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## **Former Gov. Kitzhaber: On health care, we can do better**

*Former governor introduces ground-breaking health-care proposal*

**Portland, Ore.** —Former Gov. John Kitzhaber today announced the introduction of the Oregon Better Health Act, an ambitious plan to overhaul the health-care system in Oregon and force a re-examination of the assumptions on which the U.S. health-care system is built.

The Oregon Better Health Act emerged from a remarkable eight-month process of citizen engagement involving physicians, nurses, hospital CEOs, insurance and health plan executives, employers, organized labor, senior citizens including representatives from AARP, and more than 3,500 individual consumers from across Oregon.

“The Oregon Better Health Act provides a framework for true health-care reform that is sustainable and fiscally transparent and feasible,” said Ken Provencher, CEO of PacificSource Health Plans, an Oregon-based not-for-profit health plan. “It was developed using a participative process that sought input from a diverse group of stakeholders including consumers, unions, employers, providers and insurers and therefore presents a uniquely collaborative and principled approach to solving this serious problem.”

The Oregon Better Health Act is the product of the Archimedes Movement, a broad-based grassroots effort to create a shared vision of a new health-care system by challenging the underlying structure of our current system and offering an alternative with which to replace it.

“Our current system is based on structures and assumptions that are now 40 to 50 years old and reflect the realities of the last century, not the realities of today,” said Kitzhaber, who practiced emergency medicine for almost 20 years before becoming governor. “Without finding the courage to rethink these assumptions in light of today’s realities, we will be unable to meet the health-care challenges facing our state and the nation.”

The Oregon Better Health Act addresses two challenges: how to define a “benefit” as well as the inefficient system through which health services are currently delivered. The proposed legislation seeks authority from Congress to allow Oregon to reallocate the public resources currently being spent on health to optimize the health of Oregonians by creating a sustainable system in which everyone has access to a defined set of essential health services. This “core benefit” would be portable and not tied to employment, thus relieving employers and employees of this cost while leaving them free to offer and purchase secondary insurance for additional services.

“AFSCME has always supported comprehensive health-care reform,” said Ken Allen, Executive Director, Oregon AFSCME. “This is a good first step towards that goal.”

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The proposed legislation seeks to explicitly define a set of essential health services and provide a transparent process through which the adequacy of this “core benefit” could be publicly debated and agreed upon. It also aims to realign financial incentives to ensure fair and reasonable payment to providers, value-based cost-sharing for consumers and the transition to a more efficient delivery system.

“As a doctor at a safety-net clinic, I see people every day who are symptoms of our worsening health-care crisis,” said Evan Saulino, M.D. “If hard-working Oregonians cannot afford health care now, how will we all afford health care in the future? We can provide a better future for ourselves and our children.”

“The Oregon Chapter of the American College of Physicians endorses the principles outlined in the act,” said Robert Gluckman, M.D., governor of the chapter. “They provide a basis for much-needed health-care reform.”

Passage of the act by the Legislature would trigger not only a formal request for congressional authority to reallocate the public dollars currently spent on health care, but also an open, public process of adding details to the benefit design and delivery system. In addition, the legislation includes a provision whereby the general public, employers, employees, senior citizens, and health-care providers will have an opportunity to compare the new system with the current system before moving forward with implementation.

“It's time to roll up our sleeves and do what it takes to work toward fundamental health-care reform,” added Andy Davidson, President and CEO of the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Healthcare Systems. “But we need to be thoughtful, to be sure that incremental reform won't cause unintended consequences. This proposal reflects the courage necessary to challenge the status quo. Oregon's hospital community will continue to be an active participant in this process.”

“Governor Kitzhaber and the Archimedes Movement have begun a process and proposed a means for health-care reform that is logical and rational,” said Scott Gallant, Associate Executive Director of the Oregon Medical Association. “We applaud the governor’s work and vision.”

For more information, go to [www.WeCanDoBetter.org](http://www.WeCanDoBetter.org).