

OUR VIEW

Problems with state accounting, again

The Oregon Secretary of State's Office audits tell us what we know but need to be reminded about: State government makes mistakes with money.

Every year there's a roundup of these mistakes. And it's clear it's necessary. For the fiscal year 2020, state auditors found \$6.4 billion in accounting errors. That's right, \$6.4 billion.

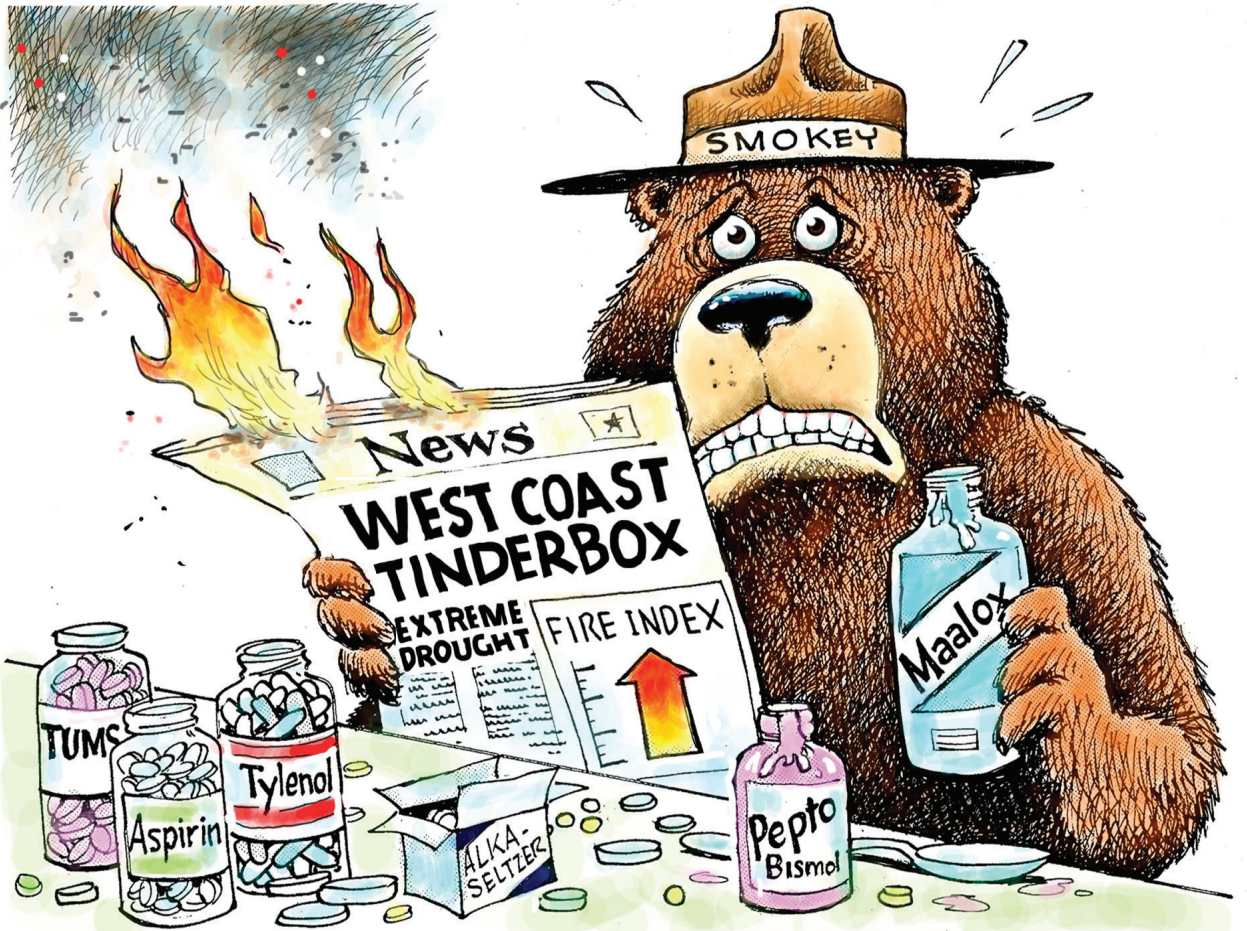
Those were unintentional mistakes. It's not like somebody was trying to abscond with \$6.4 billion. They were mistakes. Basically, numbers were put in the wrong column and later caught thanks to state audits. It does make you wonder what wasn't caught.

What can be more important is when the audits uncover weaknesses in the policies for handling money.

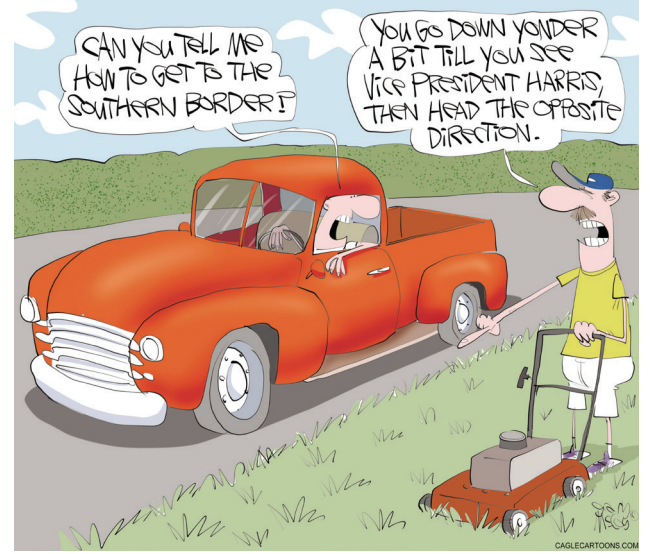
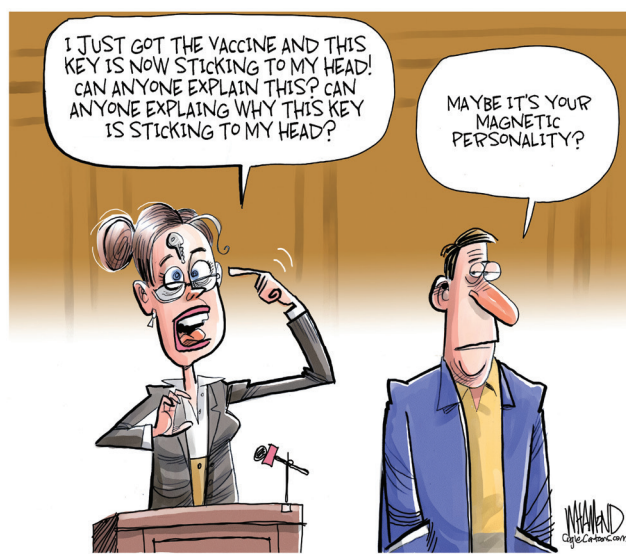
For instance, the Department of Consumer and Business Services is a state agency dedicated to consumer protection and business regulation. It failed to properly follow new accounting rules required for fiscal year 2020. Other state agencies got it right. The department misinterpreted the new rules and reported about \$400 million incorrectly. That department also failed to have required documentation explaining how it made decisions about handling money in two areas, such as determining what is uncollectible money.

And there's more. When state auditors tested some spending to ensure proper procedures are followed so federal funds may be used to pay for them, it found mistakes. The biggest problem was in the child care and development fund. That is a federal grant program that helps provide child care services for low-income families and improve child care overall. Auditors found \$4.2 million in errors. Numbers were miscalculated, provider copays were off, there was a lack of documentation to back up payments and more.

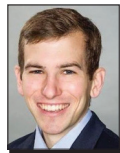
New report. Similar conclusions. Without state auditors peering over the shoulders of other state agencies, even more mistakes would be made.



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Oregon needs independent voice in D.C.



KEVIN FRAZIER
OTHER VIEWS

In the 2019 legislative year, there were 236 Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives, four of whom were from Oregon. Out of those 236, though, the Oregonians were nearly indistinguishable from the rest of the Democratic block.

Reps. Suzanne Bonamici, Earl Blumenauer, and Peter DeFazio all recorded nearly perfect party-line records; CQ Press reported their party unity scores as 99 out of 100; Rep. Kurt Schrader came in at 93. Comparatively, on the other side of the aisle, then-Rep. Greg Walden had a far lower party unity score of just 81.

On the whole, these scores go to show that Oregonians have lacked an independent voice in D.C. Sure, Oregon's Democratic representatives have spoken out against their party from time to time and, though less frequently, even voted against their ideological colleagues; but, from a voting record perspective, there's nothing distinctive about the state's congressional delegates — especially on the Democratic side.

In defense of Oregon's Democratic delegates, they're just following a much larger trend. The average party unity score in 2019 for House Democrats was 97.6 — up from 75.8 in 1983.

Oregonians have a chance

to elect a voice, rather than an echo, in their sixth congressional district.

Now more than ever, independent voices in the House have a chance to sway the conversation by virtue of the fact that neither party has a controlling presence in the chamber. Right now, there's 219 Democrats, 212 Republicans and four vacancies.

Electing independent representatives in a handful of districts would upend politics as usual by forcing both parties to cater to this party-free caucus.

Of course, the odds of state legislators drawing an independent district are low. It's in the interest of both parties to draw "safe" seats. These are seats with such skewed party registration differentials that it's a Sisyphean act for someone from the other side to run a credible campaign.

These sorts of seats save both parties money because the general elections are so uncompetitive. They also reinforce the faulty idea that we're stuck with two options when it comes to our elected officials and, therefore, entrench the dominance of the two parties.

So as legislators start to redistrict, Democrats will push for a map that has five safe, blue seats and that offers the Republicans one safe, red seat; Republicans will push for a four-two map. Neither will advocate for a purple district.

That's why the rest of us, the voters of Oregon, must do so.

A competitive district in Oregon will give at least some Oregonians

a meaningful choice every election cycle. The two parties will have to put forth their best candidates, and third party or nonaffiliated candidates may even have a chance at running competitive races. This district can become an example of the sort of democratic competition that voters have long been denied due to closed primaries, gerrymandered districts and undue influence afforded to ideologically exclusive parties.

If just a few other states take this brave approach of thwarting party efforts to draw safe seats, then we could see the emergence of U.S. Representatives capable of offering their voice and not merely an echo of the party line.

Our democracy is not broken; it's fixed. The rules, the game board and the players are tilted to two sides.

Let's create space for an independent voice in Oregon again; someone who can truthfully share these same lines from Sen. Wayne Morse: "I will exercise an independence of judgment based on the evidence of each issue. I will weigh the views of my constituents and party, but cast my vote free of political pressure and unmoved by threats of loss of political support."

Kevin Frazier currently operates *No One Left Offline*, which has distributed nearly 100 Wi-Fi hot spots throughout Oregon. Kevin will graduate from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law in May of 2022.

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