## 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

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 Advocates of Oregon.

"We remain deeply concerned with what is happening on the national level," Swerdlow said in a phone interview Wednesday. "This legislation is in 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 leg-

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islation. 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 added, 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. Others were the ACLU of Oregon, Asian-Pacific American Network of Oregon, Family Forward Oregon, NARAL Pro Choice Oregon, Oregon Latino Health Coalition and Western States Center, Swerdlow said.

Sen. Monnes Anderson introduced similar legislation in 2015, though it did not include coverage for men, transgender individuals and undocumented immigrants. Bipartisan opposition in the Senate, however, kept her bill from progressing to a vote, she said.

Some senators felt covering abortions could be too controversial, Monnes Anderson

Gayle Atteberry, executive director of Oregon Right to Life, said the anti-abortion organization would oppose the new legislation.

"While Oregon Right to Life takes no position on true contraceptives, we, of course, are opposed to abortion, which always takes the life of an innocent unborn child," Atteberry said in an email. "Because of the abortion component, ORTL is opposed to (the bill)."

Atteberry's comment raises the question of whether including abortion could sink the bill and doom other benefits such as coverage of birth control without a copayment.

"I believe that this year there will be much more pressure to pass this important

bill," said Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland. "I believe that events at the national level will add to that pressure."

The bill's proponents, including Rep. Barker, said they believe a majority of Oregonians will support coverage of abortion. The Legislature also

has a Democratic majority. "This is a bill sponsored by two Democrats, and Democrats are in charge" noted Rep. Sherrie Stenger, R-Scio, who sponsored an unsuccessful bill last year to ban sex-selective abortions. "That is probably the most salient point in this conversation."

Lawmakers will consider the proposal during their session, which kicks off Feb. 1.

Since 2014, California, Illinois, Maryland and Vermont have passed laws adopting the Affordable Care Act's mandate to cover contraceptives without a patient copayment and expanded on the federal law's provisions.

## Lawmakers' spending framework includes 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

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

'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

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.

This year, the state must now also pick up some of the tab for insuring additional Oregonians under the Oregon Health Plan, as a result of the Legislature's decision to expand coverage in 2014 under the Affordable Care Act — a decision Devlin and Nathanson said they stood by Thursday. The federal government covered the initial costs of implementation.

Devlin and Nathanson attributed the deficit to a "fundamental imbalance" caused by these and other policies enacted in Oregon's past.

Measure 5 in 1990, for example, reduced property taxes and required local public schools to be funded by the state's general fund rather than by local taxes.

Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, called the framework a "call to action."

"The fact that we face such a deficit during a booming economic period in our state demonstrates the need for comprehensive revenue reform," Burdick said.

She said legislators were looking for ways to maximize the state's dollars but reiterated the need "to reform our revenue system to make sure it is fair to all Oregonians."

House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson, D-Portland, said the state couldn't "afford to move back-

"We can't afford to move backward in our investments in education, health care and critical services for struggling families," Williamson said in a statement. "We shouldn't shortchange our economic future by making it harder for students to get a good education. And I don't believe that any Oregonian wants us to make these painful cuts."

Jim Green, the head of the Oregon School Boards Association, called for both revenue and PERS reform in a statement Thursday.

"Our students need leadership on these two issues from the governor and our legislative leaders," Green Republicans, however, generally

praised the framework. In a statement, Sen. Jackie Win-

ters, R-Salem, also called the budget a "starting point."

'Now the work begins," Winters said. "We have our work cut out for us to craft a sound, sustainable budget (that) benefits Oregonians, urban and rural alike.'

Sen. Minority Leader Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, said the budget the co-chairs presented was "based in reality."



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