

Poll: 15% of Americans worse off a year into pandemic

By SARAH SKIDMORE SELL
AP Personal Finance Writer

While most Americans have weathered the pandemic financially, about 38 million say they are worse off now than before the outbreak began in the U.S.

Overall, 55% of Americans say their financial circumstances are about the same now as a year ago, and 30% say their finances have improved, according to a new poll from Impact Genome and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. But 15% say they are worse off.

The problem is more pronounced at lower-income levels: 29% of Americans living below the federal poverty line say their personal finances worsened in the past year. Roughly that many also find themselves in a deepening financial hole, saying they struggled to pay bills in the past three months.

Britney Frick, 27, is among those whose finances have taken a hit. She worked as a substitute teacher before the pandemic but her role was eliminated. Initially, she found a telecommunications job that allowed her to work from home, but the hours began to dwindle then dried up altogether.

Frick ended up unemployed for six months but was able to get by using her



Damian Dovarganes/Associated Press, File

In this May 7, 2020, photo, a person looks inside the closed doors of the Pasadena Community Job Center in Pasadena, California, during the coronavirus outbreak. While most Americans have weathered the pandemic financially, about 38 million say they are worse off now than before the outbreak began in the U.S.

savings, reduced rent and help from her parents.

"I am slowly getting back on my feet but am nowhere near where I was before COVID," she said.

Frick got a job at a day-care in March and the steady work is helping her rebuild her financial picture.

"I am still living paycheck to paycheck but at least the paycheck is covering the bills," she said.

"But I am happy to be back at work honestly and happy that things are kind of

returning to normal."

The pandemic has wreaked havoc on the economy — the United States still has 8.4 million fewer jobs than it had in February 2020, just before the pandemic struck.

The government has passed three major relief bills in response, which included direct economic relief payments to individuals. That has helped ease the suffering of some.

The latest round of government payments — \$1,400

to individuals — were sent out beginning last month.

Households, on average, are using, or plan to use about one-third of the money to pay down debt, about 25% on spending and put the rest into savings, according to a report released last week from the New York Federal reserve. That closely mirrored spending of prior relief payments.

Overall, the Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll found 52% of Americans say they were able to

save money for most of the past three months, while 37% broke even and 10% were short on paying bills. Among Americans living below the poverty line, 29% say they struggled to pay bills recently, while just 16% have saved. By comparison, 61% of those living far above the poverty line say they have been able to save. The federal poverty line for a family of four in 2019, prior to the pandemic, was \$25,750.

There also are wide racial disparities, with 57% of white Americans, 47% of Hispanics and just 39% of Black Americans saying they have saved recently. Black and Hispanic Americans are about twice as likely as white Americans to say they have come up short on bill payments.

Andrew Holland said his family's finances were fairly steady for most of the pandemic. The California resident worked as a hospice nurse and case manager and his wife kept her job with a refinery. But the stress and isolation of the pandemic led him to reconsider his work.

Unlike before the pandemic, he had no in-person interaction with colleagues or friends to relieve some of the pressure of his job. So he quit and found a new job in hospice care with fewer

hours. His wife also got a new job with better pay.

While their family finances took a temporary hit and they spent some savings, he expects to recover. Holland and his wife have started tracking their spending more closely and are now planning for an earlier retirement.

"This really made me look at what do I want to do and when do I want to do it," Holland, 35, said. "I feel incredibly lucky that the worst that happened is I lost a month's of wages and got a job with fewer hours."

The poll found many Americans — nearly a third — had not had investment or similar long-term savings accounts set up even before the pandemic. Another 19% say they have been able to add more to investments like a 401(k) or a college savings plan, and 38% say the amount hasn't changed compared to last year.

Holland said he is disheartened by the inequality of how the pandemic has played out for people, and is concerned the imbalance will never be corrected.

"I am glad that it gave me the push to look at my finances and plan a little bit more for the future," Holland said. "I definitely wish it had come at a much lower cost for the world as whole."

FEMA trailers being used for Oregon wildfire survivors

Associated Press

MEDFORD — Federal officials said trailers at an industrial site in southwest Oregon, which were rumored to house unaccompanied immigrant children, are actually for survivors of the September 2020 wildfires.

The Mail Tribune reported on Sunday, April 11, the rumors spurred people with guns to show up at the site to protest the presence of the trailers. Officials said the group did not brandish their weapons in a threatening manner and no one was hurt.

"Those rumors are false. We are not utilizing the manufactured home units or any of the travel

trailers to house unaccompanied immigrants or individuals who are crossing the border in the south, the north or any other border," said Toney Raines, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's coordinating officer for the state of Oregon.

During the September 2020 wildfires in Oregon, more than 1,562 square miles and at least 4,000 homes were destroyed. Jackson County, which is in Southern Oregon and was the hardest hit area, lost 2,500 homes and, as of last week, 785 fire survivors still were living in hotels.

The flames that ravaged Oregon and wiped out affordable housing and

entire neighborhoods only exacerbated the state's housing crisis.

"We have almost no vacancy anywhere. We're at essentially 0% vacancy," John Vial, the Jackson County Emergency Operations Center director, told the Mail Tribune. "These FEMA trailers are absolutely essential. We don't have other options for housing. Without bringing in and placing trailers, people will have nowhere to go. These trailers are absolutely critical for our community."

The trailers and units have been hauled to several communities impacted by the fires, including 96 in Jackson County.

Virus deadly to rabbits found in multiple areas of Oregon

Associated Press

PORTLAND — Environmental experts are concerned about Oregon's wild rabbit population after multiple cases of a virus that is deadly to the animals were confirmed in different parts of the state.

The latest case of rabbit hemorrhagic disease, which the U.S. Department of Agriculture confirmed Wednesday, April 14, was in La Pine. Last month, the disease was detected in Milwaukie near Portland in eight dead domestic and feral rabbits.

The disease, also referred to as RHD, causes

sudden death and is highly contagious among the animals, spreading through contact with infected rabbits, meat, fur or other materials. Birds, rodents, flies, predators and scavengers can spread this virus, as well as people by carrying it on their clothing, hands and shoes.

The disease poses no health risk to humans, experts say.

Officials from the Department of Agriculture warned that people who own domestic rabbits should keep them inside, don't allow the animals to roam the yard, avoid trans-

porting the animals and quarantine new rabbits for 30 days.

In addition, officials say hunters should avoid areas where outbreaks of the disease have been reported. After handling wild rabbits, people should wash their hands, change clothes and report sick or dead rabbits to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

To prevent the virus from spreading further into the domestic rabbit population, the state is collecting and testing feral rabbits where the disease has been detected.

State budget hearings underway

Hearing for 2nd Congressional District is Saturday, April 17, at 1:30 p.m.

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon residents can testify about the state's upcoming two-year budget during online hearings that begin this week.

The Legislature's Joint Ways & Means Committee will take virtual and written testimony for the state's revenue and spending plans for 2021-22, which must be finalized by June 28.

The committee of House and Senate members will take testimony, then vote on the budget in committee work sessions still to be scheduled. The state budget is usually among the last set of bills passed during the odd-numbered year session.

The budget committee will hold five regional hearings, one for each congressional district.

The first hearing was April 14, for the 1st Congressional District, which

includes northwest Oregon.

The other hearings are:

- CD2: Saturday, April 17, at 1:30 p.m. (Bend, Pendleton, La Grande and most of Oregon east of the Cascades, plus parts of southwestern Oregon)

- CD3: Wednesday, April 21, at 5:30 p.m. (Portland and some suburbs)

- CD4: Thursday, April 22, at 5:30 p.m. (Eugene, Corvallis, south and central coastal areas)

- CD5: Saturday, April 24, at 1 p.m. (Salem, north-central coast, most of Tillamook County plus some Portland suburbs)

How do I find my congressional district: Go to www.oregonlegislature.gov/findyourlegislator/leg-districts.html or call your county clerk's office.

What's in the budget: The hearing covers the 2021-22 state budget, which would go into effect July

1. The budget will be in Senate Bill 5555.

An overview of the committee's plans are at bit.ly/ORbudget. To read Senate Bill 5555 as it now looks, go to bit.ly/SB5555.

How to watch: The hearings will be streamed live, and be available for later viewing, at bit.ly/ORbudgetlive.

How to testify: Written testimony can be submitted at any time, and comments on specific regional issues will be taken up to 24 hours before a hearing. To submit testimony electronically, go to bit.ly/ORbudgettestimony.

To submit testimony by mail, send to: Joint Ways and Means Committee, 900 State Street NE, Room H-178, Salem 97301.

Registration is required to testify by phone or video link. Registration closes at the meeting's start time. To register electronically, go to bit.ly/ORbudgettestify.

For assistance, call 833-698-1371.

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