



## OREGON HOUSE REPUBLICAN OFFICE

### **For Immediate Release**

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### *In Case You Missed It* **Former Co-Speaker Hanna on public employee healthcare costs**

#### **[A change to public employee healthcare could help Oregon schools, graduations rates \(Guest opinion\)](#)**

*The Oregonian/OregonLive*

By: Former Co-Speaker Bruce Hanna

During my time in the Legislature, and particularly as co-Speaker of the Oregon House, Oregonians were clear about their priorities. They wanted us to increase access to healthcare, improve its delivery, and prioritize predictable education funding that would improve graduation rates while getting more money into the classroom.

During the 2011-12 legislative session, we worked to accomplish all of those things. Not only did we implement the provisions of the Affordable Care Act, but for the first time in anyone's memory we passed the education budget first so that school districts and educators had peace of mind to plan for the coming school years. In fact, we took our commitments to stabilize education and healthcare budgets a step further.

Legislators realized that if we expanded Medicaid to hundreds of thousands of new Oregonians, we were going to have to find a way to pay for it once the federal match rate decreased. We were also concerned about balancing the risk pool in Cover Oregon and the Exchange so that healthcare remained affordable for all. After a 2011 cost-savings measure to allow school districts to opt out of the Oregon Education Benefits Board (OEBB) failed, we settled on a different approach to free up money for schools while ensuring the success of the Exchange.

In 2012, as part of the business plan for Cover Oregon, we passed House Bill 4164. This bill would have allowed school districts the chance to buy insurance through the Exchange at a lesser cost than what they're currently paying through the OEBB. At the time, the difference in savings between a Gold Plan on the Exchange and the OEBB costs was conservatively a half-billion dollars per biennium. That's a significant amount of money our school districts could have used to shore up their budgets.

The very next year, the legislature made a huge mistake in rolling back House Bill 4164. The "budget hole" the state is currently facing can be attributed in part to that decision. School districts lost the opportunity to save money and protect classroom dollars. The day of the rollback vote, I reminded my colleagues of the massive amount of work we had done to keep our promise to Oregonians and warned of the consequences of a rollback. Sadly, [with a party-line vote](#), Democrats sidelined the intent and spirit of the ACA and denied our school districts a cost-saving opportunity.

It doesn't give me joy to say "I told you so" when we're talking about the lives of hundreds of thousands of school children and lost classroom dollars, or low-income Oregonians who could lose their health coverage next year. We are now seeing the consequence of that decision in the news headlines. School

district budgets are millions of dollars short. Districts are preparing to lay off teachers and administrators while cutting music and physical education classes. In direct opposition to a mandate from voters to fund career-tech and STEM education, the legislature is already working to gut Measure 98 funding. Oregon's universities are facing steep tuition increases. It didn't have to be this way.

Gov. Kate Brown, House Speaker Tina Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney could help to bring down costs around public employee healthcare so the savings reach Oregon classrooms and improve graduation outcomes by passing House Bill 3428. This bill would trigger a 2011 statute to begin moving public employees into Coordinated Care Organizations. It is the right approach at a time, even with record revenue growth, when the state's budget can't afford increasing healthcare costs.

This time there can be no room for error, nor can we afford special deals for special interests. Our children and low-income Oregonians must come first.

[Read the entire op-ed as printed by The Oregonian/OregonLive here.](#)

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