



NEWS

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Jared Mason-Gere (503) 986-1907

House Democrats Call for Release of Health Care Bills *Exchange, Transformation are Important to Small Business,* *Necessary for Budget Rebalance*

SALEM- House Democrats issued a call this afternoon for House Republican leadership to release the Health Care Transformation and Health Insurance Exchange bills so they can be passed this session and begin to bring down business costs and increase access to health care.

HB 4164, the implementing bill for the Health Insurance Exchange, passed out of the House Health Care Committee on a 7-0 vote, and was originally expected to pass from the House on Thursday, February 9. On Monday, February 13, House Republicans passed a procedural vote to refer HB 4164 to Ways and Means, citing the need for a mysterious technical fix.

“To date, the bill has not been referred to a subcommittee by House Republicans and there do not appear to have been any amendments drafted for the bill,” said Rep. Tina Kotek (D-Portland), the House Democratic Leader. “It’s just baffling. I can’t for the life of me understand why a bill that has been as extensively developed as this and is listed as a priority of all major business groups in the state would be held up.”

“It becomes even more puzzling when you note that the bill came out of committee on a unanimous vote and there was a floor letter from the Republican committee co-chair saying it should pass. If this is some kind of game, I don’t think Oregonians think it’s funny.”

Meanwhile, the Health Care Transformation bill, SB 1580, passed the Oregon Senate on a bipartisan 18-12 vote on Tuesday, February 14, and has yet to even receive procedural referral to committee.

“Normally, direct committee referral is a routine formality for bills that come through Ways and Means” said Rep. Terry Beyer (D-Springfield), a veteran Ways and Means Committee member.

“Now we’re approaching the deadline for referral and nothing has happened. This session is too short for this sort of delay tactic.”

Beyer also noted that due to the bill’s leverage of federal money, the legislature couldn’t finalize budget negotiations until the transformation bill was passed. “The clock is ticking and we need to leave here with a balanced budget. Every day we fail to pass Transformation, we jeopardize federal funds that are required for the rebalance. It’s frustrating that there is this sort of gamesmanship with something that has such serious implications for everything else we’re trying to do.”

As the February session moves toward its final days, Democratic leaders said they would continue to urge the release of the bills and expressed hopes that a more reasoned approach to key issues would color the remainder of the session.

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