

RETIREMENT

GOP Congress to states: Stop helping workers save for retirement

The Republican-led Congress just passed a law to make it harder for states to offer voluntary retirement savings plans.

Five states, including Oregon, are in the process of setting up state-sponsored low-fee retirement accounts for workers who don't have any employer-sponsored retirement plan. The states asked the U.S. Department of

Labor (DOL) to remove legal uncertainty by declaring that the plans aren't subject to the federal pension law known as ERISA. DOL did that, but financial services firms, which collect fees for setting up retirement savings plans, called for Congress to undo the DOL ruling.

A bill to do that passed the House Feb. 15 on a 231-193

vote, with all but three Republicans for it and all but one Democrat against. It then passed the Senate May 3 by 50-49, with all Democrats against it, and all but two Republicans for it. As of press time, the bill was awaiting President Trump's signature.

"In the face of a multi-trillion dollar retirement savings crisis, Congress chose to side with the

special interests over working Americans," said Oregon Treasurer Tobias Read in a statement reacting to the Senate vote. Read says Oregon's program will go forward despite the act of Congress. It will launch July 1 as a pilot project, expanding to employers with 10 or more workers in 2018, and to all employers in 2019.

WORKERS RIGHTS

An end to overtime?

U.S. House passes a bill letting employers offer 'comp' time instead of paying overtime.

A bill that passed the U.S. House of Representatives on May 2 would allow employers to offer "comp time" instead of paying overtime. HR 1180, the "Working Families Flexibility Act of 2017," would undermine the federal overtime protection that has been in place since 1938. House Workforce Committee Chair Bradley Byrne (R-Ala.) called the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) an "antiquated federal law" in a hearing on HR 1180. FLSA is the law that sets the federal minimum wage and requires employers to pay time-and-a-half to hourly workers when they work more than 40 hours a week.

The point of the FLSA's overtime provision is to discourage long hours — by making it more expensive for the employer to schedule them. HR 1180 would undo that disincentive because the employer could offer the paid time off at the regular hourly rate instead of paying the time-and-a-half rate. Not only that, but the paid time off would come at the employer's discretion *up to a year later*. It would amount to an interest-free loan by the worker to the employer, because the worker wouldn't be paid anything for the hours until the comp time is used.

HR 1180 says workers could accrue up to 160 hours of comp time; any not used by the end of a year would have to be cashed out at the time-and-a-half rate within a month.

The bill says employees would have to agree to the comp time swap. But the bill's critics say given the power differential, many nonunion workers would feel compelled to accept comp time.

When it reached the House floor, it passed 229-197. Not a single Democrat voted for the bill, and six Republicans joined the Democrats in voting "no." A companion bill, S.801, is now in the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. The White House in a statement said President Trump would sign the bill if it reaches his desk.

**Labor 411**

MAKING IT EASY TO SUPPORT GOOD JOBS

LOS ANGELES | SAN FRANCISCO | WASHINGTON, D.C. | PHILADELPHIA

Welcome to the great outdoors! It's camping season and Labor 411 has put together another great camping list with Union Made, American Made products. Make a melty s'more or just kick back in the sun and know your trip's got the union stamp of approval.

S'mores:

Honey Maid Graham Crackers
Campfire Marshmallows
Chocolate - Ghirardelli, Hershey
(check for Made in U.S.A.)

Grill:

Weber (Genesis, Summit and Q series)

Sunscreen:

Coppertone
Bain de Soleil

Hammocks:

Algoma Net

Boots:

Wolverine
Danner
Double-H
Red Wing
Thorogood
Wood N' Stream

Coffee:

USA Coffee Company
Millstone Coffee
Eight O'Clock Coffee
Folgers
Maxwell House

Hot Cocoa:

Swiss Miss
Ghirardelli

Coolers:

Rubbermaid

Tools:

Channellock
Craftsman
Ridgid
Stanley Hand Tools
Black & Decker
SnapOn

**Outdoor Clothing:**

AFL-CIO Union Made Gear
All American Clothing Co.
Carhartt

Hunting:

Remington and Colt firearms

Board Games:

Visit Labor411.org to see our full list of board games