

Dear Chair Monnes Anderson and Senate Health Care Committee Members:

I am writing as an Oregonian who is facing early retirement and a significant increase in my health insurance costs. For the past 20 years I have been a State of Oregon employee, covered by great health care, at low costs. My salary has increased over the years, and currently my health care costs (both insurance and actual care - because of deductibles) are less than 1 percent of my salary. I've been fortunate to have coverage under PEBB and feel that every Oregonian deserves the same health insurance and care I've had for 20 years.

I retire in June and am looking at a pension of \$2700/month. My husband is self-employed with no pension. My husband and I have three years before we are eligible for Medicare. Our PERS insurance costs will be \$2000/month, with a \$2000 yearly deductible. Insurance through PEBB would be slightly cheaper at about \$1750. This will effectively cost us about \$26,000/year (which includes the extra costs for deductibles). The monthly payments will be taken out of my pension, giving us about \$700/month to live on. I have savings - OSGP, and two rental homes, both on a mortgage so while they increase my income on paper, that's not money I have to live on. Much of my husband's income goes back into his business.

My family has longevity in their genes. My father died at 92, and my early retirement at 62 is so that I can care for my 97 year old mother. In planning my own retirement, I have to expect to live to 97 and make sure that I don't outlive my money. With health insurance at 35% of our income, I am forced to dip into savings to live. I'm very concerned that later in life I'll need that \$78,000 (\$26,000 x 3 years) to cover my living expenses.

Currently, throughout the country, and in Oregon, retirees like myself are looking at other alternatives to the health care industry's extortion-level costs. Some choose to be uninsured, but none of them want to be. In a previous hearing, I listened to Senator Greenlick talk about how to insure the 6% of Oregonians currently uninsured. He's missed a population of Oregonians. Know that being uninsured is not the only choice Oregonians make.

The numbers of Americans leaving the US because of health insurance costs have more than doubled in the past 20 years (the conservative estimate is about 9 million US expats living in other countries). In Oregon, I'm a member of a group called "Portland to Portugal" - people (mostly retirees not eligible for Medicare) who are working through the process of leaving the US to live in Portugal. There are also groups for other countries and active expat Facebook pages of Americans seeking to leave due to the costs of healthcare and insurance. Five other State of Oregon retirees I know either have left, or are leaving Oregon, for Portugal, France, Costa Rica, and Brazil.

The reasons for leaving are primarily cited as the cost of health insurance. More and more older Americans have realized that it is not financially viable to remain in the USA. In Portugal, private, non-State-subsidized health insurance for my husband and I will

cost about \$2000 a year. In France, the government provides coverage for all - citizens or not - charging them 8% of their income. A far cry from the 35% that I'm expected to pay in the US. And sadly, the quality of care in both countries is much better than in the US. Saving \$24,000 each year allows my husband and I reassurance that we have savings later in life; that we didn't squander it on high US health insurance costs early on. And we do get an adventure out of it that's cheaper than staying home.

However, our preference, and original plans prior to realizing the staggering costs of health insurance, had been to travel around Oregon and the West Coast in our retirement. We would really like to be in Oregon in order to be closer to our children. They are distressed about our decision, knowing that after caring for my Mother, our plans are to leave the US (although if she lives to 100, we'll be Medicare eligible and then can continue to afford to stay). In the meantime, we consider ourselves subject to extortion by health insurance companies who pay their CEOs exorbitant salaries, and we watch as our savings dwindle.

Please, for us and the many others who are forced into retirement early, I ask that you consider passage of SB770. Having a universal health care option (with costs strictly regulated by the State) would provide us with the comfort we need to know that we can continue to live in Oregon and the US without fear of spending our money on "benefits" we're likely to never see. For those of us forced into early retirement it's important to have adequate healthcare coverage. If we can't get it here, we can get it in Portugal (and France, and Germany, and Spain, and Israel, and Switzerland, and Italy, and Belgium, and Finland, and The Netherlands, and New Zealand, and Australia, and the UK, and Thailand, and Taiwan, and Estonia, and Lithuania, and Norway, and Costa Rica, and Equador, and Mexico, and Latvia, and Poland, and Greece, and Chile, and Hungary, and Slovenia, and Iceland, and South Korea, and Denmark, and Japan, and.....)

Sincerely,

Lesa A. Dixon-Gray
Portland, Oregon