



OFFICE OF THE SENATE PRESIDENT

900 Court St., N.E., Room S-201

Salem OR 97301

www.leg.state.or.us

NEWS RELEASE

Contact:

Robin Maxey

(503) 986-1605

robin.maxey@state.or.us

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COURTNEY URGES LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES TO GET ANSWERS ABOUT INSURANCE EXCHANGE

(SALEM) – Senate President Peter Courtney Tuesday urged Legislators to “ask the hard questions and get the answers Oregon and her people deserve” when key executives from Cover Oregon, the state’s healthcare exchange marketplace, and the Oregon Health Authority appear before three Legislative Committees Wednesday.

“The exchange is a critical link in our efforts to expand access to healthcare for uninsured Oregonians and lower costs for small businesses,” Courtney said. “Oregonians have questions. What went wrong with the roll out? How are they going to fix it? When are they going to get it right? Is the website contractor doing everything it can? Our people need to know.”

The healthcare exchange was created by the Legislature in 2011 with broad bi-partisan support. Courtney said it’s imperative that lawmakers determine if additional legislation is necessary to facilitate the full implementation of the Affordable Care Act in Oregon. The deadline for filing legislation for the 35-day 2014 Session is Nov. 26.

The Joint Committee on Legislative Audits, Information Management and Technology is scheduled to receive an update on Cover Oregon, the state’s healthcare exchange marketplace, at 11 a.m. Wednesday. Scheduled to testify are Cover Oregon’s Executive Director Rocky King; Cover Oregon’s Chief Information Officer Aaron Karjala; and Carolyn Lawson, chief information officer for the Department of Human Services and the Oregon Health Authority.

King will also appear before a joint meeting of the Senate Health Care and Human Services Committee and the House Health Care Committee at 2:30 p.m. Wednesday. The committees will also hear from Bruce Goldberg, director of the Oregon Health Care Authority.

The troubles with Cover Oregon mirror those of the national insurance marketplace website. The federal on-line exchange has struggled to enroll people in health insurance plans even as millions of Americans are receiving notices that their current plans will be cancelled Jan. 1, when the Affordable Care Act fully goes into effect. The Oregon Insurance Division this week allowed insurance companies to extend those current plans for one additional year.

To date, the Cover Oregon website has been unable to enroll anyone in a healthcare insurance plan. State officials have chosen to enroll people by hand. The exchange has recruited new employees to assist the public in filling out paper enrollment forms. The open enrollment period ends March 31, 2014.

Oregon has had success in reducing the number of uninsured in the state by expanding Medicaid to include 56,000 additional persons. Officials say that expansion alone reduced the number of those without healthcare coverage by 10 percent.