



Member Lobbying

OPEU state employees spent a day at the Capitol lobbying for an interim study of the State classification system. Here the group speaks with Ann Greenfield, an assistant to House Speaker Hardy Myers (D-Multnomah). H.J.R. 38 would require the State to conduct such a study.

Legislators Table Bill to Close Mental Unit

Legislation that would close the section of Eastern Oregon Hospital (EOH) for mentally retarded patients is dead, according to one of the bill's primary sponsors, Rep. Tom Troop, D-Bend.

However, substitute legislation that would serve as a policy statement requiring the State to reduce the number of patients in large institutions and phase them into privately administered, community-based facilities is currently before the House Committee on Human Resources.

While the substitute legislation—H.B. 3232—does not set specific dates for closing any state institution or for establishing community-based facilities, it would commit the Mental Health Division to moving the majority of institutionalized patients to smaller facilities.

The bill calls for a "systematic decrease" in the number of mentally retarded patients in state-operated hospitals and training centers and an "orderly development" of community-based facilities for treating these patients.

H.B. 3232 sets no guidelines for size

of the community-based facilities and provides no start-up funding.

Rep. Mike Thorne, D-Pendleton, said that the Ways and Means Committee rejected funding for H.B. 2828 largely due to its experimental nature. He feels the Legislature will probably reject H.B. 3232, because it "would expose the state to untold legal liabilities." He said that attorneys could make a strong case that denying patients institutionalization would be a violation of their civil rights.

Rep. Thorne is a strong opponent of both H.B. 2828 and H.B. 3232.

OPEU Government Affairs Director Chuck Mendenhall said, "There is considerable merit in Rep. Troop's concept to provide the mentally retarded with increased means to enhance their independence.

"However, Rep. Troop's original bill would have pushed patients into the communities before facilities were available. In addition, our research showed that in other states where this (speed-up process) was tried, there were serious problems of patient abuse and/or neglect."

Retirement Measures Gain Initial Committee Approval

Two major pieces of "retirement legislation" have gained committee approval and have been sent to the Joint Ways and Means Committee with a recommendation for passage.

Legislation providing an immediate cost of living adjustment (COLA) of 4.0 to 11.4 percent, depending on a public employee's year of retirement, has been approved by the Senate Insurance, Banking and Retirement Committee. The bill—S.B. 843—also provides retirees with an identical COLA on July 1, 1982. These adjustments would be in addition to the yearly two percent COLA provided under current law.

A second major piece of legislation that effects future retirement would enable all public employees to retire at 58, without losing money they have accrued in the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS).

A similar bill was passed by the 1979 Legislature, but it only applies to certified teachers. This new legislation—S.B. 494—attempts to bring

equity into the PERS program by enabling all other public employees to retire at 58, without suffering an actuarial loss. Currently all public employees, other than certified teachers, must wait until age 60 to retire without a PERS loss.

The Senate Insurance, Banking and Retirement Committee has sent the bill to the Ways and Means Committee with a recommendation for passage. But OPEU Legislative Lobbyist Eric Parker says there is concern about the bill's chance for passage in Ways and Means because of its high cost.

However, proponents of the measure argue that any additional costs, due to early retirement, will be nearly offset by new hiring. They point out that at age 58 most employees are at the top of their pay scale. To let them retire early and to replace them with a person at the lower end of that pay scale, would nearly equal the additional cost of lowering the retirement age, they point out.

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