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The Legislature could take up a bill that would put Oregon's potential membership in the National Popular Vote Compact on the November ballot.

Oregon may join national popular vote compact

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

A bill introduced in the Legislature Monday would enlist Oregon in the National Popular Vote Compact contingent on voter approval in November.

By joining the compact, states agree to cast their Electoral College votes only for presidential candidates who win the national popular vote.

A national popular vote would have changed the outcome of the 2016 general election, which put President Donald Trump in office.

Since 2009, Senate President Peter Courtney has blocked similar proposals four times in Oregon. Last year, the Salem Democrat said he would support a bill to join the compact only if the decision was endorsed by Oregon voters.

"I would be open to ... sending the question to the ballot," Courtney said in May. "If you believe in the popular vote, then let the popular vote decide the issue."

This year's bill, filed by the Senate Rules Committee, meets that condition: It requires voters to approve or reject a referendum to enact the national popular vote.

Ten states — including Washington and California — and the District of Columbia have already signed the compact. They represent 30.7 percent of the electoral votes.

The agreement takes effect when enough states have joined to cumulatively make up a majority of the electoral votes.

The popular vote movement took on new life after President Trump won election by a 77-vote margin in the Electoral College, but lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by almost 3 million.

Rep. Bill Post, R-Keizer, said he opposes the bill. Any attempt to obligate voters to the national popular vote would likely face a challenge in court and be overturned.

"Are you kidding? No, it is unconstitutional," Post said.

Oregon joins challenge of net neutrality repeal

New York AG: 2 million fake comments found

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

Oregon has joined 20 other states and the District of Columbia in launching a legal challenge to the Federal Communications Commission's decision Dec. 14 to repeal a rule barring internet providers from blocking or charging more for access to one website over another.

The lawsuit, filed Tuesday in the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., asks the court to overturn the decision to repeal "net neutrality" and to find it unlawful. The suit alleges that the decision by the FCC was an abuse of discretion and that it violated the U.S. Constitution and the Communications Act of 1934. Fur-



File photo

Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum

thermore, attorneys general of the states argue that the action conflicted with notice-and-comment rulemaking requirements.

Other plaintiffs in the case are the attorneys general of New York, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Mexico,

North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia and Washington.

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

An investigation by New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman's office found that 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. His office has identified at least 2 million fake comments.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum has said the repeal would have "lasting negative impacts for our economy and almost every aspect of our lives" and would "incentivize Big Cable over other companies."

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

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

Subsidized passenger train ridership declines after derailment

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

Ridership of state-subsidized Amtrak Cascades passenger trains has plummeted in the past month since an Amtrak train derailment just south of Tacoma, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation.

That's significant to taxpayers because the state subsidizes each ride to the tune of about \$118. The fewer tickets riders buy, the greater the amount that the state has to chip in, said Hal Gard, ODOT rail and public transit division administrator.

The number of rides was down 2,791 in December from the previous year. Ridership typically surges during December as people visit family for the holidays, Gard said. The monetary loss of the decline has yet to be calculated, but ODOT offi-



Courtesy photo/Oregon Department of Transportation

An Amtrak Cascades train leaves Portland's station in this file photo. Oregon saw its subsidized passenger train ridership plummet in December following a fatal train derailment south of Tacoma Dec. 18.

cialists said they plan to request reimbursement for any losses from Amtrak.

A spokesperson for Amtrak was not immediately available for comment late Thursday afternoon.

The Dec. 18 derailment caused three fatalities and 62 injuries and shut down southbound Interstate 5 south

of Tacoma for 57 hours. The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the cause of the crash. The train was going 80 miles per hour in a 30-mph zone when it veered off the tracks, according to Oregon Public Broadcasting.

The derailment happened on the debut run of a new Amtrak route from Seattle to Portland. As a result of the derailment, service from Portland to Seattle came to a standstill. ODOT has had to adjust schedules and routes. The north-south route will operate between Tacoma and Nisqually until the Portland-to-Seattle line is repaired.

The schedule and route changes combined with diminished consumer confidence in rail travel after that crash are likely to blame for the decrease in ridership, Gard said.

Amtrak has agreed to pay for repairs of equipment and cleanup along the tracks and interstate, Gard said. It's unclear, however, whether the company would pay for the loss in ridership.

What may be more difficult is rebuilding confidence in and reliability of the service, Gard said.

Oregon has faced consistent problems filling seats on the passenger trains operating through the state, while Washington has had the opposite problem, not enough seats to meet demand.

State officials have kept the service alive in Oregon despite the heavy subsidies because they foresee population growth in the state increasing demand for rail travel.

Overall, ridership was down about 2,420 for all of 2017, after an increase in ridership in August thanks to visitors for the solar eclipse.

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