

Nonbeliever credits work, not 'blessings,' for success



DEAR ABBY
ADVICE

DEAR ABBY: My husband and I have had some crazy life swings since the beginning of the pandemic, mostly positive. I found a wonderful, well-paying job that I enjoy. In our 16th year of marriage, we have also brought a healthy, happy daughter into our lives. We recently bought a lovely home, and have added another, nicer, used car to our assets. In addition, my job allows my husband to live his dream of being a stay-at-home dad with our daughter.

I come from a very religious

family, although I am no longer religious. We don't attend church services with the family, and it seems they have adopted the philosophy of mostly "don't ask and we won't tell." My dilemma is: How should I respond to their constant comments that we are "so blessed" to be where we are?

I have worked extremely long, hard hours to get to this point in my career. I put myself through school with no support from my family and worked my butt off to get us to where we are. Yes, I'm thankful for the people I've worked with who have helped me to grow and reach this point. However, it feels wrong for me to equate my success to being blessed from God.

That statement comes up

numerous times during family get-togethers. Normally, I ignore it or say we feel very lucky to have what we do. Should I continue saying that or ignore them altogether? Is there a tactful response I'm not seeing in this kind of awkward situation? — **DESERVING IN MICHIGAN**

DEAR DESERVING: In the interest of family harmony, smile, nod and agree with the person making the comment. Of course you have worked hard and are deserving of your success. But to announce it in this instance and with those deeply religious people would be braggadocious and is uncalled for. This is not a personal putdown, so continue to resist the urge.

DEAR ABBY: I have been

happily married for 32 years. My wife is going to a girls' thing this coming Saturday and asked me what I will be doing. I said I'm going to a funeral for a girl I knew in high school. (We were never boyfriend/girlfriend, just friends.)

My wife asked me how I heard about it, and I shared that one of my friends mentioned it during our Monday night football chat. She said, "You haven't talked to her in more than 40 years. You really didn't know her anymore, but you're going to her funeral?" I said yes. Then she said it is "eerie, strange and weird" and it seems inappropriate. I reminded her that people print obituaries to let people know.

I asked the guy who told me

what he thought about me going. He said it sounded fine to him, but I shouldn't go stag. I said, "Doesn't 'stag' mean single and looking? I'm an old married man." I'm perplexed about both of these conversations. Am I missing something? Am I a weirdo if I go? Can I go alone? — **PAYING RESPECTS IN CALIFORNIA**

DEAR PAYING RESPECTS: The answers to your questions are no and yes. If you feel the need to pay last respects to a friend from high school, there's nothing "weird" about doing so. Your football friend may have substituted the word "stag" for the word "solo," which means "alone." (I see no reason why you shouldn't attend the funeral alone if the spirit moves you.)

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

Please hold: Pricy way to jump IRS phone line at tax time

By **FATIMA HUSSEIN**
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — If there's one thing that pains everyone trying to reach the IRS at tax time, it's being stuck on endless hold. Well, not everyone. E. Martin Davidoff's accounting firm spends upwards of \$5,000 a year to a company that can zip him and others to the front of the line to get through to an IRS customer service representative. He says paying for enQ's line-jumping service cuts out hours every day that he would otherwise spend waiting to talk to an agent.

"It's the epitome of American entrepreneurship," says Davidoff, who heads the National Tax Controversy Practice for Prager Metis in New Jersey. Consumer advocates are less enamored with enQ, seeing it as a pay-to-play arrangement that gives those who can afford it a

way to get quick access to what should be a free government service equally available to all. Members of Congress from both parties have concerns, too. The service was expected to come up on Thursday, Feb. 17, during the Senate Finance Committee's hearing on customer service problems at the IRS, where call volumes have reached record levels.

"No taxpayers should have to fork over \$1,000 to a private company to get their phone calls answered by the IRS. It's maddening," committee chairman Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, wrote in an email to the AP. "Rebuilding this agency so it can serve hardworking taxpayers is a top priority, and the committee will again examine the issue this week."

Last November, Sens. Bill Cassidy, R-La.; Todd Young, R-Ind.; Bob Menendez, D-N.J.; and Mark Warner, D-Va., wrote



Patrick Semansky/The Associated Press, File

A sign is displayed outside the Internal Revenue Service building May 4, 2021, in Washington. A private company, enQ, lets those who are willing to pay jump to the front of the line to get their phone calls answered at the IRS. That has attracted the attention of lawmakers who want the IRS to investigate the company's impact on the agency's phone capacity.

to the IRS to urge the agency to investigate how the company's robocalls to the IRS affect agency phone systems. The company's bots regularly get in the queue for various IRS service lines, and then clients who

dial in to enQ can swap in to spots at the front of the waiting list. Tax professionals who need regular access to IRS services during the busy filing season say that while enQ may be controversial, it's necessary for them to

do complicated tax work. The service, which can cost \$300 a month or \$1,000 a year, claims to cut phone hold times by up to 90%. And the problem is immense. At the height of the 2021 filing season, the IRS was receiving more than 1,500 calls per second. National Taxpayer Advocate Erin Collins, who serves as an IRS ombudsman, told a House subcommittee earlier this month that taxpayers had more difficulty reaching the IRS by phone in 2021 than ever before. Because of staffing issues and an overload of work, just 11% of the 282 million phone calls received last year were answered.

Andrew Valiente, founder and CEO of enQ, declined to comment in detail, stating in an email that he was "hyper-focused on building" the business. In a video on his website, he says his approach may be "unorthodox," but it's

also a "no-brainer" to avoid wasting time on hold. Mark Steber, chief tax officer at Jackson Hewitt Tax Service, is among the many CPAs who use enQ.

"We're conflicted that it costs money to access a free government service," Steber said, "but in the service of serving American taxpayers, I kind of fault the IRS for not having funding and resources — but they haven't been funded for 20 years."

Legislation that would have given the IRS billions of dollars to bolster its enforcement capacity and update everything from printers to photocopiers to the agency's staffing levels and improving telephone service is stalled in Congress.

Robert Nassau, director of the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic at Syracuse University College of Law, said getting through to an IRS agent can feel like winning the lottery.

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weather

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|--|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| TONIGHT A bit of snow and rain | SUN Colder with a little snow | MON Cold with snow showers | TUE Quite cold | WED Turning cloudy; very cold |
| Baker City 26 Comfort Index™ 3 | 36 21 | 32 14 | 24 3 | 27 8 |
| La Grande 34 Comfort Index™ 7 | 37 27 | 34 16 | 21 1 | 27 12 |
| Enterprise 28 Comfort Index™ 5 | 33 21 | 32 12 | 19 -4 | 19 13 |

Comfort Index takes into account how the weather will feel based on a combination of factors. A rating of 10 feels very comfortable while a rating of 0 feels very uncomfortable.

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| ALMANAC | THURSDAY EXTREMES |
| TEMPERATURES | NATION (for the 48 contiguous states) |
| High Thursday 37° | High: 90° |
| Low Thursday 16° | Low: -28° |
| PRECIPITATION (inches) | Wettest: 3.63" |
| Thursday 0.00 | Wettest location: Cape Girardeau, Mo. |
| Month to date Trace | OREGON |
| Normal month to date 0.36 | High: 71° |
| Year to date 0.38 | Low: 11° |
| Normal year to date 1.06 | Wettest: Trace |

AGRICULTURAL INFO.
HAY INFORMATION SUNDAY
Lowest relative humidity 55%
Afternoon wind WNW at 8 to 16 mph
Hours of sunshine 2.0
Evapotranspiration 0.04

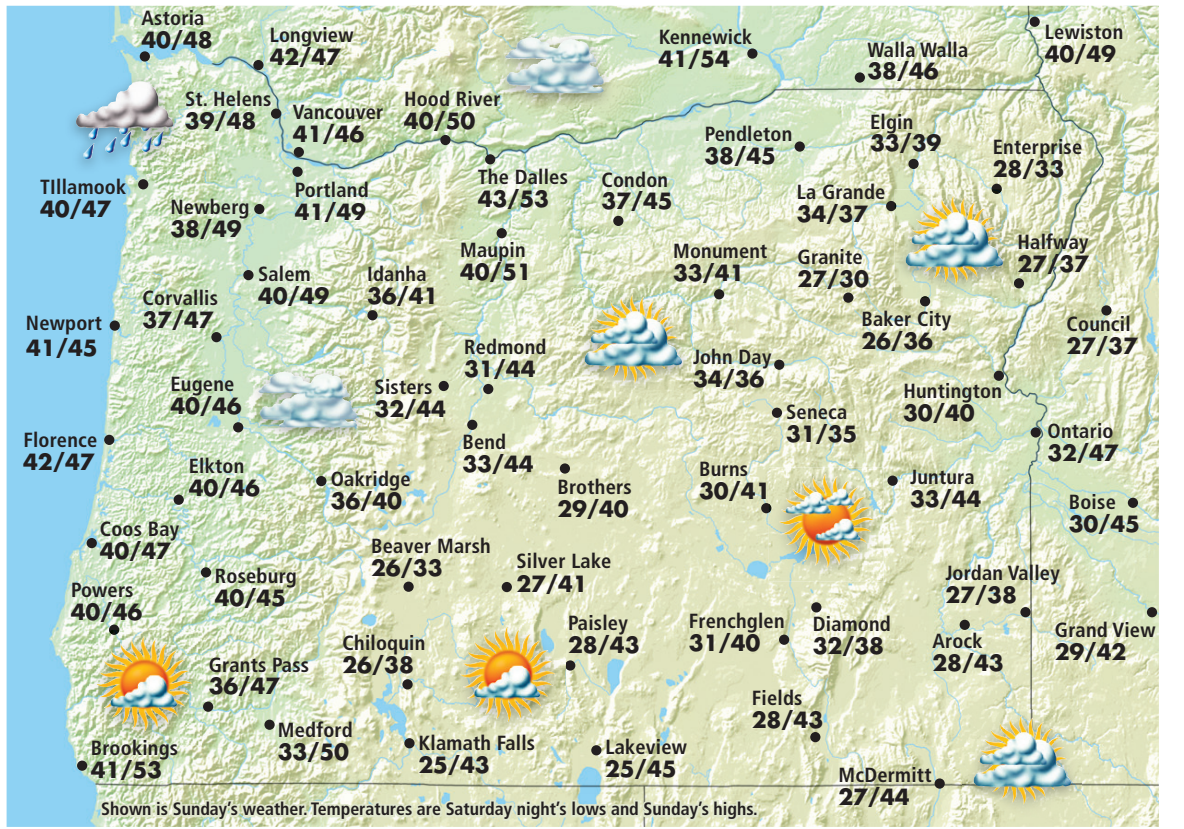
RESERVOIR STORAGE (through midnight Friday)
Phillips Reservoir 3% of capacity
Unity Reservoir 31% of capacity
Owyhee Reservoir 22% of capacity
McKay Reservoir 40% of capacity
Wallowa Lake 25% of capacity
Thief Valley Reservoir 46% of capacity

STREAM FLOWS (through midnight Thursday)
Grande Ronde at Troy 1690 cfs
Thief Valley Reservoir near North Powder 1 cfs
Burnt River near Unity 6 cfs
Umattilla River near Gibbon 201 cfs
Minam River at Minam 133 cfs
Powder River near Richland 50 cfs

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|----------------------------|----------------|
| SUN & MOON | |
| Sunrise 6:48 a.m. | SAT. 6:46 a.m. |
| Sunset 5:25 p.m. | SUN. 5:27 p.m. |
| Moonrise 9:00 p.m. | 10:13 p.m. |
| Moonset 8:28 a.m. | 8:49 a.m. |
| MOON PHASES | |
| Last | New |
| First | Full |
| Feb 23 Mar 2 Mar 10 Mar 17 | |

AROUND OREGON AND THE REGION

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|------------------------|----------------------|
| REGIONAL CITIES | |
| SUN. | MON. |
| City | City |
| Astoria 48/36/sh | Lewiston 49/34/sn |
| Bend 44/27/sf | Longview 47/39/sh |
| Boise 45/27/pc | Meacham 36/26/sn |
| Brookings 53/38/pc | Medford 50/31/c |
| Burns 41/23/sh | Newport 45/38/sh |
| Coos Bay 47/37/sh | Olympia 49/31/sh |
| Corvallis 47/33/sh | Ontario 47/30/pc |
| Council 37/18/sn | Pasco 55/31/sh |
| Elgin 39/26/sn | Pendleton 45/33/sh |
| Eugene 46/35/sh | Portland 49/37/sh |
| Hermiston 51/37/pc | Powers 46/38/sh |
| Hood River 50/37/pc | Redmond 44/27/sf |
| Imnaha 42/30/sn | Roseburg 45/35/sh |
| John Day 36/26/sn | Salem 49/36/sh |
| Joseph 33/21/sn | Spokane 42/24/pc |
| Kennewick 54/34/pc | The Dalles 53/40/pc |
| Klamath Falls 43/21/c | Ukiah 35/25/sn |
| Lakeview 45/22/c | Walla Walla 46/33/sh |

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|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| RECREATION FORECAST SUNDAY | |
| ANTHONY LAKES | PHILLIPS LAKE |
| Snow, 1-2" | A little snow |
| 16 7 | 34 21 |
| MT. EMILY REC. | BROWNLEE RES. |
| Snow, 1-2"; colder | A little snow |
| 27 20 | 39 22 |
| EAGLE CAP WILD. | EMIGRANT ST. PARK |
| Snow, 1-2"; colder | Snow, 1-2"; colder |
| 20 8 | 32 24 |
| WALLOWA LAKE | MCKAY RESERVOIR |
| A little a.m. snow | Rain/snow showers |
| 33 21 | 43 31 |
| THIEF VALLEY RES. | RED BRIDGE ST. PARK |
| A little a.m. snow | A little snow |
| 36 21 | 37 27 |

Veterans Appreciation Day at Anthony Lakes

Complementary skiing for Veterans and their families

February 28, 2022

Details at AnthonyLakes.com

CHD
Center for Human Development, Inc.
"Working for Healthy Communities"
www.chdinc.org