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The Oregon Transportation Commission Thursday postponed the release of a draft of a management audit of the Oregon Department of Transportation. The 60-page report contains trade secrets of the firm that conducted the review that must be redacted before its release.

Commission nixes expected release of ODOT review

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Transportation Commission on Thursday nixed a scheduled briefing on draft findings of a management audit of the Oregon Department of Transportation.

The audit is intended to ensure ODOT is prepared to effectively manage a potential transportation package that legislators could approve later this year.

That legislation — one of Gov. Kate Brown's priorities as governor — could hike gas taxes and fees on drivers and funnel hundreds of millions of dollars in additional funding to ODOT.

The state in September awarded a nearly \$1 million contract to New York-based McKinsey & Company to conduct the long-awaited review.

The briefing on draft findings had been added to the commission's Jan. 19

meeting agenda after the EO Media Group/Pamplin Media Group Capital Bureau earlier this month requested a copy of the 60-page document.

Bret West, an administrator with the Department of Administrative Services who oversees the McKinsey's contract, received the draft findings Dec. 23, said Matt Shelby, a DAS spokesman. However, the document contained McKinsey's trade secrets, including strategies the firm uses to conduct management reviews. Trade secrets are exempt from disclosure under Oregon public records law and had to be redacted, Shelby said.

West said after receiving the draft findings he asked McKinsey to expand on two areas in the review related to conflicts of interest and the agency's decision-making authority.

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Legislation would fill gaps left by Obamacare repeal

Bill expands insurance mandate to cover abortions, other services

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

Oregon is joining several other states that are seeking to protect no-cost birth control in case the federal mandate is rolled back as part of a potential repeal of the Affordable Care Act.

Most legislation in other states has focused on preserving mandatory insurance coverage of hormonal contraceptives without a patient copay, with some other moderate expansions on the federal act.

Oregon's legislation, however, reaches far beyond the federal law, to include abortions, vasectomies and other services.

Oregon's legislation — the Reproductive Health Equity Act — was in the works well before New York billionaire Donald Trump won the November presidential election.

However, Trump's vow to repeal and replace President Obama's landmark health care law, popularly dubbed Obamacare, could intensify pressure to pass the bill. Republicans have made the repeal a first order of business this year.

The bill is intended to reinforce and fill in gaps in reproductive health care coverage under Obamacare and to expand those who are eligible for the benefits, said Laurel Swerdlow, advocacy director of Planned Parenthood Advoca-

tes of Oregon.

"We remain deeply concerned with what is happening on the national level," Swerdlow said in a phone interview Wednesday. "This legislation is on no way to be a remedy for political attacks on the Affordable Care Act. This is legislation to establish coverage for reproductive health care for all Oregonians."

For instance, abortion and vasectomies, services excluded from the Affordable Care Act mandate, would be covered under Oregon's legislation. Men, transgender individuals and undocumented immigrants would be eligible for the coverage.

"All Oregonians need access to full reproductive health coverage for families to thrive, for a healthier state and for a stronger economy," Swerdlow

said. "Working families are under so much strain today, and oftentimes, they have a hard time making ends meet."

"What this legislation does is it recognizes that a right without access is not a right at all," she add, referring to the right to terminate pregnancies. "What we really want is to make sure that all persons have access to the full spectrum of reproductive health care that they need. We don't always know a person's circumstances. We aren't in their shoes."

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon was one of several advocacy groups that worked on the legislation, sponsored by Sen. Laurie Monnes Anderson, D-Gresham, and Rep. Phil Barker, D-Aloha.

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Lawmakers' spending framework includes budget cuts, no new taxes

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The co-chairs of the Legislature's joint budget-writing committee Thursday presented a spending plan that included cuts in services to reflect the state's expected \$1.8 billion shortfall for the next two-year budget cycle.

The \$20.265 billion budget outline presented by Sen. Richard Devlin, D-Tualatin, and Rep. Nancy Nathanson, D-Eugene, reflects that shortfall and describes potential cuts to general program areas such as health care, education and public safety.

Devlin and Nathanson said the framework makes large cuts to key state services.

"To be clear, to be clear, we do not believe the resources as allocated in this document are sufficient," Devlin said in remarks during a press conference at the Oregon State Capitol.

Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick said in a statement that the framework demonstrated a need for revenue reform.

The state's Republicans, meanwhile, presented the framework as an opportunity to cut state spending. Both parties stressed maintaining "critical" services; the framework, if implemented, could mean changes ranging from higher college tuition costs to cuts in dental care for low-income people.

Gov. Kate Brown's \$20.8 billion recommended budget released Dec. 1, was put together assuming \$897 million in new revenue gathered through new taxes and the closing two tax loopholes.

By contrast, under the framework presented by Devlin and Nathanson does not assume the new revenue Brown proposed.

Under the plan, the Oregon Health Authority spending would be 27.5 percent less than needed to maintain current service levels, while the Department of Human Services would receive 8.7 percent less.

Proposed cuts vary in size between K-12, higher education and other state education

programs that don't fall into those two categories, such as career technical education.

The co-chairs were also quick to note that cuts to some state services mean cuts to matching funds from the federal government.

It's also unclear whether any direct cuts to federal funding may be coming down the pike under the new administration.

Much of the \$1.8 billion shortfall comes from the loss of federal subsidies for health care costs for low-income Oregonians, and the mounting costs of the state's public pension system, which faces \$22 billion in unfunded liability.

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