

Carols at the Capitol: 'It restores my faith in the future'

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

First-graders from Salem's Crosshill Christian School curl their arms into wing shapes, flap around the rotunda of the Oregon Capitol and belt out: "Three French hens, two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree."

The class of nearly 20 first-graders is among more than 500 students who are performing Christmas carols at the Capitol this holiday season.

The decades-long tradition has gained such popularity that the Capitol's Visitors Services employees no longer have to reach out to schools to book the performances. School choir directors call each year to claim their spot on the schedule.

"I remember singing here when I was a child so it was fun to see my daughter sing here," said Danielle Johnston, mother of Crosshill first-grader Parker Johnston.

Surrounded by a magical scene of Christmas trees and holiday adornment in the rotunda, the choirs sing from about 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Saturday until Dec. 22. Parents, passersby and state employees fill audience seats. Some state employees bring their lunches to the rotunda so that they can watch the performances during their break.

"Our world is a chaotic place right now," said Robin Maxey, communications director for Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem. "We see and hear a lot more about the bad than the good in it. To be able to see the joy of the season on the faces of these children and teenagers every day gives me a lift. It restores my faith in the future."

Maxey keeps closed-circuit footage of the performances switched on in his office upstairs for most of the day.

The performances also are streamed live online.

"Having it in office doesn't compare to being in the rotunda and actually hearing them, but it's a busy time of year for us prepping for session so we can't always get out there," Maxey said.

(The Oregon Legislature convenes its policymaking session shortly after



First-graders with their teacher, Colleen Andersson, from Salem's Crosshill Christian School sing "The Twelve Days of Christmas" in the rotunda of the Oregon Capitol in Salem Dec. 12.



The school choir performance schedule at the Oregon Capitol in Salem Dec. 12.

the holidays Feb. 5-March 9.)

Sherry Chandler of Visitors Services, who schedules the choirs, sits at an information desk near the rotunda for the most of the day. She said she never tires of hearing the carols.

"The little ones have sweet, little voices, and in the middle school and high school choirs, there is very good talent. Sometimes, you hear the same carols over and over. This year, they were mixing it up a little."

The carolers bring a starkly different scene to the Capitol, where during other times of the year lawmakers may bicker over bills and lobbyists pace the halls.

"The kids aren't wearing thousand-dollar suits and lobbying for bad causes," quipped Arthur Towers, a lobbyist for Portland-based Oregon Trial Lawyers Association. "It's heartwarming as opposed to heartbreaking."

Scott Jorgensen, chief of staff for Sen. Alan DeBoer, R-Ashland, said he got sick of hearing Christmas music in his past life as an employee at Fred Meyer, where the music cycled constantly from Thanksgiving to New Year's.

"It's different when the school kids sing," Jorgensen said. "I absolutely love it. I think it's easy to lose sight of how special it is when you're there every day."

"Through the eyes of schoolchildren, especially schoolchildren from the rural parts of the state, it's a really big deal to be able to come to the Capitol. You can see it on their faces how thrilled they are. It really warms your heart to see the groups of kids singing."

Oregon plans to challenge repeal of net neutrality

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau



Ellen Rosenblum

Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum said she plans to join a lawsuit to challenge the Federal Communications Commission's decision to repeal a rule barring internet providers from blocking or charging more for access to one website over another.

The FCC voted 3-to-2 along party lines to scrap the rule approved by the FCC in 2015. The commission's two Democrats voted against it.

"The decision today by the FCC to reverse course on net neutrality will have lasting negative impacts for our economy and almost every aspect of our lives," Rosenblum said. "We all rely on a free and open internet, and we will no longer have an even playing field if we start to incentivize Big Cable over other companies."

The vote came despite calls from state attorneys general, consumer advocates, tech executives and even some Republican lawmakers to postpone or cancel the decision.

Rosenblum spearheaded a letter from 18 state attorneys general Tuesday to the FCC urging them to delay a vote until investigators could determine whether the fraud was committed in the FCC comment process.

New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman's

Office has been investigating whether commenters to the FCC on the proposed rule change illegally used the identities of Americans from around the country to give feedback on net neutrality.

Schneiderman released new information Wednesday that his office had identified a total of 2 million fake comments on net neutrality to the FCC using stolen identities.

His office has a search engine where residents can look to see if their identity was used fraudulently in comments.

Oregon is one of more than a dozen states expected to join New York in launching a legal challenge of Thursday's FCC decision.

"I'm proud to stand up with other attorneys general and join New York to petition for review," Rosenblum said.

Supporters of the rule change argue that it will benefit consumers by spurring more competition between broadband providers and cutting internet providers' expenses.

FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel, one of the two FCC commissioners who voted against the rule change, told NPR's "The Takeaway" that half of U.S. households have only one choice for a broadband provider.

Measure 101 supporters, opponents clash in debate

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau

Supporters and opponents of Ballot Measure 101, which could repeal part of Oregon's Medicaid funding plan, faced off Wednesday in a debate at the Multnomah Athletic Club.

Medicaid is a health care coverage program jointly funded by the state and federal government serving about 1 million Oregonians through the Oregon Health Plan.

A special election Jan. 23 concerns parts of a 2017 funding law. Particularly at issue are provisions in the law to increase federal Medicaid matching funding by collecting assessments from the state's hospitals, insurers and coordinated care organizations — the regional networks of providers serving Medicaid patients.

A trio of Republican state representatives successfully petitioned to refer portions of the law, including those provisions, to the ballot.

Measure 101 will ask voters to either vote "yes," to keep all the provisions of the bill; or "no," to cut some of them out.

Republican State Reps. Julie Parrish, of Tualatin/West Linn, and Cedric Hayden, of Roseburg, who referred the issue to the ballot, spoke in favor of repealing parts of the law Wednesday.

Speaking on the opposite side was Felisa Hagins, political director of the Service Employees International Union Local 49, and Jessica Adamson, director of government affairs for Providence Health and Services, who are advocating to keep all of the assessments.

Some takeaways from Wednesday's forum:

• **Neither side wants to cut people from Medicaid:** Both sides of the issue said they didn't want people on Medicaid to lose health care. Parrish and Hagins say they



and Hayden, a dentist, serves patients on the Oregon Health Plan.

Hayden and Parrish largely disagree with the Measure 101 supporters, though, on how it ought to be paid for — and argue the state could find other sources of funding.

Supporters of the measure say that it took the last legislative session to get insurers and Medicaid providers to agree on a funding plan. They argue the legislation's mechanisms are approved ways to collect federal matching funds, which

pay the vast majority of Medicaid costs.

• **Where could the money from the taxes go?** The two sides disagree on whether the funds generated by portions of the legislation at issue can be reverted to the state's general fund to pay for other things.

Parrish claims a legislative counsel opinion from June indicates that a 0.7 percent assessment on net hospital revenues could get swept to the state's general fund and used for purposes other than health care.

The "yes" side disagrees, saying that the money collected from the assessment would only go to health care, and that a "sweep" to the general fund requires separate legislation — which is not an unprecedented move.

• **The insurance market:**

The cost of insurance for those not on Medicaid, which could also be affected by the ballot measure, came up during Wednesday's debate as well.

The law's 1.5 percent tax on gross premiums, or premium equivalents for public employee health care plans, on insurers is intended to fund a reinsurance program that insulates insurers from high-risk claims that can drive up premiums.

Proponents say it's already working, reducing 2018 premiums by an average of 6 percent.

However, petitioners want to stop the tax on insurers, because the law allows premiums to increase by up to 1.5 percent to absorb the cost of the tax.

They also argue that the state could have preempted the need for a reinsurance market by enrolling the state's public employees in coordinated care organizations or having the state buy employees' insurance on the exchange — either of those moves, they argue, would dramatically increase the risk pool and bring down premiums.

Hagins, the SEIU panelist, said that the Public Employee Benefits Board — which oversees health care benefits for public employees — did a pilot project that enrolled employees in a coordinated care organization.

But, Hagins said, the CCO was unable to contain rates to the agreed level.

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Committee Volunteers Needed

Grant County is now recruiting volunteers to serve on active boards and committees.

Obtain an Application to Volunteer from County Court, 201 S. Humbolt, No. 280, Canyon City, OR 97820; (541-575-0059) wrightl@grantcounty-or.gov Applications are due by Wednesday, January 3, 2018.

Committees are formal public bodies required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

Extension & 4-H Service District Advisory Council: Eleven members serve three year terms and meet semi-annually to provide guidance and assistance to local OSU Extension staff in planning, developing, and evaluating balanced educational programs directed to high priority needs of county residents. Membership is limited to one re-appointment.

Planning Commission: ORS 215.020. Nine members serve four year terms and two alternates serve two year terms, meeting as needed to review land use and zoning applications and discuss city and county growth issues and the siting of new facilities. Members must be residents of various geographic areas within the county and no more than two voting members shall be engaged in the same kind of business, occupation, trade or profession with agriculture designations of livestock / forage crop production and horticulture / specialty crop production. Commissioners serving in this capacity must file an Annual Verified Statement of Economic Interest with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. Members must re-apply to the County Court before their term ends if they wish to be re-appointed.

Wildlife Advisory Board: Created by Resolution 1993-29. Nine members serve three year terms and meet as needed to discuss issues regarding big game management and make recommendations to Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, including tag allocation and hunting season structure as they relate to population and damage of property.