

Why Oregonians are voting on health tax

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Yes, we're having a special election Jan. 23, and it's OK if you're confused. It's a confusing situation. But we're here to help.

Ballots are on their way to voters statewide to approve, or reject, a series of health care taxes placed on insurance companies and some hospitals by the 2017 Legislature to help cover low-income Oregonians.

The gap exists because the federal government reduced the amount it would pay for coverage of individuals eligible under Medicaid expansion. Without additional funds, or cuts elsewhere, thousands of low-income people could lose health coverage.

Here are answers to some of the common questions we've seen (and wondered about ourselves) regarding the upcoming vote:

What is Measure 101?

It's a ballot measure resulting from Referendum 301, which was circulated in the fall. It puts to a vote taxes on health insurance companies and some hospitals that were created by the \$670 million health care tax package passed by the Legislature last session.

Why are we voting on it?

Three Republican representatives disagreed with their fellow lawmakers in passing House Bill 2391 and began the process of referring the measure to Oregon voters. They succeeded in gathering more than the required 58,789 signa-

tures within 90 days to get it on the ballot. The three petitioners are: Rep. Julie Parrish, R-West Linn, Rep. Sal Esquivel, R-Medford, and Rep. Cedric Hayden, R-Roseburg.

But why are we voting in January?

The Legislature used its authority to set a special election date through an amendment to Senate Bill 229, which stipulated that if the referendum were to make it to the ballot, the vote would occur on Jan. 23.

Lawmakers who support the taxes say the vote needed to happen before November's general election because the law's funding mechanisms would be on hold until then, creating a budget hole and putting some Oregonians' health care at risk. They also said that the election needed to be happen before the short Legislative session, which starts Feb. 5, so that if the taxes are voted down, lawmakers could have an opportunity during those 35 days to find another way to maintain health insurance coverage levels.

Opponents say the date was picked to sabotage the "no" side. The measure only qualified for the ballot in mid-October and the January election limits campaign time significantly.

They also point to the historically low voter turnout in January elections and that voter pamphlets would be distributed around the distracting holiday season.

What's at stake?

It depends who you ask. The state estimates that if Measure 101 fails, between \$210 million and \$320 million in state rev-

enue would be lost, resulting in a loss of federal matching funds of between \$630 million to \$960 million.

The loss of these funds would put at risk the health insurance of 350,000 low-income individuals in Oregon.

The "yes" side says those 350,000 people are likely to lose their health care coverage because there is no other way to keep them all on their plans without raising revenue, and this plan is the only option.

The "no" side says no one will lose health insurance coverage because the state would never give up the federal matching funds — and to get those you need people enrolled in Medicaid — so the Legislature is certain to find another way to fully fund the Oregon Health Plan.

What's the "no" argument?

The "no" side has a good handful they are using, but one of the overarching arguments is that the health care taxes are inequitable, leaving out unions, special interests and big corporations while targeting schools and small businesses. They also argue that health care costs are going to rise for a majority of people not on the Oregon Health Plan when they pay at the hospital and with their premiums.

What's the "yes" argument?

The main "yes" argument is pretty simple — people need health care, and this is the way the state figured out to pay for it.

If voters want low-income Oregonians to have health care coverage, they say this is the only way it happens.

Who is on who's side?

The "yes" side boasts a coalition of more than 160 organizations, including unions, women's rights organizations, community hospitals, children's health groups and state medical associations.

The "no" side, as described by Parrish, is more "grassroots" with few state organizations pledging support. The Cascade Policy Institute paid for a "no" argument in the voter pamphlet, as did a number of individuals including gubernatorial candidate Sam Carpenter, small business owners and the chief petitioners for the measure.

Why do we need more money for health insurance at all?

There is a gap in funding for Medicaid starting this year. The Medicaid population in Oregon was expanded under the Affordable Care Act, and the federal government agreed to pay 100 percent of costs for that expansion population until 2017. Last year, the amount the federal government would pay dropped to 95 percent, and it's up to the state to come up with the money to maintain coverage levels.

When are ballots due?

The ballot must be received at a county elections office by Jan. 23 at 8 p.m. for the vote to count. For voters who don't mail in time for delivery, they can drop off their ballots at an official drop box from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Jan. 23.

Contact the reporter at cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com or 503-399-6864, or follow him on Twitter at @CDRadnovich.

Silver Falls School District religion policy goes unchanged

CHRISTENA BROOKS
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After multiple members of the public testified against a proposed rewrite of the school district's policy on teaching religion in the schools, board members agreed, by consensus, to retain the original policy.

The original policy is a detailed six-point list of prohibited actions regarding the teaching of religion in the Silver Falls School District. Local school lead-

ers wrote it in 1989.

"It's original, just like Silverton. Nobody else has it. I urge you to keep that," elementary school parent Michele Finicle told board members last month.

The proposed policy was notably shorter and more general.

It stated that teachers and staff may not "promote or inhibit, openly or covertly or by subtlety, a particular religious belief."

Current district policy can be found by going online and visiting <http://policy.osba.org/sfalls/>.

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CenturyLink participates in a government benefit program (Lifeline) to make residential telephone or broadband service more affordable to eligible low-income individuals and families. Eligible customers are those that meet eligibility standards as defined by the FCC and state commissions. Residents who live on federally recognized Tribal Lands may qualify for additional Tribal benefits if they participate in certain additional federal eligibility programs. The Lifeline discount is available for only one telephone or qualifying broadband service per household, which can be either a wireline or wireless service. Broadband speeds must be 15 Mbps download and 2 Mbps upload or faster to qualify.

Lifeline discounts include a transfer restriction (port freeze). This means that you are unable to obtain the Lifeline discount on service with another provider for a period of time. The length of time depends on the services you purchase — 60 days for voice telephone service, 12 months for qualifying broadband service. Certain exceptions to the transfer restrictions may apply. See <http://www.lifelinesupport.org/l/change-my-company.aspx> for more information.

A household is defined for the purposes of the Lifeline program as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address and share income and expenses. Lifeline service is not transferable, and only eligible consumers may enroll in the program. Consumers who willfully make false statements in order to obtain Lifeline telephone or broadband service can be punished by fine or imprisonment and can be barred from the program.

If you live in a CenturyLink service area, please call 1-888-833-9522 or visit centurylink.com/lifeline with questions or to request an application for the Lifeline program.



Silverton H.S. students take part in Hour of Code

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Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) students at Silverton High School participated in "Hour of Code" during Computer Science Education Week last month.

CodeHS, an online teaching platform, helped students write software that gave commands to computers, create web pages and design digital art.

Advanced students created real mobile apps and built shapes in a virtual reality world.

"Computer programming is sometimes called coding, but we are pro-

gramming for more than just computers," said Craig Rankin, computer science instructor.

"We are writing programs that will run on a variety of devices, like phones, tablets, and just about anything that will search the Internet."

"Students at Silverton High School have access to a growing number of classes, ranging from computer programming and technology networking to computer-aided drafting and digital media production," said Drew Hinds, Technology Director and CTE Instructor.

www.legacyhealth.org/womenshealthclinic

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