

Lawmakers advance special election to budget committee

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau

The House rules committee on Saturday advanced a bill that would create a January 2018 special election if any legislation approved this session gets referred to voters.

About one week before the Legislature reaches its deadline, a battle has developed over the special election proposal. The controversy has highlighted uncertainty over how the state plans to fund the Oregon Health Plan, its version of Medicaid.

A January election next year is expected to set the state back about \$3 million. The issue likely faces further debate at its next stop, the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, which hammers out the state's two-year budget.

Oregonians can petition to refer successful, non-emergency legislation to the ballot. The referral typically gets voted on in the next general election, but the legislature has the authority to hold special elections.

Democrats fear recently-passed legislation that creates taxes and assessments on healthcare providers, insurers and coordinated care organizations to pay for Medicaid will get referred, and say that a January election date allows legislators to reconvene in the February 2018 short session to find a plan B for Medicaid funding should the legislation fail at the ballot.

State Rep. Julie Parrish, R-Tualatin/West Linn, has publicly acknowledged her intentions to file a petition to get the so-called provider tax referred to voters.

The state is poised to raise more than \$600 million in the next two years through the provider tax and draw down nearly \$1.9 billion in federal funding to help pay for the Oregon Health Plan, Ore-

gon's version of Medicaid. Parrish contends that rescheduling the election less than a month after the Christmas holiday circumscribes the public's ability to weigh in.

Oregonians vote by mail, but Parrish argues that sending out voters' pamphlets during the holiday season, when the mail business is typically busy and results in delays, could disenfranchise overseas and military voters.

House Democrats are concerned a referral could result in a funding shortfall in Medicaid, which approximately 1 million Oregonians receive.

Once petitioners get enough signatures for a referendum, the legislation in question goes on hold.

The provider tax bill includes a tax on insurance premiums, for example, which is poised to go into effect Jan. 1, 2018. It wouldn't take effect that date if petitioners are successful in getting it on the ballot.

If the ballot measure referral vote were held in November, even if voters approved it, implementation would be delayed by 11 months.

Democrats have also charged that Parrish is personally invested in seeing the provider tax fail at the ballot, an issue that came up Saturday afternoon at a contentious meeting of the House Committee on Rules, where the amendment to the elections legislation was adopted and advanced.

A political action committee, or PAC, has already formed to campaign for the referral, according to State Rep. Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis.

Oregonians Against More Health Care Taxes has received \$10,000 in donations from a single donor, according to campaign finance records. On Wednesday, Rayfield charged that a "longtime

business and political partner" of Parrish's, Lindsey Berschauer, had established the committee.

Parrish says that while she and Berschauer are friends and "work together on issues," they do not have a legal business partnership or other entity together. Parrish has worked on previous political campaigns, including the 2016 campaign for Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, a Republican.

Rayfield contended during Saturday's hearing that Parrish stood to profit from a ballot referral.

"When you come here today, the real question I want to ask you is, are you coming here as a consultant, or are you here as a legislator, and do you intend to profit off of this referendum?" Rayfield asked Parrish during her testimony Saturday afternoon.

Parrish shot back that Democratic members of the committee had received money from unions and special interests with a stake in the provider tax legislation — such as State Rep. Rob Nosse, D-Portland, who works for the Oregon Nurses Association, Parrish said, and has received campaign donations from the association.

"Collectively," Parrish said, addressing the five Democrats, "You all have taken \$1 million."

The amended bill would also create a bipartisan legislative committee to write ballot titles; members of the majority party would outnumber the number of members from the minority party, and the provision has been decried by Republicans.

But that provision of the bill has drummed up opposition from those outside the GOP as well.

Daniel Meek, of the Oregon Progressive Party, criticized the proposal in written testimony earlier this week.

PROGRAM

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it's a valuable service, so we would rather dip into our general operating instead of cutting services."

Bob Stewart of John Day served in the Marine Corps and describes the service as "an absolute blessing."

"They come here. They pick me up. They take me where I want to go," Stewart said. "Seeing as how I'm a veteran, I can go to the doctor, to home health, to any kind of medical thing."

The program is federally funded by annual grants from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and administered by the state and partner agencies. The program helps veterans in 10 participating counties who often do

not have adequate access to medical care in their communities. Each of Oregon's 10 highly rural counties can receive up to \$50,000 a year. A highly rural county is classified as having less than seven residents per square mile. The 10 in the state are Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Lake, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Wallowa and Wheeler, according to the Oregon Department of Veteran Affairs. Each county has received the maximum funding allotment.

From October 2014 to September 2016, a total of 529,199 miles were logged, roughly half of the nationwide total reported by Oregon and all the other states participating in the VA-funded program.

Oregon's drivers tracked over 9,000 trips, spent over 20,000 hours on the road and

served 2,279 veterans during that time.

"This program's success is directly due to the outstanding management of each county's transportation system and their ability to creatively transport veterans by partnering with other transportation networks and overcoming weather, distance and other adverse circumstances," Mitch Sparks, ODVA's director of statewide veteran services, said.

To access the veteran program through People Mover, veterans will need to present a DD214 showing honorable discharge, a VA Medical Benefit Card or Oregon driver's license showing veteran status.

For more information, contact the People Mover at 541-575-2370 or visit grant-countypeoplemover.com.

Grant County Awarded Federal Funds under Phase 34 of the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program

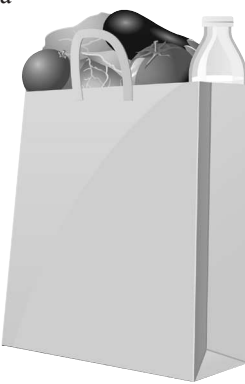
Grant County may receive an award from the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program to supplement emergency food and shelter programs in the county.

Selections are made by a National Board that is charged by the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency and consists of representatives from The Salvation Army, American Red Cross, Council of Jewish Federations, Catholic Charities USA, National Council of Churches of Christ USA, and United Way of America. The Local Board is charged to distribute funds appropriated by Congress to help expand the capacity of food and shelter programs in high-need areas around the country.

The Local Board will determine how Grant County's award is to be distributed among emergency food and / or shelter programs run by local service agencies. The Local Board is responsible for recommending agencies to receive federal funds made available through Phase 34.

Under the terms of the National Board award, local organizations chosen to receive funds must be a private voluntary non-profit or unit of government eligible to receive federal funds, with an accounting system and federal employer identification number. Organizations must demonstrate the capability to deliver qualified emergency food and / or shelter programs. Private voluntary organizations must have a voluntary board and practice non-discrimination. Qualifying agencies are urged to apply.

Grant County has distributed Emergency Food and Shelter funds previously to the Grant County Food Bank and the Prairie City Baptist Church Food Bank. These agencies were responsible for providing food to qualifying local citizens. Public or private voluntary agencies interested in applying for Emergency Food and Shelter Program funds under Phase 34 may request an application by contacting 541-575-0059, Grant County Court Office, 201 S. Humbolt Street, No. 280, Canyon City, OR 97820. Completed applications are due before 5:00 pm Friday, July 21, 2017.



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Transportation package survives in committee, heads to House floor

By Dana Haynes
Capital Bureau

Rep. Caddy McKeown, co-chair of the joint transportation committee, summed up 18 months of work, and a bill of steep compromises, with this: "We aimed for the sun and landed on the moon."

The Joint Committee on Transportation Preservation and Modernization on Saturday passed the state's transportation bill on a 12-2 vote, sending House Bill 2017 to the House floor next week. It's expected to pass there and head to the Senate for a successful run, before going to the Governor's Office.

All this within days of the end of a long and contentious session.

The bill raises \$5.3 billion over a 10-year period through increases in the gas tax, registration fees and new taxes on payroll, new vehicle purchases and bicycles priced more than \$200.

However, the new plan excludes several congestion-busting projects in the Portland area that would have been funded through a state-local match, including projects to widen Interstate 205 from Stafford Road to Oregon City and to replace the Abernathy Bridge on I-205 between Oregon City and West Linn.

The original bill also would have raised the gas tax even more in the Portland area to raise funds for the metro congestion projects.

Instead, the proposal directs

the Oregon Transportation Commission to establish a tolling program on Interstate 205 and Interstate 5. The program would be used to fund projects on I-205 and I-5 from the Washington state line to where the two interstates cross south of Portland.

The bill survived a stressful four-hour meeting on a rare Saturday session, with Sen. Betsy Johnson of Scappoose getting into heated disputes in the corridor at least twice.

Rep. Richard Vial of Scholls — not a member of the committee but a longtime advocate for transportation funding on the county level — praised the bill.

"As painful as it is, the process works," he said Saturday.

Legislative leaders and Gov. Kate Brown negotiated an agreement between Democrats and Republicans to trim the size of the package and to place a cost cap on the state's low carbon fuels standard. Republican opposition to the fuels standard is what scotched another transportation deal in 2016.

This year's deal was intended to win enough GOP votes to reach the constitutionally required three-fifths majority in each chamber for raising taxes.

The deal includes:

- Reducing the gas tax increase and an excise tax on the sale of new vehicles, from 1 percent to 0.5 percent. About \$12 million of the revenue from the proceeds of the vehicle excise tax would be used for re-

bates on the purchase of electric vehicles.

- A \$15 flat fee would be charged on the purchase of new adult bicycles with a price tag of more than \$200. The proceeds would go toward paying for commuter bicycle and pedestrian paths.

- A 4-cent gas tax increase that would be triggered in 2018, with subsequent 2-cent hikes every other year.

- A payroll tax of less than 0.1 percent, to raise money to fund public transit.

A sticking point in negotiations was Republicans' request for changes to state's low-carbon fuels standard, which calls for greenhouse gas emission reductions by 2025. In the agreement, the GOP won a cost cap of \$200 per subsidy for efforts such as alternative fuel production and electric vehicles, a concession Republicans wanted to control the cost of the program. The deal also allows temporary suspension of parts of the program when there are fuel shortages.

The bill also will see improvements of outer Powell Boulevard — roughly from Interstate 205 east. The street, now owned and maintained by the Oregon Department of Transportation, will be handed over to Portland for subsequent maintenance and improvements.

Conversely, Cornelius Pass Road will revert to ODOT control under this bill.

Dana Haynes is a reporter for Pamplin Media Group.



Pamplin Media Group

More than half of House Democrats have signed a letter that seems to threaten passage of a transportation measure unless the Legislature raises more money for services.

House Democrats renew call for more revenue

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau

Sixteen House Democrats appeared Saturday to threaten a major transportation package with a renewed call for tax reform addressed to the Speaker of the House.

A group of 16 of 35 House Democrats have written a letter to Speaker of the House Tina Kotek, D-Portland, saying that while they supported the "well-crafted transportation package," "the package alone is not enough."

"In the final days of the 2017 session, we believe that the legislature must focus on the all-important task of identifying additional revenue to support education and other essential state services, ensure government transparency and reduce waste so we can protect critical services that the most vulnerable Oregonians can rely on," the group wrote.

A legislative committee had advanced the \$5.3 billion transportation package, the result of a significant effort to come to agreement between

Democrats and Republicans, mere hours earlier. It's expected to go to the floor of the House of Representatives next week.

Since the beginning of the session in February, Democrats had been advocating for structural revenue reform, aiming to shift the basis of business taxes from income to sales in search of what many argued would be more, and more consistent, revenue in future budgets.

But after months of debate that followed a divisive ballot measure campaign, the issue had appeared to come to a stalemate. Although a last-ditch effort to drum up nearly \$200 million in additional revenue by restructuring a tax break for small business-owners passed the House, it appears unlikely to make it to the Senate for a vote.

Kotek said in a statement late Saturday regarding the letter: "At this point, I'm not sure what this will mean for the final vote on transportation."

The transportation pack-

age raises \$5.3 billion over ten years through increases in the gas tax, registration fees and a new tax on payroll, new vehicles and bicycles priced more than \$200. Because it raises new revenue, it requires a three-fifths majority vote in both the Oregon House and Senate.

Union groups had suggested earlier in the session that they would withdraw support for a transportation package without revenue reform.

The letter was signed by representatives Karin Powner, of Milwaukie; Julie Fahy, of Eugene; Rob Nosse, of Portland; Pam Marsh, of Ashland; Diego Hernandez, of Portland; Chris Gorsek, of Troutdale; Sheri Malstrom, of Beaverton; Janelle Bynum, of Happy Valley; Tawna Sanchez, of Portland; Mark Meek, of Clackamas County; Carla Piluso, of Gresham; Ken Helm, of Washington County; Teresa Alonso Leon, of Woodburn; Janean Sollman, of Hillsboro; Mitch Greenlick, of Portland; and Brad Witt, of Clatskanie.

HOME SCHOOL PARENTS

Home school students are required by law to be tested by a qualified neutral person following grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. [OAR581-021-0026 (5) (A)] However, students who participate in interscholastic activities are required by OSAA rules to be tested every year and must score in the 23rd percentile to be eligible to participate in interscholastic activities.

Grant ESD will offer assessment testing for home school students finishing grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. Cost \$20.00 per student. Payment is due at the time of testing. Register your student for assessment testing by calling Grant ESD, 541-575-1349 on or before, July 17, 2017.

Testing Dates: July 19, 2017 – 8:00am to 2:00pm
July 20, 2017 – 8:00am to 2:00pm

If you have any questions you may contact:
Robert Waltenburg or Jo Sproul
Grant County ESD
541-575-1349

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