



Ellen Morris Bishop/Wallowa County Chieftain, File

A new poll by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, a project of DHM Research, concluded nearly two-thirds of Oregonians (63%) are in favor of allowing motorists to pump their own gas rather than relying on an attendant.

POLL

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reach 30% support for this policy change,” according to a DHM policy brief on a potential sales tax.

Here are the key findings:

- Nearly two-thirds of Oregonians (63%) are in favor of allowing motorists to pump their own gas rather than relying on an attendant. Demographics showing the strongest support include those making more than \$100,000 per year (73%) and political conservatives (71%). Support is lowest among political moderates, pegged at 55%.

- Even more unifying is the proposal to allow hard alcohol sales in grocery stores, instead of restricting them to state-licensed liquor stores. Roughly two-thirds (65%) support such an idea, including 70% of Democrats and 69% of those living outside the metro area and Willamette Valley. Those aged 65 and older registered the least support, with just 57% in favor.

- Oregonians overwhelmingly gave the thumbs-down to creating a new statewide sales tax, with 75% of residents in opposition. Demographics that most strongly rejected the idea include those without school-age children (79%), those earning less than \$50,000 per year (73%), conservatives (79%) and those living in the outer suburbs (88%). Those making more than \$100,000 per year were most in favor, but only 26% offered support.

- The idea of paying a tax at the cash register became more palatable when paired with a proposed reduction in the state income tax, with half opposed, one-third in favor and the remainder unsure. Opposition was strongest among those aged 65 and older (67%), while those with college educations evinced the most support (40%).

At age 76, Bob Fankhauser remembers pumping thousands of dollars' worth of gas at a service station in San Francisco — and that was when

it cost only 25 cents on the gallon.

“It’s always presented as, ‘if you pump your own gas, you’ll save money,’” said Fankhauser, who lives in the Garden Home area of Washington County. But he’s not buying the argument. “They charge you the same amount in Washington as they do in Oregon.”

Today, New Jersey is the only other state still requiring attendants, though Oregon lawmakers began allowing rural residents to pump their own gas in 2018.

Fears of viral transmission early last year prompted a pilot project for self-service gas, because motorists feared being near gas station attendants might help spread the COVID-19 virus. But that pilot project didn’t last long, and the state soon returned to attendants-only service in May.

“I am sometimes a little annoyed that I can’t pump my own gas,” admitted Fankhauser, “but it provides employment to people who might not otherwise have it.”

On the topic of liquor sales, Southeast Portlander Suzanne Bader is in favor of loosening the rules slowly, potentially through a pilot program.

“I would not like to see it available in convenience stores or sold 24/7,” the 59-year-old said.

Fankhauser disagreed, saying the restrictions smacked of “lingering puritanism.”

And the two survey respondents split on the topic of a sales tax, with Fankhauser in opposition, noting that a sales tax is “regressive” — that is, it puts the heaviest burden on those with the least income. But Bader said the state doesn’t have enough revenue to match the ever-rising expense of providing services. “I don’t think our residents have a realistic view of what things cost,” she said.

DHM surveyed 603 Oregon adults in January, using respondents from a professional panel who were selected to be representative of state demographics. The margin of error for the poll is 2.4% to 4%.

SNOW

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While Tollgate is popular for winter recreation, Sno-Park parking areas are a lower priority, the press release stated, and crews will not plow the sites by the time the highway opens. Once the route is open, drivers can expect narrow lanes, limited shoulder space and up to 10-foot-high snowbanks adjacent to some highway sections.

ODOT District 13 Manager Ace Clark in the press release stated there is little to no parking in Sno Parks next to Highway 204, and visitors should expect deep snow in the parking areas off the highway. He also warned about parking on the side of the highway in areas not designated for parking.

Those locations are not viable alternatives and “will significantly slow our snow removal operations,” he said. “It will also create a hazard in the low visibility conditions.”

Weather forecasts call for continued snow. ODOT requested everyone avoid the Tollgate Highway area until conditions improve. ODOT will plow Sno-parks and designated parking after other critical sections are clear and safe.

For updated conditions, continue to check TripCheck.com or call 800-977-6368.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Gene Hardy gets ready to plow a driveway off Hardy Road on Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. Nearly 2 feet of snow fell over the past week in Northeastern Oregon around the towns of Imbler, Elgin and La Grande, according to the National Weather Service, while Tollgate has upwards of 10 feet of snow accumulation.

“Later Thursday through early Friday, is when we can start to see another round of snow.”

Dan Slagle, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Pendleton

The weather is winding down, Slagle said, but he expected another weather system to enter the Grande Ronde Valley in the coming days. Most of the storm will hit higher elevations, but a few inches will accumulate in La Grande and surrounding areas.

“Later Thursday through early Friday,” Slagle said, “is when we can start to see another round of snow.”

The NWS predicted the Grande Ronde Valley will receive a moderate amount of snow the next two days, with 1-3 inches of snow from the eve-

ning of Thursday through early Friday, Feb. 18-19, according to Slagle. After Friday, snowfall should cease as temperatures rise into the 40s.

The Weather Service has forecast a high temperature of 34 degrees Thursday is La Grande and a low of 30. Friday’s high temperature could reach 40 in La Grande with a low of 30. Saturday looks about the same, with a high of 39 and the low 29.

Across the state, the winter weather had left tens of thousands without power as ice- and snow-covered trees came crashing down through power lines.

FLOODS

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Without it the ranchers will have to continue to keep their livestock and farm animals in tight quarters, said Valerie O’Dai of Elgin, the executive director of Relief Angels, a local organization formally known Emergency Equipment Solutions, which is continuing to help those affected by the flood.

The five ranchers the fundraiser will help are but a portion of the many who still are recovering from the disaster.

“Thirty percent (of the people in Umatilla and Walla Walla counties hit hard by the flooding) are still feeling the impact,” O’Dai said.

Recovery is proving to be a heart-wrenching process filled with unexpected twists.

O’Dai noted many people who had their homes insured for their full value are finding themselves well short of the money they need to rebuild. They have had to spend large sums just to clean up the flood-damaged land before the foundation for a new home can be put in.

“Some people who have a \$200,000 home may be spending \$50,000 to



Dick Mason/The Observer, File

Valerie O’Dai of Elgin loads hay March 1, 2020, to help livestock in flood-affected areas of Umatilla County. O’Dai is the executive director of Relief Angels, which is helping to fundraise to help victims still reeling from the floods in Umatilla County and in Walla Walla County, Washington.

HOW TO HELP

- People who would like to contribute to the efforts on Saturday but cannot come to Les Schwab in La Grande or Pendleton can call to have volunteers pick up donations. For information, call O’Dai at 541-663-6050 or Laurie Harvey at 509-386-7007.

\$70,000 (of their insurance money) to clean up their land,” she said.

Others are discovering they cannot use their insurance money to rebuild their home at the site their old one stood. O’Dai explained a number of the flooded houses were built long ago on land later given floodplain designation. These homes were allowed to remain occupied because

of grandfather clauses.

Today’s government rules do not allow homes to be rebuilt in these floodplains, forcing some flood victims to purchase new property and move. O’Dai said in some cases these victims are paying between \$20,000 and \$30,000 for one acre on which they can rebuild. Insurance, she said, does not cover land purchases. When O’Dai reflected

back upon Relief Angels’ efforts to help flood victims in Umatilla and Walla Walla counties, she said one thing she would do differently is work to help build more permanent replacement fencing for farmers and ranchers. Much of the fences volunteers erected involved temporary panels. The panels are not nearly as strong as barbed wire fencing.

She said plans were in place to have 300 volunteers install a major amount of permanent fencing in March 2020.

O’Dai said the outbreak of the coronavirus threw up a big hurdle.

DAMS

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would have to be built and online by 2030, prior to breaching the dams.

The concept includes an automatic 35-year extension of licensing for all remaining public and private dams generating more than 5 megawatts in the Columbia River Basin. This would “lock in” the dams and eliminate the “slippery slope” argument of, “If you allow them to remove these four dams they will go after the other main-stem Columbia River dams and others,” the representative said.

Under the concept, if the dams are removed, any litigation related to anadromous fish within the Columbia River system under the Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act or the Clean Water Act would be immediately halted and stayed for 35 years.

The plan combines many different elements that are not necessarily

related, including fish recovery, energy generation and electricity rates, said Kristin Meira, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association.

Each element requires its own intense inquiry and study, she said.

“Unfortunately, the idea of Snake River dam breaching is a nonstarter when it comes to how we move cargo and ultimately for our energy portfolio,” she said. Taking out the dams would make that stretch of the Snake River impassable for barge traffic.

Stakeholders also said breaching the dams won’t achieve salmon recovery, pointing to fish declines along the West Coast due to ocean temperatures, runoff and other factors.

Four of 13 endangered salmon populations listed traverse the Snake River dams, said Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission.

“Everybody knows salmon are not doing well regardless of the rivers

that have dams, don’t have dams,” Squires said.

Removal of the dams and the navigation system would affect reliability and timeliness of wheat delivery to customers overseas, Squires said.

“When we visit with overseas buyers, very seldom, if ever, do they ask about what’s going on with the barge system,” he said. “What they ask about is, what’s going on with the rail system?”

Transportation costs to get wheat to West Coast ports would increase by 50% to 100%, said Michelle Hennings, Washington Association of Wheat Growers executive director.

Barging is the most carbon-friendly mode of transportation, Hennings said. Switching to trucks and trains would likely increase carbon dioxide and other harmful emissions by over 1.25 million tons per year.

“This is not a plan that gets us on a greener path when it comes to cargo movement,” Meira said.

“That’s for them to figure out, the environmental groups,” the representative of Simpson’s office said. “They’re apparently more concerned about the salmon going endangered because of the dams than emissions.”

Hennings said Simp-

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