

Legislature 2015: Is Oregon ready for universal health care? Senators weigh the matter  
Health Care, inc Northwest,. May 5, 2015 by Dennis Thompson

Oregon lawmakers are weighing whether the state should move toward universal health care for its citizens, a move that would outpace even the federal Affordable Care Act in providing medical coverage for all.

A key committee held a hearing Monday for Senate Bill 631, which would establish a universal, comprehensive and publicly funded health care system in Oregon.

One of the bill's chief sponsors, Sen. [Michael Dembrow](#), argued that universal health care will provide residents with more freedom to move between jobs and would attract more business, since companies would no longer have to provide insurance.

At best, what we're going to continue to have is an expensive, complicated, patchwork system" if the state continues to provide coverage under the scheme set up by the Affordable Care Act, said Dembrow, D-Portland.

Even though they testified for SB 631, proponents of universal health care actually asked that Senators support a bill currently in the House — House Bill 2828, which funds research by the Oregon Health Authority into ways the state could pay for health care for all citizens.

HB 2828 currently has been referred to the Joint Ways and Means Committee, and so still stands a chance of passage in this session.

On the other hand, SB 631 is a placeholder bill meant to create a framework for future legislation that would enact universal health care.

"We recognize that this bill will not move in this session, but we feel that someone working on a health care bill in future sessions might be interested in our intended language," activists for Health Care for All Oregon said in written testimony.

SB 631 received a lot of support from many varied organizations, including the Oregon Center for Christian Voices.

"The health care system in Oregon is so flawed morally and practically, that a major change is required. While the Affordable Care Act has provided many improvements to our current healthcare system, this healthcare system is a flawed system built on profits rather than the well-being of people," the center's chair and vice-chair said in written testimony. "Oregon Center for Christian Voices asks you to support the passage of SB 631."

The Main Street Alliance of Oregon, a small business owners' group, also testified in support.

"The Main Street Alliance of Oregon strongly believes a publicly funded universal healthcare system in Oregon and eventually the entire country is the only feasible and sensible way to provide the healthcare that every Oregon citizen both deserves and needs," testified Jim Houser, co-chair of the group and owner of Hawthorne Auto Clinic in Portland, and Mark Kellenbeck, owner of BrainJoy LLC in Medford.

However, SB 631 also had its detractors.

For her written testimony, one Oregon resident filed a copy of a 1982 pamphlet titled "Brain-Washing: A Synthesis of a Russian Textbook on Mass Mind-Control."

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