

# As health bill teeters, Medicaid recipients watch nervously

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Associated Press

With the latest Republican health care overhaul teetering near collapse, one group in particular is watching with heightened anxiety.

The debate in Congress is personal for many of those who gained coverage through Medicaid in the 31 states that expanded the program under former President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act.

Alan Purser, who lives in eastern Arkansas, credits expanded Medicaid with saving his life, after a routine doctor's visit ended with him being hospitalized and treated for multiple blood clots in both lungs. The 60-year-old diabetic said he would not be able to afford his insulin medication because he does not qualify for traditional Medicaid.

"I am going to be up a creek if it goes through," he said.

The Medicaid expansion brought health insurance to some 11 million lower-income Americans, helping drive the nation's uninsured rate to just 9 percent. That program would have ended in three years

under the initial version of the Republican's latest health care bill, triggering widespread uncertainty for both recipients and states facing the prospect of winding down their coverage.

The latest GOP effort appeared to be doomed late Monday when Republican U.S. Sen. Susan Collins of Maine announced her opposition, citing in part the proposed cuts to Medicaid that she described as "devastating." With Democrats united in opposition, the only way Republicans can revive the bill is to alter it in ways they hope will change opposing senators' minds.

The bill's demise is welcome news to New Jersey state Sen. Joseph Vitale, a Democrat, who says the legislation would have been devastating for people who are covered through the Medicaid expansion. "They can now go to sleep at night like the rest of us who have health insurance, knowing that if something happens to them or something befalls a family member," Vitale said, "that they have access to affordable care and quality care."

States signed up for the

Medicaid expansion under the promise that the federal government would pick up the vast majority of the costs. Experts and officials in several of the states that opted for it said that under the GOP plan they would not have the ability to cover the costs of all those who benefited.

"I don't want to have to look those people in the eye and say you are losing your health insurance," said Nevada state Assemblyman Michael Sprinkle, a Democrat.

In his state, more than 300,000 people gained health insurance through the expansion, which extended coverage to more lower-income Americans by raising the income limit. Most were adults with no children at home.

## Big gains

Kentucky was another state seeing big gains under Obama's health care law, its uninsured rate dropping from 14.3 percent before it took effect to 5.1 percent last year. The 64 percent decline was the largest of any state, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Nearly all that gain was because Kentucky's former

Democratic governor opted to expand Medicaid, which provided coverage to 461,000 Kentuckians. The state also is home to U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who is among those leading the Republican effort to dismantle the law, and now has a Republican governor who also favors repeal.

John Holbrook, of Ashland, does not want to see the law repealed. He received substance abuse treatment under the Medicaid expansion, after being hospitalized with a dangerously high blood-alcohol level in December 2015.

"I would be dead or still homeless," said Holbrook, 36, who now works as a peer support specialist at a private treatment facility that accepts Medicaid. "Working in recovery, I see it changing lives every day."

The original version of the GOP bill would end funding for expansion enrollees in 2020, among other changes that would shift more of the financial responsibility of the \$500 billion-plus overall Medicaid program to the states. States already spend, on average, about 25 percent of their budgets on Medicaid.

# Clamming: Limit remains 15 clams per person

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This year, however, annual surveys show only an estimated 3 million clams in the area, the lowest number recorded there since state biologists first began surveys in 2004.

"These low numbers are troubling, as they mean Clatsop beaches haven't seen a significant recruitment event for two years," said Matt Hunter, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's shellfish project leader. "But this recruitment issue is not isolated to just Clatsop beaches. It's being seen on the entire Oregon Coast and for Washington beaches, too."

In the past, the clams harvested on the Clatsop beaches have accounted for more than 90 percent of the razor clams harvested in the entire state.

Razor clam populations are cyclical, state biologists say, with periods of high abundance often followed by times of low abundance. And there is a silver lining: Since the harvest has been closed for so long on the Clatsop beaches, the clams available are larger, averaging about 4 1/2 inches.

"While razor clam numbers are lower this year, clams are quite large," Hunter said. "To be successful, clambers should be diligent, choose the best low tides and actively 'pound' to get razors to show."

This year is the first time Washington state has fallen into a rebuilding category for harvest on its beaches because of the low population numbers, particularly those in the southern portion of the state, according to Dan Ayres, coastal shellfish manager with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. He attributes the low population numbers in part to an extended period of low salinity in near-shore ocean waters.

The state announced several tentative digs through December, but is severely limiting the number of days available, and is also keeping

a close watch on toxin levels. The first dig will start at 7:49 p.m. on Oct. 6 in Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis and Mocrocks, and at 8:33 p.m. the next day in these same locations. The next round of digs will occur in the first week of November.

"We're taking into account that it's a weaker population as we set harvest rates," Ayres said. Even while the numbers are low and the state takes a cautionary approach to digs, Ayres still expects clambers will go home happy.

"The total number of clams may be down this year, but we still expect good digging on most beaches," he said.

The tides are another factor clambers will need to consider, however. As the coast plunges deeper into fall and winter, the best low tides will occur early in the morning or at night, said Mitch Vance, shellfish project leader with the Oregon fish and wildlife department's marine resources program.

"We're getting into nighttime razor clamming, which is a whole different world," said Vance, and it is something he recommends only for "people who already know what they're doing."

Throughout September, the levels of domoic acid have gone up and down by small increments; recent tests show clams are safe to eat, Vance said. The Sunday opener follows several rounds of tests that showed levels of the toxin were below the threshold established by the Oregon Department of Agriculture. The state will continue to monitor toxin levels and announce a closure if levels spike.

In Oregon, the daily bag limit remains 15 clams per person, with no sorting or releasing allowed.



Colin Murphy/The Daily Astorian

Warrenton is looking at ways to improve conditions at the Hammond Marina.

## Marina: Hit several revenue records this year

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"There's a lot of unused water there that could turn into more slips, or moving the slips over," Mayor Henry Balensifer said. "There's a lot of stuff that could be done there."

But, he added, echoing Sweet, "Dredging permits only last so long before you lose them ... There's process, so it's better to get these things moving."

Hammond is not the only marina near the mouth of the Columbia River beleaguered by dredging concerns.

The ports of Ilwaco and Chinook in Washington state must also worry about material silting in boat slips and marina entrances. While the

Army Corps uses large dredging vessels to keep federal channels clear in the Columbia River, these marinas and basins fall outside of the agency's responsibility.

Ilwaco, however, has its own small dredge for marina work. In January, the port moved the dredge down the highway to Chinook to dredge the smaller port's marina. In November, the same dredge is scheduled to work in the Port of Astoria's West Mooring Basin, which hasn't been dredged in 11 years and where accumulated sediment threatens the docks.

## 'Filled year-round'

Warrenton has leased the Hammond Marina from the

Army Corps for more than 50 years.

"But it wasn't like the Corps of Engineers was putting in new docks or anything," Balensifer said. "That was all on us."

Over the years, the city made small improvements to the marina. Most recently, Sweet oversaw bathroom improvements, as well as repairs and improvements to the parking lot. She also put a camp host in place this summer.

The work paid off, literally. The Hammond Marina hit several revenue records this year during the busy summer months and is on track to exceed its budget in camping and launch fees alone. "It was one of the best years

so far," Sweet said.

But all those financial gains could quickly dry up if the marina becomes unusable, she said. For now, fishermen can plan their launches around the tides, but it is a far from ideal situation.

"It's a huge economic impact if we don't have that (marina)," Warrenton City Commissioner Pam Ackley told other commissioners at a meeting in mid-September after she had attended the marina task force meeting.

Short agrees, saying, "They need it dredged, and they need new docks extra bad." Given the improvements already completed, "they do those two things and they'll be filled up year-round."

## Rentals: 'This is really just about health and safety'

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"Over the past two decades there has been tremendous growth in the use of second homes as vacation rentals," Clatsop County Manager Cameron Moore wrote in a meeting agenda item summary. "It is anticipated that the 'vacation rental industry' will continue to grow in Clatsop County for the foreseeable future."

Moore added that short-term rentals — unlike hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts — are not regulated by the state to ensure renters' health and safety. County staff has held internal discussions about the issue since the summer of 2016. Since then, staff

documented complaints that included inadequate septic systems, balconies without railings and electrical wirings near hot tubs.

Permits could, among other things, require owners to comply with quiet hours, provide covered garbage containers and possess at least one fire extinguisher. The regulations could also set maximum occupancy at three people per sleeping area plus two more at a rental.

What the regulations would not require is a limit on the number of days a particular unit can be rented out, which is a major difference from ordinances in some cities, Community Development Director Heather Hansen said.

At a meeting in January, Hansen provided an example of a large home near Cullaby Lake that had caught fire and became completely engulfed in flames. Advertised as a short-term rental, it did not seek permits from the county. No cause had been determined for the fire, but staff suspected it was an electrical issue.

"This is really just about health and safety and to ensure that someone who comes here on vacation has some reasonable assurance that whatever it is they rented is not going to cause harm to them or their family," Moore said during a January work session. "It's really not uncommon for people to not get permits, not fol-

low code. Frankly, people play games."

The ordinance would require owners to obtain five-year, renewable permits for an unlimited number of properties. The permits would be transferable upon sale to a new owner.

The permit process would involve an inspection of the property and payment of a fee. That fee would be adopted by commissioners based on the money needed to offset the cost to the county for conducting inspections and processing permits. It would apply to all properties in unincorporated areas with the exception of Arch Cape, which already has short-term rental regulations.

## Attention Hunters & Forest Recreationists

The Lewis & Clark Timberlands managed by GreenWood Resources in Clatsop County will again open for motorized recreational access this fall.

Public access is allowed from one hour before sunrise until one hour after sunset. Camping, campfires, off-road driving, ATVs and motorcycles are prohibited. All access is subject to change.

**Gates open from Sept. 30, through Nov. 24, 2017**

- L&C Camp Gate (71)
- 400 Line (72)
- 300 Line (73)
- Klootchky Park (39)
- Sugarloaf (24)
- Charlie Cr. (26)
- Clatsop Fir XO (25)
- Tidewater (49)
- Snow Point (54)
- Elk Mtn. W (98/99)
- L&C ML at Saddle Mtn. Park Rd East/West (56/57)
- Fisher ML (83)
- Twilight Gates (110/113/114)
- Bear Cr. 300 (80)
- Elk Mtn. East (53)

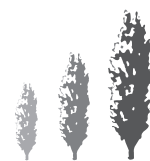
Any gate that may be open but is not listed above could be closed at any time, as unlisted gates are open for active Lewis & Clark Timberlands operations only.

Please report any illegal or suspicious activity to the Sheriff's Office at 503.325.2061 or the Oregon State Police at 1.800.452.7888

**TO REPORT A FIRE OR EMERGENCY CALL 911** Road maps showing gate locations are available at our New Gearhart office. Current access information is available on the Recreational Hotline at 503.738.6351, ext.2.

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