

‘Dear Lord, please give Oklahoma just one more boom’

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=2804#more-2804>

When I first moved to Oklahoma in 1982, I remember seeing a political cartoon in the paper that portrayed three formerly rich guys sitting around a table.

The caption, as I recall, went something like this: “Bob lost all his money on cattle, Jim lost his in stocks, and Fred lost his in oil.”

On the table was a small sign that read, “Lord, give us just one more boom and we promise not to fritter it away.”

Oklahoma, at least as I have lived here, has not suffered the impact of recessions nearly as much as the rest of the country. For a lot of other states, work is either grinding to or has already ground to a halt. I have two colleague architects, one in Missouri and the other in South Carolina, that are running on fumes because clients are not willing to get into projects with the economic climate as it is today.

As far as I know, most architects in Oklahoma are still busy, myself included, and the construction that is still going on here is attracting attention from builders in other states. When one of my small projects went out to bid several months ago, I got calls from builders from Texas and Illinois wanting to bid on them.

Today I was told by one of our local plan rooms that projects that normally would have attracted two or three bidders are now attracting fifteen or sixteen, and a lot of those were from out of state, especially Arkansas.

It’s important to watch architects in times like these, because if we are busy now, there will be construction later. In this month’s issue of AIArchitect, our online newsletter, the news was that the economy was still in a decline, but not declining as fast. It said:

“Following a significant decline of more than five points in June, the AIA’s Architecture Billings Index (ABI) in July returned to a score comparable with what had been reported during the three previous months, 43.1. (An ABI score below 50 indicates a decline in billings or inquiries.) Although this score continues to indicate that more architecture firms are seeing firm billings decline than are seeing increasing billings, the slowdown moderated in July.”

“The index is likely to continue to fluctuate for the next few months as the economy begins to stabilize from the recession that began in early 2008. In another positive sign, the inquiries index remained above 50 for the fifth month in a row, indicating that there continues to be some interest in new projects. However, the score of 50.3 was the lowest reported since February.”

The survey noted that firms in the south had the highest scores, firms in the Midwest had the lowest, and that no regional average in the country had a score above 50 in more than a year.

The survey also noted that some projects coming to architectural firms were different from previous projects, due to stimulus funding. It said, "More than half indicated that projects derived from stimulus program funding have more competition from other firms (60 percent), involve more rules and regulations from the client (55 percent), and are more likely to be renovations/rehabilitations of existing facilities than new construction (53 percent).

These projects have a longer turnaround time from inquiries to billing, report 49 percent of the firms, and 46 percent have found that they have more design-build requirements. Projects derived from stimulus program funding also tend to be less profitable (38 percent) and are smaller in terms of cost and size (26 percent).

I think that the stimulus money will have a very limited effect on the architectural community, although for firms who are able to get projects, it might make the difference between keeping their doors open long enough to survive the recession or closing their doors for good.

The real answer to getting the economy back on track is for the Obama administration and the Democrats to stop what they are doing.

American businesses don't know what to expect from Cap and Trade, or socialization of health care, and see out of control spending as inflationary and detrimental to the economy. That naturally makes even the most die-hard, risk-taking capitalist nervous about implementing new projects or hiring additional people.

Stopping the stimulus spending, dropping Cap and Trade and abandoning the socialization of health care would give businesses confidence in the future, and that would immediately boost the economy.

Oklahoma may be doing great in comparison with other states, but if things continue as they are, it will eventually catch up with us. Then there will be lots of Oklahomans sitting around the table saying, "Lord, give us just one more boom and we promise not to fritter it away."

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