

THE OBSERVER

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Weekend Edition

SATURDAY - MONDAY • February 27, 2021 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Paul Shorb of La Grande

Oregonians face taxes on stimulus payments

Lawmakers consider fixes, including refund on next year's taxes

By MIKE ROGOWAY
The Oregonian/OregonLive

SALEM — Last year's federal stimulus payments will generate \$112 million in additional Oregon taxes because of a quirk in state tax law.

The taxes will hit 877,000 Oregonian taxpayers, about half of all those who received federal

stimulus payments in 2020 and early in 2021, according to the state. They would owe an average of about \$130 apiece, including many lower income workers

who would owe \$100 or more.

Lawmakers from both parties say that's unfair, and the Legislature is examining a fix that would wipe out the higher tax bill. But with the April tax filing date fast approaching it's not clear there's consensus to make a change.

Here's why this is happening:

Last March, Congress authorized \$1,200 in stimulus checks for adults and an additional \$500 for children, with the amount declining for wealthier taxpayers. A second round authorized in December, and paid early in 2021, paid \$600 per adult and another \$600 per child — again, with the totals declining in more affluent households.

The stimulus payments were structured as a tax rebate, which means they aren't subject to federal or state income taxes. But Oregon is one of six states that allow taxpayers to deduct a portion of their federal tax payments from their state income taxes.

Most years, the deduction functions as a state tax break. But when the feds hand out free money it reduces the size of that break. A lower federal tax bill means there's less to deduct from your state taxes.

The Legislative Revenue Office estimates Oregon will collect an

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

K-9 unit Molly bolts from Union County sheriff's deputy Dane Jensen's police vehicle Feb. 24, 2021, behind the Island City Walmart. Molly is the lone police dog in the sheriff's office.

THIN BLUE LEASH

Union County sheriff's deputy and K-9 Molly work to make a difference

By ALEX WITTWER
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Molly is one of the most popular dogs in Union County.

Unless you happen to be a criminal suspect trying to flee from the cops.

She is the sole K-9 unit at the Union County Sheriff's Office. As a Dutch shepherd, she's one of the smallest breeds of police dogs available to law enforcement agencies. She also is one of the most affectionate.

Molly and her handler, deputy Dane Jensen, started their shift Wednesday, Feb. 24, behind Walmart in Island City for obedience training. The sun was out and the day was clear. Molly began to get excited as they neared the location. For her, training is akin to playtime.

When Jensen issues commands to Molly, they're in German.

"It was easier for me to learn her language than it was to teach her English," he said.

A delivery truck began to offload merchandise nearby, but Molly sat as still as a statue, her attention on Jensen. He started a stopwatch to record their training. He must log at least 15 hours a month of training with the canine to keep her certified.

The training is mostly routine, but Molly is enthused. Jensen said it's important that police dogs have fun — if they don't, they're not as efficient and they won't work for you.

He returned Molly to the vehicle then rubbed a spent shotgun shell and a cell-phone on his chest underneath his shirt and tossed them into a bush. It's training for finding evidence that fleeing suspects drop or discard.

Approximately 20 minutes later, Molly exited the SUV and followed Jensen obediently to the area to search for the articles, but she needs a special cue in order to do her task.

Jensen began dancing.
"They say K-9 handlers are the goofiest," he said.

She understood the cue and took off on her search. She found the shell in less than 30 seconds.

In July 2020, Molly had her first big tracking win as a K-9.

There was a drive-by shooting in Cove, and the driver of the vehicle dropped off



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Union County sheriff's deputy Dane Jensen and K-9 unit Molly train Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021, behind the Island City Walmart. Jensen logs at least 15 hours a month of training with Molly to keep her certified.

five juveniles with the firearm in Riverside Park, La Grande. Law enforcement apprehended two of the suspects, but they could not find the firearm. Molly sniffed out the gun in a bush under the footbridge in a matter of minutes.

Getting Molly

In January 2019, Jensen had been tracking a string of burglaries. They almost had the suspect at one point, but he managed to slip away.

"There was snow on the ground, and officers followed his tracks to an alley and, well, in the alley there's a bunch of tracks," the deputy said. "They ended up at some house that was far away, when in reality he was two blocks from where he ditched the car."

The man went on to commit five more burglaries, Jensen said, before catching the suspect in March that year. For Jensen, this was the catalyst for restarting the county's K-9 program.

"I was upset," Jensen said. "If we'd

had a dog, we would have caught him that first night and prevented all these other victims."

With the help of Erik McGlothlin, the K-9 handler for the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office, Jensen did the research and put together a plan for getting Molly.

In total, the briefing he presented to then-Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen was four pages long. It included budget, operating costs and benefits that would help the sheriff's office solve cases.

To top it off, the Clackamas County's Sheriff Office donated a K-9 cruiser to Union County.

"The sheriff looked at it and said, 'I didn't know dogs could do this much,'" Jensen recalled.

Jensen's passion for the project was the tipping point.

He received the go-ahead, and from there it was all nerves. Jensen had little experience working with police dogs.

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 19° LOW Cold
Sunday 39/27 A little snow

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Issue 25
2 sections, 12 pages
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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com. More contact info on Page 4A.

