

Young Latino people provided the legwork behind Alonso León's win and legislative victories such as Cover All Kids, which was backed by the Portland-based Oregon Latino Health Coalition. Both campaigns proved training grounds for political action.

A similar political quickening among Latino youth is under way in Eugene-Springfield in a community linked by a Facebook page associated with Alex Reyna's internet radio station called La E-Kiss. There, people post their problems, need for work, need for employees, problems with authorities — and members of the community respond.

"The network has matured beyond belief," says Philip Carrasco, labor and political organizer and member of the Lane Community College Board of Education. "It's at our disposal in a matter of seconds."

Through Carrasco's Grupo Latino de Acción Directa of Lane County, Latino youth are attending political education forums, discussing policing and immigration status with law enforcement leaders and developing political skills.

"A lot of these youth know how to canvas, how to phone bank, know the technology today, how to establish political messaging. They know the value of getting out the vote," Carrasco says.

Demographics predict soaring political clout at the state and local levels.

While Hispanic residents make up 12 percent of Oregon's population, they're 23 percent of the state's school kids — including 22 percent of the Springfield School District, 20 percent of the Bethel district and 15 percent of the Eugene district.

The potential potency of the Latino vote is concentrated in cities and in neighborhoods. Statewide, school districts with majority-minority student populations are Umatilla, Ontario, Nyssa, Mount Angel, Morrow, Milton-Freewater, Hermiston, Gervais and Forest Grove.

In Eugene-Springfield, five schools enroll greater than one third Hispanic students: River Road/El Camino del Río, Danebo, Buena Vista, César E. Chávez and Guy Lee elementary schools.

As local Latino students reach senior high and turn 18 years old, Johannis Tadeo's youth-led City Wide MEChA group is there to get them registered to vote.

Hispanic people in Oregon are winning elections at the local level, moving onto city councils, school boards and other local offices — the places where candidates traditionally earn their chops before moving on to statewide office.

Two years ago, on Eugene-Springfield elected boards, it was only Carrasco at LCC, he remembers. Now, there are four Hispanic local elected officials: Emilio Hernandez on the Springfield School Board, Evangelina Sundgrenz on the Eugene School Board, Alan Contreras on the Lane ESD Board as well as Carrasco at LCC.

"We are building a bench of political operatives, political staffers," Carrasco says.

"On top of that we're starting to train candidates."

At the Statehouse, the new level of diversity is making a difference, Sen. James Manning Jr. says.

Alonso León, for example, spoke with authority during the Cover All Kids bill debate when she described the pain of an immigrant mother who couldn't afford to take a sick child to a doctor.

"People with a lot of means would never experience that, so they wouldn't know," Manning says.

"It's heartbreaking. I grew up very poor. I didn't have access to medical insurance or anything like that. Our thing was, stay healthy. Don't get sick. If something happens you go to the emergency room. You get patched up and you went back out and healed the best that you could."

Alonso León sponsored a successful bill to require cultural competency training at public universities, and

Rep. Hernandez sponsored another to require ethnic studies as part of social studies in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Alonso León and other Latino lawmakers debated on the House floor with a perspective that was hard to argue with, said the APP's Arredondo, who also serves as a trustee on the Western Oregon University Board.

"She's gone through our higher education system," he says. "She genuinely understands what cultural competency is, and she knows who's doing a good job and who's not."

A 'sweeping' bill for equal pay

While Latino lawmakers enjoyed gains, it was female power that dominated the decision making in the 2017 session of the Oregon Legislature. This was the year of the historic Women's March and the international #MeToo movement.

Women were in charge — as governor, as House speaker, as House majority leader and as Senate majority leader. And soon after the session ended, Senate Republicans named Sen. Winters, a black woman, their minority leader.

Compare Oregon's approach with Congress' much-maligned 13-man work group in charge of health care bills.

"For the first time in Oregon history, the Democratic caucus is majority female. We had a group of strong women saying (health) was a priority — and men too," says freshman Rep. Julie Fahey, D-Eugene, who carried the Reproductive Health Equity Act on the House floor. "It's very clear the Legislature is better at representing the people it serves when it actually looks like the people it serves."

The 2017 Legislature also passed what legal writers dubbed the most "sweeping" and "all-encompassing"

OREGON'S LEGISLATIVE SCORECARD

What happened at the Statehouse last summer

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH EQUITY ACT (HOUSE BILL 3391) JULY 5

This 2017 Oregon bill is the one most likely to make Breitbart followers' heads explode: The new law locks Roe v. Wade protections for legal abortion into state law.

The law extends \$6.2 million in state-paid medical services to 22,873 women who are undocumented immigrants — and one of those guaranteed medical services is state-paid abortion.

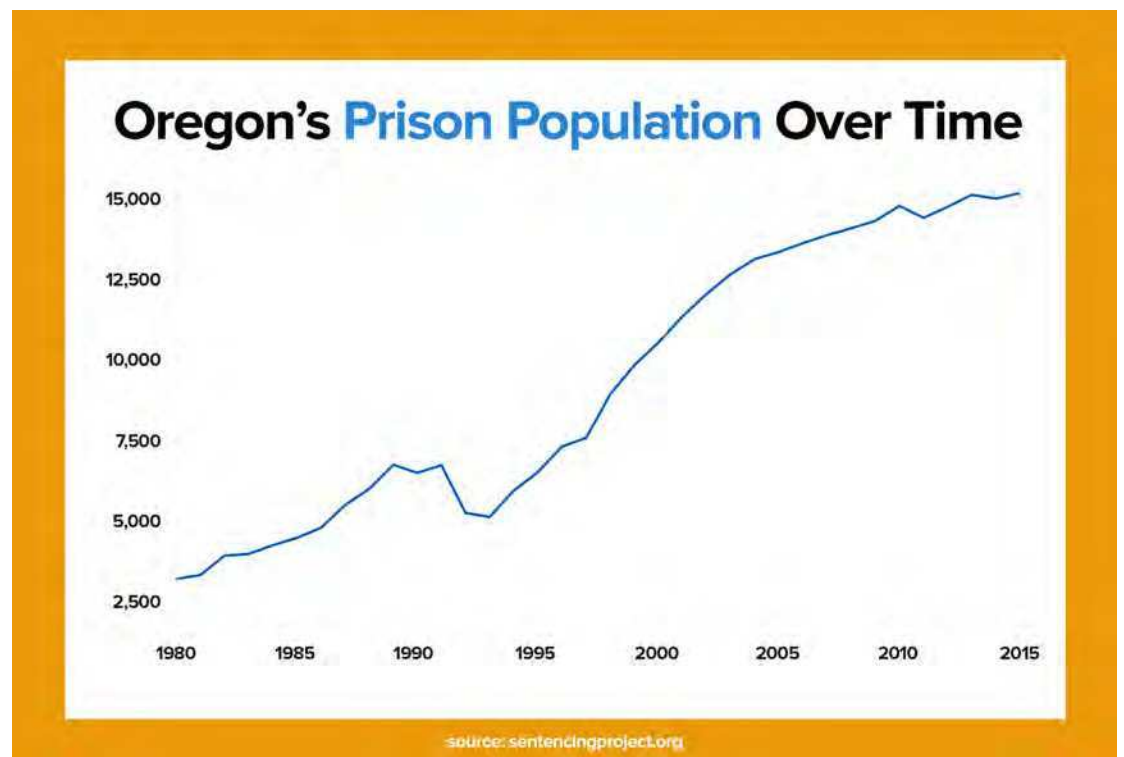
Additionally, the services are free. Insurers can't charge copays for reproductive health check-ups, and/or treatments and counseling for sexually transmitted

infections, domestic violence, breastfeeding, breast cancer, contraceptives, abortion and pregnancy to include 60 days of postpartum care. Religious organizations are exempted from some of the requirements; state agencies are tasked with providing coverage for women in exempted plans.

ANTI-PROFILING/DRUG DEFELONIZATION BILL (HOUSE BILL 2355) JULY 6

Lawmakers adopted this two-part measure to address bias in policing and the state court system — and the harm it causes to people of color.

In Oregon, black men and women make up less than 2 percent of the state's



population but nearly 10 percent of the state prison population, according to The Sentencing Project prison reform group. Drug felonies become a life sentence as ex-felons are denied jobs, housing and student loans.

The new law addresses the problem in two ways.

State and local law

enforcement agencies are required to collect and report information on traffic and pedestrian stops that will allow the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission to detect any pattern of bias. (Oregon outlawed profiling in 2015, but the new law creates a means of detection.)

The second part of

the measure liberalizes punishment for some first-offense drug convictions involving small amounts of methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin or opioid pills.

The new law reduces punishment for certain possession offenses to misdemeanors with less than one-year imprisonment —