

Legislature

Continued from C1

Also helpful was a delayed implementation of the Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance program that provides employers and the state more time to implement this new law, extending the deadline out a year to January 2023.

And at this time legislation looks to be passing to bolster economic development by allowing local jurisdictions to temporarily suspend enterprise zone employment due to pandemic-related delays on construction.

This session saw a specific spotlight on the acute needs across Oregon to support people experiencing homelessness.

The city of Bend received \$2.5 million for a navigation center that provides services, in addition to \$2 million from Rep. Jason Kropf's American Rescue Plan Act allocation for a year-round, low-barrier shelter.

Central Oregon's legislators also had a hand in bills that would create more housing. This, combined with a 2019 bill that creates more density via middle housing units such as duplexes, triplexes and cot-

tage homes, is welcome legislation for our housing-starved community.

The lack of child care was highlighted in this year's session.

Several bills took aim at helping ease the child care shortage across the state as families are trying to return to work and employers are trying to find enough labor to keep their doors open. One such effort was Rep. Jack Zika's bill to ease regulations on where child care can be located and on regulatory barriers associated with operating a center.

Lawmakers also considered

a bill to create a new stand-alone Department of Early Learning to better coordinate the state's early childhood education programs and streamline supporting services to child care providers and families.

The lack of child care is so astute that Sen. Tim Knopp included \$1 million in his ARPA allocation to a pilot program at Oregon State University-Cascades and Central Oregon Community College that will fund a new child care program developed cooperatively by the two higher institutions and offered to students, faculty and

the public. The program awaits final funding from Deschutes County.

And, late this session, the business community proposed promising ideas to improve the severe labor shortage that is hindering businesses in Central Oregon and across the state. The proposal would create an essential-worker stimulus payment to those who worked through COVID-19 and include a return-to-work hiring bonus to help lure people on unemployment payments back to work.

All told, the 2021 session can be chalked up as an un-

expected success as progress has been made on key issues impacting our community and businesses get a break from new taxes for the time being. Our local lawmakers, Knopp,

Knopf and Zika all played a significant role in helping to advocate for the needs of our community. We thank them for their steadfast support and leadership in what truly was a unique legislative session.

■ *Katy Brooks is the Bend Chamber of Commerce CEO. Her vision for the chamber is to catalyze an environment where businesses, their employees and the community thrive.*

Could all vehicles have breathalyzers someday?

BY FREDRIKX KUNKLE • The Washington Post

Technology that could reduce drunken driving has evolved faster than the willingness among political and auto industry leaders to put it to use, safety advocates say.

But that could be changing.

On Wednesday, the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety announced that its breath-analyzing interlock, which can detect impaired drivers, will be available for use in commercial vehicles for the first time later this year. A consumer version could be ready by 2024.

The device is among several anti-DUI technologies that could be used to prevent drunken driving and has so far attracted the most attention. For more than a decade, the federal government and the auto industry have been working to develop the device as part of a Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety, or DADSS, that can passively detect whether a driver is intoxicated and prevent the vehicle from starting.

But with a new administration in the White House, a new Congress and advances in the technology, momentum appears to be building for new federal auto safety standards that would go beyond DADSS to reduce alcohol-related crashes and save an estimated 9,400 lives.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving is pressing the auto industry to take advantage of existing technology, such as driver-monitoring and driver-assist lane controls, to reduce drunken driving now, rather than wait for DADSS or fully autonomous vehicles to hit the market.

While some automakers, such as Volvo, have integrated driver-monitoring cameras and sensors into their safety systems, advocates expressed frustration that the rest of the industry has been slow to do the same.

"We are mad that the automakers are ignoring the potential technologies they have to prevent drunken driving," said Ken Snyder, whose daughter, Katie Snyder Evans, was killed by a drunk driver in October 2017 in California. He said there are 241 technologies available to combat drunken driving, with some requiring little more than rejiggering the computer code in driver-assist technology. "I can't sit still until this is done because I don't want other families to go through the hell we've been through," Snyder said.

The number of drunken driving fatalities has fallen by more than half since 1982, when the federal government began collecting alcohol-related crash data. Yet every 50 minutes, another American dies in an alcohol-related crash. The Insurance Infor-

mation Institute says 10,142 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes in 2019, accounting for 28% of all traffic fatalities.

Bipartisan legislation — the Reduce Impaired Driving for Everyone Act in the Senate and a similar bill in the House — would require the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to formulate rules and standards on implementing anti-DUI technology. Backers include Rep. Debbie Dingell and Sen. Gary Peters, both Democrats from Michigan. Several Republicans, including Sen. Rick Scott of Florida and Rep. David McKinley of West Virginia, have also signed on.

The auto industry opposes such mandates. Industry officials warn that existing driver-assist and driver-monitoring technology is not yet up to the task of intervening against a drunk driver, and that ineffective or unreliable measures could backfire. What would happen, they ask, if technology designed to monitor driver behavior inaccurately determined that a driver was impaired and disabled the vehicle or forced the vehicle off the road?

"While these systems may help identify many of the effects of alcohol and drug impairment, we are unaware of existing research demonstrating the robust effectiveness of these systems in detecting alcohol impairment," Scott Schmidt, vice president for



A universal ignition interlock used to combat drunken driving. Unlike ignition interlocks in use today, mostly for people charged or convicted of drunken driving, the new technology would be built into the vehicle.

safety policy at the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, said in comments submitted to NHTSA in January.

At best, Schmidt said, the current driver-assist technology can only infer that a person is impaired, unlike DADSS, which is intended to make reliable and accurate readings of a driver before the car gets on the road. He said it's also possible that current technology might fail to intervene with a "high functioning" driver who is relatively able to operate the vehicle while under the influence.

"As a result, we believe that DADSS research should be supported and completed as an agency priority," Schmidt wrote.

NHTSA also supports further research and development of DADSS, an ignition interlock device that would prevent the vehicle from starting if it determines that the driver has a blood alcohol level above a certain threshold. Such breathalyzer-like devices have become widespread over the past three decades as states implemented various programs to stop recidivism among drivers who were charged with or convicted of a DUI.

Unlike existing interlocks, however, DADSS technology is intended to become standard

equipment in all automobiles and require no effort from the driver to take a reading. The driver would not be required to blow into a tube, for example. Instead, DADSS would analyze the driver's ambient breath. The nonprofit is also developing a touch-based sensor similar to thermometers and blood-oxygen gauges applied to a finger tip.

Robert Strassburger, president of Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety, said the pandemic had set back development of DADSS by at least a year because of limits on research involving human subjects and disruptions to the supply chain for electronic components. He said the coalition is ahead of the usual 20-year timeline for research and development of a major traffic safety component with its breath-analyzing interlock.

"We still need to make the

sensor more sensitive to alcohol and further shrink its size so it's more easily integrated into cars," Strassburger said. He said the touch-based technology is expected to reach commercial fleets by 2023, followed by a consumer version two years later.

NHTSA has contributed \$55 million to developing DADSS, matched by \$16 million from the auto industry, an agency spokeswoman said. The federal agency is also exploring other possible technologies to reduce drunken driving, having issued a "request for information" to manufacturers and researchers in November. A report on the findings is expected later this year.

Joan Claybrook, a former president of Public Citizen who headed NHTSA during the Carter administration, likened the push for anti-DUI technology to the resistance to

installing air bags in vehicles. "Fifty thousand lives have been saved by air bags, and the auto industry fought it like mad, even though they invented it," Claybrook said.

At a Senate subcommittee hearing in April, Sen. Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., a Reduce Impaired Driving for Everyone Act co-sponsor and victim of a drunk driver, expressed urgency as he questioned John Bozzella, president of Alliance for Automotive Innovation.

"Mr. Bozzella, have you ever been hit by a drunk driver?" Lujan asked.

"No, I have not," Bozzella answered.

"I have," Lujan said. "I got hit head-on by a drunk driver 29 years ago. And there were many nights that I'd be driving home after that accident, or driving anywhere, and all I would see were headlights coming at me, and it scared me to death."

Lujan, in an interview last week, said he still recalls the feeling of shock and disorientation he felt moments after the crash. He also recalled seeing an empty child carrier in the other car and fearing that perhaps a child had been flung from the wreckage. It turned out that the other car's only occupant was the drunk driver, and both he and Lujan emerged from the crash relatively uninjured.

"The point of this, I'm here to tell the story, (but) there are so many people who died," Lujan said. "There's no good reason why auto manufacturers are not required to include technology in their vehicles which is readily available to prevent drunken driving crashes from happening."

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