

Expansion bond for COCC touted as a job creator

By [Sheila G. Miller](#) / *The Bulletin*

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Last fall, Central Oregon Community College got an answer from voters that it didn't like when they turned down a \$43.75 million bond for capital projects.

So this fall, as the college tries to pass a similar \$41.58 million bond that would build a variety of new facilities around the region, it is changing its message to voters.

"The message now is really simple," said Charley Miller, COCC's board vice chairman and the head of the bond campaign. "It's jobs for now, jobs for the future, and less than \$2 a month for the average homeowner."

On Nov. 3, voters in Central Oregon will be asked to approve a \$41.58 million bond in part to deal with the massive 45 percent enrollment increase over the past two years that has the college scrambling to find new classrooms, classes and teachers.

Last week, the college froze enrollment for the fall term due to so many students signing up for classes. At the board meeting Wednesday, Dean of Student and Enrollment Services Alicia Moore told board members that as of Monday there were about 600 students enrolled entirely on wait lists and a total of 8,300 seats on wait lists.

The bond would pay for construction of a health and science building in Bend, a technology education center in Redmond, and education campus facilities in Madras and Prineville. It also would fund new labs, clinics and other facilities for health career programs and renovation of campus facilities.

The bond would cost property owners about 12 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. For a home assessed at \$200,000, the bond would cost a homeowner about \$24 a year.

If the bond passes, it would allow the college to use \$11.47 million in state funding, which is earmarked for the health and science building and the technology education center.

For Miller, the need for the new buildings hits close to home. While visiting the college recently, Miller ran into two people he knew from the construction business. One was enrolling to study nursing, and another planned to study to become a teacher.

Community colleges, Miller said, can more easily respond to changes in the economy.

“Wherever the needs are, we are developing programs. We’re always working with industry and businesses,” Miller said. “You don’t see that at the high school or university. ... They’re more like ships. COCC is a speedboat.”

After last November, COCC board members blamed the failed bond election on a variety of reasons, including the down economy and high number of other measures and candidates on the ballot.

But Miller also cited a much-too-complex message about the bond as a reason for its failure. The college used television, radio and direct mail advertising in 2008, but the ads went into detail about costs that Miller believes just got in the way. This fall, there will be no television or radio and very little formal advertising. Instead, the college will depend on word-of-mouth and a grass-roots campaign.

Miller said he’s also focusing on particular groups to help pass the bond. Students are taking a lead on passing the bond, and Miller is focused on local businesses, especially those that might benefit from the new buildings and expanded classes and services. And the college is using social networking, including e-mails, Facebook and Twitter, to spread word about the upcoming bond.

That seems to be working. Both the Bend and Redmond chambers of commerce have endorsed the bond.

“I think people are realizing the impact of community colleges (on the economy),” Miller said. “I think since the spring the attitude has changed. I think people understand the need and the tie-in that COCC has to economic vitality. I think they see it as a part of the solution.”

And COCC President Jim Middleton said the sheer number of students and people interested in taking classes at the college helps get out the message as well.

“There’s certainly a lot of students who themselves know that we need facilities, and there are friends and relatives who know that, too,” Middleton said.

According to College Relations Director Ron Paradis, there is no organized opposition to the bond. The November voters pamphlet will feature several letters in support of the bond, and Paradis said he knew of no opposition letters being placed in the pamphlet.

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