

State Senate passes bill to raise smoking age to 21

Bipartisan support in the House

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The state Senate Thursday passed a bill to raise the smoking age to 21. If the House concurs, Oregon would become the third state in the nation to prohibit the sale of tobacco to people younger than 21.

“The is pure and simple a public health bill,” said the bill’s chief sponsor, state Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton.

The bill passed 18-9, with all Democrats and two Republicans, Sen. Jackie Winters of Salem, and Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena, voting in favor. Winters and Democrat swing vote Sen. Betsy Johnson of Scappoose changed their votes. A Republican, Rep. Rich Vial of Scholls, co-sponsored the bill with Steiner Hayward.

Both lawmakers have said they lost loved ones to tobacco-related diseases.

Sen. Alan Olson, R-Canby, argued the bill looked like the work of a “nanny state.”

“I appall smoking,” Olson said. But the senator said he felt people have the right to make that choice for themselves.

Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, said people who are old enough to serve in the military ought to be able to decide whether they want to smoke. He said the law change would create a new illicit market for people between the ages of 19 and 21.

Steiner Hayward, who is a family physician, retorted that states have prohibited people younger than 21 from drinking alcohol and that alcohol is less addictive than tobacco.

Recent research, including some from the U.S. Surgeon General’s Office, shows that brains under age 26 are more susceptible to addiction.

The legislation would impose first-time civil pen-

alties of \$50 for clerks and \$500 for managers who sell to minors.

“We made a conscious decision not have criminal penalties because we know that tobacco companies tend to target low-income communities who can least afford it,” Steiner Hayward said.

Taking 18- to 20-year-olds out of the legal market would result in an estimated loss in tobacco tax revenue of \$1.6 million every two years, according to a projection by the Legislative Revenue Office.

An increase in the tobacco tax proposed by Gov. Kate Brown could offset some of that loss.

In 2015, Hawaii became the first state in the nation to raise the smoking age to 21. California followed suit last year. An additional 210 cities and counties, including New York City and Boston, have similar laws.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Warrenton hears school bond options

School district tries to cope with growth

By **EDWARD STRATTON**
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — Rick Yeo, a principle with R&C Management Group who has worked on more than 300 school building projects, told the Warrenton-Hammond School Board Thursday that any new academic building would likely cost about \$600 per square foot.

Yeo was brought in to advise the Warrenton-Hammond School Board, which faces the challenge of how to accommodate a quickly growing student population, on what the district might be able to do with a drastically scaled-back potential bond from what members had been considering.

The school district had discussed the possibility of asking voters for a large bond to relocate the district to higher ground, similar to Seaside School District’s \$100 million move to an uphill K-12 campus away from the tsunami zone. But Warrenton-Hammond recently learned from state bond expert Carol Samuels that the local assessed property value of \$690 million would only allow a \$69 million bond at maximum. Superintendent Mark Jeffery said Samuels explained the biggest bond the district could realistically get voters to support is between \$20 million and \$30 million.

Yeo said the first thing the district should do is figure out the millage rate, used to calculate taxes on property. He said bonds costing property owners about \$2.50 per \$100,000 in assessed property value are the sweet spot for smaller districts.

Yeo shared a budget for the new school building his company is working on for Gaston School District for nearly \$17 million. “That’s about a 30,000-square-foot building we’re building. We’re spending \$560 a square foot. That’s in Gaston. Your buildings here cost upwards of 10 percent more.”

Jeffery said the district is looking to add eight or nine classrooms over what it has now, to accommodate growth 20 years down the road. The district has focused on adding the space at Warrenton High School, where it would relocate middle school grades to ease congestion at Warrenton Grade School, now one of the most populous K-8 schools in the state with more than 700 students.

Yeo said 30,000 square feet would be needed to add that many rooms, with the district likely tearing down an old part of the high school and building a new, two-story structure. He said a budget of about \$600 per square foot would cover all the various engineers, archi-

ects, testing, construction and other costs. At such an estimate, a 30,000-square-foot building would cost about \$18 million.

The district recently took out a \$2 million bond financed in-house to add several classrooms at the grade school in the interim. The bond included a set-aside of \$200,000 to \$250,000 to prepare for a potentially larger, voter-approved bond.

Yeo said that while the public generally doesn’t like school districts spending money, they do want districts to be prepared before asking for public funding.

“If you wanted to move forward, the next step would (be to) bring an architect out here and start going through your facilities,” Yeo said.

At the end of the meeting, Jeffery reminded school board members that the district has about five years before a glut of 100-plus classes reaches the high school. District staff has estimated class sizes in Warrenton, previously in the 60s, will average about 90 for the foreseeable future.

“It does sound like we need to keep nudging this forward,” Jeffery said, “because I don’t think anything has changed in our estimation that enrollment is going to continue to grow.”

Advocates, legislators seek more money for Oregon veteran services

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon veterans’ groups have been up in arms since the governor’s budget reduced allocations to the state Department of Veterans’ Affairs from the state’s general fund and backfilled it with most of the lottery fund dollars set aside for veterans’ services by a voter-approved ballot measure.

Now they’ve brought their concerns to a Legislature busy trying to fill a \$1.6 billion shortfall.

Measure 96 amended the

state’s constitution to allocate 1.5 percent of state lottery net proceeds to direct services for veterans.

Advocates have been vocal about what they say is a need for more support — such as for veterans’ services officers, who help returned veterans sign up for federal benefits.

Byron Whipple, a veterans’ services officer in Union County, told legislators last month that in his area of northeastern Oregon, veterans face problems accessing travel to get medical care.

In February, community members housed a 75-year-old veteran with dementia for five days because local agencies could not arrange services for him sooner, Whipple wrote in testimony to the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development.

“We do not have local missions and shelters that certain cities and counties have,” Whipple wrote. “We do not have the extra tax dollars to fund these emergencies. Last November, we did have hope.”



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