

## Smith uses tax refund to buy voters' support

■ **OUR OPINION:** Mailing checks to state taxpayers wastes money that Oregon cannot afford to lose

If you paid Oregon taxes last year, your check is in the mail.

And it will only cost the state \$823,000.

With public schools and higher education in desperate need of funding, new prisons being built, increased juvenile crime, declining police forces and a dying timber industry, \$163.6 million in overpaid taxes is being mailed to state taxpayers.

Oregon has a "kicker" law that requires the state to send back to citizens any tax income in excess of its prediction. Thus, if the state estimates it will receive \$120 billion in taxes in a given year, anything more than that is returned to the people.

Although it sounds exciting, the checks amount to an average of 6.7 percent of the taxes paid. As such, the people who earned the most last year will get the most back. Annie Student opens her mailbox to a \$2.63 check, while Ms. Glamoure gets to spend an extra \$2,000 on that trip to the islands.

Of course, that type of money disbursement is status quo. What makes this refund unique is that normally the refund is credited to the following year's taxes. This year, the refunds are being printed and mailed at the additional cost of more than \$800,000. So why the change? Gordon Smith and election-year politics.

Smith spearheaded the refund-mailing legislation, and it's no coincidence that

the checks are arriving at the same time primary ballots are due. With Smith already spending millions on his campaign for Bob Packwood's U.S. Senate seat, it's doubtful he will let this sharing of the wealth slip by without taking the credit.

It's also not surprising that the biggest refunds will be given to corporations, some of them receiving checks in the \$1-million range. Of course, the corporations' refunds are being credited, not mailed. People vote; corporations support campaigns.

The main problem, however, is the "kicker" law itself. With the state beset with the aforementioned problems, not the least of which is education-funding, the last thing the money should be used for is insignificant checks for the poor and thousand-dollar checks for the wealthy.

The money should be used to pay teachers more, re-establish extracurricular sports and other after-school activities, or (gasp!) lower the cost of higher education. The \$163.6 million means only \$120 per Oregonian on average, but it could mean much more if the money were used for the common good.

The Democrats tried to get this law repealed but were snuffed-out by Republicans. Once again, big money and big business took priority. At the very least, our elected officials should save the paper and stamps. If Gordon Smith really wants to help Oregonians, why not give the money to the homeless? Simple. Because you can't cast a ballot or receive a check without a mailbox.



## Visit to doctor makes ill student sick

Sniffle — cough cough — sniffle — atchoo. As sure as the rain falls in Oregon and Dead Week deprives us of sleep, the flu season is here and its got an attitude.

Recently, a nasty case of the crud forced me to step inside the "Halls of Medicine."

Yep, I had to go to the doctor's office. You know, that place that smells kind of sterile and funny, and has a waiting room filled with wheezing, sneezing and crying children? And invariably, there's that one person with a gross, gurgling smokers hack trying to keep from coughing up a lung right there on the carpet.

Every time I have to wait in a room like that (which isn't very often), I feel as if I'm being exposed to a new strain of the Bubonic Plague. Why do all those sick people hang around in there anyway? It's enough to give a person the heebie jeebies.

The doctor turned out to be a really cool guy who knows his trade inside and out.

After he finished all his doctoring stuff, he started to leave the room and said: "Come on out to the lab area so we can get a blood sample from you."

Blood sample? From me? My palms went clammy and I stuttered back: "You want me to go out there?"

"Yeah, just go right over there and they'll take care of you."

That's exactly what I was afraid of.

Actually, I wasn't that nervous. I've never had a big problem with getting shots or having blood drawn.

I mean, it's not like I'd ever fainted 12 times or anything like that.

Only four times.

And only when it involved either blood or a medical procedure.

So, I walked over to the lab area and met Mike the radiology technologist.

This is where things started to get interesting. If you have an aversion to human blood or humiliating situations, you may want to stop reading right now.

Mike was cool. He handed me a little Nerf-like ball and told me to roll up my sleeve. He instructed me to squeeze the ball three times, make a fist, and let my fingers relax slowly.

"I'm not going to look," I told him as he got the needle ready to draw some of my precious blood.

"Neither am I, I never do — it makes me nervous," Mike said back. Such a funny guy.

And I laughed because he was only kidding. Wasn't he?

His needle found my vein on the first try and I could tell he was getting blood because, well, you can kind of feel a yucky pull as the blood

leaves the vein.

He took the needle out, put a cotton ball on the "hole" and told me to hold the cotton in place for about three to five minutes.

By that time I started to feel a little light-headed. That was no big deal because I usually get light-headed after giving blood.

And the next thing I knew, I had flat out fainted.

I was gone; checked out — see you after Christmas break.

Every time I've fainted I seem to go to a very happy place — where there's nothing but brightness and happiness. I think I can fly or at least slam-dunk a basketball there.

The bummer is I can never seem to stay long enough to find out what the cost of living is there.

Then suddenly, there was this face in front of me asking questions like: "Do you know where you are?"

I didn't.

"How many fingers am I holding up?" I

think I answered at least one of the questions, but I remember being quite puzzled as to why the man (whom I began to recognize as Mike) was yanking me away from funland and bringing me back to reality.

I didn't like reality very much because reality meant that I had fainted in the doctor's office and, during the high drama, WET MY PANTS.

The lab people half carried my soggy rear end into a separate room where they laid me on a bed.

There I was, all bundled up in a blanket, feeling lousy and mortified.

Mike even accused me of camping out.

I stayed there, with my legs elevated, for almost two hours. Several staff members checked on me as the shock wore off and my blood pressure returned to normal.

I finally got to the point where I thought I could make it home. I sat up and slid off the bed, and stood for about five minutes to make sure I didn't do a Fosberry Flop right there on the floor.

I sheepishly walked out into the lab area and apologized to everyone for flooding the place.

Then I snuck out the side door and went home — but not before Mike gave me a diaper so I wouldn't get the car seat wet. What a guy.

Take it from me: Eat your veggies; try to get some sleep; wash your hands; get a flu shot, and drink lots of liquids.

And whatever you do, never, never, NEVER go to a doctor when you're feeling sick.

I could be hazardous to your ego's health.

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## Oregon Daily Emerald

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