

EAST OREGONIAN

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Oregon moves to make health care a ‘right’

Ballot referral passes House, heads to Senate

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon House of Representatives voted along party lines Tuesday to ask voters to amend the Constitution to make access to cost-effective and affordable health care the right of all state residents.

The proposal now heads to the Senate and if passed, would stand on the November general election ballot.

All 35 Democrats in the House voted for the measure, while the 25 Republicans opposed it.

Rep. Mitch Greenlick, D-Portland, the bill’s chief sponsor, said in light of federal efforts to overturn the Affordable Care Act, it is important for Oregon voters to weigh in on whether they want health care to be accessible to everyone.

The practical impact of creating such a right is open to debate.

House Speaker Tina Kotek and Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson, both Democrats from Portland, have said the measure is primarily “aspirational,” but some legal experts say adding the right to the Constitution could spur litigation.

“There is always a possibility that the state could be sued for failing to follow a constitutional mandate, but we cannot say whether such a suit would be successful and, if so, what the maximum extent of the state’s liability would be,” Legislative Counsel Dexter Johnson wrote in a Feb. 12 opinion requested by Rep. Julie Parrish, R-West Linn.

It also is “impossible to say whether the amendment would create a financial liability for the state” because the proposal doesn’t specify how the state must ensure every resident has access to health care, Johnson wrote in a Jan. 9 opinion requested by Greenlick.

“It is worth noting that the proposed amendment does not require the state to provide health care to every resident, but only to provide access to health care that is effective, medically appropriate and affordable,” Johnson wrote.

The proposal raises the question of how the state will

See HEALTH/8A

STDs rise as fear of HIV falls

Umatilla County not immune to nationwide trend since 90s

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

What’s going on with gonorrhea? The sexually transmitted disease, known colloquially as “the clap,” is surging in Oregon and around the nation. Umatilla County reported 71 new cases of gonorrhea last year and 88 cases in 2016 — up from just four in 2012.

Two other STDs, syphilis and chlamydia, are also on the rise in the United States.

Ruth Helsley, of the Oregon Health Authority, manages the state’s HIV/STD prevention program.

“STDs are having a big-time comeback,” Helsley said. “Oregon is not unique — it’s happening all over the country.”

— **Ruth Helsley,** Oregon Health Authority

From 1975 to 1997, gonorrhea rates plummeted, stayed steady for a decade, then began rising again. Syphilis had an even more dramatic rise from the ashes.

“In the ’90s, we thought syphilis was gone,” Helsley said.

Now both STDs are back — in spades. Helsley offered an explanation. People are taking more sexual risks because they are less afraid of contracting HIV.

See GONORRHEA/8A



Horizon Project Inc. recycling pickup driver Dave Pauley checks a recycling container for non-recyclables while doing his morning route Tuesday in Milton-Freewater.

Curbside recycling dumped

City ends contract due to law change, opens recycling centers

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

As vendors across Oregon curb their recycling services, Milton-Freewater residents will no longer be able to recycle materials at their curbs.

Faced with losing its recycling vendor, the Milton-Freewater City Council unanimously voted Monday to start its own recycling program, effectively ending curbside service in the city.

In an interview after the meeting, City Manager Linda Hall said the city needed to make the transition when Milton-Freewater’s recycling contractor — Horizon Project Inc. — told city officials that the organization could no longer afford to provide recycling services.

“They’re completely out of the recycling business,” she said.

Horizon Special Projects Director Ben Currin said the nonprofit has handled Milton-Freewater’s recyclables since the 1980s, employing disabled people to help sort through the material.

But in 2015, the state reached a settlement on a federal lawsuit

See RECYCLING/8A

Disaster teams, locals pitch in to dig out flooded farm



Volunteers and members of the nonprofit disaster relief organization Team Rubicon work Saturday to clear fencing from flood debris on a home near Milton-Freewater.

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Emergency responders and volunteers answered the call Saturday to help local flood victims Ginger and Brian Afdahl.

The North Fork Walla Walla River on Feb. 4 flooded the 10 acres of their homestead east of Milton-Freewater. Ginger Afdahl said most of the water receded but left a big mess, with mud and gravel covering much of their land.

Tom Roberts, Umatilla County emergency manager, said in a written statement he received a call from Mike West, the Tri-Cities administrator for the Northwest Region of Team Rubicon, soon after getting reports about the flooding on the Afdahl property.

“I had heard of Team Rubicon and their capabilities and knew immediately that we needed to get them in touch with the family,” Roberts said.

Team Rubicon is an international nonprofit that unites military veterans with first responders to take on disasters. The organization has sent teams to hurricanes Maria and Harvey and the wildfires in Sonoma County, California. Coming to Umatilla County was a first, as was teaming up with the county’s emergency management.

Team Rubicon volunteers assembled, according to Roberts, who joined the effort along with community members who wanted to help. Roberts said he hopes to “build a robust relationship with the organization for future collaborations” when disaster strikes in the county.

Ginger Afdahl said the flood buried irrigation lines, fencing and more under rocks and gravel, and the volunteers

See FARM/8A