

SPOKESMAN Opinion

OUR VIEW

Oregon's best lottery jackpot is booze

BY TIM TRAINOR
Redmond Spokesman

I'm a sucker for a lottery, but not enough of a sucker to fall prey to the Powerball. Even when that nationwide jackpot crept over \$2 billion — more than the annual GDP of Belize or the down payment for a two bedroom home in Central Oregon — I held firm. I know a sucker's bet when I see one.



Trainor

The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* compiled a list of things more likely to happen to you than cashing a winning Powerball ticket. Their list included: being killed by a meteorite, canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church or giving birth to conjoined twins. Leave it to a Las Vegas newspaper to remind us what a bad gamble is.

The article didn't spell it out exactly, but the odds of winning the Powerball may be roughly the same as being born as a conjoined twin, THEN being canonized a saint AND THEN being killed by a meteorite. Definitely a longshot trifecta that would make for a great comic book.

Despite the insanely low odds, I understand why folks play the Powerball. More than half of Americans play the lottery every year, and one-in-eight play it every week.

I do think it's possible to get your \$2 of pleasure before the numbers are even chosen by daydreaming the night away and thinking about what you'll do with the money. There's plenty of joy in thinking about the places you'll go and the things you'll build, the good deeds you'll do and the problems that will be solved by a couple billion in gold bullion.

And don't believe the rumor that lottery winners often find their way back to being broke and miserable — that their lives fall apart under the strain of unimaginable wealth. Sure, it happens. And when it does, juicy books are written about the mayhem that ensues. But a number of recent studies have shown the chances are no higher for lottery winners than those in any other socio-economic strata — and that nearly 90 percent of lottery winners rate themselves "happier" decades after their windfall than they were before.

Still, we must never forget the hip-hop credo: "More money, more problems." And there's something there. A nest egg of that size does bring with it some additional pressures. Those pressures and possibilities mean lottery players can find something to be thankful for, win or lose.

But I have found a better option. An Oregon lottery that costs nothing, has a fair chance of cashing in and gives you the chance to enjoy something beyond your means. Every year, the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission holds a lottery for a chance to win limited release products — often hard-to-find, aged whiskeys that go for big bucks on the black market.

Often, those sought-after bottles get immediately scooped up by resellers and price gougers, who buy out a state liquor store's inventory and sell them online at big markups. That prices out winter evening sippers like me, who doesn't have a bottomless wallet but enjoys the flavor of something that has been seeping in an oak barrel since I was a toddler.

Last week, the OLCC held their 2022 chance-to-purchase lottery. The top prize was a 17-year bottle of Old Fitzgerald, available for its retail price of \$199. A quick google shows bottles of that same stuff selling for more than \$1,500 online. There were a number of other bottles up for grabs in the lottery, ranging in price from \$149 down to \$39.

The lottery is free to enter, though you have to be of legal drinking age and an Oregon resident. If your name is drawn you win the opportunity, not the obligation, to purchase the bottle in question. It is then shipped to your local liquor store and the purchase is made. Each winner must enjoy the product themselves, not turn around and resell it on the black market, which would defeat the purpose of the lottery.

It's not a billion dollars, but I'd be pretty pleased to see my name pulled out of a hat and given the chance to buy that Old Fitzgerald. And I'd be sure to enjoy it in moderation — would hate for the lottery winner's curse to find me.

■ Tim Trainor is editor of the Redmond Spokesman. Reach him at trainor@redmondspokesman.com or call 541-548-3203.

WRITE TO US

Letters policy: We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 300 words and include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of the Spokesman.

Guest columns: Your submissions should be between 600 and 800 words and must include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere.

How to submit:

- Email is preferred: news@redmondspokesman.com
- Or mail to: 361 SW Sixth Street, Redmond OR 97756



KUPER

"There's not that many of them. Only eight billion."

YOUR VIEWS

Find unity with neighbors this holiday season

This holiday season, I ask those to show mercy, true forgiveness, to those who are hurting and have been treated poorly by others around them.

Instead of having so much hate against

them, you hold the key to greater peace between all. Think of the consequence of division instead of unity.

We should work to not have a misunderstanding against those not having the same race or color of skin. As they were the bad ones. We should work to put at ease the fear many have of being physi-

cally hurt.

It would be enough to solve the issue of racism. Many will see no reason to mistreat others or wrong them at all. We must choose not to be influenced by violence against anyone.

Guy Smith
Redmond

GUEST COLUMNS

Grocery monopolies bad for shoppers

BY REBECCA WOLF

American families are heading into the end-of-year holidays facing sticker shock in the grocery aisles. Prices have jumped 13% over the past year, with even larger increases for staples like eggs, chicken and pork. Although inflation decreased slightly in October, it remains a top concern in public opinion polls for a reason: High prices are hurting people, and they need help.

Meanwhile, second- and fourth-largest grocers in the country have hatched a plan that would actually make things worse for consumers. Kroger and Albertsons — which together already own chains like Ralphs, Food 4 Less, Fred Meyer, Safeway, Acme, Pick 'N Save and Vons — announced plans to merge, potentially creating an industry behemoth second only to Walmart.

We know the pattern well: Big companies keep getting bigger, their competitors disappear and prices keep going up. Recent research from Food & Water Watch found that in 2019, just four companies took in nearly 70% of all grocery sales in the country. And while the power and profit of the grocery

giants has grown, the number of stores has shrunk by roughly 30% between 1994 and 2019. This has hit some communities very hard; according to the Department of Agriculture, 17% of Americans now live in low-income areas with reduced food access.

To hear the grocery goliaths tell it, bigger is better: They save money by controlling more of the market, and those savings are passed on to you and me. But evidence shows that when they have the power to jack up prices, they do.

In 2011, an Agriculture Department economist found that prices tend to rise as concentration increases; the following year, a Federal Trade Commission paper noted that "those mergers generating the largest price increases [for consumers] take place in the most concentrated markets." As inflation hammers family budgets, grocery chain CEOs — including Kroger boss Rodney McMullen — occasionally admit that this is the perfect environment to raise prices and rake in record profits. After all, everyone needs to eat.

A new mega-merger would negatively impact everything from food safety and farming

practices to wages for grocery workers. Farmers face pressures from both processors and retailers; the highly-consolidated processing industry sets the prices for products like meat, poultry, milk and eggs. In the end, farmers earn only about 14 cents for every dollar spent at the grocery store.

Similarly, workers often struggle to make ends meet. More Perfect Union reports that an internal company presentation acknowledged that at least one in five Kroger employees received government assistance — which is sadly typical across the industry.

Merger mania in this industry is nothing new. Kroger and Albertsons have been buying up competition and bullying consumers for decades.

These deals have been given the thumbs-up by federal regulators that no longer use anti-trust laws to challenge corporate consolidation. Instead of focusing on consumer choice and competition, agencies now favor "efficiency." This suits the profit-margin needs of mega corporations and Wall Street, at the expense of the rest of us.

But when it comes to challenging corporate power, there may be hope: The Department

of Justice and Federal Trade Commission have pushed to block several big mergers this year, a sign that regulators may be ready to upend the corporate-friendly status quo. Several lawmakers wrote a letter to Federal Trade Commission chair Lina Khan saying that this deal "could exacerbate existing antitrust, labor, and price-gouging issues in the grocery sector." And Sens. Cory Booker, D-N.J., and Jon Tester, D-Mont., and Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wisc., have introduced legislation to stop these kinds of mega mergers.

A Kroger-Albertsons merger would only deepen the power of grocery retailers to control our food system and profit off the basic needs of everyday Americans. Prices are already too high and choices too few for consumers; workers are stuck with stagnant wages; and the farmers that produce our food are losing out at every turn.

By stopping this deal, regulators would send a powerful message that puts the needs of everyday people over corporate profits.

■ Rebecca Wolf is the Food Policy Analyst at the national advocacy group Food & Water Watch.

Thankful for fat, tasty turkey



with Slim Randles

Thanksgiving is always one of my favorite days, but I couldn't tell you why ... exactly. Oh, it's time to get the clan together around the table and compliment Grandma on how yummy the world's dumbest bird is this year, like always.

The complete stupidity of the turkey is legendary. Of course, they have been do-

mesticated since Miles Standish was in Pampers, and domestication gave them large breasts but didn't help the thinking process much. You know, like some actresses we could name.

And of course, there is the family entertainment. We get to check out the elderly uncle to see if he'll tell the same stories as last year and if he can keep cranberry sauce off his white shirt. It's always fun to tease old folks, of course, because since I happen to BE the old folks these days, it sometimes hits close to home.

Some Native American tribes referred to November as the "hunger moon." Sure has seemed to be that way for a lot of the people I know. Folks who don't have a

nine-to-five like smart people have. Outdoor-type folks just have to tolerate November until Thanksgiving, because then it's okay to consider the remainder of November to be "almost December."

Did you know that domesticated turkeys can't reproduce without help? Yep. The tom turkey is now so heavy if he tried the traditional method on a hen he'd break her legs. Turkeys have to be bred artificially.

But fat or stupid or not, the turkey deserves our respect for one thing at least. There have been some changes over the past 250 years. There are today more turkeys in America than there are Pilgrims.

■ Slim Randles is a nationally syndicated columnist.