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Front Page News

Wednesday, November 20th, 2024

RCC board says timing was bad to seek \$60.3 million bond measure

By Chris Bristol of the Daily Courier

Members of the Rogue Community College Board of Education on Tuesday performed a post-mortem on the death of the school's \$60.3 million bond for capital improvements.

"People didn't like the economy, the way it was going," said board member Pat Fahey, who lost his own race for Josephine County commissioner, adding, "I think we were beaten by national politics."

Other board members agreed, saying the timing was bad during a presidential election that saw a tide of Republican victories across the country and locally led by Donald Trump.

RCC officials had hoped to capitalize on the success of the school's 2016 bond, which is about to be paid off and raised about \$20million for a host of improvements, including construction of the health professions center at the Table Rock Campus in White City, the science building at the Redwood Campus in Grants Pass and the tie-in to city water at Redwood, which formerly relied on wells.

Led by President Randy Weber, the college wants to provide more workforce training in trades like automotive and diesel, welding and nursing at Table Rock and Redwood. The bond also would have paid for safety and security upgrades to all three campuses, including Riverside in downtown Medford.

Approval also would have sprung \$15 million in matching funds from the state, RCC said.

But voters said no. In Jackson County, it failed 54.5% to 45.5%. In Josephine County it was much more lopsided, losing 74.3% to 25.7%. The combined vote was 60.3% to 39.7%.

The question now is what to do next. Board members on Tuesday did not sound like they were going to give up, but they also didn't sound dead set on a quick do-over.

"I don't know what the timing is," said Roger Stokes, a longtime board member from Jackson County. "I've heard people say, 'Go out a different time, maybe soon.' ... I have reservations about that, because the voters are going to say, 'We told you no.' Only in stronger terms than last time."

Indra Nicholas, the other board member from Josephine County, along with Fahey, said she was not surprised by the defeat, but attributed it to the presidential race, inflation and sticker shock from tax bills that went out right before the election.

"Seventy-five percent is a hard 'no,'" she said. She advised her colleagues to consider waiting a little while before asking again, and "asking for less."

She did not remind her colleagues that she had voted against putting the measure on the Nov. 5 ballot in July, when she warned them the timing was bad because of the economy.

Reach city editor Chris Bristol at 541-474-3716 or cbristol@thedailycourier.com.



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