

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

State needs long-term strategies

In the words of State Economist Mark McMullen, Oregon's economy "is still pretty hunky-dory."

The current period of economic growth is on its way to becoming the longest on record, with little chance of a recession within the next year. As a result, the state is collecting far more in taxes than previously projected.

But if any legislators and other state officials are making plans for spending that extra dough, forget about it. Here are three reasons:

First, the most obvious is Oregon's unique kicker law. It could result in more than \$550 million being returned to taxpayers as rebates on their 2019 personal income taxes.

The kicker remains popular with taxpayers, although a strong argument can be made that voters eventually should funnel that money into government rainy-day reserves instead. Historically, some Oregon recessions came on the heels of big kicker payouts.

Second, we know good economic times cannot last forever, which is why economist McMullen referred to Oregon being in a "pre-crisis" mode.

It appears the state will enter the 2019-21 budget period with \$1.2 billion to \$1.8 billion in reserves, which

might be unprecedented. "However," says the Oregon Economic and Revenue Forecast issued this week, "such reserves would barely be sufficient to withstand a typical recession's impact on state revenues, let alone account for the increase in public services and programs during downturns."

Third, our state government still has no overall strategy of economic, educational, environmental, social and related goals; or, how financial decisions — taxing and spending — can most effectively achieve those priorities. Instead, the state budgets incrementally — department by department, program by program, crisis by crisis. What is urgent overwhelms what is most important.

Meanwhile, the global pace of change intensifies each day. Oregon lags in affordable housing; an adequate, timely transportation network; worker retraining in the face of inevitable auto-



E.J. Harris/East Oregonian

Kuper Bracher, 12, loads a trailer with soft white wheat outside of Helix. Oregon's economy is more trade-dependent than other states, according to the revenue forecast.

mation; and other areas. Each of those will have an economic impact, pro or con.

It's long past time for the Legislature, state leadership and the public to set long-term strategies to ensure prosperity

for the state and its residents.

On the Web

State economist predicts 2019 taxpayer 'kicker': bit.ly/2019kicker

Oregon economic and revenue forecast: bit.ly/2019forecast

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GUEST EDITORIALS

Oregon paved the way for ruling on betting

The Register-Guard

The U.S. Supreme Court didn't exactly legalize sports betting in its decision last week. The court nullified a law passed by Congress that prohibited states from allowing sports betting. Oregon was Congress' target when the law was initially proposed — and by the time it passed, it was meant to keep Oregon's sports-betting contagion from spreading.

Oregon got into the sports-betting racket in 1989, when David Dix, a creative state representative from Eugene, went looking for a way to pay for athletic programs at the state's public universities. Dix settled upon the newly created Oregon Lottery, and persuaded the Legislature to create Sports Action. The lottery game allowed players to bet on professional football games and, briefly, pro basketball games as well.

Sports Action raised about \$4 million at first, mostly for non-revenue sports, with half the money dedicated to women's athletics. The professional sports leagues and the NCAA fiercely resisted Sports Action, arguing that Oregon's piddly little game somehow threatened their integrity — never mind that a much larger sports-betting enterprise was well-rooted in neighboring Nevada.

The leagues began with the empty threat that no pro football franchise would ever locate in Oregon. They then turned their attention to Congress, with greater success. The Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act, which bans states from running sports-betting operations, was approved in 1992, but not

before Oregon Sen. Bob Packwood inserted a provision protecting existing state sports-betting games such as Sports Action into a separate piece of legislation.

The Legislature killed Sports Action in 2005, hoping to lure NCAA basketball tournament games to Portland. By then, New Jersey and other states had begun to hunger for the revenue to be obtained from sports betting. By the time New Jersey's lawsuit against the 1992 legislation prevailed, even the pro sports leagues had come halfway around: They're no longer unalterably opposed to sports betting, as long as they get a piece of the action.

The argument that state-run betting undermines the integrity of sports has never been convincing. A more likely source of corruption is the \$150 billion illegal gambling enterprise. At least some of that money will now come above ground, where gambling can be regulated and profits can flow to public purposes rather than mobsters. Sports Action might even be reactivated in Oregon — there would be no shortage of ideas for where to spend the revenue.

Spring brings an uptick of hazards outdoors

Corvallis Gazette-Times

As temperatures in the mid-valley slowly increase as the mid-valley's spring marches onward, there seems like a good time to remind you of some of the horrible things that can happen when the weather turns warmer.

On the top of the list is a new warning from our friends at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Health officials reported recently that the number of people

getting diseases transmitted by mosquito, tick and flea bites has more than tripled in recent years. Furthermore, since 2004, at least nine such diseases have been discovered or newly introduced in the United States, according to a report in The New York Times.

Although much of the uptick (pun intended, more or less) is concentrated in states that tend to have warmer weather, it's not limited merely to the South: New tick-borne diseases such as the Heartland virus (which we never have heard of before and, based solely on the name, have decided we don't want to know about) are growing, along with cases of Lyme disease and other infections.

And growing in a hurry: Between 2004 and 2016, the Times reported, about 643,000 cases of 16 insect-borne illnesses were reported to the CDC. In 2004, the CDC received 27,000 reports. In 2016, that number had risen to about 96,000. (The agency used 2004 as the baseline because that was the year it started to require more detailed reporting about these illnesses.)

Of course, as the CDC noted, the actual number of infections almost certainly is much larger. For example, the CDC estimates that about 300,000 Americans get Lyme disease each year, but only about a tenth of those cases (35,000 in this case) are reported.

It's worth noting that the health officials at the CDC did not urge Americans to hole up inside their houses this summer and to don biohazard suits for those occasions when they absolutely have to go outside — although the CDC is, of course, a notorious killjoy.

Instead, CDC officials issued a fairly common-sense suggestion: When you go outside, don't forget the bug repellent.

The CDC also urged consistent funding for local and state health departments, which

remain the first line of defense against these illnesses but which remain underfunded. In the words of Dr. Robert Redfield, the new head of the CDC: "We must enhance our investment in their ability to fight these diseases."

Redfield was too good a sport to note that the CDC itself is facing the prospect of steep budget cuts, part of the consistent underfunding of the nation's scientific enterprises. This unfortunate trend predates the Trump administration, but you can be sure that we'll be paying the price for it sooner or later. (And probably sooner.)

In the meantime, make a note to grab the bug repellent at the same time that you're tracking down the sunscreen. It can be an ugly mixture, these first few sunny days and tender Oregon skin.

And speaking of spring cautions: As the temperature rises into the 70s and 80s, so does the temptation to cool off in some of the mid-valley's streams, rivers and other bodies of water. You always want to exercise caution when spending time around the water, but this is the time of year when a little extra care is called for: The water may seem inviting, but it's still running cold — and, in some cases, fast.

Fast-running rivers can conceal debris and other potential dangers to swimmers. And hypothermia is a real danger this early in the season.

So follow these common-sense tips: Always swim with a friend and stay in designated swimming areas. Be certain to provide constant supervision to children in or near the water. Wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket.

And don't forget this after you climb out of the water and towel off: Now it's time to put on another coating of bug repellent.