

Legislature adjourns difficult session with mixed outcomes

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Capital Bureau

Oregon lawmakers adjourned a contentious legislative session Friday.

The more than five-month session yielded a two-year budget, new taxes, transportation funding, expanded health care benefits and staved off the need for a second women's prison. But lawmakers also succumbed to partisan gridlock over corporate tax reform, paring pension costs and tenant protections.

"At best, our successes are tempered by disappointment," said Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem.

House Minority Leader Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, said the session was the "most partisan and divisive" one he had "ever been a part of."

The state faced a \$1.4 billion revenue shortfall in the budget for the next two years. Republicans agreed to support moderately increasing taxes on corporations in exchange for reducing the cost of public employee pension costs and spending reductions, but the two parties were unable to reach an agreement.



Contributed photo/Oregon Department of Transportation

The Legislature adjourned Friday after a contentious session. Although a budget and a transportation package were passed, there was no progress on long-term pension cost and revenue reforms.

A last-ditch effort to restructure small business taxes, which would have raised nearly \$200 million in the next two years, also went by the wayside.

"The session will be more about missed opportunities than anything else," McLane said. "The sound of a can being kicked down the road is resonating."

Lawmakers passed a long-awaited transportation funding bill, made reproductive health care free-of-charge to patients and made undocumented children el-

igible for health care under Medicaid.

Democrats and Republicans did cooperate to pass a health care provider tax to help offset the state's increasing financial responsibility for expanded Medicaid. Without the tax, 350,000 Oregonians would have lost health coverage, some Democrats argued.

"I am just really proud of the work they did this legislative session," said Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat. "There were some very difficult votes taken, both sides of the aisle,

and I want to applaud their courage and their willingness to put politics aside and do the right thing for Oregonians."

Some of those accomplishments, including the transportation package and the state's funding mechanism for Medicaid, appear to face possible challenges at the ballot box.

The legislature convenes the five-month session in odd numbered years. In that time, they must balance the state's budget.

Lawmakers made cuts and ended tax credits in the effort to close the \$1.4 billion gap.

"Our budget was the best we could do without real revenue reform," Senate President Courtney said. "It funds schools better than expected. It limits tuition increases. It protects the Oregon Health Plan."

Lawmakers came up with a few ways to save money in the future through Senate Bill 1067, mainly through holding down costs of public employee health benefit plans. The savings attributable to the bill in the next two years are indeterminate, according to the legislative fiscal office, but are projected to save about \$1 billion in the 2019-21 biennium.

The transportation funding bill crowned lawmakers' accomplishments this session, after a similar plan crumbled in 2015. Brown and legislative leaders identified the transportation funding deal as top priority for the session.

The bill raises the revenue over 10 years through an increase in the gas tax and registration and title fees, a flat tax on adult bicycles priced more than \$200, and a 0.5 percent excise tax on the purchase of new vehicles.

However, lawmakers signaled fear that voters might challenge the proposal at the ballot. They passed another law to move up the date of any election on any referral to May 2018.

While a bill to ban no-cause evictions came to a standstill, the Legislature approved tens of millions of dollars in funding to address the state's critical affordable housing shortage with emergency housing assistance, affordable housing preservation, state-backed bonds for development and an increase in the cap for the affordable housing tax credit.

Other legislation helps to accelerate permitting for affordable housing and accessory dwelling units and

establishes a loan program to developers to purchase land for affordable housing.

"We made good progress, but we need to do more to protect renters from staggering rent spikes and no-cause evictions. In 2018, we will push to finish this session's unfinished business on housing," said Speaker Tina Kotek.

To avoid opening a second women's prison, lawmakers expanded early-release and alternative programs to help keep low-level female offenders out of prison. They also reduced penalties for drug and property crimes, which are the main drivers of female incarceration.

Under another law, secret grand jury proceedings must be recorded.

Lawmakers also instituted a new mandate aimed at reducing racial profiling during police stops. The law requires police to collect data on race, gender and other information during law enforcement stops. The Criminal Justice Commission would analyze the data to identify trends and the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training would provide training to all law enforcement on preventing profiling.

Transportation package heads to governor

A \$5.3 billion statewide transportation package is headed to Gov. Kate Brown for a signature after the Senate passed the bill 22-to-7 Thursday. The House of Representatives passed the bill 39-to-20 Wednesday.

The 10-year plan includes hikes in the gas tax, registration and title fees and new taxes on payroll, new vehicle purchases and bicycles priced more than \$200.

Legislature passes bill requiring coverage of abortion at no cost

The state of Oregon will soon require insurers cover specific health services, including abortions, at no out-of-pocket cost to patients.

House Bill 3391, approved by the Oregon Senate Wednesday, now heads to Democratic Gov. Kate Brown's desk.

The legislation would prohibit plans from imposing a deductible, coinsurance, copayment or other cost-sharing requirements on specific services, such as preventive reproductive healthcare, contraception

and postnatal services.

The House passed the bill after hours of debate Saturday, repeated briefly in the Senate Wednesday.

One point of contention: A provision that would have the state separately provide abortion coverage for women who have health insurance through religious employers exempted from covering the service in their health benefit plans.

Under the bill, the Oregon Health Authority will develop a program with the Department of Consumer and Business Services to cover abortion services for employees with those plans.

The bill sets aside about \$10 million in the next two years for the Oregon Health Authority to administer the provisions of the bill. The bill also would guarantee coverage of the specified services for Oregon residents regardless of immigration status or gender identity.

Senate Democrats said in a statement that the bill would expand access to contraception for over 18,000 Oregonians and reduce the number of unintended pregnancies in the state.

Senate Republicans, on the other hand, said they did not oppose the bill in its entirety, but wanted to amend the bill to exclude required coverage for abortion, a move they por-

trayed as a possible bipartisan compromise. A motion to refer the bill back to the committee to consider the amendment was voted down.

Many Republicans who spoke on the floor before the vote made clear their opposition to abortion.

"The issue here is really quite simple: What we're talking about is the unjustified taking of an innocent human life," said Sen. Dennis Linthicum, R-Beatty.

Bill to raise state smoking age to 21 passes

Oregon is on its way to become the third state to raise the legal age to buy tobacco from 18 to 21.

The House of Representatives on Thursday passed a bill to increase the legal age.

The Senate, which had previously passed the bill, then approved a minor language change made by the House, sending the bill to Gov. Kate Brown for a signature.

"Research has shown that raising the minimum legal sale age of tobacco products and electronic cigarettes to 21 years, in line with alcohol and marijuana, significantly reduces the number of youth who begin using these products and become addicted to

them, saving Oregonians billions of tax dollars, and the lives of thousands of loved ones, each year," said Rep. Rich Vial, R-Scholls.

Vial and Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton, sponsored the legislation to help prevent youth from becoming addicted to tobacco. Tobacco-related disease is the state's leading cause of preventable death and claims the lives of more than 5,500 Oregonians each year.

Legislature approves election dates for referrals

The Oregon Legislature Thursday approved election dates for two major pieces of legislation if they are referred to voters.

A \$5.3 billion transportation funding package passed Thursday and new taxes on health care providers to pay for Medicaid could get referred to voters next year.

Oregonians can petition to refer 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.

Three Republican lawmakers plan to file a petition to refer the so-called \$550 million "provider tax" to the ballot.

Democrats in the House and Senate passed legislation Thursday to hold the possible referral election on that issue in January 2018, rather than the November general election. The same elections bill says that if the transportation package gets referred, it will be voted on in the May 2018 primary election.

The transportation package, an effort more than two years in the making, raises \$5.3 billion over 10 years through increased gas taxes, registration and title fees and a flat tax on adult bicycles priced more than \$200.

Many Republicans have cried foul at the Democratic effort to hold a January election on the possible provider tax referral. Sen. Alan Olsen, of Canby, was moved to remark on the Senate floor Thursday: "It's like the Grinch stole the election."

The state already assesses

certain urban hospitals 5.3 percent of their net revenues to help pay for Medicaid. Hospitals receive most, if not all, of the amount back in the form of payments. Legislation passed this session creates a tax of .7 percent on those hospitals, a new 4 percent assessment on rural hospitals, and taxes insurers.

Oregon lawmakers approve state REAL ID

A bill to give Oregonians a voluntary path to upgrade their state-issued driver's license or ID card to federal standards is headed to Gov. Kate Brown for a signature.

The upgraded identification will be necessary as soon as 2018 to board domestic commercial flights and enter any federal facility, including Bonneville Dam or a federal courthouse.

Without compliant state-issued ID, travelers will instead have to use a passport or other federally approved form of ID.

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SUNDAY AUGUST 27TH

JOHN DAY GOLF CLUB • 18 HOLE SCRAMBLE • 8:00 AM CHECK-IN • 9:00 AM TEE OFF

AWARDS TO FOLLOW PLAY • BBQ TO FOLLOW AWARDS • 3:00 PM SOCIAL HOUR

\$75 ENTRY INCLUDES TOURNAMENT & BBQ

\$25 BBQ ONLY

ENTRY DEADLINE IS AUGUST 24

NUMBER OF PLAYERS _____ @ \$75 EACH (GOLF AND DINNER) TOTAL \$ _____

PLAYER #1: NAME _____ PHONE _____ HANDICAP OR AVG PLAY _____

PLAYER #2: NAME _____ PHONE _____ HANDICAP OR AVG PLAY _____

PLAYER #3: NAME _____ PHONE _____ HANDICAP OR AVG PLAY _____

PLAYER #4: NAME _____ PHONE _____ HANDICAP OR AVG PLAY _____

If less than a 4 person team, you will be placed with other players to make up a team.

Team Sponsor: _____

NUMBER OF PEOPLE FOR BBQ ONLY _____ @ \$25 EACH (tickets required for dinner) TOTAL \$ _____

NAME _____ PHONE _____

NAME _____ PHONE _____

NUMBER OF CART RENTALS _____ @ \$20 TOTAL \$ _____

MULLIGAN (INSURANCE) TICKETS MAY BE PURCHASED THE MORNING OF THE TOURNAMENT

WATERHOLE MULLIGANS MAY BE PURCHASED ON #4 & #13

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