

OCCA signs onto letter in support of community college bonds on November ballot

OCCA Board President Austin Fohnagy signed onto a joint letter to the editor with four Oregon community college board chairs in support of those colleges' capital construction bond measures on the November 5, 2024, general election ballot.

INVEST IN THE PEOPLE WHO WILL BECOME THE BACKBONE OF OUR LOCAL WORKFORCE

To the editor,

As chairs of our local community college boards, we write today to underscore the vital importance of supporting the upcoming community college bond measures that will be on the ballot this November and next spring. These bond measures are more than just financial investments; they are commitments to the future of our communities, our students and our local economies.

Community colleges in Oregon, including Clackamas, Columbia Gorge, Mt. Hood and Rogue, have long been cornerstones of education and workforce development. Our colleges exist today because of the initial and continued investments from our communities. These bonds are critical to ensuring we can continue providing high-quality education and training that directly benefits our districts.

A recent analysis by Lightcast, commissioned by the Oregon Community College Association (OCCA) and our state's 17 community colleges, highlighted the significant impact we collectively make in our communities and state. In the 2021-22 academic year, Oregon's community colleges generated a staggering \$9.6 billion in annual economic impact and support one out of every 22 jobs in the state. This is not just an abstract number; it represents the thousands of individuals who rely on our colleges for education, training, and career opportunities.

For every dollar invested in our community colleges, students see a \$5.20 return in lifetime earnings. Taxpayers gain \$1.30 in added tax revenue and public sector savings, while society reaps \$7 in added income and social savings. These are real, tangible benefits that resonate throughout our communities.

We train welders, nurses, teachers, wildland firefighters, cybersecurity specialists and other essential workers who drive our local communities. We do this at an accessible cost and close to home, where we help keep families together and thriving locally. Just imagine what our communities would look like without these community-based educational institutions.

At Clackamas Community College, the bond would help expand student opportunities by constructing a center of excellence for horticulture, updating aging buildings, modernizing classrooms and strengthening workforce and STEM opportunities. At Rogue Community College, bond funds would expand workforce training in high-demand fields like automotive, nursing and welding, while also updating and upgrading facilities across all three campuses. Columbia Gorge Community College's bond would enhance safety, update facilities for energy efficiency and modernize learning spaces to meet the needs of today's students. Mt. Hood Community College would use bond funds to restore facilities that have not been updated in more than 50 years, create

a new center for health professions to meet critical-demand jobs, and modernize online and hybrid learning across a vast rural and urban community footprint.

These projects share a common goal: To ensure our colleges remain safe, modern and capable of providing the education and training that our students and communities need to thrive.

We urge you to support these bond measures in your community. By doing so, you are investing not just in buildings and facilities but in the people who will become the backbone of our local workforce, driving our economies and enriching our communities for generations to come.

Community is, quite literally, our middle name. Let's continue to build a stronger, more vibrant future together.

Gary Plano, Chair, Rogue Community College Board of Education

Kim Morgan, Chair, Columbia Gorge Community College Board of Education

Diane McKeel, Chair, Mt. Hood Community College Board of Education

Jane Reid, Chair, Clackamas Community College Board of Education

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