



NEWS

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After Delay, House Passes Health Insurance Exchange *Bill Will Bring Down Costs for Small Business, Increase Access to Quality Health Care*

SALEM- In a vote long-awaited by Oregon House Democrats, business leaders, health care advocates, and Oregon small businesses and workers, HB 4164 passed the Oregon House of Representatives on a bipartisan 55-5 vote. The bill was a top priority of major business organizations throughout the state. Despite expected passage early in February, the bill sat for half of the session, stalled in the Joint Ways and Means Committee until its release late yesterday afternoon.

HB 4165 is designed to improve access and bring down costs of health coverage by providing a central marketplace where individuals and small businesses can shop for health insurance plans. Oregonians will be able to easily compare plans, find out if they are eligible for tax credits and other financial assistance, and enroll for coverage through the Exchange website. They also will be able to shop and enroll by phone or by working with community-based insurance agents.

“We’re taking innovative steps to bring down health care costs and expand access to more Oregonians,” said Rep. Mitch Greenlick (D-Portland), Co-Chair of the House Health Care Committee. “We are very proud of what we have done today on behalf of all Oregonians.”

In order to meet aggressive timelines and be ready for open enrollment in October 2013, the Legislature needed to pass the legislation this February session.

“We have heard from Oregon businesses large and small that this action was needed this session to bring down costs and improve competitiveness,” said Rep. Margaret Doherty (D-Tigard). “It

took some patience and persistence, but we were able to get the bill released and the state will be better for it.”

HB 4164 passed the House Health Care Committee on a unanimous vote and was expected to pass easily. House Republicans referred the bill to Ways and Means on an unexpected procedural vote on February 16, and despite efforts to free it, it remained there until this morning. Because of the 30-30 split in the House, Democrats could not move forward on the bill without the agreement of their colleagues.

“This bill will allow us to leverage federal funds,” said Greenlick. “This is a great bill and I’m glad that we can continue our work to support Oregon businesses as the economy recovers. We’ve done a lot in a short session to create a climate where businesses can create jobs.”

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