would require a constitutional change, put the issue to voters in November.

But since redistricting is a politically difficult issue — particularly if the districts as currently drawn benefit incumbents, as some in Oregon believe — it remains unlikely there will be political will or the time to take up the issue in the 35-day session come February.

One of the task force's main points in its proposal was to make all criteria for creating district lines open to the public. The criteria they recommend include keeping county and city lines in tact and using natural boundaries.

The task force also said districts set by the commission should avoid diluting the voting strength of minorities, which the U.S. Supreme Court declared earlier this year that North Carolina was guilty of doing.

Richardson's chief of staff Deb Royal said there aren't any specific districts that stand out as gerrymandered, but the need for the commission is clear. She said the issue should be near the top of the list for lawmakers since unfairly drawn districts have been a problem for years.

"Just look at the map," she said.

Jim Moore, political scientist at Pacific University, said gerrymandering in Oregon and other Western states is far less egregious than in their eastern counterparts.

He thinks having a commission handle redistricting instead of potentially biased lawmakers is a good idea, but he said there might not be much for them to address.

"Oregon does a pretty good job balancing big population centers," Moore said.

The next nationwide redistricting will occur in 2021 based on the results of a census conducted a year previous.

The term "gerrymandering" was coined in 1812 when Massachusetts Gov. Elbridge Gerry drew a district that was satirized in a political cartoon to look like a dragon.

One of the central problems associated with gerrymandering, according to observers, is that it allows lawmakers to choose their voters, instead of voters choosing their representatives. With

fewer contested districts, it arguably undermines the "one person, one vote" premise of democracy.

Democratic voters in Wisconsin have challenged the district lines drawn by Republicans as unfairly entrenching the majority party.

The conservative members of the court expressed some hesitancy to inject the court into this debate, which they fear could lead to doz

Many expect a 5-4 ruling, with Justice Anthony Kennedy the deciding vote. He did not let on to his thinking during Tuesday's hearing, unlike his eight colleagues whose positions were clear.

The Supreme Court has never discarded a district map because of its overt partisan nature.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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## OBITUARIES

Larry Allen Brandt

Dec. 22, 1936 — Sept. 19, 2017

With family present, Larry passed away peacefully on Sept. 19 from Lewy body dementia. He is survived by his loving and caring wife of 58 years, Ruth (Torresdal) Brandt, his sons Craig (Monica) and Mark (Cynthia), and daughter Sonya (John), along with seven grandchildren and three great grandchildren. In addition, he is survived by his brother Glen.

Born in Silverton, Larry was the youngest of eight children. After graduating from North Salem High School, Larry's career consisted of working for

Wah Chang, Libby McNeil and Boyd's Coffee, where he retired from in 2001.

Larry thoroughly loved his family, and enjoyed fishing, hunting, golf and travel.

A celebration of life ceremony will be held at 1 p.m. Oct. 14, 2017, at Trinity Lutheran Church, 507 W Powell Blvd. in Gresham.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Mt. Hood Hospice. Arrangements by Springer and Son.

Dennis Downey

June 7, 1946 — Sept. 26, 2017

Dennis William Downey passed away

at his home, overlooking his beautiful canyon, surrounded by his loving family and his faithful dog Murphy at his side.

He was the son of Bill and Muriel Downey from Lafayette, California. He moved to Silverton with his family in 1973 and became a general building contractor in 1975, creating his company, Dennis Downey Construction. He was an accomplished swimmer who also co-founded the Silverton Swim Team. He had a love for the outdoors and never missed the opportunity for adventure and fun.

He is survived by his wife Cindy; three children: Heather, Hope and Shawn; step-children Jamie and Jake;

and nine grandchildren. Until we meet again, D-2. "Remember to tie a bell around your burro."

Service will be held at 2 p.m. Friday, Oct. 20, at First Christian Church in Silverton.

In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation to the Dennis William Downey Memorial Fund set up at Columbia Bank.

Starting this week, complimentary obituaries in the Silverton Appeal Tribune have been discontinued. Please contact Kayla Bowen at (503) 399-6794 to publish a paid obituary.

# Ex-Silverton area resident to perform at Northern Lights

JUSTIN MUCH  
STAYTON MAIL

Native Oregonian and country singer-songwriter Joey James announced a return to his home state for a one-night performance at Northern Lights Theatre Pub in Salem Saturday, Oct. 21.

James, who attended Scio High School and lived in the Silverton/Mt. Angel area, will feature the debut of his latest single, "Drinkin' Here."

A press release for the event said 20 percent of all profits generated from the show will be donated to Spokane, Washington group Gr8ter Veterans. Children

12 and under will be admitted for free.

James is a United States Navy Veteran and is described as a prolific songwriter with a powerful, soulful voice.

"Joey's music is pure passion, energy and emotion that's evident in the studio and on stage," said producer Jordan O'Leary.

"If you're looking for a solid entertainer, Joey is your guy," O'Leary said.

James has opened for Diamond Rio, Lee Brice and Montgomery Gentry.

For information, visit [www.joeyjamesband.com](http://www.joeyjamesband.com), or Facebook.com/Joeyjames.kirsch, or Twitter.com/JoeyJamesBand.



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