

Health Care for All rally brings hundreds to Salem

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A coalition of more than 100 organizations — including many labor unions — rallied at the State Capitol Feb. 11 where they called on Oregon lawmakers to create a single-payer health insurance system. Bills have been introduced in previous sessions but have gone nowhere. State Sen. Mike Dembrow (D-Portland), a member of American Federation of Teachers-Oregon, is leading the charge.

Last session, lawmakers did authorize a study on how such a system could be set up in Oregon. The study was to be funded with private money, and supporters so far have raised about \$50,000 of the \$200,000 needed. Rallygoers on Feb. 11 called on lawmakers to extend the deadline for the study, and have the state match the amount of private dollars raised. Dembrow also re-introduced a bill to implement a single-payer system. SB 631, which has 27 co-sponsors, will get a hearing in March, but it's not expected to pass.

“Thank you for sticking with this for so many years,” Dembrow told rally-goers. “We have so much work to be done, and it's going to be done in our neighborhoods, churches and organizations, one on one. We have to explain to people that we are talking about a simple system here, so that people do not fall through the cracks and are not denied coverage.”

Also speaking at the rally were Portland Democratic state representatives Barbara Smith Warner and Jennifer Williamson.