

STATE BRIEFS

Gas prices continue to set new records

SALEM — Oregon gas prices have reached record highs, soaring past \$5 per gallon for the first time. On Tuesday, May 14, the state average rose to \$5.06 per gallon, a 21-cent jump over last week's average.

Portland-area prices are even higher, with the May 16 average reaching \$5.13 per gallon, also up 21 cents from last week. And national gas prices also broke records, rising 15 cents to \$4.52.

Average prices in Union County are up to \$4.81, up from \$4.70 last week. Wallowa County saw an increase to \$4.99, up 12 cents from a week ago.

National and Oregon prices have been breaking records almost every day for the past week. Marie Dodds, an AAA spokesperson, said the high price of crude oil, more than \$110 a barrel, is costing customers more at the pump. As long as those prices remain high, she said, there's no relief in sight.

Nationwide, prices continue to skyrocket, with Oregon remaining fifth in the nation. California remains the most expensive, reaching a record-breaking \$6 per gallon this week.

Within Oregon, Curry County's prices are still the highest, at \$5.24 per gallon. Josephine and Lake County are not far behind. Multnomah County is averaging \$5.18 per gallon.

Experts discuss extremism after mass shooting

PORTLAND — Police are calling a weekend shooting at a supermarket, where 10 people were killed and three others were injured, a hate crime.

In the aftermath of the Buffalo, New York, shooting, experts in Oregon are weighing in on extremism in the Pacific Northwest.

Oregon is ranked as one of the worst areas in the nation for violent and hate-fueled extremism. A report from March about domestic terrorism and extremist attacks showed Oregon ranked the sixth highest in the U.S. for incidents between 2011 and 2020. The state accounted for 10% of all attacks in 2020 alone, despite Oregon ranking 27th in population.

The state's audits director and a former U.S. Attorney both pointed to a specific reason for the problem.

"We're one of only 16 states that do not have legislation criminalizing domestic terrorism," said Oregon Audits Director Kip Memmott.

"People need to be held accountable and if they know they're not going to be, then we see what the result is," said Billy J. Williams, former U.S. Attorney for Oregon.

Randy Blazak is the chair of the Oregon Coalition Against Hate Crime and he studies extremist ideology.

"It's really frightening how we're seeing the normalization of some of the rhetoric that drives white supremacist violence," Blazak said. "Making white people feel like somehow the world is out to get them."

Blazak tracks extremists and has a \$750,000 grant for an anti-violence program called Cure PDX. The program aims to reach potential offenders and avoid racist attacks like in Buffalo, New York.

"I think people of color all over America today are having another reminder that there are people who want to kill them just for existing in their skin," said Blazak. "We're trying to get people to be more empathetic."

Oregon Health Authority: Pandemic 'not over'

By FEDOR ZARKHIN

The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon's chief disease specialist threaded a fine line Wednesday, May 18, between cautioning Oregonians to protect themselves amid a surge in coronavirus infections while not ordering or even recommending statewide measures to prevent infection.

The current bump in identified COVID-19 infections, with a daily average of more than 1,400 reported cases per day, may be reaching its peak, Dr. Dean Sidelinger said at a now-monthly COVID-19 media update May 18. But the sustained growth in cases and hospitalizations means "the pandemic is not yet over."

"If you're in a gathering of people outside your home, sooner or later you will be exposed to the virus," Sidelinger said. "The risk of exposure and infection exists in every Oregon community."

In the more than two years since the pandemic began, Oregon



Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian, File

State epidemiologist Dr. Dean Sidelinger fields questions April 4, 2020, from journalists during a tour of the Oregon Health Authority's newly configured operations center in Portland.

has reported an average daily case load higher than 1,400 for only about four months. And underscoring how widespread the disease is likely to be, the epidemiologist said "most" cases now are not reported to the state, because some people get their results through an at-home test, which doesn't have to be reported, or simply don't get tested at all.

Everyone in a county where the federally determined risk level is "medium" should consider wearing a mask, Sidelinger said. Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties are at that risk level, as are Deschutes, Columbia and Benton counties. He also encouraged people who are unvaccinated, older, immunocompromised, at risk of severe disease, or who live

with anyone in those categories, to wear a mask.

The key marker of the severity of the current pandemic bump, hospitalizations, remains far below the peaks reached in either the omicron or delta waves. That's expected to remain true through the peak, projected to hit 321 occupied beds by June 10. Hospitalizations approached 1,200 at the height of the delta wave. As of May 17, 255 people were hospitalized with COVID-19, according to Oregon Health Authority data.

"OHA is optimistic that the overall number of Oregon's hospitalized patients with COVID-19 will not exceed our hospital system's ability to care for them," Sidelinger said.

As for what happens after this wave is over, Sidelinger said he expects Oregon won't see sustained case growth through the summer thanks to immunity from recent infections and vaccinations and because people will be spending time outdoors.

Predicted 2024 kicker rebate grows to record \$3 billion

By HILLARY BORRUD

The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon's state economists delivered another astonishing revenue forecast Wednesday, May 18, with surging tax revenues now predicted to deliver a record kicker rebate of \$3 billion to taxpayers in 2024.

Economist Mark McMullen called the latest revenue outlook for the state's two-year budget cycle "nothing short of shocking." The size of the kicker is likely to fluctuate before it is finalized in summer 2023.

"We really never could have imagined the sort of stuff we've seen in the last couple months," McMullen said.

Oregon's blockbuster income tax receipts this filing season mean a \$2.3 billion increase in general fund revenue compared with just three months ago, but the state's unique kicker tax rebate would return much of the money to taxpayers. The expected size of the kicker tripled since February.

"This season Oregon and all the other income tax states saw an unprecedented flood of revenues at the filing deadline," McMullen said.

"What that's left us with is unprecedented balances for the current biennium. But those are largely, but not completely, offset by the larger kicker."

The upshot is \$427 million more for state lawmakers to spend in the 2023-2025 budget, but only if the Legislature holds on to the money until then. Oregon's current two-year general fund and lottery budget is \$29.3 billion, according to the Legislative Fiscal Office. Lawmakers and Gov. Kate Brown have so far given no indication they want to approve additional spending this year, which would

require a special session.

Rising wages in the tight labor market are helping to drive the revenue increases, but so is taxpayer behavior including wealthy individuals selling assets that yield capital gains, economists said. McMullen said the "end of 2021 was a great time to cash things in" and one of the questions going forward will be how much that slows down.

Oregon's unique kicker rebate is triggered when tax revenues for a biennium come in more than 2% above economists' forecast from the start of the budget cycle, in this case the May 2021 revenue forecast.

Field Test CANDIDATES WANTED

You may qualified to participate in a special Field Test of **NEW** hearing instrument technology being held at a local test site!

An industry leader in digital hearing devices is sponsoring a product field test in your area next week, and they are selecting **15 qualified candidates** to participate! They are interested in determining the benefits of GENIUS™ 5.0 Technology in eliminating the difficulty hearing aid users experience in complex environments, such as those with background noise or multiple talkers. Candidates in other test areas have reported **very positive feedback** so far.

We are looking for additional candidates in **La Grande and the surrounding areas.**

Product Test Sites:

La Grande
111 Elm St
La Grande, OR 97850
(541) 605-2109

Baker City
2021 Washington Ave
Baker City, OR 97814
(541) 239-3782

Enterprise
113 1/2 Front E Main St
Enterprise, OR 97828
(541) 239-3877

In an effort to accurately demonstrate the incredible performance of these devices, specially trained representatives will be conducting testing and demonstrations during this special event. In addition to an audiometric hearing evaluation, candidates will receive a fiber-optic otoscope exam, a painless procedure that could reveal common hearing problems such as excessive wax or damage to the eardrum, as well as other common causes of hearing deficiencies.

Qualified Field Test Candidates:

- Live in La Grande or the surrounding area
- Are at least 55 years of age or older
- Have experienced some level of hearing difficulty, or currently wear hearing aids
- Don't currently work for a market research company
- Must Call Before **May 25th, 2022** and Mention Code: **22MayFT**



FIELD TEST PARTICIPANTS

Will be tested and selected same-day.

We have also been authorized to offer **significant discounts** if you decide to take the hearing instruments home. If you choose not to keep them, there's no risk or obligation of any kind.†

TO PARTICIPATE:

- 1) You must be one of the first 15 people to call our office
- 2) You will be required to have your hearing tested in our office, **FREE OF CHARGE**, to determine candidacy.
- 3) Report your results with the hearing instruments to the Hearing Care Specialist over a three week test period.

Qualified candidates will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis so please call us **TODAY** to secure your spot in the Product Field Test. Participants who qualify and complete the product test will receive a **FREE \$100 Restaurant.com Gift Card*** as a token of our thanks.

AVOID WAITING – CALL NOW & MENTION CODE: 22MayFT

*One per household. Must be 55 or older and bring loved one for familiar voice test. Must complete a hearing test. Not valid with prior test/purchase in last 6 months. While supplies last. Free gift card may be used toward the purchase of food at participating restaurants where a minimum purchase may also be required. See restaurant.com for details. Not redeemable for cash. Promotional offer available during special event dates only. †Pursuant to terms of your purchase agreement, the aids may be returned for a full refund within 30 days of the completion of fitting, in satisfactory condition. See store for details.