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Single-payer creeps back into Oregon spotlight after Trumpcare flameout

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It would be an ironic turn of events if the demise of the Republican's Affordable Care Act replacement cracked open the door for single-payer health care.

It's also pretty far fetched, given the Republican control of Congress and the White House and Republicans' ongoing quest to resuscitate their long-sought effort to repeal the ACA.

And yet ... universal care is gaining some steam, both at the state and federal level.

Sen. Michael Dembrow, a Democrat from Portland, and 31 other lawmakers are sponsoring Senate Bill 1046, which establishes a Health Care for All Board to develop and oversee comprehensive health care coverage for all Oregonians. It would repeal the health insurance exchange, supplant private insurance coverage and cover public employees.

No fiscal or revenue statements — which could be a deal breaker— have been issued as yet, as the bill awaits a hearing before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means.

The idea is also gaining currency outside of Oregon. The Progressive Change Campaign Committee, which represents the “Elizabeth Warren” wing of the Democratic party, started circulating a petition for Medicare for All just days after the Obamacare replacement flamed out.

Currently, 84 Democrats in Congress are sponsoring the single-payer bill that Rep. John Conyers Jr., a Democrat from Michigan, introduces every year, a seemingly fruitless quest in the face of staunch Republican opposition. But the measure has 22 more co-sponsors than two years ago.

Among them are three of the five reps from Oregon: Earl Blumenauer of Portland, Suzanne Bonamici of Beaverton and Peter DeFazio of Eugene. Rep. Kurt Schrader, a Democrat, and Republican Rep. Greg Walden have not signed on (don't expect Walden to do so, ever).



Oregon Sen. Michael Dembrow supports universal coverage.

“This country needs a truly universal, single-payer health care system, similar to the less costly and more efficient systems in Western Europe, Australia and Canada,” Blumenauer said in a statement. “Health care must be recognized as a right, not a privilege. Ultimately, we need a universal system that covers everyone from cradle to grave.”

On the Senate side, Sen. [Bernie Sanders](#) continues to lead the charge for a single-payer program, vowing last week to introduce a bill. Oregon Sen. [Jeff Merkley](#), Sanders’ only colleague to endorse him for president, laid out a few possibilities in a [recent Huffington Post story](#).

“There are plenty of ideas already on the table that would make health care more affordable for working families, from a public option to prescription drug negotiations to offering older Americans the chance to buy into Medicare,” Merkley told HuffPo. (He was unavailable for comment this week, due to his [15-hour marathon](#) denunciation of President Trump’s Supreme Court nominee, Judge Neil Gorsuch).

Dr. Sam Metz, a Portland physician [who has long pushed for universal care](#), said while there is unlikely to be any action at the federal level, Congressional leaders of both parties favor the idea of giving more autonomy to states in designing a health care system, and that’s a positive sign.

“Nationally, we are one step closer in a journey of 1,000 miles,” Metz mused. “The best aspect that could come out of this is that the health care discussion moves away from the ACA to how to provide better care for more people for less money. We’ve seen that with Congressional Democrats, who aren’t talking about how to defend the ACA; they’re talking about how to lower the Medicare age and national single payer. These are issues mainstream Democrats haven’t talked about before.”

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