

Universal health care measure dies in Senate

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau



Pamplin Media Group

Rep. Mitch Greenlick, D-Portland, chairman of the House Health Care Committee, was the sponsor of a voter referral to amend the Oregon Constitution to make health care a fundamental right. The measure died in the Senate Monday for lack of votes.

Monnes Anderson announced Monday, Feb. 26, that her committee would not hold a vote on the referral.

Even though the committee had enough votes to send the measure to the Senate floor, there are not enough votes to

pass the bill in the larger body, she said.

"The bill would have needed extensive amendments for it to get the support it needs in the Senate, and given this late timing in the session, the committee chair made the difficult decision to not move forward with it," said Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, D-Portland.

Had the referral been approved in the Legislature, the proposal would have gone to voters in the November general election.

In the House, all 35 Democrats voted for the measure, while the 25 Republicans opposed it.

Rep. Mitch Greenlick, D-Portland, who has repeatedly sponsored the measure, said this is the third consecutive time the Senate has

blocked the referral.

In light of federal efforts to overturn the Affordable Care Act, Greenlick said it is important for Oregon voters to weigh in on whether they want health care to be accessible to everyone.

"I think we are making a terrible mistake not to give them the opportunity to tell us whether they really believe that universal access to health care is something that our citizens deserve and that we should take seriously as we consider how we move forward in dealing with the health care system," he said.

Using a catchphrase from the 1984 science fiction film, "The Terminator," Greenlick said: "I will be back."

The practical impact of creating such a right was unclear.

House Speaker Tina Kotek and Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson, both Democrats from Portland, described the measure primarily as "aspirational," but some legal experts said adding the right to the Constitution could spur litigation.

"I think we all agree that health care should be an inalienable right for everyone. I'm concerned that you send it to the voters and the voters say yes and it comes back, at what expense do we pay for it?" said Sen. Alan DeBoer, R-Ashland, a member of the Senate Health Care Committee. "We need the federal government to come to the table. I have always been a supporter of single payer ... but how do you pay for it once you approve it and the lawsuits?"

Legislators pass bill to strip guns from stalkers, abusers

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

and past intimate partners of all kinds.

Sen. Herman Baertschiger Jr., R-Grants Pass, said existing law already bans abusers who have been in intimate sexual relationships with their victim from buying or possessing guns. He said the language in the bill is full of "ambiguity" and would likely result in other loopholes.

A study by the Oregon Department of Justice showed that more than 16 Oregonians were killed in nine separate domestic violence incidents between Dec. 25, 2016, and Jan. 16, 2017. Not all of the fatalities involved romantic relationships. Laws aimed at keeping guns from abusers have reduced homicides of intimate partners, according to recent research published in the American Journal of Epidemiology.

A bill to strip gun rights from convicted stalkers and intimate partners convicted of abuse passed the Senate 16 to 13 Thursday, Feb. 22. The legislation goes to Gov. Kate Brown who says she intends to sign it into law.

Brown urged U.S. lawmakers to enhance protections against gun violence nationwide in the wake of a deadly mass shooting Feb. 14 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The latest in a string of attacks on U.S. schools has sparked unprecedented demonstrations across the country for stronger gun laws.

"Now's the time to enact real change, and I'm encouraged to see students in Oregon and across the nation engaged and joining the call for gun safety legislation," Brown said in a statement. "It's long past time we hold the White House, Congress, and legislators accountable."

House Bill 4145 closes the so-called "boyfriend" or "intimate partner loophole," in state law that omitted stalkers and abusers in some intimate relationships.

Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, who presented the bill on the Senate floor Thursday, said that his sister was murdered by a boyfriend with a gun and urged his colleagues to support the new protections. The legislation also would require Oregon State Police to notify other law enforcement when they learn someone has tried to obtain a gun illegally.

Brown described the bill as "bipartisan," and in the House, the bill did receive support from both parties. However, in the Senate, opposition, rather than support, was bipartisan.

Representatives of Giffords, the anti-gun violence group led by former U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords of Arizona, and her husband, NASA astronaut Capt. Mark Kelly, praised Thursday's vote by the Oregon Senate.

"Oregon is continuing to step up to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people," said Robin Lloyd, Giffords' government affairs director. "Guns and domestic violence are a particularly lethal combination that have deadly consequences. Once this bill is signed loopholes will finally be closed in state law that let domestic abusers possess guns."

Twelve Republicans and one Democrat, Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, voted against the measure. Johnson said she opposed the bill because it would give estranged dating partners a way to seek revenge.

"This is no time for an emotional response," Johnson said of the bill.

Under existing law, only convicted abusers in domestic relationships, such as a spouse, former spouse, co-parent or live-in partner, are prohibited from having guns. The bill expands the ban to stalkers and current

Regulators ask for more money to police legal weed

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau

Amid mounting pressure to shore up controls on legal cannabis, Oregon regulators want more money to enforce state marijuana laws and rules.

In early January, Attorney General Jeff Sessions alerted states that had legalized recreational marijuana that he was rolling back the previous administration's guidance on marijuana prosecutions. Sessions' memo effectively leaves it up to federal prosecutors in each state to exercise individual discretion when it comes to enforcing violations of federal marijuana law.

Billy Williams, Oregon's top federal prosecutor, claimed Feb. 2 that the state has a "massive marijuana overproduction problem," and that weed grown in Oregon is leaking into the illicit market and across state lines. And state auditors said in a Feb. 7 report that Oregon's cannabis licensing and tracking systems have weaknesses that could overlook illegal activity.

Those challenges, in conjunction with the infancy of the legal marijuana

market and the explosion of people interested in entering the industry, appear to be prompting the Oregon Liquor Control Commission to ask for more funding in the middle of the two-year budget cycle.

The agency is asking for \$2.74 million for 17 new positions, including a chief information officer, and its director supports more funding targeted toward illegal marijuana activity.

A potential amendment to a bill before the Senate Rules Committee would create grants distributed by Criminal Justice Commission to law enforcement activity for investigations targeting illegal marijuana "cultivation or distribution."

Although a specific amount of funding hasn't been decided, OLCC Director Steve Marks told lawmakers this week that it could be in the neighborhood of \$3 million, funded by marijuana tax dollars.

"I actually believe this is the singular most important thing you'll do to help us regulate marijuana in the state of Oregon," Marks said of the proposed program.

Additionally, enforcing violations in the legal marijuana system "is going to be an intense area of growth for us," Marks said. "We are going to be writing a lot more violations in the near future."

The hires, if approved by the Legislature, will include 13 regulatory specialists and three administrative support staff. Regulatory specialists inspect and investigate marijuana businesses for compliance, similar to the state's regulatory specialists for alcohol.

The requested administrative support staff would work to process license applications and renewals.

Marks also said his agency would be more transparent and provide a report to the Legislature on enforcement of illegal marijuana activity before the start of the long legislative session in 2019.

According to the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, consumers bought about \$520 million worth of recreational marijuana in Oregon last year. Sales are expected to generate \$150 million in tax revenues in the state's current two-year budget, which ends in mid-2019.

H&R
BLOCK

TAX REFORM QUESTIONS?

WE HAVE ANSWERS.

THREE THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- 1» Virtually all taxpayers will be impacted, some more than others.
- 2» Standard deductions and personal exemptions have changed.
- 3» There are certain strategies you should take now to maximize your refund for next year.

HOW WILL YOU BE IMPACTED?
WE CAN TELL YOU.

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT OR VISIT US TODAY.

103 W MAIN
JOHN DAY, OR 97845
541-575-0533
92 W ADAMS ST
BURNS, OR 97720
541-573-1519

HRBLOCK.COM | 800-HRBLOCK

Every tax situation is different. See a Tax Pro to discuss your tax implications due to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. OBT# B13696 © 2018 HRB Tax Group, Inc.