

# Health care provider tax gets closer to ballot

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Legislation designed to pay for Oregon's expanded Medicaid program through a tax on providers and insurers got a step closer to the ballot Wednesday.

State Rep. Julie Parrish, R-Tualatin/West Linn; Rep. Cedric Hayden, R-Fall River; and Rep. Sal Esquivel, R-Medford, filed paperwork to start collecting signatures to get a tax on health care providers on the ballot.

Oregon already assesses certain urban hospitals 5.3 percent of net revenues in order to help pay for the costs of the Oregon Health Plan, the state's version of Medicaid, the federal program that provides health coverage for the poor and other qualifying groups.

Legislation approved last month would continue the assessment, create a "true tax" of .7 percent of net revenues, create a new 4 percent assessment on rural hospitals and a 1.5 percent tax on insurers.

Taxing providers allows states to draw substantial federal funds to pay for Medicaid. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, all states except Alaska had some kind of provider tax in the 2016 fiscal year.

In Oregon, the provider tax is expected to collect more than \$600 million in the next two years, and to leverage nearly \$1.9 billion in federal funds to pay for Medicaid.

Health care providers receive a portion of the total Medicaid funds in exchange for providing care to Medicaid patients.

If the petitioners collect the required 58,789 signatures in about three months, the legislation will "freeze" and parts of it will not be implemented as planned. The tax on insurers, for example, would not start on Jan. 1, 2018, as the legislation outlines.

Parrish is critical of that

aspect of the bill, and said Wednesday it amounted to a "sales tax on health care" for people who buy insurance on the individual market.

Esquivel voted for the provider tax — the lone Republican to do so and a key vote supplying the required three-fifths majority approval in the House.

Esquivel said in a prepared statement Wednesday that although he voted for the provider tax, he was concerned about recent initiatives in health care led by Democrats, such as mandating coverage of reproductive health services for Oregon residents, regardless of immigration status. That bill was passed by the Legislature Thursday.

"I supported (the provider tax bill) because I think those who qualify under the federal law should have a way to see the doctor," Esquivel said. "It was a hard vote, but it needed to be done. What's ensued since is a major overreach by the House Democrats to drive new costs and expand programs when we can't fully fund programs for our veterans and citizens. That's not how those tax increases were presented to me."

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat, signed the provider tax legislation Monday. In a statement Wednesday, she called it "critical to protecting the health care coverage of Oregonians and stabilizing the commercial insurance market."

"Any delay would jeopardize the care of more than 1 million Oregonians who rely on the Oregon Health Plan, drive up costs of Oregonians who buy their insurance on the individual market, and limit health care options for rural Oregonians," Brown said.

It's not yet clear when the tax could go to the ballot: the House is scheduled to vote today on when to hold the election. Democrats are pushing for a January election to decide the issue sooner, a move that Parrish opposes.

# Oregon House passes anti-racial profiling bill

By **PARIS ACHEN**  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A bill aimed at reducing racial profiling during police stops passed the House of Representatives 36-23 Wednesday.

The legislation received broad support for its anti-profiling measures but drew controversy when Democrats added provisions to decrease penalties for felony drug crimes and for certain misdemeanors.

The Senate is set to vote on the bill next.

House Bill 2355 "is a critical piece of legislation for ensuring fair policing practices and building trust between law enforcement and the public," said Rep. Tawna Sanchez, D-Portland. "This is an intersectional approach to addressing the inequities in our criminal justice system at every level both on the ground in everyday interactions with law enforcement and in the courthouse through common-sense sentencing reforms."

Sanchez, who is of Native American heritage, shared her own experience during traffic stops with police. She said on multiple occasions, officers pulled her over and without asking her whether she knew why she had been pulled over, and inquired whether she had been drinking.

The proposal requires police to collect data on race and other demographic information during law enforcement stops. The Criminal Justice Commission would have the responsibility to analyze the data to identify any trends showing officers have singled out people with specific qualities such as the color of their skin.

Another provision requires training of police, including veteran officers and leadership, in concepts of bias and implicit bias, the idea that people unconsciously feel more

trust toward others who are similar to them.

The Department of Public Safety Standards and Training would then assist law enforcement agencies in stopping profiling practices and develop training programs to prevent profiling, according to the measure.

The bill also reduces the circumstances under which possession of a controlled substance is charged as a felony. A task force assembled by Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum recommended the sentencing changes. Members of the task force found in their research that people of color are disproportionately charged with drug-related crimes despite statistics that show they use drugs at about the same rate as people who appear as Caucasian, Rosenblum has said.

The bill reduces possession of six controlled substances from a Class B or C felony to a Class A misdemeanor, unless a defendant has a prior felony conviction, two or more possession convictions, commercial possession or amount exceeds a certain threshold.

Rep. Andy Olson, R-Albany, said he opposed the bill because the change could fuel other crimes such as property crimes.

"It's a very difficult bill for me to vote no against because I am 100 percent behind the racial profiling part of it," Olson said.

Another provision reduces maximum penalty for a Class A misdemeanor from 365 days of imprisonment to 364 days. That change was meant to prevent federal deportation of legal immigrants who are convicted of a Class A misdemeanor and may be a refugee, enrolled in school in the United States, or are the spouses or family members of a U.S. citizen, said Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland. A sentence of 365 days triggers mandatory federal deportation.

## WORLD IN BRIEF



AP Photo/Evan Vucci

President Donald Trump waves as he arrives to deliver a speech at Krasinski Square at the Royal Castle today in Warsaw.

Associated Press

## Trump administration to sell Patriot missiles to Poland

WARSAW, Poland — Poland's defense minister says the Trump administration has agreed to sell Poland a new batch of medium-range Patriot missiles to upgrade the European nation's air defenses.

Minister Antoni Macierewicz made the announcement today as President Donald Trump kicked off a day of meetings on defense and energy initiatives.

The purchase deal is still to be signed.

Warsaw is seeking to raise its defense potential amid Russia's heightened military activity, some of it near Poland's air space.

Macierewicz said the purchase could total some \$8 billion

## Trump says Russia likely hacked but nobody 'knows for sure'

WARSAW, Poland — On the eve of his first meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, President Donald Trump questioned the veracity of American intelligence about foreign meddling in the U.S. election, arguing today that Russia wasn't the only country that may have interfered.

"Nobody really knows for sure," Trump said.

Opening his second overseas trip as president, Trump also warned North Korea that he's considering "some pretty severe things" in response to the isolated nation's unprecedented launch of a missile capable of reaching the U.S. Though he declined to offer specifics on the U.S. response, he called on all nations to confront the North's "very, very bad behavior."

As U.S. investigations into Russia's meddling move ahead, Trump is under intense scrutiny for how he handles his first face-to-face session with Putin. U.S. intelligence officials say the unpredictable Russia leader ordered interference in the election that brought Trump to the White House.

Trump and Putin plan to sit down on Friday in Hamburg, Germany, on the sidelines of an international summit.

## US warns North Korea that diplomatic window is closing

WASHINGTON — The United States warned Wednesday that North Korea was "quickly closing off" the prospect of a diplomatic resolution to its provocations, as the Trump administration launched a government-wide effort to identify options for confronting Pyongyang following its unprecedented intercontinental ballistic missile launch.

President Donald Trump and other senior officials dangled the prospect of punishing countries that trade with North Korea — a threat aimed directly at China, Pyongyang's biggest benefactor. In a tweet Wednesday morning, Trump questioned why the U.S. should continue what he sees as bad trade deals "with countries that do not help us."

His message was bolstered at the United Nations, where U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley told an emergency meeting of the Security Council that the Trump administration was eyeing penalties against "any country that does business with this outlaw regime." She also raised the specter of military action, declaring that the U.S. was prepared to use force if necessary.

"Their actions are quickly closing off the possibility of a diplomatic solution," she said of North Korea's leaders.

Some administration officials are still holding out hope of persuading China to ratchet up economic pressure on Pyongyang, despite Trump's increasingly pessimistic attitude toward Beijing. Trump, who departed for Europe early Wednesday, is scheduled to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Germany.

## Police look into what prompted deadly ambush of officer

NEW YORK — At the start of her midnight shift, Officer Miosotis Familia was in a New York Police Department mobile command post, writing in her notebook, when a gunman strode toward her.

She never saw Alexander Bonds coming before he shot her in the head through the passenger-side window, killing her before officers ultimately killed him, police said.

Police are investigating what may have prompted Wednesday's shooting, which Police Commissioner James O'Neill described as an officer being "assassinated in an unprovoked attack on cops."

"Officer Familia was murdered for her uniform and for the responsibility she embraced," O'Neill said in a message to officers Wednesday night. "For the NYPD, regularly achieving lower and lower crime figures means absolutely nothing when one of our own is brutally shot and killed."

A 12-year NYPD veteran, the 48-year-old Familia had come to police work later in life than most on a force where the average recruit is 26. She had been a nurse and medical assistant first, according to her profile on the career site LinkedIn. A mother of three who lived with her own mother in the Bronx, she felt a calling to help her community, friends said.

## Wounded Rep. Scalise readmitted to intensive care

WASHINGTON — The Washington hospital where House Majority Whip Steve Scalise is recuperating from a gunshot wound says he has been readmitted to the intensive care unit.

MedStar Washington Hospital Center says the Louisiana congressman is back in intensive care because of new concerns for infection. Scalise was in serious condition Wednesday night.

Scalise and four other people were injured last month when a gunman opened fire on a Republican baseball practice in nearby Alexandria, Virginia. U.S. Capitol Police and other officers returned fire and killed the gunman.

The congressman was struck in the hip and the bullet tore into blood vessels, bones and internal organs. He has undergone several surgeries and had been upgraded to fair condition.

The shooting in the Virginia suburb that critically wounded Scalise and injured several others has forced members of Congress to examine their security arrangements to determine if they are sufficient.

## Device thought to be WWII-era bomb is actually time capsule

NEW YORK — Workers at a construction site dug up what first appeared to be an unexploded World War II-era bomb but turned out to be a time capsule from a nightclub that helped launch Madonna's career.

Police found the device Wednesday in the Flatiron section of Manhattan and determined quickly that it was not dangerous. It turns out the capsule was buried in 1985 by clubgoers and bartenders from the club Danceteria. Former owner John Argento told the Daily News of New York he bought it for \$200 at an Army Navy store on Canal Street.

"It was just an excuse to do a party," Argento said. "We forgot about it and went on to the next party."

Madonna danced through Danceteria in the movie "Desperately Seeking Susan," and she performed there in real life, as did Billy Idol, Duran Duran and many other '80s icons. The club closed in 1986.

"The city was exciting then — it was innovation, music, art, fashion because kids could still afford to come to New York City and get an apartment for \$100 and the drinks were \$2," Argento told TV station WCBS.

Argento, who now runs two clubs in New Jersey, said he can hardly remember what was inside the Danceteria capsule.

"I was hoping the contents survived and I want to get them back because a lot of people ask about it," Argento said.

The police said Argento may be able to pick up the contents of the capsule once they've been thoroughly searched.

## Govt supporters storm Venezuela congress, injuring lawmakers

CARACAS, Venezuela — Pro-government militias wielding wooden sticks and metal bars stormed congress on Wednesday, attacking opposition lawmakers during a special session coinciding with Venezuela's independence day.

Four lawmakers were injured and blood was splattered on the neoclassical legislature's white walls. One of them, Americo de Grazia, had to be removed in a stretcher while suffering from convulsions.

"This doesn't hurt as much as watching how every day how we lose a little bit more of our country," Armando Arias said from inside an ambulance as he was being treated for head wounds that spilled blood across his clothes.

The unprecedented attack, in plain view of national guardsmen assigned to protect the legislature, comes amid three months of often-violent confrontations between security forces and protesters who accuse the government of trying to establish a dictatorship by jailing foes, pushing aside the opposition-controlled legislature and rewriting the constitution to avoid fair elections.

Tensions were already high after Vice President Tarek El Aissami made an unannounced morning visit to the National Assembly, accompanied by top government and military officials, for an event celebrating independence day. The short appearance at the congress by top officials who have repeatedly dismissed the legislators as a band of U.S.-backed conspirators was seen by many as a provocation.

## Syrian TV: At least 3 dead in blast in central Syria

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syrian TV says an explosion has gone off in the central city of Hama, killing at least three people.

The state-run TV says today's midday explosion went off in a bus station in the city, which is controlled by President Bashar Assad's forces. It said the "terrorist blast caused a number of casualties, including dead and wounded."

Explosions in the city are rare.

Assad traveled to Hama and attended prayers at a mosque in the city on the first day of the Muslim al-Fitr holiday late last month.