

Senate passes health care reform framework

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

SALEM, Ore. - The Oregon Senate on Wednesday took a major step towards fundamental health care reform with the passage of Senate Bill 329. The bill creates the Oregon Health Fund Board, with a direct mandate to develop a plan for an affordable health system to be acted upon by the 2009 legislature.

“There is no more important issue to Oregonians than health care,” said Senate President Peter Courtney (D-Salem/Gervais/Woodburn). “This bill is a product of lots of late nights, long hours and early mornings. Senators Bates and Westlund have worked hard for the health of all Oregonians.”

The Health Fund Board would be charged with developing a plan to provide essential health services to all Oregonians. The board will consist of seven members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. Board members will be aided by professional staff from the Oregon Health Policy Commission, the Office for Oregon Health Policy and Research, the Health Services Commission, and the Medicaid Advisory Committee.

“The Healthy Oregon Act begins by looking at efforts to contain costs and hold the health care industry accountable,” said Senator Ben Westlund (D-Bend), co-carrier of the bill. “We can’t just throw money at the current broken system.”

“We have over 600,000 uninsured Oregonians,” said Senator Alan Bates (D-Ashland), co-carrier of the bill and family physician. “We have to find a health care solution for Oregonians that can’t afford essential preventative care to keep themselves healthy.”

The Oregon Health Fund Board will create subcommittees that examine financing, the delivery system, benefits, and eligibility and enrollment of health care policies. They will also establish a federal policy committee to study the impact of federal laws on health care goals and ask the Oregon congressional delegation to take action.

“Our health care crisis is not unsolvable,” said Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson (D-Gresham). “We can create a system that will make affordable health care accessible to all Oregonians.” Senate Bill 329 will now move to the House floor for consideration.

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