

RECOVERY, from page 5

One answer may lie in the governor's opioid bill. It was one of the two bills on Oregon Recovers' agenda for lobbying that day, and it would create a pilot program aimed at creating a link between drug overdose and access to treatment.

House Bill 4143 would also require licensed prescribers to register with the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program and initiate a study on insurance barriers to accessing drug and alcohol treatment.

The other bill was House Bill 4137, which would require the Oregon Drug and Alcohol Policy Commission to complete a strategic plan for improving the state's substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery programs. Oregon Recovers sees the completion of this long-overdue plan as a crucial first step toward reform.

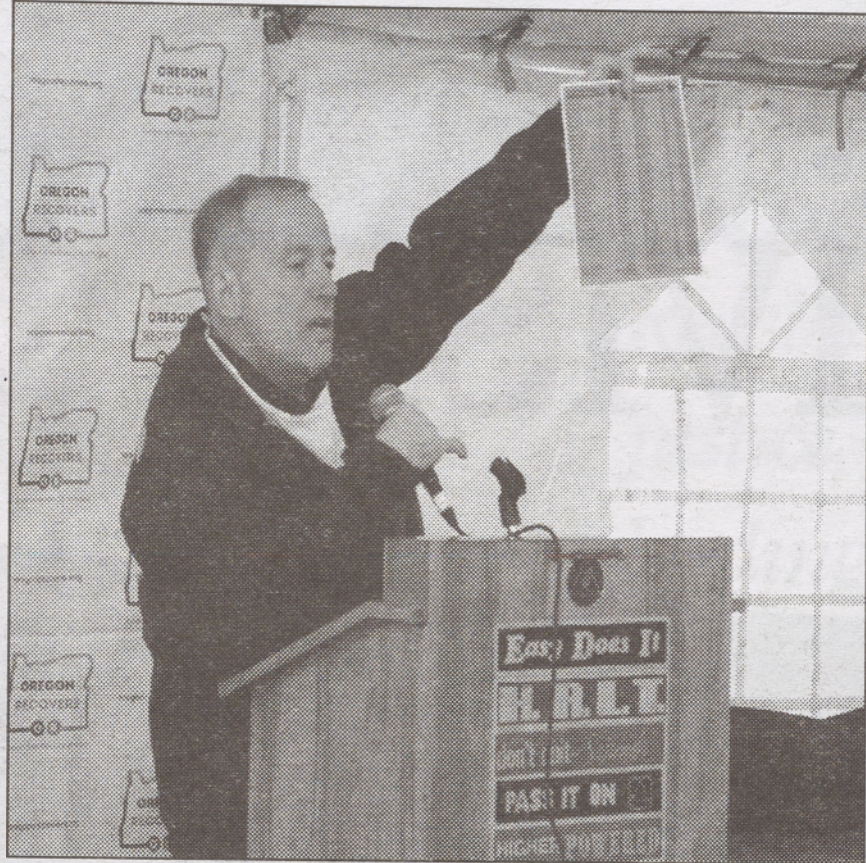
After a quick coaching session and armed with plenty of statistics and information packets, Maylene Grier and Dan Loynes, both former intravenous drug users, walked up the Capitol steps to lobby for the first time in their lives.

Grier has been clean for nearly eight years, and Loynes just celebrated nine years clean earlier this month. Now they draw on their past experiences in their work with people struggling with addiction. Grier works with parents whose children are in state custody through her job with Volunteers of America in Portland, and Loynes works at Bridges to Change in Salem as a certified recovery mentor, working with men coming out of the Oregon State Penitentiary.

Their first stop was the office of Sen. Jackie Winters (R-Salem) on the third floor. They were visibly nervous as they discussed who would say what in the hallway outside her office.

Upon entering, they were slightly disappointed to discover they would be speaking with a staff member instead of the senator herself. This would be the case for most Oregon Recovers appointments in various offices throughout the day. Much of this was due to the timing – it was just over a week into a busy but short legislative session.

Unshaken, Grier and Loynes pleaded



Oregon Recovers co-founder and director Mike Marshall talks about the day's schedule with the citizen lobbyists.



Each shoe placed outside the Capitol at the Oregon Recovers lobby day represents a life lost to addiction.

their case to Winters' two-year staff member Liz Hartman. They began by recounting their own history of drug use, how they triumphed with the help of treatment and now help others battle their addictions.

"There are success stories," Grier said.

But, they said, the state isn't giving them the tools necessary to help all the people who need it, when they need it.

"You get a person into detox, where they're 'shakin' and bakin' as we say, but where do they go from there?" Grier asked. "We're really good at treating the acute phase, but we need a continuum of care."

Loynes added, "This is so big, if we don't address it and really prioritize it, it's going to become an arterial flow."

While 1 in 10 Oregonians struggles with drug or alcohol addiction, only 11 percent of those people receive treatment, according to Oregon Substance Use Disorder Research Committee report released in November. The national average is 14 percent.

Lori Guerrero, a supervisor at Volunteers of America who is in long-term recovery, said one of the greatest needs in Oregon is additional residential treatment beds for single dads, in addition to the need for access to treatment when people need it.

But when asked what she would improve

or change about the state's alcohol and drug programming if she had a magic wand and just one wish, she simply stated, "More."

Later that day, Page and seven others, all wearing Oregon Recovers T-shirts, walked into House Speaker Tina Kotek's office for their 2:30 p.m. appointment. When the receptionist told them they weren't on Kotek's calendar, several of the young men did not hide their disappointment. "That's some bullshit," one said as he walked out the door.

Two others decided to go back into the office and demand someone speak with them. It worked. The group was invited back into the office, where Kotek's legislative deputy director heard them out.

This group had better luck with their next appointment, where Sen. Lew Frederick (D-Portland) met with them in person and was candid when telling them about how addiction has touched his own family.

Just before lunchtime, everyone gathered outside the Capitol once again for speeches and an announcement from Gov. Kate Brown. Many held signs; some read "4 deaths a day is unacceptable," "I'm sick of my friends dying" and "Addicts Matter."

In a short speech, Brown declared that substance abuse is a "public health crisis in

Oregon."

It was an announcement Oregon Recovers had advocated for in the past six months, and one that left many onlookers optimistic and rejuvenated as they headed back inside to talk to more lawmakers.

The governor also announced she would sign an executive order that, like one of the bills Oregon Recovers was promoting that day, would require the Oregon Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission to come up with a comprehensive plan for improving the state's substance abuse programs.

"The governor has a stake in it," Marshall said not long after the announcement. "That's why today is so important – it's a beginning, not an end."

Oregon Recovers is determined to push policymakers to make Oregon go from being one of the worst states in the nation when it comes to access to addiction treatment to becoming one of the best – within the next five years. It's a lofty goal, but to those walking through the Capitol halls that day, it's a necessary one.

"I wasn't a priority if I wasn't in jail," Page told the crowd shortly before Brown took the mic. "And that's not OK."

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