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Community

Wednesday, November 6th, 2024

RCC bond measure losing by wide margin

By Chris Bristol of the Daily Courier

A \$60.3 million Rogue Community College bond measure that would have allowed for the expansion of workforce training like welding and emergency medical services was losing on election night.

The measure was losing in both Jackson County, 54.7% to 45.4%, and in Josephine County, 74.9% to 25.1%.

RCC President Randy Weber said school officials, including the Board of Education, would need to regroup before deciding on a new course of action.

"We're definitely going to go back and see what we can do to move forward," he said in a late phone interview on election night. "Our students and our employers need us to be as creative as we can to meet their needs."

The bond would have allowed improved workforce training at two of RCC's three campuses, Table Rock in White City and Redwood in Grants Pass, and made safety and security upgrades to all three campuses, including Riverside in downtown Medford.

Automotive training would have been added to Table Rock, with improvements to classrooms to handle more students training to be diesel mechanics, truck drivers, nurses, welders, and for apprenticeship programs in crucial trades like HVAC, electrical and plumbing.

In Grants Pass, diesel mechanic and EMT training would have been added to the Redwood Campus, with improvements made to existing offerings in automotive, welding and manufacturing.

The money raised also would have allowed for modernizing the student success center and classrooms at the Riverside Campus in Medford. And it would also have paid for deferred maintenance issues at certain facilities, including HVAC and roofs.

The bond would have raised \$60.3 million over 21 years at a rate of 13 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value. That works out to \$13 a year per \$100,000 of assessed value.

Jackson County residents, who are already paying a 13-cent rate, would have continued to pay that amount if the measure passed. With its failure, the tax rate will drop to a 4-cent rate as a previous 9-cent Jackson County-only bond expires.

Josephine County residents would have gone from paying 4 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value to paying 13 cents.

School officials had hoped to build on the success of RCC's 2016 bond, which raised about \$20million that paid for a host of improvements, including construction of the health professions center at Table Rock, the science building at Redwood and the tie-in to city water at Redwood.

Weber noted the rate would have stayed the same for Jackson County residents, which school officials thought would be a selling point.

"We built the Science Building and Health Sciences Center, and other students deserve similar experience in different programs," he said. "We'll have to figure out how to move forward without getting resources similar to what we received for those projects."

Voter approval of the bond also would have brought with it \$15 million in matching funds from the state, RCC said.

In July, the RCC board voted 6-1 to seek the new bond, with a majority of members saying the community desperately needs more job training programs, especially in health care.

"Retired folks, probably half the medical staff they see on a regular basis comes from RCC," board member Pat Fahey said at the time.

But board member Indra Nicholas was doubtful, saying the two-county setup was unfair to residents of Josephine County and that voters probably would be wary due to inflation.

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