

Survey finds Oregonians down on statewide economy

BY MICHAEL KOHN
The Bend Bulletin

An increasing number of Oregonians are concerned about the state of the economy, the latest case of public disillusionment with the direction the state is headed as voters head to the polls to choose a new governor and other state leaders next week.

That's the overarching theme from a survey from the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, a nonpartisan group that releases periodic statewide surveys on issues ranging from the economy and the environment to politics and healthcare.

Those polled were asked how worried they are about Oregon's economic future — 75% of those surveyed said they were either very or somewhat worried while just 23% said they were not at all or not too worried about the future of the state.

The overall perception that the economy is worse than it was a year ago could spell trouble for Democrats in the Nov. 8 general election. Political observers say the negative outlook on the economy is one reason why Republican gubernatorial candidate Christine Drazan has managed to keep pace with Democrat Tina Kotek in a state that historically votes blue in statewide elections.

The survey was conducted between Sept. 13-21 and involved 1,878 Oregon residents aged 18 and up. The margin of error is 2.3%.

When asked to rate the economic condition of Oregon's economy today, 2% of respondents said it is "excellent," 23% said it is "good," 36% said "only fair," 23% said it is "poor," and 12% described it as "very poor."

Most Oregonians (60%) that responded to the survey said it's more important to maintain the natural environment to attract people and companies to Oregon, compared to 25% who said it would be better to relax environmental rules to make doing business easier.

Crook County resident Sidney Stringer said in the survey that lead-

ers should "stop paving paradise," a reference to the breakneck speed of development happening across Central Oregon.

The survey also showed that Oregonians were mostly split on how taxes should be spent — 26% of respondents said too much is spent on public services, 30% said the right amount is spent on public services and 30% said Oregon is not spending enough on public services.

When asked what issue elected leaders need to focus on most, homelessness was listed as the most important issue, with 35% of respondents putting it at the top of the list. Housing, crime, inflation, and cli-

mate change were other listed concerns.

Daniel Olson, another Deschutes County resident, said there's a danger in offering too many services to assist homeless people.

"We have moved past helping and are doing more enabling of bad behavior," he said.

Another Deschutes County resident sees the problem, not as one caused by too many handouts, but as one caused by poor performance from elected officials.

"I think they have the right amount of money (for homeless care)," said Amanda Wallace. "They are just spending it wrong."



Dean Guernsey/The (Bend) Bulletin, File

City contractors with Central Oregon Biosolutions gather personal items while dismantling a homeless camp on NE Second Street in Bend on Monday, March 14, 2022.

Oregon mayors ask state for more homelessness funding

BY NICOLE HAYDEN
oregonlive.com

Mayors from across Oregon gathered virtually Monday, Oct. 31 to ask the state for a significant increase in funding to address homelessness.

They announced their intention to submit two budget proposals ahead of the 2023 Legislative session.

The first includes nearly \$124 million in annual funding from the state to directly allocate to each city in Oregon based on the city's full population, not just those unhoused. They want the allocation to be \$40 per resident, with a minimum of \$50,000 for each city. The money could be used for housing, construction, outreach services, encampment sweeps, shelter and prevention, among other things.

Oregon has cities as small as Lonerock, population 25, Granite, population 32, and Unity,

population 40.

The second budget proposal asks the state for capital improvement funding to build shelters and transitional housing across the state, which the state's mayors association estimates will cost up to \$175 million.

The Oregon Mayors Association's task force on homelessness was created in May with the goal of addressing the lack of funding from the state and the inequity in how funding is distributed.

Many mayors from smaller, rural Oregon cities said they felt funding was prioritized for larger cities where homelessness is very visible.

"Funding usually favors large cities that have staff (to fill out lengthy applications)," said Beth Wytoksi, mayor of Dayton, population 2,700.

"If funding goes only to cities only with visible challenges, then the root causes? of homelessness

goes unaddressed," Wytoksi said cities need no-strings-attached flexible funding that would allow cities to address their unique needs.

She said funding to keep people housed is a priority for them. "Preventing homelessness is just as important as addressing the (unsheltered) emergency," she said.

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler said his most recent city proposal to create large, city-designated camp sites, enforce camping bans and scale up needed resources for unhoused residents won't be able to move forward without contributions from the state.

He said the legislative budget proposals were "critically important" to get his new plan up and running.

The mayors are just the latest group to say they need and deserve vastly increased funding

and an ongoing commitment from the Legislature. Higher education leaders said the same about student financial aid in August.

During the 2022 legislative session, lawmakers pumped \$400 million into a homelessness and housing package. It included funding to build and preserve affordable housing, address and prevent homelessness with rent assistance and temporary shelters, and encourage homeownership with down payment assistance programs.

The state also increased funding for youth homeless services and launched pilot programs in eight cities to better coordinate services.

Beaverton Mayor Lacy Beatty said that, while the state made significant one-time investments this year, it wasn't enough and it will never be enough unless it continues year after year.

Panel: Kotek didn't create hostile workplace

BY ANDREW SELSKY
Associated Press

SALEM — Democratic candidate for governor Tina Kotek did not create a hostile work environment for a lawmaker when she was House speaker, the Oregon House Conduct Committee determined Monday, Oct. 31, after voting mostly along party lines.

The committee members, two Democrats and two Republicans, decided that some of Kotek's behavior toward former Rep. Diego Hernandez was "unwelcome," such as when she raised her voice at him as they argued over support for bills.

But a motion to characterize Kotek's behavior as "severe or pervasive" failed, with

the two Republicans voting yes and both Democrats voting no. A motion needs a majority of votes to pass.

Hernandez, a Democrat, told the committee in an earlier remote hearing on Oct. 19 that he was bullied by Kotek to the point that he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Kotek is in a tight race for governor against Republican nominee Christine Drazan, with unaffiliated candidate Betsy Johnson potentially siphoning off votes that would have gone to Kotek in a two-way race.

Hernandez himself faced accusations that he created a hostile work environment for three women. He announced his resignation in 2021, days before the House was sched-

uled to vote on whether to expel him.

Investigator Melissa Healy, a lawyer hired by the Legislature, had already exonerated Kotek in her draft report. She told the committee again Monday that she didn't see Kotek's conduct as severe or pervasive.

"A contentious conversation between colleagues as they're both advocating for their position on bills is not going to rise to that level," Healy said by video link.

"I also didn't find that the conduct was pervasive."

Legislature rules say a person "creates a hostile work environment by engaging in behavior that is unwelcome and is so severe or pervasive that it either affects a person's ability to function in the workplace or denies a person the benefits of the workplace."



Kotek

Projects

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"The economic climate is to blame for a lot of this," McDowell said.

Julie Huntington, chair of the Baker School Board, agreed that the \$9.1 million bid was a realistic, and dramatic, demonstration of how much construction costs have increased since the district put the bond measure on the ballot.

A different approach

In August district officials said that given construction costs, the board would consider what's known as a construction manager/general contractor approach rather than solicit another round of bids for the middle school cafeteria.

The idea is to hire a contractor that can work with the district to come up with an affordable proposal for the middle school and other projects that also meets the district's goals, Lair said.

The school board, meeting on Oct. 20, agreed to hire CB Const, Inc. of La Grande as construction manager/general contractor for remaining bond projects, including the proposed middle school cafeteria.

The district will pay CB Const \$38,880 for work prior to construction.

During construction, CB Const fees would not exceed 3% of construction costs, according to the company's proposal.

The district also received a proposal from Wright Brothers The Building Company of Boise.

A committee including district staff and members of the school board and bond oversight committee recommended the board choose CB Const.

District officials met on Monday, Oct. 31 with representatives from CB Const, as well as Wenaha Group, the district's project manager, and LKV Architects, to start planning.

"We are entering an intensive pre-construction period with CB Const that is expected to last through March 2023, where the team will work together to form a plan that maximizes project scope within the remaining budget," McDowell said. "Until we are further into the process, we won't know

how this will affect plans for the middle school cafeteria/multipurpose building, but no one has given up hope that the building will still get built."

CB Const is familiar with the district and in particular with the middle school. The company was the contractor for a \$2.3 million project, completed on Oct. 14, to make the middle school gymnasium better able to withstand the effects of earthquakes. That project was paid with a state grant for seismic projects and was separate from the bond measure.

Other money sources and projects

The district also has a \$4 million grant from the state, \$2 million from its capital projects budget, \$2 million from the state Student Investment Act, \$1.5 million from federal COVID-19 aid, and \$1.4 million from another state program earmarked for work at the Baker Early Learning Center (BELC), which is in the former North Baker School building at 2725 Seventh St.

Details, including deadlines and allowed uses, for each of the money sources:

- **\$4 million voter-approved bond** can be used for any bond expenses; 85% must be spent by December 2024.

- **\$4 million state grant (Oregon School Capital Improvement Matching Grant)**, can be used for any bond expenses. Money must be spent by March 30, 2024, but the district has requested an extension.

- **\$2 million from the Student Investment Act**, must be used for safety/security projects. District has spent \$1 million, primarily at Brooklyn Primary, and the remainder must be spent by June 30, 2023.

- **\$1.5 million federal COVID-19 aid**, must be spent for HVAC projects, and the money must be spent by Sept. 30, 2024.

- **\$2 million from district's capital projects budget**. Money can be used for any bond expense, and there is no spending deadline.

- **\$1.4 million from the Oregon Legislature** must be spent for projects at the Baker Early Learning Center. Deadline is Sept. 30, 2023, but the district has requested an extension.



Samantha O'Conner/Baker City Herald

The Baker School District hopes to use money from a \$4 million property tax bond that voters approved in May 2021 to build a cafeteria/multipurpose building on the west side of the Baker Middle School.

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