

Oregon's benchmarks make case for either pride or action

Imagine it's 2029.

Oregon has achieved excellence in education, and work-force development, arts participation, social services, public safety and sustainable, green development.

Its many diverse population groups are no longer a small minority and have become an essential part of Oregon's communities, businesses and rich culture.

The economy is robust, and per capita income in Oregon exceeds the national average. The population continues to grow, yet Oregon's natural environment is one of the cleanest and most stunning in the Union.

To top it all off, Oregonians give high marks to their state and local governments for trust and accountability.

We can do this. If we want Oregon's economy to be competitive in the world economy, we must.

The Oregon Progress Board has been listening for nearly two years to dozens of Oregon leaders in economy, education, civic engagement, health, social services, public safety and the built and natural environments. These leaders voiced a common theme: In order to achieve the 2029 vision, Oregonians need to get better at working together and understanding how our actions affect one another.

How?

One: By better grasping how everyone and everything is connected and how our individual actions and government policies often create unintended as well as intended consequences.

For example, slick new economic developments produce new housing in chic downtown areas, but they push affordable



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housing 30 to 40 miles from the core of several Oregon cities. Waitresses, janitors and other service workers are forced to commute long distances. This increases air pollution and road maintenance, as well as travel expenses for those who can least afford it.

Two: By people and organizations — in and out of government — getting better at working together.

Parents are used to thinking about their kids and families. Business owners are accustomed to concentrating on their business and profits. Government officials are responsible for their budgets and their productivity.

Yet all are residents of the same community, share the same air, drive the same roads, rely on the same public safety resources and send their kids to the same schools. It is much easier to stay in our comfortable worlds, do our familiar jobs and make our own decisions.

But we have learned that real, sustainable progress rarely happens in silos. We must work harder to reach out, find common ground and act collaboratively to solve difficult issues with neighbors, political opponents, business rivals or anyone who differs from us.

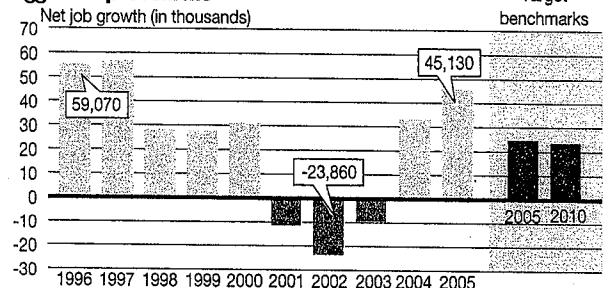
Three: By using a better lens to our world. Most of us know our own income, housing costs, educational attainment, whether we've voted and whether we've been the victim of crime.

But what about everyone else? What is our county or state's average income as a percent of the U.S.? How safe are our communities? How well are our kids doing in school? How clean

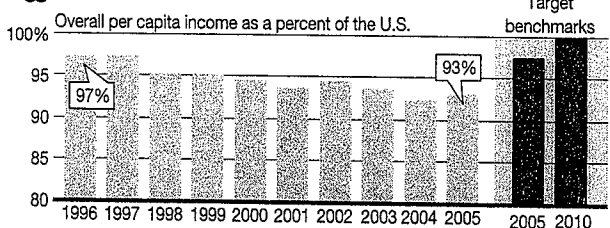
Economy benchmarks

Oregon's biggest improvement was in net job growth, which for the state was third in the nation. The biggest economic concern was in per capita personal income, which was 93% of the national average.

Biggest improvement



Biggest concern



SOURCE: Oregon Progress Board, 2007 Benchmark Report MATT GARTON | Statesman Journal

Online

<http://benchmarks.oregon.gov>

is our air? Do we really have a hunger and homelessness problem? Do we vote in high numbers?

Oregon has a secret resource. For nearly two decades it has reported this kind of information, and now it is online, at your fingertips. Go to <http://benchmarks.oregon.gov> to check out how well your state and county are doing on these and many other Oregon Bench-

mark measures.

These quality-of-life yardsticks offer facts and figures about the world in which people and businesses exist, the one to which the well-being of all Oregonians and Oregon enterprises depend.

The more we understand about our world, the quicker we can innovate and solve problems together, and the more effective we will be in improving Oregon's economic environment and future well-being.

Rita Conrad is the executive director of the Oregon Progress Board.

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Quality jobs, educational attainment go hand in hand

Oregon's success in reaching its benchmark goal of ensuring Oregonians have quality jobs depends significantly on its effort toward meeting another benchmark: increased educational attainment.

One relies on the other. There is a well-known direct correlation between education and income. The more education people have, the higher skilled jobs they have, and the more income they make. It makes sense, therefore, for much of the responsibility for improving employment in Oregon to rest on the education sector.



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As a state, we are making some progress on the benchmarks, but results are mixed. According to the Oregon Progress Board, total net job growth has passed its target, but per-capita income continues to fall. We are adding more jobs, but all too often, they are low-income jobs. Also, we are falling short of meeting the goal of providing workers at least 20 hours of training per year.

By the year 2015, 76 percent of all jobs in America will require highly skilled employees. The State Board of Higher Education estimates that 87 percent of the new jobs created in Oregon during this decade will require an associate degree or higher.

What lies ahead of us and the entire state is a challenge to marshal all our resources to educate more of our young people. The

benchmark for bachelor's degree completion by 2010 is 38 percent of Oregon adults. As of 2004, only 32.6 percent had at least a bachelor's degree. We have a long way to go.

To reach the targets, the Oregon Community College Association suggests that Oregon must expand access to colleges and universities for more than 106,000 additional students in the next eight years.

We will need more

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