

Oregon AG: Delay vote on net neutrality

Rosenblum warns of fraud

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum and 17 other attorneys general wanted the Federal Communications Commission to delay a vote to end a rule that prohibits internet providers from making it more difficult or expensive to access one website over another.

The attorneys general, all Democrats, stated in a letter that they are concerned about the amount of falsified comments that were made to the FCC in support of the rule change.

The five-member commission, three Republicans and two Democrats, voted 3-2 today along party lines to repeal the rule.

"Changing the rules around net neutrality will have major implications for commerce and almost every aspect of modern life. Before that is allowed to happen, we must get to the bottom of whether fraud was committed in the FCC comment process on behalf of unsuspecting Americans," Rosenblum said in a statement Wednesday.

Rosenblum spearheaded the letter and obtained signatures from the attorneys general of California, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, Vermont and Washington.

New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman's office is investigating whether commenters illegally used the identities of New Yorkers to give feedback on net neutrality.

FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel also has looked into the authenticity of comments. She told NPR's "The Takeaway" Tuesday that among 23 million comments about the proposed rule change, she and Schneiderman had found 1 million used stolen identities. About 500,000 of the comments came from Russian addresses, and 50,000 consumer complaints were omitted from the record of comments, she told the radio program.

Schneiderman released new information Wednesday that his office had identified a total of 2 million fake comments on net neutrality to the FCC using stolen identities of Americans across the country.

The office has a search engine where residents can look to see if their identity was used fraudulently.

Supporters of the proposed rule change argue that ending net neutrality will benefit consumers by spurring more competition between broadband providers.

But Rosenworcel noted on "The Takeaway" that half of U.S. households have only one choice for a broadband provider.

"A careful review of the publicly available information revealed a pattern of fake submissions using the names of real people. In fact, there may be over 1 million fake submissions from across the country," the letter by the attorneys general states. "This is akin to identity theft on a massive scale — and theft of someone's voice in a democracy is particularly concerning."

The attorneys general said "it's essential that the commission gets a full and accurate picture of how changes to net neutrality will affect the everyday lives of Americans before they can act on such sweeping policy changes."

Measure 101 supporters, opponents clash in debate

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

PORTLAND — Supporters and opponents of Measure 101, which could repeal part of Oregon's Medicaid funding plan, faced off Wednesday in a debate at the Multnomah Athletic Club.

Medicaid is a health care coverage program jointly funded by the state and federal government serving about 1 million Oregonians through the Oregon Health Plan.

A special election Jan. 23 concerns parts of a new funding law. Particularly at issue are provisions in the law to increase federal Medicaid matching funding by collecting assessments from the state's hospitals, insurers and coordinated care organizations — the regional networks of providers serving Medicaid patients.

A trio of Republican state representatives successfully petitioned to refer portions of the law, including those provisions, to the ballot.

Measure 101 will ask voters to either vote "yes," to keep all the provisions of the bill; or "no," to cut some of them out.

Republican state Reps. Julie Parrish, of Tualatin/West Linn, and Cedric Hayden, of Roseburg, who referred the issue to the ballot, spoke in favor of repealing parts of the law Wednesday.

Speaking on the opposite side was Felisa Hagins, political director of the Service Employees International Union Local 49, and Jessica Adamson, director of government affairs for Providence Health and Services, who are advocating to keep all of the assessments.

Some takeaways from



EO Media Group

Supporters and opponents of a ballot measure on Oregon's Medicaid funding package squared off in a debate Wednesday.

Wednesday's forum:

• **Neither side wants to cut people from Medicaid:** Both sides of the issue said they didn't want people on Medicaid to lose health care. Parrish and Hagins say they grew up covered by Medicaid, and Hayden, a dentist, serves patients on the Oregon Health Plan.

Hayden and Parrish largely disagree with the Measure 101 supporters, though, on how it ought to be paid for — and argue the state could find other sources of funding.

Supporters of the measure say that it took the last legislative session to get insurers and Medicaid providers to agree on a funding plan. They argue the legislation's mechanisms are approved ways to collect federal matching funds, which pay the vast majority of Medicaid costs.

• **Where could the money from the taxes go?** The two sides disagree on whether the funds generated by portions of the legislation at issue can be reverted to the state's general fund to pay for other things.

Parrish claims a legisla-

tive counsel opinion from June indicates that a 0.7 percent assessment on net hospital revenues could get swept to the state's general fund and used for purposes other than health care.

The "yes" side disagrees, saying that the money collected from the assessment would only go to health care, and that a "sweep" to the general fund requires separate legislation — which is not an unprecedented move.

• **The insurance market:** The cost of insurance for those not on Medicaid, which could also be affected by the ballot measure, came up during Wednesday's debate as well.

The law's 1.5 percent tax on gross premiums, or premium equivalents for public employee health care plans, on insurers is intended to fund a reinsurance program that insulates insurers from high-risk claims that can drive up premiums.

Proponents say it's already working, reducing 2018 premiums by an average of 6 percent.

However, petitioners want to stop the tax on insurers, because the law allows insurers to increase premiums by up to 1.5 percent to absorb the cost of the tax.

They also argue that the state could have pre-empted the need for a reinsurance market by enrolling the state's public employees in coordinated care organizations or having the state buy employees' insurance on the exchange — either of those moves, they argue, would dramatically increase the risk pool and bring down premiums.

Hagins, the SEIU panelist, said that the Public Employee Benefits Board — which oversees health care benefits for public employees — did a pilot project that enrolled employees in a coordinated care organization.

But, Hagins said, the CCO was unable to contain rates to the agreed level.



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