

Bill to raise state smoking age to 21 passes state House

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon is on its way to become the third state to raise the legal age to buy tobacco from 18 to 21.

The state House of Representatives on Thursday passed a bill to increase the legal age.

The Senate, which had previously passed the bill, then approved a minor language change made by the House, sending the bill to Gov. Kate Brown for a signature.

“Research has shown that raising the minimum legal sale age of tobacco products and electronic cigarettes to 21 years, in line with alcohol and marijuana, significantly reduces the number of youth who begin using these products and become addicted to them,

saving Oregonians billions of tax dollars, and the lives of thousands of loved ones, each year,” said state Rep. Rich Vial, R-Scholls.

Vial and Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton, sponsored the legislation to help prevent youth from becoming addicted to tobacco. Tobacco-related disease is the state’s leading cause of preventable death and claims the lives of more than 5,500 Oregonians each year.

Despite endorsements from public health advocates and an easy passage in the Senate, the bill faced a setback when tobacco company Altria hired former state Sen. Margaret Carter, D-Portland, to lobby against the measure, according to a story by Willamette Week. Carter, the first black

woman elected to the Oregon Legislature, argued to lawmakers that raising the legal age could prompt racial profiling of minority youth, according to the alt-weekly article.

The House Rules Committee amended the bill Monday to eliminate the potential for that problem and ensure individuals younger than 21 are not penalized for possessing tobacco.

The statewide law would follow a similar law enacted in Lane County in March.

If signed by the governor, the bill would make Oregon the third state to raise the smoking age. Hawaii began the statewide trend in 2015, followed by California last year. More than 200 cities and counties, including New York City and Boston, have similar laws.

Roughly 1,800 Oregon kids

become new daily smokers every year and an alarming 24 percent of Oregon’s 11th graders report using tobacco products. The increase in sales age will keep tobacco products out of high schools, where younger teens often access them from older classmates, according to advocates with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. About 95 percent of adult smokers started smoking before age 21, said Christopher Friend, Oregon government relations director for the Cancer Action Network.

“High school is a prime time for youth to begin a tobacco addiction, but we know that if kids don’t pick up a cigarette during these vulnerable teenage years that most of them will never start smoking later,” Friend said.

County: ‘County manager staff is really small’

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Moore has been trying to find a clear replacement, whether it be short term or long term, since he became county manager in April 2016. He was hired to curb a trend that saw nine different county managers in 16 years, though the recent past was not a consideration for him in this decision, he said.

“That’s the most important thing a leader does is to plan for succession,” Moore said. “What happens if I’m not here tomorrow. What happens if I’m not here next year?”

Post was eliminated

The assistant county manager position was eliminated due to budget cuts in the recession. But this year’s spending plan is considerably healthier, representing a nearly 25 percent increase from just two years ago.

“Certainly compared to a lot of other counties in Oregon, we’re in pretty decent financial shape,” Moore said. “Other places are dealing more with cutting staff and things that we’re not having to do right now. It’s a lot more fun to be in this position than it is to be in that position.”

The assistant county manager vacancy essentially combined two full-time positions into one, making this transition a natural fit, he said. He expects the move will allow Clatsop County to engage more comprehensively in issues such as policy advocacy at the state level.

“The county manager staff is really small,” Moore said. “There’s so many things that we do. There has to be somebody at a high enough level at the county that can engage in discussions with other counties, maybe cities in the county.”

Moore and Steele will work closely, often attending the same meetings. Having a like-minded assistant who is privy to the same discussions will help Moore maintain consistency with staff even when he

is away.

“That’s important for the staff, frankly, so that they don’t wonder if there’s a problem,” Moore said. “There might be things that come up when I’m out of the office, but I need to be confident that those things will be handled in a way that I would like them to be handled if I had been here myself.”

Three-year goal

The initial goal is for Steele to become the full-time assistant county manager within three years. In the meantime, she will specialize on a rotating set of issues each year until her base of knowledge is more complete.

The budget office planned to hire a full-time employee to replace a departing half-time employee. The hire will allow two accountants to take on larger roles in Steele’s partial absence.

Steele will receive the same \$97,810 salary as last fiscal year. The budget allocates 60 percent of her salary toward the budget and finance director position and 40 percent for the assistant county manager position. But Steele is under no illusions that her work hours will not increase.

“There are a lot more responsibilities stepping into a role like that. There is big time commitment,” Steele said. “I feel like, at this point in my career, that it’s something I would be interested in pursuing, to move up to that next level.”

After initially receiving a bachelor’s degree in exercise science, Steele changed career paths. She worked in a variety of accounting positions in the private sector and eventually earned an accounting degree as well.

She started working in the Clatsop County Budget and Finance Office in 2010 as the assistant director before being promoted to lead the department in 2014. The office has earned awards for its budget presentation each year since.

“Monica was already per-

ceived by a lot of people as a leader,” Moore said. “She had already earned a broad level of respect from county staff. Whoever is in that senior financial position, they touch every part of that organization. People in those positions often start with a very good base of knowledge about other parts of county operations.”

So when Steele definitively expressed her interest in moving toward management, Moore was pleased.

“That said something to me, that she had a desire,” he said. “I guarantee you there are people here that would say, ‘No way in hell would I take the county manager job.’”

Though she didn’t start on a path toward local government, it has become an adopted passion for Steele.

“I just love county government,” she said. “It can be a really hard job from day to day trying to make people happy, not just the citizens, but the staff and the commissioners. We have a set of laws that we have to follow.”

Early test

Steele may be tested early on that front.

Some county elected officials have expressed concerns both publicly and privately about the process under which Steele assumed the position, as well as the perception that she may be preparing to eventually become the county manager.

The county charter grants the Board of Commissioners the sole power to hire a county manager. Scott Lee, the board’s chairman, said he has been supportive of the move since Steele was first approached about the position. He noted it re-establishes a position that was forced to be cut, and that Steele already assumes interim county manager responsibilities when Moore is away.

“She’s assumed that role quite effectively,” Lee said. “We feel that this is a logical step. It’s a good general house-keeping issue.”

Commissioner Lianne

Thompson, however, said that county staff heard about the transition long before she and other commissioners did. Thompson, the sole “no” vote when the county budget was adopted last week, is displeased that commissioners did not have more time to deliberate on Steele’s transition, among other things.

“It’s about role and scope of authority,” she said. “For Cam to select the person who will succeed him is inappropriate. This is what the county’s governing body has devolved to.”

Thompson has repeatedly questioned whether or not commissioners have the proper amount of sway in county decision-making.

Lee seems to agree the board has devolved, though not in the same way. When asked about recent dissatisfaction expressed by commissioners, he said the professionalism of the board has been called into question.

“I think the process has been open and transparent. We’re not grooming a future county manager; we’re re-establishing a position,” Lee said. “I think it’s irresponsible rhetoric, and I dismiss it.”

Both Steele and Moore acknowledged the board will have the final say in any future hiring decision and that a number of applicants will likely be considered.

“This isn’t hiring a county manager, and this isn’t saying that I would necessarily get hired as a county manager,” Steele said. “It’s just somebody so, should something happen, you have an interim, somebody who’s in that place who is familiar with all of the events going on currently.”

Moore added that by the time he eventually vacates the county manager role, which he has said will be his final position before retirement, the board will likely feature a new assortment of commissioners.

“There are no guarantees there,” he said. “I don’t think anybody could presuppose what that might look like.”

Transportation: Plan will hike gas tax by 10 cents gradually

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The 10-year plan includes hikes in the gas tax, registration and title fees and new taxes on payroll, new vehicle purchases and bicycles priced more than \$200.

The package also calls for congestion-priced tolling at some of Portland’s bottlenecks. The Oregon Transportation Commission is responsible for establishing the program, which could toll certain lanes on Interstate 5 and Interstate 205 to pay for congestion-busting projects.

Among projects specified in the plan are congestion relief on Highway 217, widening northbound Interstate 205 from Powell Boulevard to Interstate 84 and initial investment in adding new lanes to Interstate 5 through Portland’s Rose Quarter.

Local impacts

The plan also includes other projects around the

state. Senators each received a summary of what projects in their respective districts are included.

The plan hikes the state’s existing 30-cent gas tax gradually over a seven-year period to a total of 40 cents. Registration fees would climb by \$13 and title fees by \$16 in 2018. Beginning in 2020, the state would move toward a tiered system of registration and title fees based on a vehicle’s gas mileage.

The plan also levies a 0.5 percent tax on the purchase of new vehicles. About \$12 million of the revenue from the proceeds of the vehicle excise tax would be used for rebates on the purchase of electric vehicles.

A \$15 flat fee would be charged on the purchase of new adult bicycles with a price tag of more than \$200. The proceeds would go toward paying for commuter bicycle and pedestrian paths.

Gearhart: Mayor Brown supports the city’s rules

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vacation rental ordinance is far more beneficial to the city and the residents of Gearhart than the current ordinance.”

Some elements of the original ballot initiative prepared by the city are retained in the rewritten summary, including a vote on future short-term rental zoning amendments, safety inspections and permit fees.

‘A responsible cap’

Mayor Matt Brown stood by the city’s rules. “Our current vacation rental laws are working very well,” Brown said. “We have a responsible cap while allowing all current vacation rentals to continue to rent. Substandard septic and cesspools are being repaired and replaced, and bedrooms are being updated with fire egresses to protect children, families and our property owners.”

Brown said that the ordinance has stimulated more available housing for full-time residents, who choose Gearhart for “its quiet residential nature.”

The city’s rules regulate short-term rental occupancy limits, parking and property management contact information, among other provisions.

Permits are transferable only by inheritance, not by the sale of the property.

Brown said language in the new proposal is “very dangerous” to the quiet residential nature of the community and against the language in the city’s comprehensive plan.

The revised ordinance would eliminate the ability to protect residents from negative impacts, he said, and

allows an unlimited number of commercial vacation rentals in residential zones.

According to Brown, the proposal would eliminate septic inspections for high-occupancy rentals and eliminate state certified fire and life safety inspections. “I believe it’s my sworn duty to reject something that could put lives in danger,” Brown said.

Headed to vote

City Administrator Chad Sweet said Thursday that 84 Gearhart property owners had registered their homes as short-term rentals.

Gearhart has about 1,400 voters on its rolls, Sweet said. While the deadline has passed for homeowners to apply for short-term rental permits, the city has extended the period for property owners to make improvements required by the city’s current ordinance. Window replacement or installation for safety egress, septic upgrades, cesspool replacement and other fire and life safety issues comprise the majority of repairs or upgrades needed to meet city standards.

Once the city delivers a notice of election, the initiative will be placed on the Nov. 7 ballot, County Clerk Valerie Crafard said.

Brown said, “I am looking forward to our citizens getting the true facts on the differences between our current common-sense vacation rental rules and their new repeal ordinance allowing unlimited commercial vacation rentals. I have the utmost faith that our citizens will decide what’s best for the future of our quiet residential community.”

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

Trump meets Putin: Talk of positive results, not of election

HAMBURG, Germany — At long last face to face, President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin voiced confidence today that their historic first meeting would pave the way for a positive trajectory for their two countries. If thornier issues like election meddling came up, they discussed them only in private.

In characteristically confident fashion, Trump said he and the Russian leader were holding “very, very good talks” as journalists were briefly allowed in to witness part of their meeting in Germany. Seated with an American flag behind him, Trump appeared informal and relaxed and said it was “an honor” to be with Putin.

“We look forward to a lot of very positive things happening for Russia, for the United States and for everybody concerned,” Trump said.

Trump offered no details about what issues he and the Russian leader had discussed, describing them only as “various things.” Putin was similarly vague, telling reporters through a translator that they were discussing international problems and bilateral issues.

Still, Putin described the fact that they were meeting as a positive sign in itself, and he said he hoped the meeting would “yield positive results.”

“Phone conversations are never enough definitely,” Putin said. “If you want to have a positive outcome in bilaterals and be able to resolve most international policy issues, that will really



AP Photo/Evan Vucci

President Donald Trump meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the G20 Summit today in Hamburg.

need personal meetings.”

Then the leaders shook hands firmly but briefly before reporters were escorted out of the room. Trump did not respond to shouted questions about whether they would discuss Russia’s meddling in the U.S. election — a topic lawmakers in Washington have been demanding that Trump raise directly.

The heavily anticipated meeting is being closely scrutinized for signs of how friendly a rapport Trump and Putin will have.

Trump’s predecessor, President Barack Obama, had notoriously strained ties to Putin, and Trump has expressed an interest in a better U.S.-Russia relationship.

G-20 summit in Germany to discuss terror, trade, climate

HAMBURG, Germany — The Group of 20 leaders’ summit opened in Hamburg today amid ongoing protests in the German port city, with terrorism, global trade and climate change high on the agenda.

The host, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, says she hopes to find “compromises and answers” on a range of issues at the two-day meeting of leading industrial and developing nations. While there’s little disagreement on fighting terrorism, the first item on the agenda, prospects of finding common ground on climate change and trade look uncertain.

The gathering, at which President Donald Trump will hold his first meeting with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, follows skirmishes Thursday evening between police and protesters at a demonstration in Germany’s biggest city that was expected to be the biggest flashpoint around the summit.

Police said that at least 111 officers were hurt during the clashes, one of whom had to be taken to a hospital with an eye injury after a firework exploded in front of him. Twenty-nine people were arrested and another 15 temporarily detained. Windows at the Mongolian consulate were also broken.

The city has boosted its police with reinforcements from around the country and has 20,000 officers on hand to patrol Hamburg’s streets, skies and waterways.