

BILL: Would ease insurer coverage requirements

Continued from 1A

“Hopefully everything we’re doing now helps another member get to ‘yes,’” Cornyn said. “There’s really no other reason to tweak this thing.”

In the face of unanimous Democratic opposition, the health care bill will crash if just three of the 52 GOP senators oppose it. McConnell suddenly canceled a doomed vote last month on an initial version of the legislation, and at least a dozen Republicans have said they oppose the initial package or distanced themselves from it.

Since his June retreat, McConnell has been reshaping the measure in hopes of winning GOP votes. Even so, no GOP leaders were yet predicting passage.

McConnell also said he will delay the chamber’s August recess for two weeks, a rare move he said would give lawmakers time to break logjams on health care, defense and executive branch nominations. Growing numbers of Republicans, chagrined at Congress’ failure to send any major bills to President Donald Trump, had called on McConnell to make that move.

The GOP bill would ease coverage requirements Obama’s 2010 statute placed on insurers, like paying for

maternity services; erase his tax penalties on people who don’t buy policies and cut Medicaid. The measure will also eliminate most of Obama’s tax increases, including boosts on insurers, pharmaceutical manufacturers and medical device makers.

Obama’s law has added around 20 million to the ranks of the country’s people with health insurance. An analysis of McConnell’s initial bill by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office projected it would increase the number of people without coverage by 22 million by 2026.

The updated legislation is also expected to ease some of its earlier Medicaid cuts, a move aimed at assuaging GOP senators from states that expanded the program by millions of people under Obama’s law.

According to Cornyn, the refashioned GOP measure will probably keep Obama’s 3.8 percent tax boost on investment income for couples earning over \$250,000 annually. It would also retain a payroll tax increase of 0.9 percent on the same earners that helps finance Medicare.

Together, retaining the two levies would produce \$231 billion over the next 10 years, according to Congress’ nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation.

Republicans generally oppose tax boosts, and it was unclear whether preserving those tax increases would threaten support by any conservatives for the health bill. But Cornyn said some of the money — perhaps around \$50 billion — would be used to buttress around \$100 billion already in the measure for states to help insurers hold down insurance costs, and he said the move might help defend against Democratic attacks that the GOP package will help the rich and hurt the poor.

“We’re trying to take at least one sharp stick off the table,” Cornyn said. “I don’t think it will change the narrative.”

A study released Tuesday by two bipartisan groups estimated that the country’s poorest families would lose more than \$2,500 in average annual health care benefits once the GOP legislation was fully phased in. Families making more than \$1 million a year would get tax cuts averaging about \$50,000, according to the analysis by the Health Policy Center and the Tax Policy Center.

Still at issue is a plan by conservatives led by Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, to let insurers sell low-price policies with bare-bones coverage — if the company also sells a policy covering a list of services like maternity care that Obama’s law mandates.

SESSION: Don’t expect any major movement on the PERS funding problem in off-year

Continued from 1A

of the Real ID requirements. “This bill is preemptive,” Hansell said. “A majority of citizens will have no idea because they never experienced the effects of what would have happened if we hadn’t passed it.”

While the legislature may have fixed state IDs and many other smaller problems, a pressing statewide problem they failed to fix was PERS. Hansell said by now he has accepted that there is no perfect “silver bullet” to reduce the system’s unfunded liability. He did like a proposal by the Oregon Business Council that featured a mix of elements favored by both ends of the political spectrum, but it never got any traction.

“If a business body could lead the charge, then it wouldn’t be a Republican thing and it wouldn’t be a Democratic thing and we probably could have come to the middle on this,” he said. “It never even got a hearing.”

In answer to a question about whether it would be better to tackle PERS in a special session, where legislators weren’t consumed with the type of bills that name a new state bird, Hansell said circumstances are different in Salem than they were in 2013 when then-Governor John Kitzhaber continued working with legislators after the session and then pulled everyone together to vote on the final solution during a brief special session in the fall.

“We would not have had that without his leadership,” Hansell said. “For that to happen, the executive leadership would have to be not only on board but leading the charge, and I don’t think Governor (Kate) Brown is inclined to do that.”

Rep. Greg Smith, District 57, said he didn’t expect any major movement on the PERS problem in the shorter, off-year session next February either.

“There are primary elections a month after the February session ends,” he said. “I doubt the political will is there to tackle it.”

One thing he does hope the legislature can tackle in February is finding a “win-win” on revenue that will give schools more money without hurting the average Oregonian or business. He said he and Sen. Mark Hass of Beaverton have committed to deeply research the state’s revenue structure and meet regularly between now and then to come up with solutions they can present to their colleagues next year.

Smith said this session was an intense one of many, many late nights as he served on 10 committees and stepped up to fill some of the negotiating roles Rep. Cliff Bentz of Ontario had filled before having a minor heart attack in June. Headline-grabbing bills about topics like abortion may have filled the news, but Smith said there were many quieter bills he worked on this session that were a “heavy lift” to get passed. One such bill allowed Umatilla Electric Cooperative to use low-value farm land for solar panels, and another adjusted some enterprise zone requirements to allow the Port of Morrow to continue to use the incentive.

“The Port of Morrow has reached a size that legislators are starting to ask themselves whether they want to keep giving the area tax incentives,” Smith said.

He said leadership saved the most contentious bills for the end of the session, which is when debates on the House floor started to get heated.

Representative Greg Barreto, District 58, described the 2017 legislative session as long, tiring and frustrating at times.

In written thoughts shared with the *East Oregonian*, he said that he and Hansell worked side by side on a number of bills to help Oregonians. The two

legislators sponsored Senate Bill 372, which allows the salvaging of game meat after an animal has been struck and killed by a vehicle. That bill ultimately passed, along with another the two sponsored that directs the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to establish a pilot program for controlling urban deer populations in cities where they have become a nuisance.

While much of the focus of post-session analysis has been on what the legislature did not accomplish — particularly PERS reform — Barreto, true to his conservative identity, also had something to say about bills that the legislature should not have put time into.

Democrats were one vote shy in each house of the three-fifths majority needed to pass revenue bills, but they were able to pass policy bills without a single Republican vote, including House Bill 3391, which requires all insurance providers in Oregon other than Providence to cover abortions completely.

“These abortions are allowed until the child is born, extended to undocumented people in Oregon and without a co-pay or deductible,” Barreto wrote, calling its passing a “dark day for Oregon.”

He also mentioned bills that House Democrats passed but were unable to get through the Senate, such as the law that would have allowed law enforcement to remove firearms from someone if a judge agreed with a family member’s claim the person was an immediate danger to themselves or others.

“This is a challenge of ‘due process’ and our Second Amendment rights,” he said, adding it to his list of “egregious” bills brought forward during the session.

He said the last four days of the session were particularly busy as legislators debated and voted on more than 130 bills.

FORESTS: Sky lanterns prohibited year-round

Continued from 1A

for fires, and must have an ax, shovel and fire extinguisher on hand.

Seasonal campfire restrictions also remain in effect on the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests through Oct. 31. That means:

- Campfires are allowed only in pits surrounded by dirt, rock and commercial rings, in areas cleared of flammable material within a 3-foot radius.
- Campers must attend to fires at all times, and have a shovel and one gallon of water in their possession.
- Fires must be dead out prior to leaving.

ODF has its own set of

restrictions that go into effect Wednesday on the Northeast Oregon District. Known as regulated use closures, the rules ban all open fires except in designated state parks, such as Emigrant Springs, Ukiah-Dale, Catherine Creek, Hilgard Junction, Red Bridge, Wallowa Lake, Minam Lake and Unity Lake.

Like the Forest Service’s public use restrictions, regulated use closures also ban smoking except in vehicles or cleared areas, and prohibit non-industrial chainsaw use between 1-8 p.m. The same goes for cutting, grinding or welding metal, and mowing dried grass with power-driven equipment.

Other rules during fire season include:

- Burning debris is prohibited except in burn barrels with a valid burning permit.
- Exploding targets and tracer ammunition are not allowed.
- Sky lanterns are prohibited year-round.

Regulated use closures in the Northeast Oregon District affect ODF-protected land primarily in Umatilla, Union, Baker and Wallowa counties, as well as small portions of Morrow, Malheur and Grant counties.

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