



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

Oregon State Legislature
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Salem, OR

EDITORIAL:

A BANNER DAY FOR OREGON KIDS, ROADS

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All across the country this year, recession-wracked states have tossed millions of low-income families off public health care programs.

Many such states have slashed highway spending, too. From California to New Jersey, projects small and big have been abruptly suspended, often with heavy machinery left to rust on the side of the road.

Fortunately, Oregon has taken a far better path on both subjects. The payoff will begin Thursday when new laws take effect, providing a huge boost to health care and transportation in the state.

The health care package was the signature achievement of the 2009 Legislature. One of the bills that kicks in Thursday will extend medical coverage to an additional 80,000 uninsured children, putting Oregon among only 12 states with universal coverage for kids.

Many lower-income adults will benefit, too. Altogether, the legislation will add about 115,000 people to the Oregon Health Plan.

Accomplishing this, at a time when states like California are dumping the working poor from health care, took amazing political courage in the Capitol and refreshing enlightenment in the medical community. Hospitals, insurers and physicians stood together behind the legislation, which leverages more than \$1 billion in federal matching money by expanding the state's medical provider tax and replacing a managed care tax with a revenue tax on most insurers.

A companion bill, also taking effect Thursday, is the true reform mechanism. It creates an Oregon Health Authority that will be charged with streamlining state health services and carrying out a variety of initiatives to contain costs and improve quality in the state's health care system.

Thursday will also be a major milestone for Oregon's transportation system. After years of political gridlock in Salem, legislators this year achieved an enormous breakthrough in crafting a bipartisan transportation package that will raise hundreds of millions of dollars for much-needed road and bridge projects, creating jobs and stirring the moribund economy.

The \$300-million-a-year package will help ensure that commerce can keep moving on Oregon highways, and it will help cities and counties build and maintain streets and roads. A raft of vehicle fee increases take effect Thursday, and the monthly checks will begin flowing in December to local governments as a permanent source of transportation funding.

The bill will also provide a well-timed economic boost for the state. Oregon Department of Transportation officials estimate that the big package will create and sustain 4,400 jobs annually over the next 10 years.

Oregonians are only too familiar with the lamentation that they're failing to get the job done in arenas such as higher education, social services and economic development. This makes Thursday's landmark achievements in health care and transportation all the sweeter.

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