

OUR VIEW

Cities may urge Legislature to raise taxes

Increase taxes on booze. Allow cities to increase taxes on marijuana. Change incentives in the wake of Measure 110 so more people in Oregon get drug treatment. Change the law so temporary local property taxes become permanent if they pass three or more times.

Those are all possible priorities that cities in Oregon may lobby the Legislature to take action on in 2023. The League of Oregon Cities has asked cities across the state to pick their top five priorities from a list.

We decided to highlight a couple of things on the list that we thought you might be interested in.

The League of Oregon Cities may push that state taxes be increased on beer and wine, so in turn, cities would get more money trickling in. One possible piece of legislation: Cities could be allowed to have local sales taxes on beer and wine.

When recreational marijuana was legalized, cities were receiving 10% of the net revenue of the state tax of 17% on all sales of recreational marijuana. That changed with Measure 110. Revenue to cities dropped. Cities can still have a local tax of up to 3%. The League of Oregon Cities proposal is for the state to somehow restore the money that cities lost because of Measure 110 or allow voters in cities to raise the local pot tax above 3%.

Measure 110 decriminalized much minor drug possession in Oregon and replaced it with a \$100 ticket. The concern has been that if a goal is to get more people into drug treatment the measure might not work as intended. The measure did shift more money into treatment centers. It also, though, made it easy for someone cited with a ticket to avoid paying, avoid getting treatment and not face any repercussions. The League of Oregon Cities proposes to encourage legislators to restore more incentives for people to get treatment.

The League has come up with a number of possible changes to property taxes. In Oregon the permanent tax rates for cities were frozen at 1997 levels and cannot be increased. That's because of Measure 50. For instance, they make up about 76% of the revenue of La Grande's \$7.1 million general fund. One idea is to make it so local option levies that pass three or more times become permanent. Another idea is to allow voters to set tax rates outside of the current limits.

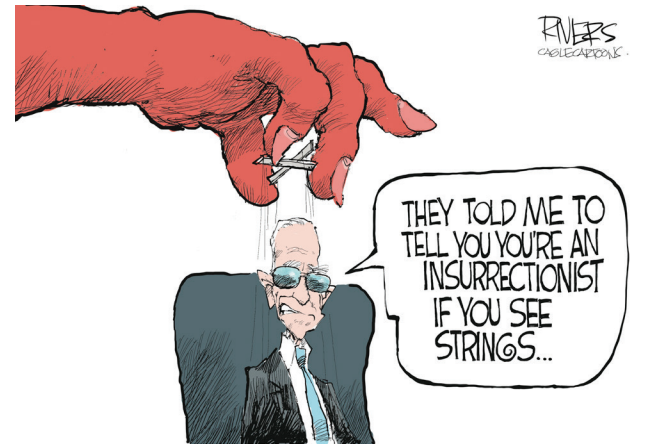
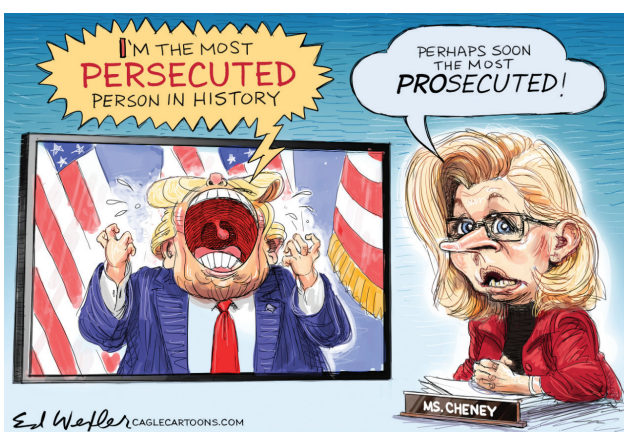
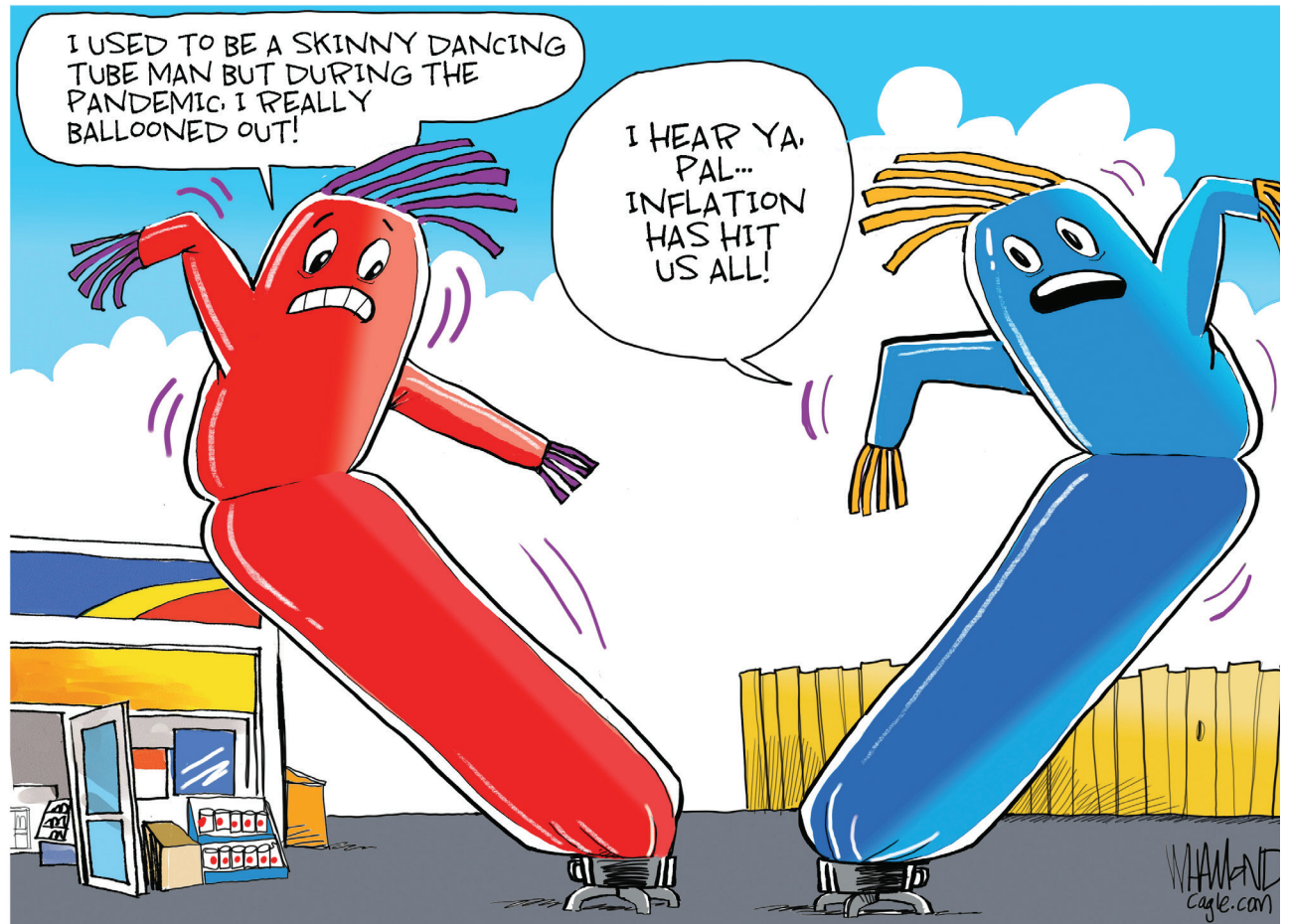
These are just some of the changes that the League of Oregon Cities may gear up to advocate. You can see the complete list here tinyurl.com/ORcitypriorities. What do you think your community should support?

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Will Northwest have a fire season?

MARY WISTER
EYE TO THE SKY

It doesn't take the test of a magic eight ball to answer this question. All signs point to yes. We're observing a late season based on the cool and wet conditions this past spring, but we still have about two months of hot and dry conditions. Southeast Oregon already has seen a major wildfire. At the end of June, the Willow Creek Fire burned more than 42,000 acres near Vale.

What a difference a year makes. In June 2021, the Pacific Northwest suffered more than a week of brutally hot temperatures and extremely dry conditions. In June 2022, the Pacific Northwest was cool and wet for most of the month. Obviously, precipitation and temperature extremes during the spring play a role in the summer fire season.

Last year in early June, Oregon had its first large wildfire of the season (Joseph Canyon Fire) in Wallowa County that required an incident management team. It's not uncommon to have grass fires over Eastern Washington and Eastern Oregon in June, but a large wildfire in the higher ter-

rain where fuels are often green is rare. Fires in this area often show their ugly appearance in July.

Monsoon season typically kicks off in the desert southwest in early July, and moisture is often transported north that could contribute to thunderstorms with lightning-caused fires over Eastern Oregon and southeast Washington. Unfortunately, human-caused fires add to the wildfire statistics in July as well.

The Climate Prediction Center is expecting the continued hot and dry conditions in the Pacific Northwest through September. Fine fuels such as grass and shrubs respond quickly to changes in the humidity and precipitation. If you look around, you likely will observe that cheat grass and foxtails are thick and tall. Most have cured with very little fuel moisture. Grass fires have been the primary concern this month. As we continue to experience more hot and dry conditions, the larger fuels in the higher terrain will show signs of curing and will be monitored for large wildfire potential.

The Northwest Coordination Center Predictive Service in Portland works closely with other geographical area coordination centers across the nation to compile a fire season outlook. The outlook is pro-

vided around the first day of each month. From July through August, the Cascade Range and the southern half of Oregon have a greater than average potential for large wildfires.

Most of this area remains under a moderate to extreme drought. In September, the focus for large wildfires will be from the Cascades westward due to the likelihood of easterly downslope winds, and this area will remain under above average potential for large fires.

No matter what the season has in store, it's better to be safe than sorry. Maintain your lawn and cut down tall weeds and grass. Don't allow vehicles to idle along grassy areas. Campfires should never be left unattended and should be completely extinguished when no longer in use. Trailer chains should be properly secured around hitches and not left dangling to the ground.

The fire season in Washington and Oregon has been quiet so far; let's do our part to keep it that way.

■ *Mary Wister is a meteorologist and fire weather program manager at the National Weather Service in Pendleton. Wister serves as an incident meteorologist when large wildfires or other natural hazards necessitate an incident management team's quick response to protect life and property.*

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