

Senate passes bill to raise smoking age to 21

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

The Oregon Senate Thursday passed a bill to raise the smoking age to 21. If the House concurs, Oregon would become the third state in the nation to prohibit the sale of tobacco to people younger than 21.

"This is pure and simple a public health bill," said the bill's chief sponsor, Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton.

The bill passed 18-to-9, with all

Democrats and two Republicans, Sens. Jackie Winters of Salem, and Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena, voting in favor. Winters and Democrat swing vote Sen. Betsy Johnson of Scappoose changed their votes. A Republican, Rep. Rich Vial of Scholls, co-sponsored with Steiner-Hayward. Both lawmakers have said they lost loved ones to tobacco-related diseases.

Sen. Alan Olson, R-Canby, argued the bill looked like the work of a "nanny state."

"I appall smoking," Olson said.

But the senator said he felt people have the right to make that choice for themselves.

Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, said people who are old enough to serve in the military ought to be able to decide whether they want to smoke. He said the law change would create a new illicit market for people between the ages of 19 and 21.

Steiner Hayward, who is a family physician, retorted that states have prohibited people younger than 21 from drinking alcohol and that alcohol is less addictive than tobacco.

Recent research, including some from the U.S. Surgeon General's Office, shows that brains under age 26 are more susceptible to addiction.

The legislation would impose first-time civil penalties of \$50 for clerks and \$500 for managers who sell to minors.

"We made a conscious decision not to have criminal penalties because we know that tobacco companies tend to target low-income communities who can least afford it," Steiner Hayward said.

Taking 18- to 20-year-olds out of

the legal market would result in an estimated loss in tobacco tax revenue of \$1.6 million every two years, according to a projection by the Legislative Revenue Office.

An increase in the tobacco tax proposed by Gov. Kate Brown could offset some that loss.

In 2015, Hawaii became the first state in the nation to raise the smoking age to 21. California followed suit last year. An additional 210 cities and counties, including New York City and Boston, have similar laws.

Advocates, legislators seek more money for veteran services

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau

Oregon veterans' groups have been up in arms since the governor's budget reduced allocations to the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs from the state's general fund and backfilled it with most of the lottery fund dollars set aside for veterans' services by a voter-approved ballot measure.

Now they've brought their concerns to a Legislature busy trying to fill a \$1.6 billion shortfall.

Ballot Measure 96 amended the state's constitution to allocate 1.5 percent of state lottery net proceeds to direct services for veterans.

Advocates have been vocal about what they say is a need for more support — such as for veterans' services officers, who help returned veterans sign up for federal benefits.

Byron Whipple, a veterans' services officer in Union County, told legislators last month that in his area of northeastern Oregon, veterans face problems accessing travel to get medical care.

In February, community members housed a 75-year-old veteran with dementia for five days because local agencies could not arrange services for him sooner, Whipple wrote in testimony to the Ways and Means

Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development.

"We do not have local missions and shelters that certain cities and counties have," Whipple wrote. "We do not have the extra tax dollars to fund these emergencies. Last November, we did have hope."

In December, Gov. Kate Brown released a budget that decreased the amount of general fund dollars for veterans' services from \$10 million to \$2 million, provoking the ire of veterans' advocates, who said that the ballot measure was intended to supplement, not supplant, current state funding for veterans.

The Governor's Office said in a statement this week that at \$19.8 million, the governor's budget reflected the intent of Measure 96 by increasing the overall budget for the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Although \$19.8 million would be a near doubling of funding for veterans' services in the next budget cycle, veterans groups' say it's not enough, and that the governor's plan may meet the letter, but not the spirit, of Measure 96.

The co-chairs of the Joint Ways and Means Committee, the legislative budget-writing committee, proposed \$23.5 million in combined lottery and general funds for veterans' services as part of

their preliminary spending framework in January.

Some legislators have called for boosting the amount higher still.

State Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth, is one of them.

Evans acknowledged in a statement Thursday that state legislators were facing an "extraordinarily difficult budget environment."

"Now we have to find a way to increase funding to a level where we can do some real good for the men and women we've sent into harm's way, while also strengthening our schools, providing quality health care and investing in other critical services," Evans said.

Freshman Rep. Ron Noble, R-McMinnville, wants to bump the amount of money the veterans' services program gets by amending the agency's funding bill, bringing the total to about \$30 million for veterans' services.

Noble says he wants to obey the will of the voters. According to the Oregon Secretary of State's Office, 83 percent of Oregon voters voted in favor of Measure 96.

However, according to the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Office, the measure did not require that the amount of money allocated to veterans' services in the general fund be maintained.

"There's nothing in the

bill that says you cannot supplant the dollars," Noble said. "But I think that's, I'm going to be blunt, I think that's just a chicken way out."

Noble did not have specific proposals Thursday as to where he'd cut back elsewhere in the state's general fund to increase veterans' services.

He said the state could be more efficient, and that he is preparing to provide more details at future meetings of the Ways and Means Subcommittee reviewing the ODVA budget, of which he is a member.

Supporters of more funding, such as Noble and State Rep. Julie Parrish, R-Tualatin/West Linn, argue that an up-front investment in direct services will bring more revenue to the state down the line by increasing the amount of federal benefits Oregon's veterans receive. They claim it will also lessen the burden on other areas of the state budget, such as health care and housing.

Parrish was behind the legislative proposal that was referred to voters, and said in a phone interview Thursday that it was not her intention to backfill a lower general fund budget with the lottery funds.

Furthermore, she believes the state has the resources to pay for the veterans' services that advocates want.

She said she was working on a bill to curtail the costs of healthcare for public employees. "We have the money," Parrish said, "We're just not holding state agencies accountable for how we're spending it."

LEGISLATIVE BRIEFCASE

Irrigators criticize \$100 water rights fee proposal

A proposed \$100 annual fee on all Oregon water rights has met with criticism from irrigators who say it would contribute to already mounting financial burdens.

Farmers overwhelmingly testified against House Bill 2706, which aims to raise money for water management, during a March 22 hearing before the House Committee on Energy and Environment.

Members of the Klamath Water Users Association, for example, are already paying steep costs to comply with the Endangered Species Act and engage in water rights adjudication in the region, said Dave Jensen, a farmer and representative of the group.

For irrigators with multiple water rights, the bill would cap total fees at \$1,000 a year, while municipalities could pay up to \$2,500 a year.

The money raised would pay for the administrative, technical and field duties performed by the Oregon Water Resources Department, which oversees 89,000 water rights in the state.

The bill would effectively impose a discriminatory tax on irrigators and other water users, said Curtis Martin, a rancher and chair of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association's water resources committee.

Opponents also argue that electricity costs have continued rising, adding to the cost of pumping water, and irrigators would have to pay the management fee even if they didn't fully use their water rights.

House Bill 2705, a companion proposal requiring the installation of water measurement devices at irrigation diversions, also drew objections from irrigators at the hearing.

Complying with the requirement would be expensive and the Oregon Water Resources Department doesn't have enough staff to analyze the new information anyway, said John O'Keefe, president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association.

"Additional data for the sake of data does not solve any problem," O'Keefe said.

It would be more realistic to ensure that watermasters — who can already order water measurements when necessary — are properly equipped to do their jobs, he said.

Installing water measurement devices also isn't practical for farmers who rely on flood irrigation and divert water directly from streams onto fields, according to opponents.

Farmworker housing operations tax credit progresses

A proposed tax credit to compensate farmers for half the operational costs of providing worker housing has made some headway in the Oregon Legislature.

Senate Bill 1, which is supported by a coalition of agriculture and housing groups, has moved out of the Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue. The impacts to Oregon's revenues and budget from SB 1 have yet to be determined.

While the bill will now move to the Joint Committee on Tax Credits, which includes members of both the House and Senate, it was referred out of the committee without recommendation as to its passage.

It's common for the Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue to move bills without a recommendation at this stage, since various tax credit proposals must still be prioritized, said Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, the committee's chair.

Under Senate Bill 1, farmers would be able to obtain tax credits for half the amount of repairs, maintenance, insurance and other costs associated with farmworker housing during the year.

Oregon lawmakers consider banning livestock discrimination

An incident of prejudice against pigs near the state capital has Oregon lawmakers contemplating a broader prohibition against livestock discrimination.

A landowner in West Salem is facing a prohibition against raising pigs on properties smaller than 10 acres due to a species-specific regulation by Polk County's government.

The dispute has caught the attention of Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth, and Rep. Brian Clem, D-Salem, who have proposed a bill that would ban county ordinances that generally allow livestock but forbid certain animals.

"It's weird to exclude one particular species," Evans said during a March 23 hearing on House Bill 3016.

The Association of Oregon Counties opposes HB 3016 due to its "all or nothing" approach to local livestock regulations, said Mark Nystrom, policy manager of the Association of Oregon Counties.



We offer monuments of unsurpassed quality. Order your monument by April 15th. Granite • Bronze
Choose from many beautiful styles in assorted sizes.

SAY IT IN STONE PRESERVE IT FOREVER...



Serving Grant County Since 1937

241 S Canyon Blvd., John Day
541-575-0529 driskillmemorialchapel.com

Love Your Smile



Maintaining Smiles in Grant County since 1979

Offering Preventive & Restorative Care, Crown & Bridges, Dentures and Partial Dentures

Dr. Norm DeJong DDS, MPH, PC

Melanie DeJong RDH
132 Front St Prairie City
541-820-4369 • 888-820-4369
www.prairiecityoregon.com



Capital Bureau
MyEagleNews.com

Vote Aletha Bonebrake OTEC Board Position 2



"I ask for your vote on your OTEC Ballot coming in the mail..."

I am dedicated to keeping rates affordable for all members, with cooperative benefit the heart of all decision-making.

Service to Members

- Two full years on OTEC Board 2013-14
- Credentialed Cooperative Director Certification
- Relationships in every OTEC community
- Informed decision-making

Experienced Leadership

- Director, Baker County Library District 1985-2007
- Baker City Council 2009-2013
- State Library Board of Trustees, Governor appointment 2010, Chair 2013-present

Commitment to Community

- Volunteering in Eastern Oregon since 1985
- OCF Eastern OR Leadership Council 2009-present

Recognizing our Local Dentists on

DOCTORS' DAY

Virginia McMillan, DDS, PC
150 Ogilvie Dr.
John Day
541-575-0550



We cater to cowards!
www.johndaysmiles.com

