

Bill would let younger Americans buy into Medicare

Sen. Merkley says Medicare E would lower drug prices

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

The Choose Medicare Act would allow Americans to opt into Medicare over private health insurance.

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, and Chris Murphy, D-Connecticut, introduced the bill and say Americans would do just that. The senators dubbed the proposed new program "Medicare E." The E is for everyone, said Merkley this week during a conference call with journalists.



Jeff Merkley

Currently only people over 65 have access to Medicare, but this program would allow working-age people to buy in too. Merkley isn't pitching the program as a single payer system, saying the proposed revamp doesn't go as far as Sen. Bernie Sanders' Medicare for All plan. That bill would have expanded coverage to everyone and cut out private insurers entirely.

This plan leaves it up to each person to decide to participate or not. Murphy has called the bill "the public option on steroids." Merkley describes it as common sense.

"So often folks say to me, 'I just want a seamless, stress-free system of health care,'" he said. "The good news is that we have such a plan — it's called Medicare."

He said the program would bring high-quality coverage, bargaining power and low administrative costs. Employers who buy company health care could buy in to a Medicare plan for employees.

Merkley didn't pretend that the legislation has a realistic chance of getting through a GOP-controlled Senate. Instead, he said, the bill serves as a way to keep thinking about how to improve health care.

"Here's something that could work," he said. "Let's put it out there."

He described Medicare E as self-sustaining, fully financed by premiums and available on all federal and state exchanges. People could use existing Affordable Care Act subsidies to help pay for it. With the bump in participants, he said, Medicare would have even more power in negotiating for prescription drug prices and could drive down private insurance premiums.

Merkley lamented that the current system is in trouble.

"Are we satisfied having the most expensive health care system in the world?" he said. "And it's getting more expensive."

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Oregon State University relocates cereal scientist position to Pendleton

Ryan Graebner has degrees in barley, potato breeding

By MITCH LIES
EO Media Group

Oregon State University announced April 18 it has hired Ryan Graebner, who just a week earlier obtained his Ph.D. in crop science, as extension cereals scientist.

Graebner will work out of the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center in Pendleton.

His predecessor, former OSU Extension Cereals Specialist Mike Flowers, worked on the Corvallis campus.

Flowers left OSU last September after a dozen years at the university to take a position with Limagrain Cereal Seeds.

"We are excited to have Ryan," said Jay Noller, head of the Department of Crop and Soil Science. "With Ryan and other new faculty that we have brought on, and others we will be announcing soon, we are looking for an even brighter future for our agricultural sector in Oregon."

Noller said the department expects to fill three field crops extension positions in coming weeks, including two in the Willamette Valley and one in Malheur County.

Graebner holds a master's degree in crop science specializing in barley breeding, and a Ph.D. with a specialty in potato breeding.

He obtained both degrees from Oregon State.

Noller said Graebner's background in plant breeding should



Courtesy of Ryan Graebner

Ryan Graebner, the new Oregon State University Extension cereals scientist at the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center in Pendleton.

serve him well in his new position.

"We anticipate great synergy between Ryan and (OSU wheat breeder) Bob (Zemetra)," Noller said.

Mary Corp, director of the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center, said she is

delighted with the change in location of the cereal variety program from Corvallis to Pendleton, and in having Graebner take over the program's leadership.

"I think he has the skills and training to do a great job, and I know he is committed to the region and to

the growers," Corp said.

Corp said OSU consulted wheat growers before deciding to move the position to Pendleton.

"We talked to the wheat growers about if it made more sense to move the program to where we grow the most wheat in the state, and they were very supportive of the idea," she said. "I think it is going to be a great fit."

With the help of faculty research assistants, Graebner will conduct trials in wheat growing regions throughout the state, Noller said, including in the Willamette Valley, where he will work closely with Zemetra and plant pathologist Chris Mundt, both of whom are stationed on campus.

OSU Extension field crops agent Nicole Anderson, who recently moved her office from McMinnville to the North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora, also will do some wheat research, Noller said.

Noller noted that OSU has changed the statewide cereals extension position from tenure track, as it was under Flowers, to professor of practice, a change that relaxes some of the position's academic publishing requirements in exchange for more outreach and applied research.

Flowers' position also included some teaching responsibilities, which Graebner will not have.

Graebner, who was stationed in Hermiston while working on his Ph.D., said he is excited over his new position.

"I like the crop, I like the place and I like the growers," Graebner said. "I am excited to be working with Oregon wheat."

CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE RACE

Candidates let their numbers do the talking

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

The two candidates running for the local circuit court bench are touting their numbers.

Rob Collins won the recent Oregon Bar Association's judicial preference poll over Mike Breiling. But when it comes to courtroom work, Breiling claims he has the upper hand.

Breiling, 48, and Collins, 67, last week met with members of the *East Oregonian* editorial board and faced off at a candidates forum in Pendleton. The two Pendleton lawyers are seeking the open position 1 seat in the 6th District, which encompasses Umatilla and Morrow counties. Circuit court judges serve six-year terms.

Collins prevailed in the



Rob Collins



Michael Breiling

judicial preference poll 25-17. Local members of the state bar were the voters. Collins said he considered the outcome reflective of how local lawyers view his reputation for fairness and thus a good fit for the bench.

Breiling said his primary work is as a defense attorney, so right off he lost the votes of district attorney prosecutors. And around 50 lawyers practice in the two counties, he said, so several did not vote.

Breiling stated how often he and Collins work in the courtroom is a better measure of who the voters should select. Breiling said he was in court 483 times in the past year while Collins saw the inside of a court just 39 times. Circuit court judges have to have the rules for evidence at their fingertips in criminal cases, Breiling said, and the only way you get to know them is to practice them in court.

Collins contended many and maybe most of Breiling's appearances have little to do with arguing about such rules. Rather, they are the routine appearances every defense lawyer must make, such as showing up for arraignments or giving

the court an update on the status of the case. He said he did not think that the yardstick voters should hold up for this election.

Both lawyers tend to agree on the affects of one number — Measure 11, Oregon's mandatory minimum sentencing law for violent crimes.

Collins at the forum Thursday told the roughly 70 in the crowd he would like judges to have more latitude to shape sentences to fit the circumstances of each case. Breiling said Measure 11 treats the criminal who shoots and wounds a man the same as a guy who gets into a scuffle and shoves an opponent who cracks his head on the curb.

Presumptive sentences rather than mandatory would be better, Breiling said. He and Collins also stated the

law is the law, and judges must follow it.

They also both supported the re-invention of drug treatment court in Umatilla County. Collins said the benefits to society outweigh the costs, and he would take a keen interest in treatment court.

Breiling and Collins will exchange views again Thursday, 5:30-6:30 p.m., at the Pendleton Center for the Arts.

Last chance to register to vote before May primary

PENDLETON — Tuesday is the last day Oregon residents can register to vote in the May 15 primary. Kim Lindell, Umatilla County elections manager, also reminded voters of the state's closed primary system.

"In Oregon, if you are registered with a major political party, Democrat, Republican or Independent, you will receive a ballot with just those candidates affiliated with that party for all the partisan races," she said, which in Umatilla

County consists of only state and federal contests. The ballot also includes statewide and local races and measures.

Anyone wishing to receive a major political party ballot in May must register with that party or request an Independent party ballot by Tuesday. You can register in person at your local county elections office or online through the Oregon Secretary of State's website at www.oregon.gov.

"If you are registered with a minor political party such as Libertarian, Progressive, Pacific Green, Constitution, Working Families or not a member of a party," Lindell added, "you will receive a ballot with only statewide and local non-partisan races and measures."

Major political parties in Oregon have the option to open the primary to nonaffiliated (not a member of a party) voters. The Independent Party took that

step and a request form is available in the state voter pamphlet and online at oregonvotes.gov as well as umatillacounty.net.

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