

Medicaid: State projects related to expansion have faced setbacks

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The Oregon Health Authority worked with three other private vendors, and used Oregon Department of Human Services employees and its own staff to handle the work.

According to an email from Interim Oregon Health Authority Director Pat Allen to two legislative offices, provided to the EO Media Group/Pamplin Media Group Capital Bureau on Monday, the outside vendors provided expertise in project management, “back up call center support,” and support for processing renewals.

This outsourcing allowed health authority staff who had more familiarity with the system to focus on more complex cases requiring redeterminations, according to Allen’s email.

Allen said that the cost breakdown he provided to state Rep. Julie Parrish, R-Tualatin/West Linn, and Mike Carew, chief of staff to House Minority Leader Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, on Friday evening was the best estimate his agency could presently provide.

Certain internal costs such as payroll will not be known until after the end of the fiscal quarter, Allen, the former director of the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services, said.



The Blue Mountain Eagle

Oregon has struggled to get a handle on Medicaid eligibility.

ment of Consumer and Business Services, said.

“In summary, this represents our best estimate at this point,” Allen wrote. “It will no doubt change somewhat, and we can provide a more detailed final accounting

in November.”

The EO Media Group/Pamplin Media Group Capital Bureau inquired about the costs associated with reconciling the backlog earlier this summer, under the tenure of prior Oregon Health Authority

Director Lynne Saxton, who resigned at the end of August in the wake of a public-relations scandal.

While at the time, the health authority did provide some information about private vendors brought on to

help with the project, public-relations officials at the agency declined to provide more specific information about the internal personnel costs associated with the project, saying only that those costs were within the agency’s

approved budget.

The approximately \$4.3 million in costs pale in comparison, though, to the overall financial challenges Oregon has faced in implementing the Affordable Care Act, which allowed states to raise the income threshold for Medicaid.

While hundreds of thousands of Oregonians gained coverage under the ACA, with the federal government footing most of the bill, Oregon projects related to the expansion have faced setbacks.

Cover Oregon, an ambitious state-run health care exchange, failed to come to fruition, costing taxpayers about \$300 million.

An ongoing state IT project to integrate eligibility systems for various social safety net programs in Oregon, including the Oregon Health Plan, is estimated to cost \$241.7 million, according to documents produced by the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Office.

A portion of that is expected to be covered by the federal government. The project’s progress is being monitored by the Legislature and is expected to be complete by June of 2019.

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Lease: Restaurants that could be models shown

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Parts of the concept include the hotel, the Chinook Building and the former Seafare restaurant in between. The restaurant, once a popular gathering place that has long been vacant, is run down from past storm damage and likely needs to be demolished.

After the Port Commission signed off on the lease, Trabucco came forward to show pictures of restaurants in Newport Beach and Tiburon, California, that could be models for the former Seafare. “This gives you an idea of what we could do with the riverfront side,” he said.

In other news, the Port Commission approved:

- An intergovernmental agreement to have the Port of

Ilwaco, Washington, dredge a portion of the west-end marina this winter. Ilwaco has a smaller dredge that can fit into the marina, which hasn’t been dredged in at least a decade. Sand bars appear at low tide, grounding boats and damaging docks. The Port, which can’t afford to dredge the entire basin at one time, has opted to spread the operation over a few years.

- An increase in annual moorage rates at marinas of \$3 per foot per year over the next three years. The current rate is \$34 per foot annually for recreational vessels. Boatyard haul out and storage rates were also increased. Port Director of Operations Matt McGrath said the Port’s marina and boatyard rates are far below that of other ports, prevent the agency from

taking care of deferred maintenance and are part of the reason the agency loses money on the operations.

- New Port bylaws the agency and its general counsel, Eileen Eakins, have been working on in recent months.

- An updated Port commissioner compensation policy, which would allow travel reimbursement for meetings outside Clatsop County and a \$50 stipend for official Port Commission meetings and approved committee assignments.

- Roughly \$20,000 above the \$75,000 budgeted for repairs to the Port’s dredge. McGrath said the dredge, from the 1970s, had several areas of surprise concern when hauled out at North Tongue Point by WCT Marine.

- Moving forward with the process of developing an updated strategic plan to direct the Port’s endeavors. The Port’s last strategic plan was in 2010. Knight has said the state wants an updated plan every five years.

- Spending more than \$700,000 of the \$1.1 million left in a Federal Aviation Administration grant for improvements at the Astoria Regional Airport in Warrenton. The Port’s contractors completed work covered under Airport Improvement Project 21. Airport Manager Gary Kobes said the Port has to use the money left on airport improvements or lose it. The Port needs to match \$70,000 to receive the grant money, \$40,000 of which staff said is budgeted.

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Sessions: 1987 law made Oregon a sanctuary state

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The governor said she requested a meeting with Sessions but received no response from his office. She said she would have appealed to preserve Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which the Trump administration wants to rescind. The program allows undocumented young adults brought to the United States as children to legally work and attend school.

“He clearly did not have time to meet with me and hear my strong views about how I feel about making sure that Dreamers are able to go to school, to work and to lead lives in this state,” Brown said.

Sessions’ office did not immediately return a phone call seeking comment on why he decided against meeting the governor.

In his speech, the attorney general said the nearly 500 sanctuary cities across the nation “hinder the work of federal law enforcement” and “pro-



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Gov. Kate Brown said Tuesday that she asked for a meeting with Attorney General Jeff Sessions when he was in Portland, but his office did not respond to her request.

mote lawlessness.”

“That makes a sanctuary city a trafficker, smuggler, or gang member’s best friend,” Sessions said.

Brown said she is “appalled by the position of the attorney general.”

“I want to make it very clear that Oregon is a state that welcomes and wants to encour-

age our immigrant and refugee communities,” the governor said. “We see them as a very important part of Oregon’s cultural and economic fabric, and they’re part of what makes Oregon unique.”

A 1987 law effectively made Oregon a sanctuary state. Brown reinforced that law with an executive order in Febru-

ary barring the use of any state resources to enforce federal immigration policy.

Sessions announced this month that the Trump administration would phase out DACA in the next six months, unless Congress chose to enact the program legislatively.

The administration asserts that the program, created through executive order by President Barack Obama, is unconstitutional because it circumvents congressional powers.

Oregon is one of 16 states that sued the Trump administration earlier this month claiming that the dissolution of DACA violates the Constitution’s equal protection clause.

If Brown had met with Sessions, she said: “I would tell him that his position on DACA is absolutely counter to Oregon values and Oregonians.”

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Judge OKs lawsuit seeking better protection of Puget Sound

Suit brought by environmental group in Oregon

By GENE JOHNSON
Associated Press

SEATTLE — The Washington Department of Ecology faces the possibility of losing millions of dollars in federal money after a judge Tuesday declined to dismiss a lawsuit brought by an Oregon-based environmental group.

The lawsuit, by Northwest Environmental Advocates, of

Portland, is designed to force the state to do more to protect Puget Sound from pollution or risk losing more than \$3.5 million per year in federal support.

The federal government is supposed to cut certain funding for states that don’t have an approved plan for protecting coastal waterways from pollution related to farming, logging and other activities. Cutting the funding — a punishment dictated by Congress — is supposed to pressure states to control the pollution.


According to the lawsuit, the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration haven’t approved Washington’s plan, but they keep giving the state money anyway. The state’s orcas, salmon and other species remain in peril.

“They keep talking about saving these species and protecting human health from pollution, but when push comes to shove they’re not doing anything,” said Nina Bell, the group’s executive director. “Our goal here is not to take money away from the Department of Ecology. It’s to use a tool Congress created to pressure them to do what they’re supposed to be

doing, controlling the source of pollution.”

Such fixes include measures such as requiring farmers or loggers to leave enough vegetation on stream banks to keep eroded soil, pesticides or other pollutants from reaching the water, she said.

The federal government asked U.S. District Judge John C. Coughenour in Seattle to dismiss the case, on the grounds that Northwest Environmental Advocates lacked standing to sue, among other grounds. But the judge ruled Tuesday that most of the group’s claims can go forward.



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