

# Trump could have big impacts on Oregon health care

Changes could take a few years to filter down

By NICK BUDNICK  
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Oregon has plenty to lose when it comes to President-elect Donald Trump's vow to change the nation's health care system.

His surprise victory threatens state officials' hope of plugging a looming budget hole with \$1.25 billion in federal health care reform payments, and his vow to immediately repeal Obamacare creates uncertainty for more than 470,000 Oregonians who received coverage or subsidies under the law.

However, Trump already has signaled a willingness to reconsider aspects of the federal Affordable Care Act, and observers believe nobody's coverage is in immediate danger. Any changes could take until 2018 to filter down.

Here's what Oregonians should know as Trump prepares to take office in January.

## Oregon Health Plan

About 1 million Oregonians are enrolled in the state's version of Medicaid, the government low-income health care program.

Of those, 378,607 adults



Pablo Martinez/The Associated Press.

President-elect Donald Trump speaks during his meeting with President Barack Obama last week in White House. Trump could have a big impact on Oregon health care.

qualified under Obamacare's expansion of Medicaid, which in Oregon boosted the maximum income to qualify from 100 percent of the federal poverty level to 133 percent. Instead of having to earn \$20,160 or less to qualify, a family of three could make a little more than \$26,800 under the new cap.

But while Trump has vowed to repeal and replace Obamacare, it's unclear how that might affect Medicaid expansion.

Jeff Heatherington, CEO of Portland-based Family Care, one of 16 organizations around

the state providing for Oregon Health Plan members, echoes other health care officials in saying it's unlikely Republicans will strip millions of Americans of their health care.

"I think it would be a crazy disaster," he says, "The hospitals and the pharmaceutical companies would argue against doing that because they're making too much money."

Robert Gootee, president and CEO of Moda Health, which operates the Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization, also sounded a note of optimism. "I remain

confident the uncertainties of today will transition to opportunities for sustainable long-term solutions, so that our members throughout Eastern Oregon can secure broader choices, with lower costs, and greater flexibility in their access to health care," he said.

Trump has proposed turning Medicaid into a program that gives states block grants rather than placing restrictions on the spending. Republicans in Congress, meanwhile, have long sought to add conditions to the program such as premiums or work requirements.

Oregon could avoid any major changes under an application for a five-year waiver from standard Medicaid rules. President Barack Obama could approve the plan before leaving office.

Gov. Kate Brown's office released the following statement: "There will be a lot of speculation in the next couple of months, but we have to work with the facts we have, which is that Oregon has a successful coordinated care model that is improving the quality of care while holding down costs."

## State budget

Oregon faces a nearly \$1.4 billion budget hole over the next two years.

The state's waiver application includes a request for \$1.2 billion over the next five

years from the federal government, which could do a lot to help plug that hole. A similar request by Gov. John Kitzhaber in 2012 yielded \$1.9 billion.

But even if the state's Medicaid waiver request is approved by Obama, any funding that goes with it could be cut off by the Trump administration at any time, officials say. "I think that could be at risk, said Health Share of Oregon CEO Janet Meyer.

It's too soon to say, but the resulting budget pressures could affect how the state administers the Oregon Health Plan.

## Obamacare private insurance

More than 220,000 Oregonians not covered by employers or Medicare buy their own insurance policies in a market that has undergone a radical makeover under the Affordable Care Act.

Obamacare bans insurers from discriminating against people with pre-existing medical conditions and levies a tax penalty against many of those who don't have health coverage, while offering subsidies to those with incomes of 400 percent of federal poverty level or less.

About 130,000 Oregonians signed up through the federal website HealthCare.gov, and of those 95,000 qualified for tax credits to offset their

premiums, averaging \$250 a month.

Premiums for the 130,000 Oregonians who don't receive subsidies have skyrocketed, however. On the national level, such hikes have driven the push to repeal Obamacare.

Since being elected, Trump has said he favors preserving Obamacare's guarantee that sick people can't be denied coverage — triggering speculation that the changes to Obamacare may not be as widespread as advocates of the law feared.

What does the future hold? "We can't answer that right now — it's too early to tell what changes may be made," said Lisa Morawski, a state spokeswoman.

Morawski says people should keep enrolling for 2017 private health insurance. Those who do are guaranteed no changes in terms for the coming year.

## Medicare

More than 750,000 Oregonians receive benefits under Medicare, the health insurance program for people 65 and older.

Trump has vowed to preserve and modernize Medicare, but congressional Republican leaders want to turn it over to private insurers.

Budnick is a reporter for Pamplin Media Group's Portland Tribune.

# Enforcement of public benefits in Elliott sale still to be determined

Several groups interested in buying forest

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE  
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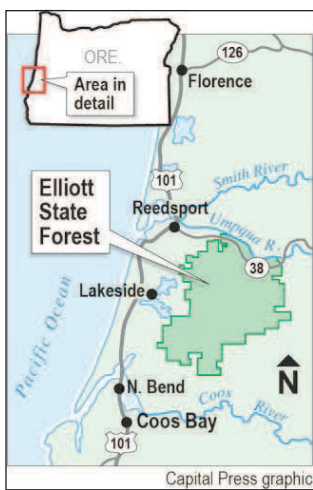
SALEM — The eventual buyer of an 82,500-acre parcel of state-owned coastal forest will be required to provide 40 full-time jobs for a decade, preserve some old growth stands, maintain trees in riparian areas and allow public access to half the forest.

As the deadline to submit acquisition proposals approaches, one key detail is still unknown — how those "public benefit" requirements will be enforced.

A range of parties have expressed interest in buying the large swath of the Elliott State Forest, including conservation groups such as the Audubon Society of Portland and timber companies such as Roseburg-based Lone Rock Resources.

The acquisition plans are scheduled to be released publicly next week, but the enforcement provisions won't be fully hammered out until after a buyer is selected.

Although prospective buyers have been asked to include



enforcement provisions in their acquisition plans, these could differ among bidders.

So it remains to be seen who will assess how well the eventual buyer meets the requirements, and who will step in to require the entity to follow the rules if the buyer is found to be out of line.

"I know it's kind of squishy," Department of State Lands Spokeswoman Julie Curtis said last week. "It's just really hard to say what the proponents are going to say."

Oregonians will know who submitted plans Wednesday, but will not know the substance of the plans, including suggested enforcement mechanisms, until they are released in full Nov. 22.

The department will evaluate potential buyers' propos-

als for responsiveness and pass those that are deemed responsive to the State Land Board for ranking and a final decision.

The board is composed of the governor, treasurer and secretary of state.

The Department of State Lands won't have a further role in the Elliott Forest property once it is sold to another entity, and so it can't enforce the requirements.

## Enforcement

The proposals have to identify a third party responsible for enforcement — such as a tribe or conservation group — or give the public standing to enforce those requirements.

The department has said that ownership by a land trust "in and of itself" is insufficient to meet the public benefit requirements.

The prospective buyers' suggested enforcement provisions may factor into the board's final decision.

"Differences between responsive plans on how to address assurances of enforceability may be a basis for their prioritization and choice," the department said in response to questions submitted by interested parties earlier this year.

Negotiations will continue after the land board selects the buyer as officials and the buyer work out a purchase and sale agreement.

Department of State Lands Director Jim Paul said last week that prospective buyers submitting plans could choose a default enforcement mechanism — a conservation easement.

Conservation easements typically prohibit certain uses of land by the owner and are

held by another party such as a land trust.

The public benefits — excluding the jobs requirement, which lasts for 10 years — would have to continue in perpetuity, according to the department.

## Public ownership

Environmental groups and activists have supported keeping the land in public ownership, and several public entities such as the Bureau of Land Management and the Oregon Department of Forestry have expressed interest in buying the property.

As far as assessing whether the buyer has met its obligations down the line, it's unlikely that the secretary of state, the state's

top auditor, would audit the eventual buyer due to the secretary's position on the land board.

Molly Woon, a spokeswoman for the Secretary of State's Office, said that if the secretary participates in the acquisition decision, the office's current auditor would recommend that an outside entity conduct an audit.

"We want to avoid auditing anything related to the secretary's State Land Board responsibilities," Woon wrote in an email Thursday.

The Department of State Lands is charged with managing the Elliott for the benefit of the Common School Fund, which was designed to provide revenue for schools through timber harvests.

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