

House OKs mandate for Hood locators

Search and rescue | A bill requiring climbers to carry the devices goes to the state Senate

By JANIE HAR
THE OREGONIAN

SALEM — Climbers on Mount Hood would be required to carry a locator device under a bill endorsed by the Oregon House on Wednesday.

Representatives approved House Bill 2509 by a 33-22 vote after lengthy floor speeches on personal responsibility, government mandates, rescue costs and saving lives.

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Climbers and rescuers, for the most part, oppose the bill. They say most experienced mountaineers already carry such devices and that the units could spur risky behavior in some climbers by giving them a false sense of security.

"They are opposed to mandates without teeth and one that disregards their opinion," said Rep. Chuck Burley, R-Bend, in opposing the bill.

Supporters called the proposal a common-sense public safety regulation, much like mandating seat belts or life jackets. "Carrying a device that could save your life is worthwhile," said Rep. Jerry Krummel, R-Wilsonville.

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group would be required to carry a two-way communication device, such as a cell phone, and one of the following: a global positioning system receiver, personal locator beacon transmitter, a mountain locator unit or another comparable device.

Lim tried to delay the starting date until 2010, but the bill as written — if approved by the Senate and not vetoed by the governor — would kick in Jan. 1.

Lim's idea got a boost in February, when another trio of climbers carrying locator units was rescued. Clackamas County Sheriff's Office officials credited the units with saving their lives; other rescuers said the group would have been found regardless.

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Rocky Henderson, a member of Portland Mountain Rescue, said he was outraged at legislators' inconsistent actions. Earlier Wednesday, they voted down a proposal requiring people riding all-terrain vehicles to wear helmets.

Interviews with voters, pollsters and analysts in New Hampshire — where McCain upset front-runner George W. Bush in 2000 — suggest that the senator's problems are deeper than campaign management and that he's now the establishment figure at risk of being knocked off in the nation's pivotal first primary.

"Compared to a year ago, he's not doing so well," said Dick Bennett, a New Hampshire-based pollster.

The most recent survey by Bennett's firm, the American Research Group, found McCain still holding an edge over the field but by a much narrower margin. He lost 6 percentage points in the first three months of this year — as did Giuliani — while Romney gained 8.

A new CNN poll of New Hampshire voters released Wednesday put McCain in a tie with Giuliani at 29 percent each, with Romney at 17 percent and former Tennessee Sen. Fred Thompson at 14 percent. That's comparable to the CNN poll's findings in February.

For all his courting of conservatives, he remains suspect in their eyes for putting limits on campaign spending in the McCain-Feingold law as well as for his readiness to break with the party on many occasions.

"Conservatives admire him for staying the course on Iraq. But he doesn't talk about the issues that social conservatives care about," said Dante Scala, a political scientist at Saint Anselm College in Manchester.

McCain aides on Wednesday blamed his third-place showing in fundraising — \$12.5 million, well behind former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney's \$23 million and trailing former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani's \$15 million — on the mechanics of his campaign. They announced a new fundraising team.

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The Oregon Financial Services Association, a consumer lending group.

La Tisha Mortensen, 28, of Bend defended short-term lenders, saying she and her husband considered it worth \$100 in interest to borrow \$400 for a washer and dryer.

"If we didn't have that option, we wouldn't have a washer and dryer," she said.

And John Charles of Cascade Policy Institute, a Portland think tank that advocates market-based policies, asked how cutting off the short-term credit supply helped the "credit-challenged."

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"I'm going to work diligently to make sure to defeat this bill," he said.

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lenders in a law that takes effect July 1. But that law didn't apply to car title lenders, and payday lenders have been taking steps to circumvent the law with new types of loans and licenses.

Four bills passed in the House and pending in the Senate this year would plug those loopholes. But Merkley said a blanket cap is needed to ensure an end to soaring interest rates.

He named other states where high-interest money lenders found ways to skirt regulations and charge high interest by setting up broker subsidiaries and charging broker fees, creating lines of credit that cost \$150 a month to access or shifting to longer-term install-

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McCain has lost independent edge

Analysis | The GOP candidate's perceived weaknesses hurt him in polls and fundraising

By STEVEN THOMMA
MCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

PORTSMOUTH, N.H. — John McCain has lost his maverick magic.

The Arizona senator lags rivals in fundraising for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination. He's lost ground in public opinion polls.

And in this state, where he claimed his biggest victory the last time he ran, many Republicans see him as old, tired or too willing to bow down to an unpopular president or to his one-time foils, such as Christian conservative leaders.

"I was a strong backer of McCain last time," said George Carlisle, a retired corporate executive from Portsmouth. "The guy was magical. I don't think he's the man he was seven years ago. He's done. Stick a fork in him, he's done."

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