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NEWS RELEASE

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SENATE DEMOCRATS INTRODUCE AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE PACKAGE **5 Major Bills Aim to Reduce Costs and Improve Access**

SALEM – Senate Democrats today introduced a comprehensive package of legislation designed to flatten the spiking costs of health care and provide coverage for more Oregonians and their families.

“From doorstep to doorstep, day after day, voters told us during the campaign that health care is their biggest concern – both cost and access,” said Sen. Laurie Monnes Anderson, a registered nurse. “This package of bills goes right to the heart of the problem.”

She was joined at a capitol news conference by Sen. Alan Bates, a physician, and Sen. Bill Morrisette, chairman of the Senate Human Services Committee.

“Too often, older citizens in particular have to make a choice between medications and food, or have to cut their pills in half to try to cut their medical costs,” said Morrisette (D-Springfield), who co-sponsored a bill in 2003 to create a drug purchasing pool that allowed the state to use its bargaining power to buy prescription drugs at a discount. “This year I have sponsored Senate Bill 329 to expand the state drug purchasing pool to cover more low-income Oregonians,” he said.

“Health care is rapidly becoming unaffordable for Oregon families and businesses. These bills are designed to reduce costs and increase access without reducing the quality of care,” said Bates (D-Ashland).

The **Democrats’ “Affordable Health Care”** package is:

- The Insurance Industry Accountability bill, which requires health insurance companies to go through a public hearing process and justify their rate increases before raising their rates.

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- The Fair Pricing bill, which regulates hospital rates to balance the needs of patients to receive care and hospitals to invest in new equipment and have adequate reserves.
- Expansion of State Prescription Drug Purchasing Pool to include all Oregonians who lack drug coverage to lower the price of pharmaceutical drugs.
- The Hospital Wise Investment bill, which requires hospitals to get public approval to ensure there is unmet medical needs in a community before they spend millions on new construction and remodeling.
- Access to Hospital Services bill, which helps make hospital services available to low and moderate income Oregonians by ending the practice of charging the highest prices to those least able to pay.

The Democrats cited several troubling figures, including:

- Hospital rates are increasing at three times the rate of inflation
- Health insurance premiums increased 14% last year, the third consecutive year of double-digit increases
- Medical bills are the leading cause of bankruptcy in the U.S., even for the insured
- Health care and prescription drug costs are primary causes of operating cost increases in the state corrections system
- 4 out of 5 Oregonians without health insurance are employed or are members of a household in which someone is employed.

The Democrats' proposals come as new data is being released about the alarming lack of health care coverage for some groups of Oregonians. According to the state Health Policy and Research office, 31% of Oregonians ages 25-34 now have no health insurance, and the number of uninsured ages 18-24 has risen from 31% to 38%.

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