

Taxes: Quarterly economic and revenue forecast set for May 20

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and communities when we are already vulnerable,” said Leachman, who once worked for the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

More than 90% of Oregon’s general fund, which represents its most flexible state spending, comes from just two sources: personal and corporate income taxes. The state’s next quarterly economic and revenue forecast is scheduled May 20.

“We are being impacted by a loss of revenue because there are fewer people working,” Gov. Kate Brown said last week. “The needs are great in terms of our public health capacity and for our safety net. Of course, unlike the federal government, the state has to balance our budget.”

In addition to almost 300,000 Oregonians filing unemployment claims in the past few weeks as a result of business shutdowns and curtailments linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, demands have increased for public health, state-supported health insurance under the Oregon Health Plan, and other services



EO Media Group file photo

Estimates of tax losses are still being developed. But Oregon and all other states are likely to require billions in federal aid that may dwarf the amounts given during the Great Recession a decade ago — and far more than Congress has approved so far to counter the economic downturn prompted by the coronavirus pandemic.

during the downturn.

Slowdown accelerates

State Economist Mark McMullen warned in several recent forecasts that Oregon’s economy was likely to slow, despite continued growth in jobs and tax collections, as the national economic expansion passed a record 10-year mark.

The 2019 Legislature set a total of \$23.7 billion for the current two-year budget from general taxes and lottery proceeds, with an ending balance of about \$600 million. Total state spending for 2019-21 is \$85.8 billion, but more than 70% consists of federal grants or other restricted funds, such as fuel taxes and vehicle

fees earmarked for highway and bridge work.

While there are no official projections yet of how much less state tax collections will fall short, Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, said some of the early numbers are scary: Losses between \$2 billion and \$3 billion during the rest of the current two-year

cycle ending in mid-2021, and between \$1 billion and \$5 billion in the next cycle.

“We have been told by the state economist it is awful,” said Johnson, a Senate co-chairwoman of the Legislature’s joint budget-writing committee. “Other than observations at 100,000 feet, I do not know what to tell you.”

The Legislative Emergency Board, whose members make budget decisions between sessions, was preparing this week to tap the state emergency fund that is now down to around \$50 million. But only the full Legislature, not the board, can spend other funds or move money from already approved agency budgets.

Oregon does have two big reserve funds with a total of \$3 billion, almost 14% of the general-fund budget, which puts the state in a better position than during the last downturn. A lottery-based reserve can go to education, and a second reserve can be tapped for other purposes. But only the full Legislature can approve those transfers — and the laws creating the funds bar lawmakers from spending

all of the money in a single budget cycle.

The governor does have authority to cut most agency budgets by 2% without legislative approval. Brown said she has instituted a partial hiring freeze — there are exemptions, such as the Employment Department adding staff to process a record number of claims — and barred nonessential travel.

Johnson said lawmakers agree with Gov. Brown that any special session should await the next economic/revenue forecast and an updated analysis of how Oregon benefits from the myriad programs that Congress approved in the \$2 trillion CARES Act. Federal agencies are still writing rules for how the money is spent.

“We’re still waiting to understand what the federal (CARES) bill means for Oregon so that we do not do anything that makes it harder to use the federal money,” Johnson said. “That will give all the certifiably smart people in Oregon a chance to digest all the different streams coming from the federal government.”

Peace: ‘The anger they feel comes from something really deep’

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Medical Response, a medical transportation company.

On a Route 91 survivors Facebook site, Elaine learned about a free, weeklong therapeutic workshop bringing together survivors of mass shootings, including Columbine, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, the Aurora movie theater and the Antioch Waffle House. She suggested to Kevin that he might want to look into it. He applied along with hundreds of others, doing phone interviews with representatives of the Onsite Foundation that was organizing the gathering at a campus outside Nashville.

“When they chose me to attend, I was feeling a little blessed, but also was thinking they must think I’m really messed up,” he said, with a laugh.

In March, he traveled to Nashville where he found a stately manor surrounded by cabins on a large estate and numerous “world-class trauma-informed counselors.” Anderson and the 39 other survivors from seven different mass shootings turned in

their phones and got to work.

“There was no outside contact allowed,” he said. “The purpose was to get immersed into therapy.”

They split into small groups and told their stories. They mastered breathing and mindfulness techniques and talked about what trauma does to the brain. Anderson learned that trauma accumulates. He had seen plenty in his EMS career. His high school sweetheart died in his arms in 2011 of pancreatic cancer at age 49. Then came the shooting. It was a lot. Anderson learned that all this trauma amassed in his brain’s fear center, the amygdala.

“You learn to move trauma to the (prefrontal cortex) where you can digest it,” said Crystal Miller, a member of the foundation’s survivor advisory council and a survivor of the shooting at Columbine High School 21 years ago. One morning at the conference, Miller told Anderson her story over coffee. Miller has shared the story many times, she said, and it never feels rote.

Miller, then 16, was



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Kevin Anderson holds his wristband from the Route 91 Harvest country music festival at his home in Pendleton on Monday afternoon. The wristband, stained with blood, hangs from a poster from the concert on the wall of his music room.

studying in the library with two friends when she heard a popping noise. As the sound got louder, they dove under the table. Gunmen and fellow students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold entered the library and started killing.

“They ended up by our table,” Miller said. “Their boots were inches away.”

When the boys left to reload, she and her friends escaped the library, where 10 students died that day.

The speaker and author now lives in Morrison, Colorado, with her husband and three children.

Both Anderson and Miller said being around others with similar experiences helps.

“We offload pain and help share each other’s burdens,” Miller said. “There is magic that happens when we are together. We hold those scars so tenderly.”

“They call it ‘brutiful,’”

Anderson said. “It was brutal and beautiful at the same time.”

In the weeks after the conference, he said he feels calmer. Elaine has noticed too.

“It was good for him,” she said. “He is happier and more at peace.”

The conference was the brainchild of Laura Hutfless, who organized the conference to honor her boyfriend and Columbine survivor Austin Eubanks. His death in 2019 came after a lengthy addiction to opioids sparked by the trauma of the shooting.

“My goal is to give people hope and tools for healing,” said Hutfless, who lives in Nashville and works in the music industry.

Planning happened on the advice of Miller and other survivors on the advisory council that was assembled to plan the inaugural event. Hutfless knew from her experience with Austin that survivors trust survivors and they need different therapies as time goes on. Much later, after the initial aftermath, feelings surface unbidden.

“The anger they feel

comes from something really deep,” she said. “It’s an emotion that needs to be unpacked.”

Anderson said he did a fair amount of unpacking at the workshop. Now at home, he is a work in progress.

Music continues to be a balm. In a basement room adorned with concert posters, he loves to pluck a guitar from his collection, settle into a chair and play. On the wall is a Route 91 poster featuring Jason Aldean looking out with clear blue eyes. Hanging nearby is a photo of him and Elaine at the concert and Anderson’s wrist band from the weekend, one he thought he’d lost, but hadn’t. These reminders of that traumatic day are part of his story now, a story Anderson will continue to process.

In October, he, Elaine, and his sister and brother-in-law plan to go to Vegas to see Luke Combs. He will periodically video chat with other survivors he met at the conference.

“I hadn’t realized how important it is to be connected to a group,” he said. “You don’t recover alone.”



EO Media Group Photo/Ellen Morris Bishop

The bottom of Hells Canyon along the Snake River is steep and rocky, without a lot of vegetation.

Canyon: Natural barometer

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ter to keep them warm, and in the summer they don’t tolerate warm temperatures very well.”

She said that if the habitat can’t keep the pikas happy, they move elsewhere. Akenson said she’d like to do a study of the animal’s current habitat, compared to decades prior.

Jim Akenson, who is conservation director for the Oregon Hunters Association, thinks that ungulate migration in the canyon has also been modified by climate change.

“There’s a distribution of seasonal range use, especially with elk, that is different than 20 or 30 years ago,” he said. “They’re spending more time at high elevation and less time at low — the nature of the warmer winters.”

Akenson said that on jet boat trips up the Snake River in February a decade ago,

he would see plenty of elk at lower elevations. Recently, flying to check elk distribution for the OHA, Akenson noted that elk were much higher in February than years before.

“They couldn’t get to mid-high elevation (in the past) in the canyon because of snow depth, but now they bounce around with a three- or four-thousand-foot elevation change,” he said. “I don’t know if that affects their survival, but it could affect range utilization and hit those higher elevation rangelands a bit harder than before. It could be a factor if you’ve got 4,000 head of elk.”

Evidence of climate change can be hard to find in this rugged and remote landscape. But Akenson noted the canyon could serve as a harbinger of things to come.

“If there’s a piece of landscape in our region that’s going to be a barometer for change it would be Hells Canyon,” he said.

Beers: Not anti-government, anti-corrupt government

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National Wildlife Refuge.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled the group as “anti-government extremists,” a label Beers strongly disagrees with.

“We are not anti-government, we’re anti-corrupt government,” she said. “That’s been a common liberal description of our movement. When people around here look at me, they don’t see that.”

As for the 2016 refuge occupation, Beers said at least locally her and her group supported Bundy’s concept of resisting the government but didn’t support the means they took to do so.

Recently, Beers utilized the statewide network of the Oregon Three Percenters and helped organize its local members to deliver donations and connect resources to people in need after floods devastated the region earlier this year. While proud of these contributions to the community and her previous volunteering, Beers hasn’t had the easiest campaign debut with the coronavirus pandemic also stifling traditional methods of meeting voters.

“It’s been difficult for my first campaign really,” she said. “I ran for city council for Pilot Rock but I was unopposed so there wasn’t

really any campaigning to do, and so this has been a new experience for me.”

But when she has been able to speak with voters, Beers said most people are seeking stronger representation on the other side of the state.

“They want Eastern Oregon’s voice heard,” she says. “We know it’s a fact that the other side of the state does not really pay attention to the needs of Eastern Oregon as they should.”

To be heard in Salem is exactly what Beers has been fighting urgently for over the last half decade by traveling around the state, attending rallies and organizing local ones of her own.

“I want to come back here to Umatilla County and institute the things that I have learned and the ways that we can deal with some of the laws coming out of Salem,” she says.

As a county commissioner, she said that would involve extending the leverage of eastern counties through the Eastern Oregon Counties Association and enacting local protections from statewide legislation.

“We need to make it known that we’re an entity unto ourselves,” she said.



Beers

HOLLYJO BEERS

Age: 66
Residence: Milton-Freewater
Birthplace: Pendleton
Years in Umatilla County: 66
Education: Eastern Oregon University, bachelor’s degree in liberal arts with minors in criminal justice and history
Occupation: Retired
Quote: “When you’re elected you swear an oath to the United States Constitution, and I will uphold that oath every day that I’m in office.”

Locally, Beers says her top objectives are economic development, homelessness and government accessibility.

Though in favor of some tax incentives to attract businesses to the county, Beers is also wary of excessive taxes she believes are hindering the growth of local businesses. She also identified an intersection between development and the rise of homelessness in the area, which she says she’d prioritize as commissioner to an extent.

“We do have a certain responsibility to assist those people, but I think it needs to be restricted to those who want to work,” she said.

As the lone commissioner candidate outside of Hermiston, Beers said she’s noticed a lapse in coverage from the sheriff’s office on the east side of the county.

“One of the problems I know we’re having in the very east end of the county

is we don’t have enough deputies,” she said. “There aren’t enough people to answer the calls.”

The county has prioritized increasing its patrol deputy numbers and has more than doubled them in recent years, but Beers hopes to work with Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan to continue that effort.

While some may be coming, Beers currently doesn’t have any endorsements of her candidacy. At moments during the race already, she admits she’s felt like “an infant among the big dogs.”

But Beers says she isn’t an underdog or an outsider. Because in her heart, she believes she’s the best person vying for the two spots in the November general election.

“I think I bring a fresh voice, a different perspective, and a new look at things,” she says.