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Public Health Debate

Will consumer input affect a 22 percent insurance rate jump?

By Brian Stimson
Of The Skanner News

Should Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield be allowed to raise their health insurance rates 22 percent? Next month the Oregon Insurance Division plans a public hearing on the proposed hike, which would affect nearly 60,000 Oregonians.

It's the only public meeting in recent memory that the Insurance Division has held for a rate hike, according to Laura Etherton, of the consumer group OSPIRG.

Public hearings on big rate hikes could become the rule if the Oregon Senate passes bill 717, which would require the Insurance Division to hold such meetings when insurance companies request rate increases.

The bill, sponsored by state Sen. Chip Shields, N/NE Portland, as well as the Committee on General Government and Consumer and Small Business Protection, would mandate public hearings on rate increases bigger than 7 percent and those that affect 1,000 or more policy holders.

"A public meetings process would precede a public hearing to allow questions to be asked of insurers in a public forum," said Shields.

OSPIRG, a group that is contracted by the state to analyze rate increase requests, says they are currently going through Regence's bid for more money to determine if the increase is supported by the company's needs. The public hearing is June 2 from 4:30 to 7 p.m., at University Place at Portland State, 310 SW Lincoln St. in Portland

"What's clear on the face of it is that a 22 percent rate increase will make it very difficult for Oregonians to afford," said Etherton, who is part of OSPIRG's Health Insurance Rate Watch project. "That raises flags for not only affordability for Oregonians, but whether or not Blue Cross Blue Shield will be able to maintain enroll-

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HANNAH TO ATLANTA

Benson High School Junior Khari-Malik Hannah has been nominated for Team USA this fall. Now all he needs to do is come up with transportation expenses for himself and his dad, Charles Hannah, to Atlanta, Ga., where a training camp is held over Memorial Day weekend. The two figure they need to raise \$3,000 by May 26. The "Hannah to Atlanta Fund" has been set up at US Bank, where anyone can invest some money to send the father and son off to their dream. Reach Charles Hannah at 503-750-5890.



PHOTO BY JULIE KEEFE

New Evidence Gives Proof of Heroic Acts

Final push may secure Medal of Honor for Sgt. Henry Lincoln Johnson

By Helen Silvis
Of The Skanner News

Ninety-three years ago, on a World War I battlefield in France, a young Black soldier became a legend. Now new evidence may bring official recognition for Sgt. Henry Lincoln Johnson's heroism with America's highest military award, The Medal of Honor.

Sources close to the campaign say Sens. Charles Schumer and Ron Wyden will submit a packet containing that evidence to

Army Sec. John McHugh, possibly as soon as Friday, May 13.

"I didn't know that. This is very exciting," said Sgt. Johnson's grandson, Herman Johnson. "I would just love to see this happen for my grandfather, and for my uncle, Herman Johnson. It breaks my heart that my uncle passed away in his eighties without seeing his father awarded the medal he rightly deserved."

So what happened that night in 1918? On guard duty in the dark of night, Sgt. Johnson and

Pvt. Needom Roberts were attacked on two flanks by a German raiding party estimated to be 20-strong. Both men fought bravely, but Johnson displayed exceptional courage. Fighting on with his bolo knife, even after his rifle jammed and he had sustained several wounds, he repelled the attack and rescued Roberts, who was being dragged off as a prisoner.

"President Teddy Roosevelt called him 'one of the five bravest men who fought in World War I,'" Portland City

Commissioner Nick Fish wrote May 9, in a letter urging Oregon's entire Congressional Delegation to support the request. "Because he served with a French unit, under French flag, during a time of segregation in our armed forces, he has been unjustly denied this country's highest military honor."

Commissioner Fish has a personal interest in the story. He heard all about Johnson from his grandfather Hamilton Fish, who

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The Skanner Partners with Oregonian

Interactive web page brings together communities across the state

The Skanner News Group is partnering with the Oregonian and American University's J-Lab Institute for Interactive Journalism to create the Oregonian News Service, a new way for readers to catch up on news around the entire state of Oregon.

Other partners include The Lund Report, a public health blog; BikePortland, which covers cycling news and public policy

around transportation; Oregon Capitol News and more.

"Not only does this project give The Skanner News a wider platform to reach readers within our community, but it also gives the wider readership of The Oregonian a chance to find out more about our community issues," said The Skanner News Publisher Bernie Foster.

"We applaud the Oregonian for providing

this opportunity," he said.

"This is about literally sending our reader to other small news sites for the full story," said ONN project coordinator Cornelius Swart.

"The Oregonian is dedicated to professional reporting," he says.

"We'd also like to become a trusted

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