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Caption: T.R. Reid will be plugging universal care when he comes to Oregon this week.

Author T.R. Reid throws down the gauntlet to Oregon on universal health care

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by **[Elizabeth Hayes](#)** Staff Reporter *Portland Business Journal*

[T.R. Reid](#), best-selling author of “The Healing of America,” will lay down a challenge when he comes to Oregon later this week from his home state of Colorado: Which state can get to universal health care first?

“We have a race going on,” Reid said in a phone interview from Colorado. “I’m going to say, ‘Good luck, I hope you pass it, but we beat you on marijuana, and we’ll beat on universal coverage.’”

[Click here for a listing of Reid's Oregon appearances.](#)

Reid, [a former correspondent for the Washington Post and NPR contributor](#), will be speaking at three Portland events, Friday and Monday, along with events in Salem and Albany. He said he and the advocacy group Health Care for All Oregon agree on this principle: “A decent, ethical democracy should provide health care for everybody.”

“All other industrialized democracies do so already. The only one that doesn’t is the richest one — the U.S.,” Reid said. “This is a moral imperative. There are also medical and financial grounds.”

Reid’s bestseller, “The Healing of America: A Global Quest for Better, Cheaper and Fairer Health Care,” examines how other countries pull off universal care, and do it for less money and with better outcomes than the U.S.

Reid also turned his reporting into a 2009 PBS Frontline Documentary called “Sick Around the World.” In it, he examines the health care systems in Great Britain, Japan, Taiwan, Germany and Switzerland.

Congress is so polarized, the U.S. will only get there state by state, Reid said.

“If a state can get a universal plan that works, others can see it and copy it,” he said. “This is the essence of federalism. If you look at the major developments in U.S. history — women’s suffrage, the progressive income tax, gay marriage — they started in one or two states and spread. A good recent example is recreational marijuana.”

Reid chairs the Colorado Foundation for Universal Health Care, which is trying to get a measure on the ballot next year to create a state-wide insurance cooperative. He is strategic in how he

sells the initiative. In the more liberal Front Range, he emphasizes how it covers everyone and saves on administrative costs. In the more conservative Western Slope, he says, "It gets us out of stinking Obamacare!"

The Affordable Care Act contains a clause that allows states to opt out, as long as they can still cover as many people.

"The argument that resonates the most is 'Designed in Colorado, not in Washington, D.C.,'" he said. "Oregonians can also design a plan better than Washington can."

Gov. Kate Brown recently signed a bill allocating \$300,000 for a study into methods of financing a statewide health care plan that provides comprehensive benefits. The study results will be presented in the 2017 legislative session.

Reid anticipates a fight from the insurance industry. Under the cooperative plan, all residents would a 3.3 percent tax, about half what the average family current pays for insurance. They can still buy a private insurance plan, just as taxpayers may choose to send their children to a private school. Medicare would remain in place, but Medicaid would be rolled into the cooperative, along with the federal funds that come with it.

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"I don't know why somebody wouldn't take our coverage," he said. "You're paying for it anyway."

Reid said Obamacare is a start, but it doesn't go far enough: It is still projected to leave 31 million people uninsured by 2020.

"We think that's unacceptable. It's much cheaper for any health care system to cover everybody and not leave big gaps," Reid said. "It's true, although it seems counterintuitive."

On a side note, Reid is working on a book currently that looks at taxation around the world, due out April 15.