

# A Weather Report: The Public Opinion Climate in Portland

February 2011

Prepared for:  
Columbia Corridor Association



Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall INC. | Opinion Research and Consultation

[www.dhmresearch.com](http://www.dhmresearch.com)



- **Opinion Climate About Politics And Government in Portland**
- **Specific Public Opinion Issues**
- **Communications With Portlanders**

## **What Is The Public Opinion Climate In Portland Around Politics and Government?**

## A Category 5 Hurricane



- **Negativity**
- **Low awareness and knowledge**
- **Anxiety about the economy**
- **Anxiety about other problems**
- **Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission,  
No. 08-205 (Campaign Finance)**
- **Initiative process**
- **Closed primary**
- **Media changes**
- **Changing Demographics**

# NEGATIVITY



Knowing that the Oregon State Legislature is closely divided between Republicans and Democrats and that Governor elect Kitzhaber was elected by a very narrow margin, which one of the following statements comes closer to your point of view?

Response Category	Oregon N=400
I am <u>fairly confident</u> that Governor Kitzhaber and the legislators from both parties will be able to put aside enough of their partisan differences to make progress on at least some of Oregon's problems.	16%
I am <u>somewhat confident</u> that Governor Kitzhaber and the legislators from both parties will be able to put aside enough of their partisan differences to make progress on at least some of Oregon's problems.	23%
I have <u>little or no confidence</u> that Governor Kitzhaber and the legislators from both parties will be able to put aside enough of their partisan differences to make progress on at least some of Oregon's problems.	50%
Don't know	11%

## MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

- Waste and inefficiency
- Not getting anything done – Partisan Gridlock
- Wrong priorities
- Not innovative/creative
- Not comprehensive/long-range
- Public employee compensation
- Toothless laws/regulations
- Reduction of government services
- Courts nullifying voter passed initiatives
- Failure to collect taxes owed
- Negative campaign advertising
- Campaign finance



## NOT ONLY ABOUT GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS:

- **Corporations**
- **Public employee unions**
- **Media**

# NEGATIVITY ABOUT CORPORATIONS

## MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

- **Bail outs” “golden parachutes” “oil spills” “clear cuts”**
- **Board and employee compensation and benefits**
- **Tax breaks for business expansion then no family wage jobs, no local hire, stress on infrastructure in return**
- **Immediate profit only motivation (not concerned about the impact on broader public interests short or long term: low income, the environment, etc.)**
- **False or misleading advertising and public relations**
- **Campaign finance and undue influence**

# LOW AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE



# LOW AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE

- **37% do not know Oregon has two US Senators**
- **60% can not name the three branches of government**
- **35% do not know the percentage contribution the lottery makes to the state general fund (mean = 19%)**
- **28% do not know what percentage of income tax money the state spends goes to services other than education, public safety including child protection, and health care including senior care (mean=16%)**
- **Limited knowledge of which level of government (and which agency) provides specific services**

# LOW AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE

- **ABC's of politics, government, and public finance**
- **Public sector's contribution to quality of life for households and businesses**
- **History and geography**



# ANXIETY RELATED TO THE ECONOMY



# ANXIETY RELATED TO THE ECONOMY

## MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

- **Unemployment**
- **Underemployment**
- **Depreciation of home and investment value**
- **Credit card debt**
- **Growing gap between the super wealthy and everyone else**
- **Shrinking middle class**
- **Federal deficit**
- **US and Oregon losing its economic competitiveness**

# ANXIETY ABOUT OTHER PROBLEMS

- International
- National
- State
- Local





# ANXIETY ABOUT OTHER PROBLEMS

Traffic Congestion

Child Health  
And Safety

Deteriorating Transportation, Water &  
Sewer Systems

Automobile, Bicycle, Pedestrian Safety

**Homelessness**

Earthquakes

Forest Clearcutting

Urban Sprawl

Health Care Access and Cost

**FEDERAL DEFICIT**

**Israel-Palestinian Conflict**

Climate Change

Police Conduct

Ethics Violations

**Food And Product Safety**

Primary Care Physician Shortages

**Talk Show Fear Mongering**

Illegal

High School Drop-out Rates

Immigrants

**Future of Social Security and Medicare**

**Gun Control**

Corporate

Child Trafficking

Bonuses

**Rising Utility Rates**

US-China Relations

***Iraq War***

Air Pollution

**Afghanistan War**

Water Pollution

**Pandemics**

Nuclear Safety

Campaign Finance

**Population Growth**

Domestic Violence

**Yemen**

Obesity

Misleading Advertising

**Iran**

Mental Health Related Shootings

**ENERGY DEPENDENCY**

Mental Illness

**Terrorism**

# MEDIA/OTHER COMMUNICATIONS CHANGES



## Media Changes

- Less newspaper readership
- More “information” sources—Internet
- Faster communications—Non-factual claims spread more quickly and more likely to go unchallenged
- Less coverage of state and local government and politics
- Superficial coverage
- Focus on the negative and the sensational
- Framing: it is all about right vs. left, conservative vs. liberal, R vs. D

## Other Media Issues

- Focus on celebrity and entertainment
- Listeners and viewers with shorter attention spans

# CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS



- **Population growth**
- **More diversity**
- **Aging population**



## Climate Conditions

Negativity + Low Awareness and Knowledge + Anxiety  
Related To The Economy + Anxiety About Other  
Problems + Citizens United vs. Federal Election  
Commission + Initiative Process + Closed Primary+  
Media Changes + Changing Demographics

## Storm Damage

Less Civic Engagement  
Less Informed Participation in the Electoral Process  
Control of Politics, Government, and Public Sector  
Planning, and Policy Making by Special Interests and the  
Polarized Ends of the Public Opinion Spectrum  
!@%\$#%@! Less Civility  
No Appetite For Tax Increases  
A state on its way to becoming the next California

## **Specific Public Opinion Issues**

### **“Danger, Will Robinson”**

- **Just the messenger**
- **Remember the profile of voters in Portland**
- **Remember opinion climate generally**
- **Especially awareness and knowledge levels**
- **Voter education can affect opinion (good luck)**

## Job Creation/Economic Development

- Most important issue
- “Jobs” vs. “quality jobs”
- Need to keep illegal immigrants from coming in - viewed as taking jobs away and not fair to those who have played by the rules
- Investment in health and education trumps tax breaks and rolling back regulations
- Skeptical of tax breaks for corporations/big business
- Small business assistance and worker training most urgent business and economy services
- Slight lean to helping current businesses than recruiting new (need to do both)
- Support changes in forest management to reduce risk or severe wildfire and create jobs
- Support development of alternative energy sources



## **Government Spending and Taxation**

- **Low awareness and knowledge of public finance**
- **Support for Kicker Reform**
- **Openness to at least revenue neutral tax reform**
- **At statewide level, any additional revenue depends on public believing government is more efficient and less costly – public employee compensation changes, E-Government, etc.**

## Public Employee Compensation

- Oregonians split on feelings about PERS generally
- More about benefits than compensation
- Benefits more in line with private sector
- Lay-offs based on performance
- Reform a prerequisite for additional revenue

# ISSUES—PUBLIC EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION

Please tell me if you have a very unfavorable, somewhat unfavorable, neutral, somewhat favorable, or very favorable impression of the Public Employee Retirement System.

Very Unfavorable	21%
Somewhat Unfavorable	13%
Neutral	16%
Somewhat Favorable	18%
Very Favorable	16%
Not Familiar	13%
Don't Know	4%

# ISSUES—PUBLIC EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION

**It is fair that public employees have large benefit packages, such as health benefits and retirement, because they have had lower salaries and less pay increases than private sector workers in Oregon?**

<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Don't Know</b>	<b>11%</b>

# ISSUES—PUBLIC EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION

## Support For State Employee Layoffs Based on Performance

Do you strongly oppose, somewhat oppose, somewhat support, or strongly support a proposed Oregon state law that if it's necessary to layoff public employees like teachers, police officers, and public health nurses due to budget cuts, that this could only be done on the basis of performance?

<b>Strongly oppose</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>Somewhat oppose</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>Somewhat support</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Strongly support</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>8%</b>

# ISSUES—PUBLIC EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION

## Support For Abolishing Automatic Pay Increases

Do you strongly oppose, somewhat oppose, somewhat support, or strongly support a proposal that we should abolish automatic pay increases that now go to many public employees when they successfully complete another year in their existing job?

<b>Strongly oppose</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Somewhat oppose</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Somewhat support</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Strongly support</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>6%</b>

# ISSUES—PUBLIC EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION

## Support For Requiring State Employee's to Pay Half of Retirement Costs

Do you strongly oppose, somewhat oppose, somewhat support, or strongly support a proposal that would require state employees to pay half of the current Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) rate of 6% for retirement costs out of their income, instead of it being paid for all by the state, as it currently is.

<b>Strongly oppose</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Somewhat oppose</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Somewhat support</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Strongly support</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>8%</b>

## K-12 Education

- **Most important level of education – early grades especially**
- **Portland supports more money while less so at statewide level—more split vs. spending money better**
- **Strong support closing achievement gap – “equity”**
- **Support for better evaluations with student academic growth being one consideration, not just time in the classroom – for placement, hiring, tenure, dismissal**
- **Support for better mentoring new teachers and principals**
- **Teachers vs. Teacher Unions**



# ISSUES—HEALTH CARE AND HUMAN SERVICES

## Health and Human Services

- Access and cost of healthcare biggest concern
- Support for alternative health care
- More doing research on own using Internet
- Feel health more influenced by exercise, diet and lifestyle than an excellent health care system of hospitals, doctors, and insurance companies
- Support for change to health care delivery system-nurse practitioners
- High concern for vulnerable populations: elderly, disabled, people with developmental disabilities, and victims of domestic violence.
- Affordable housing and reducing homeless is also highly ranked as urgent service

**Part of Storm Response:**

**More, and More Effective  
Communications About Government  
and Public Finance  
With The Public**

## Effective Communications With The Public

- Link to value and beliefs
- Link to concerns and issues
- Link to what means positively for small business
- Keep basic
- Don't use "government"
- Show public involvement
- Show accountability and transparency
- Show partnerships
- Tell a great story (concrete, surprising/unexpected, simplicity, credibility, emotion)
- Use effective messengers
- Use multiple communication sources
- Parallel track for Spanish-speaking Oregonians (others?)-know your changing demographics and psychographics
- Keep at it, sustained effort

## **Effective Communications With The Public**

### **Link To Values And Beliefs – Three Frames**

**What do you value about living in  
\_\_\_\_\_?**

- **Outdoor recreation opportunities –proximity and variety**
- **Natural beauty including open space, farmland, and forests**
- **Water and air quality**
- **Sense of community/neighborliness**
- **Climate**

## **What core value and belief is most important to you?**

- **Participation in family**
- **Career and job opportunity**
- **Being charitable to others**
- **Independence of self**
- **Practice of religion and spirituality**
- **Concern for the environment**
- **Supporting your community**
- **Being economical or thrifty**
- **Seclusion, solitude, or privacy**
- **Diversity of people**

## **Divergence in Core Values and Beliefs Between Opinion Leaders and General Public**

## Why invest in your neighborhood or community?

- Personal safety
- Sense of community/neighborliness
- Maintaining good health
- Financial security
- Having control over essential needs
- Having time/saving time
- Importance of children
- Importance of helping people in need
- Intergenerational responsibility
- Expression of values



## **Effective Communications With The Public**

**Link To Values And Beliefs – Three Frames**

**Link To Specific Concerns And Issues – At Two Levels**

# SPECIFIC CONCERNS AND ISSUES—LEVEL 1

- **Promoting economic development/jobs**
- **Providing public safety**
- **Assisting vulnerable populations**
- **Reducing the cost of health care**
- **Reducing high school drop-out rates**
- **Reducing government waste**
- **Conserving farm and forest land**
- **Developing alternative energy sources**
- **Developing alternative modes of transportation**

**WHAT DOES THIS DO POSITIVELY  
FOR SMALL BUSINESS?**

**(NOT SO MUCH LARGE BUSINESS)**

## Effective Communications With The Public

- Link to value and beliefs
- Link to concerns and issues
- Link to what means positively for small business
- Keep basic
- Don't use "government"
- Show public involvement
- Show accountability and transparency
- Show partnerships
- Tell a great story (concrete, surprising/unexpected, simplicity, credibility, emotion)
- Use effective messengers
- Use multiple communication sources
- Parallel track for Spanish-speaking Oregonians (others?)-know your changing demographics and psychographics
- Keep at it, sustained effort

## E-Government

- **Directly addresses negativity**
- **Has to be more than informational – transactional too**
- **Cross-jurisdictional – State Portal- One stop shopping**
- **Search feature is critical**
- **Interface with social media**
- **Can assist with building public knowledge of civics and public involvement**
- **Must be accompanied with promotion**



**Metro's online participation tool:**  
a new way to share your views and help  
shape the future of the region.

**[www.optinpanel.org](http://www.optinpanel.org)**

**WELL, WELL, WELL . . .AND IN CLOSING**

**NEED TO DO BOTH:**  
**IN THIS MOST DIFFICULT OF**  
**OPINION CLIMATES**  
**RESET GOVERNMENT AND**  
**POLITICS + COMMUNICATE AND**  
**EDUCATE EFFECTIVELY**  
**. . .and even then**

# THANK YOU!

## Adam Davis

adavis@dhmresearch.com

(503) 220-0575



Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall INC. | Opinion Research and Consultation

[www.dhmresearch.com](http://www.dhmresearch.com)

