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OUR VIEW

Everyday Oregonians deserve their kicker

Oregon's unique tax "kicker" law is working exactly as intended, potentially sending more than \$1.4 billion — yes, billion — back to taxpayers next year.

Top Democrats in the Legislature's supermajority should respect the law's intent, which is to prevent excessive government spending. Instead, they want to spend your kicker refund for you.

This is despite a new and historic \$1 billion-a-year tax on businesses, while also having about \$2.1 billion more to spend during the current two-year budget period than expected when the biennium began on July 1, 2017.

Democrats already employed fiscal sleight-of-hand only a few weeks ago to reduce the potential kicker by \$108 million.

The Legislature has taken only meager steps to control spending in any meaningful way, and still wants to pass other tax increases.

For any politicians who require a refresher on the kicker, here it is: The Legislature created it 40 years ago in hopes of quelling the tax revolt spreading north from California. A brainchild of the legislative revenue officer, the kicker was a way to guarantee lawmakers could not spend large windfalls. Instead, that money would go back to the taxpayers. Isn't that the way it should be?

The details are that a kicker occurs when state tax revenues from corporations or from individuals and other sources come in



AP Photo/Jonathan J. Cooper
State economists Mark McMullen, left, and John Lehner answer questions from lawmakers in 2015. Last week, they predicted a record-size kicker for Oregon taxpayers.

at least 2 percent higher than projected at the start of the biennium. The entire surplus then is returned to taxpayers as a credit on the next year's income taxes. It's called the "kicker" because the refund kicks in when the 2 percent threshold is reached.

Corporations already have lost their kicker. Voters in 2012 approved a ballot measure diverting the corporate kicker to the State School Fund.

Unless the 2019 Legislature interferes, personal income tax payers will get the credit on this year's taxes when they file their returns next year.

After the record-size kicker was announced last week, Democrats immediately decried it as excessive, unreasonable and unnecessary. They lacked a sense of proportion. "Oregon's economy is

much larger than it used to be, so the kicker is still expected to be smaller than some as a share of biennial collections," state economists Mark McMullen and Josh Lehner said in their quarterly revenue forecast last week.

The final amounts won't be known until the next forecast on Aug. 28, but currently the average filer would receive a \$691 credit. Spent locally, that money would be a boon for economies throughout the state — and help Oregonians shoulder the increased costs coming out of the Legislature.

Under the Oregon Constitution, legislators can reduce or eliminate the personal income tax kicker if two-thirds of representatives and two-thirds of senators give their approval. That would require several Republicans to join Democrats.

Democrats will offer carrots, such as directing some of the kicker money toward rural housing, foster care, higher education or the massive PERS liabilities. Those are worthy projects — and a fine use for the extra money the Legislature already has.

But leave the kicker itself alone. No to Gov. Kate Brown's well-intentioned-but-bad idea of reducing each taxpayer's kicker by \$100 to help pay for PERS.

No to House Speaker Tina Kotek's enigmatic idea of taking half the kicker for rebuilding a bridge on I-205 and supporting green-energy transportation projects — even though reducing Portland-area gridlock would benefit freight traffic from throughout the state. Kotek this week dropped her proposal, saying there wasn't enough support for it. No, duh.

And no to any other idea for taking Oregonians' kicker this year.

In a constituent newsletter last week, Rep. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, capsulized the situation: "Constitutionally, the kicker is a check on excessive taxation. The Oregon Constitution mandates that the excess revenue be returned to Oregonians; unfortunately, that is not the opinion shared by some of my colleagues in the Legislature. However, I believe that every penny should go back to the hardworking Oregonians who contributed to our economic success."

Everyday Oregonians deserve their money. Hands off it, legislators.

LETTERS

'Lysistrata' revisited

After the 25-man Alabama Senate passed America's most restrictive anti-abortion bill on May 14, actress Alyssa Milano suggested that women should withhold sexual privileges from men.

She echoed Greek comic playwright Aristophanes, who composed "Lysistrata" in 411 B.C. Lysistrata, an exceptional woman with mercy and humanity on her side, sought to force men to end the calamitous Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.).

Fast forward to saber-rattling Republicans, currently hinting at a war with Iran, and the ongoing "war" to dismantle Roe v. Wade.

Perhaps our obsession with wars might prompt some women to reconsider Lysistrata's "war." I suspect that Alabama women may not take up arms against their menfolk, withholding sexual privileges.

But whenever men make stupid decisions about women's private parts and a woman's right to have control over her own body, it becomes necessary to cut through the media clutter to raise awareness.

In 2003, Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowee earned a Nobel Peace prize for her protests that included a sex strike to end her country's civil war. She acknowledged that it had little or no effect, but did attract significant media attention.

Actress Milano's proposal probably won't be taken seriously, but she did attract my attention. I recall that Milano was featured in a 1980s ABC hit sitcom called "Who's the Boss?" Intriguing title.

And I recall that, in the ancient Greek theater, all the actors were male. Women were not allowed onstage because that was considered "dangerous." Fascinating.

ROBERT BRAKE
Ocean Park, Washington

Thanks for voters' pamphlet

As a voter in Clatsop County, I want to publicly thank the county commissioners and the county clerk, Tracie Krevanko, for the Voters' Pamphlet, issued for the first time in many years in an off-year election.

Although the Voters' Pamphlet created more work for the county clerk's office, and extra expense for the county, I feel that it was very worthwhile. I was very pleased to be able to read about the candidates who filed a statement for the pam-



phlet. It certainly made the process of informing myself about the candidates easier.

I hope that all Clatsop County voters were equally pleased to have another tool at hand while filling in their ballots.

MARY BETH COTTLE
Cannon Beach

Shedding dams makes sense

Can we save Snake River salmon runs? That question is linked to this one: Can we save the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA)? And: Does it make sense to breach the Lower Snake River dams to save both?

Under average river flows, the Pacific Northwest has an estimated 24 percent energy surplus. Under what the BPA considers "critical water conditions" — that is, the past 100 years' lowest water levels — surplus Pacific Northwest energy sits at 17 percent. In part, due to having to sell that surplus power at ever-lower prices, even at a loss, BPA administrator Elliot Mainzer has recently acknowledged that BPA is financially in crisis.

The Corps of Engineers says the lower Snake River dam turbines have a life expectancy of 35 to 45 years. By 2030, nine of the Lower Snake River turbines will be over 60 years old, and 12 others 50 to 60 years old. The cost of rehabbing all of the turbines: over \$1 billion.

Since the Lower Snake River dams only produce 3 to 4 percent of total Pacific Northwest energy, midst a surplus of at least 17 to 24 percent, the Lower Snake River dams' 3 to 4 percent is already unneeded — it's surplus energy.

Shedding itself of these four dams could very well save not only fish, but the BPA, from extinction.

LUAN PINSON
Vancouver, Washington

Are dams needed?

In the Pacific Northwest's rapidly changing energy scene, are the lower Snake River dams needed?

In its seventh power plan, the Pacific Northwest Power and Conservation Council states that in the Pacific Northwest, energy efficiency alone will meet all pro-

jected future energy demand, and by 2030, will have saved 4,000 average megawatts — the equivalent production of (an imaginary) 16 lower Snake River dams.

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), distributor of energy produced by 31 Columbia Basin dams, says its average cost to generate and market power is \$35.56 per megawatt hour. Since 2010, the cost of wind energy has declined 62 percent, and solar 76 percent.

Idaho Power, for example, recently contracted to purchase solar energy at \$21.75 per megawatt hour. BPA, contrarily, plans to raise public utility district rates by 2.9 percent to \$36.60 by 2021.

In the meantime, the Pacific Northwest has a 17 percent surplus of power. Since the lower Snake River dams produce only 4 percent of the Pacific Northwest's power, it fits into that "surplus" margin.

It's clear that Pacific Northwest needs can be met without the lower Snake River dams, and at lower cost; and considering the cost of losing salmon runs once in the millions, Northwesterners don't need lower Snake River power.

Laurie Kerr
Battle Ground, Washington