

Powerball prize invites myths, misconceptions about lottery

By SCOTT MCFETRIDGE
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — With up to \$1.4 billion at stake in Wednesday's Powerball, questions about the drawing seem to be as abundant as the convenience-store kiosks offering tickets for the record-breaking jackpot.

The inquiries include many myths and misconceptions about the winners, the prize money and the system that decides them. A look at some of the most common questions:

Why are all the jackpot winners from certain states?

Officials with the Multi-State Lottery Association, a group of state lotteries that oversee Powerball, said this is one of the most frequent complaints.

It's "human nature to think the other guy is winning," said Sally Lunsford, public affairs director for the Kansas Lottery.

It's also wrong, though there are anomalies.

For example, in the past two years, Missouri and Tennessee have each been home to three Powerball jackpot winners, while New York, the nation's fourth most populous state, has only had one winner during that span.

Lottery officials, backed by mathematicians, said probabilities equal out over time, but in shorter periods, oddities can occur, in the same way someone could flip a coin and get heads five times in a row.

The Powerball jackpot overstates the winnings.

There's more of a rationale behind this claim. The jackpot is the amount paid out over 30 years and not the amount a winner could receive immediately. So while the current jackpot is listed at \$1.4 billion, a sole winner would only get that much if the person received 29 annual payments. Winners can also choose the cash prize, which is the total amount currently up for grabs, but that is "only" \$868 million.

Gary Grief, executive director of the Texas Lottery, responded that

Powerball prominently displays both the annuity and cash prize figures. The bigger number gets more attention, and Grief said lotteries have taken that approach for decades.

"When the prize gets so big, the critics come out as well," he said.

Winners who take an annuity face big tax dangers.

One of the most persistent misconceptions, officials said, is that winners risk tax trouble if they opt for an annuity but die before all 29 payments are made.

Terry Rich, chief executive of the Iowa Lottery, said he's heard this one frequently and repeatedly explains that if someone dies, that person's estate will treat the annuity like any other asset. A winner's heirs may choose to cash in an annuity and then pay taxes on the money, but that's a choice they must make.

Investment planners note, however, that when winners choose how to receive their money, they should consider their age and whether their mind if some of the

cash remains out of their reach and goes to their heirs instead.

The odds of winning the jackpot are worse than in the past.

This is true, as the Multi-State Lottery Commission last fall added more numbers to choose from. The new system changed the odds from 1 in 175 million to 1 in 292.2 million. But far from hiding the change, the organization trumpeted it as part of an effort to build larger jackpots while also giving away more prizes of \$2 million or less. Without the change, it's unlikely a jackpot would ever come close to the current \$1.4 billion, or \$868 million cash prize.

The smaller the jackpot, the better the odds.

This is false. Your odds for each ticket are 1 in 292.2 million regardless of the jackpot size or how many other people play. If you buy more tickets, your odds increase, but they're still woefully small.

However, it's true that as jackpots increase, more people typically play the game. And the more tickets

that are purchased, the greater the chance that there will be multiple winners.

But this all largely misses the more important fact: The chances of winning are incredibly remote, so it makes little difference whether you'd have to share the money.

What about other uses for such a vast sum of money?

The Powerball prize has grown so large that Gerald Prante, an economics professor at Lynchburg College in Lynchburg, Virginia, has determined that a single winner would likely be among the top 100 income earners in the nation for 2016.

That has made some people uneasy about so much money going to one person when it might be better spent on public needs. But when weighed against typical government spending, the \$1.4 billion looks like a more modest amount. By comparison, California Gov. Jerry Brown last week proposed a \$122.6 billion general fund budget for the nation's most populous state.

REFUGE: Government offices remain closed; schools re-open

Continued from 1A

the destruction of the fence and said the action undermines hard-earned conservation impacts achieved in the area.

"Removing fences, damaging any Refuge property, or unauthorized use of equipment would be additional unlawful actions by the illegal occupiers," Fish and Wildlife said in a statement. "Any movement of cattle onto the Refuge or other activities that are not specifically authorized by USFWS constitutes trespassing."

Sixteen full time employees and one part time employee usually work at the refuge, Holm said. Some who can't work away from the refuge have taken administrative leave, while others are working from home or another office.



AP Photo/Rick Bowmer

A Don't Tread On Me flag flies at the entrance of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Sunday.

In Burns, about 30 miles from the refuge, schools reopened after being canceled for a week over safety concerns due to the refuge standoff.

Government offices in the area remained closed, including those of the Bureau of Land Management.

BLM spokesman Randy Eardley said about 60 BLM employees were working from home.

"There is a very clear threat to BLM employees," Eardley said, but he did not cite any specific threats.

Ammon Bundy called his group's occupation of the

refuge "peaceful" and said the armed men would not leave until the Hammonds are out of prison and abuses against ranchers are exposed. Bundy called the occupation a "moral and righteous stand for the future of this country."

A man representing hunters and anglers, who arrived in Oregon from New Mexico this weekend, condemned the Bundy group at the news conference.

"What I see is a lunatic fringe of extremists who have taken my land over," said New Mexico Wildlife Federation executive director Garrett VeneKlasen. The group represents sportsmen, including hunters and anglers.

Federal, state and local law enforcement officials are monitoring the occupation but have not taken any action.

SNOW: 2015 was Oregon's warmest year on record

Continued from 1A

Melissa Webb, snow hydrologist with the NRCS in Portland, said that could derail snowpack in a hurry. In fact, Webb said snowpack has already dipped from 149 percent to 105 percent in the Umatilla Basin since Christmas Eve, showing just how quickly things can change.

"A couple inches, plus or minus, is a pretty big deal," she said. "We really need to have pretty consistent storms."

December undoubtedly delivered, with Jan. 1 marking the highest snowpack to start a year since 2011. But the effects of recent drought years are cumulative, Webb said. Simply put, it's going to take more than a month of cold and snow to complete the turnaround.

Data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shows that 2015 was Oregon's warmest year on record, and the NRCS already reported last winter yielded the lowest snowpack on record. Those factors combined mean Eastern Oregon is still in moderate to severe drought. Agriculture, fisheries and recreation were all hit

hard by the 2015 drought. Without enough snow melt to recharge streams, some irrigation districts were forced to shut off water early. Low flows and high water temperatures killed off certain populations of fish, prompting the state to impose an unprecedented afternoon ban on fishing for trout, salmon, steelhead and sturgeon.

Wildfire season also lasted roughly three weeks longer in northeast Oregon, without snow cover to keep fuels from drying out early.

"We're very excited to have a good start to the year after the drought last year," Webb said. "We want to make sure we keep building our snowpack to get close to normal water supplies."

Webb said she hopes the three-month forecast proves wrong. History has proven there are many different possibilities when starting out with a great season like this, she said.

"We are definitely in wait-and-see," Webb said. "We've had our share of low snowpack winters in recent years. I'd like to see us buck that trend."

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

DOGS: Up for adoption after they are spayed, neutered Jan. 28

Continued from 1A

two years old. "They are mostly Aussie mixes and heeler mixes," she said.

A spay-and-neuter organization out of Benton City, Washington, organized the rescue effort. Harriet Johnson, director of Prevent Homeless Pets, transported the 20 dogs in her Toyota Sienna van. Thirty more dogs were placed with two other organizations. Before the removal, a group of four Prevent Homeless Pets volunteers went into the residence to vaccinate and worm the dogs.

"Not a single one was spayed or neutered. They'd never had an exam in their

life," Sullenger said, "but none were underweight."

Johnson refused to name the dogs' owner, saying he is a kind soul who was trying to do good and simply couldn't abide seeing puppies starve.

"When you're trying to help, things can easily get out of control," Johnson said. "This is a person who deserves privacy and respect."

She urged others who become overwhelmed to reach out.

"There are groups out there that can help," she said.

Sullenger said the dogs were filthy, but healthy.

"It was not that he abused or neglected them," she said. "He just had too many. He

got in over his head."

Sullenger said eight of the dogs immediately went to foster homes. The other 12 were installed into kennels at the shelter. Another dog that seemed especially frightened went to foster care the next day for some extra loving.

Each dog was bestowed with a Valentine's Day-themed name in preparation for a Valentine's Day adoption event at a Tri-Cities Pet Smart on Feb. 13. The list of monikers includes Lovey, Heartbreaker, Sugar, Romance and Sweet Tart, among others. In one of the kennels, an Aussie mix named Romeo chased a fluorescent-green tennis ball. Juliet, another Aussie mix that is in heat, is being

fostered.

The dogs will get spayed and neutered on Jan. 28 and offered for adoption the following day.

The sudden influx of dogs puts a financial strain on PAWS, Sullenger said. She said the \$125 adoption fee doesn't usually cover spaying and neutering, vaccinations, flea treatment, worm treatment, toys and food. Donations, she said, are welcome.

"We're not getting our usual surrender fees (of \$35 per animal)," she said. "It's been a bit of a financial hit."

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

CABBAGE HILL: Elevation drops about 2,000 feet in six miles

Continued from 1A

Between the holidays and bad weather, Cannon said winter is bad for business — especially when he has to traverse Cabbage Hill.

If he isn't immediately stopped by a road closure or the blinking snow chain lights that automatically disqualify him from using the hill, the gravel ODOT uses to provide traction on the hill wears down his tires. He also risks getting stuck on the other side of a road closure on his way back home.

Paid per mile, Cannon said no one reimburses him if he's forced to stay in La Grande while the weather clears.

Despite these challenges, Cannon said he's come to expect slow business in the winter and budgets his year accordingly.

"If you don't have six months savings, you shouldn't be self-employed," he said.

Even during ideal weather conditions, the incline and decline of Cabbage Hill can be daunting.

"This seven-mile downgrade, 35 miles west of La Grande, Oregon, has some of the most changeable and severe weather conditions in the Northwest," an ODOT publication entitled "Respect the Hill!" states. "These conditions may impair visibility and cause icy road surfaces. You'll lose about 2,000 feet of elevation in



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Semi-trailers, RVs and pickup trucks sit along the side of the eastbound lanes of Interstate 84 as their owners put on traction devices at the bottom of Cabbage Hill outside of Pendleton.

six miles and twist through a double hairpin turn at a 6-percent downgrade."

Strandberg said no single person makes the call to cordon off Cabbage Hill, instead relying on judgment calls from ODOT maintenance staff to determine whether it should be closed or not, relying on observations on road conditions and driving speeds rather than a set of measurable criteria.

Using a combination of Oregon Routes 11, 204 and 82, drivers can travel from Pendleton to La Grande without using I-84, although

ODOT doesn't recommend specific alternate routes because it wants to prevent traffic congestion on smaller state roads during inclement weather.

Even without identifying alternate routes, Strandberg said finding alternate paths of travel can be difficult in Eastern Oregon where there aren't too many redundancies in the road infrastructure.

For people that live in areas solely accessible through I-84, Strandberg said ODOT will allow them to use a limited section of the highway provided they show

identification with their address.

With a distribution center in Pendleton and a branch in La Grande, a closed I-84 seems like a bane to Hodgen Distributing, but Russ Strandholm doesn't worry too much about it.

Strandholm said soft drink and beer demand is generally lower in the winter, meaning that customers can wait a day or two longer for their deliveries.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.



Tell the world how you feel, send a message to your special someone for Valentine's Day!

ONLY \$15⁰⁰ 10 Words + Photo
ONLY \$10⁰⁰ 20 Words

Fill out this form and send to our offices...

Chris McClellan 541-278-2678 211 SE Byers Ave. Pendleton
Shannon Paxton 541-564-4530 333 E Main St. Hermiston

EAST OREGONIAN HERALD

Your Name: _____ Daytime Phone: _____
Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____
Person's Name: _____
Message: _____
 Emailed photo to classifieds@eastoregonian.com
Remember: Please include a check or money order.
East Oregonian \$15 with Pic \$10 without **Publishes Feb. 13**
Hermiston Herald \$15 with Pic \$10 without **Publishes Feb. 10**
 I would like to pay with my credit card (Visa or Mastercard only)
Cardmember's Name: _____
Card Number: _____
Cardholder's Address: _____
Card Type: _____ Exp. Date: _____
Entries must be received by Feb. 3rd at Noon.