

State audit recommends diverting unclaimed Bottle Bill funds

By MICHAEL KOHN
Bend Bulletin

SALEM — Oregonians recycle lots of bottles and cans, but those that are picked up curbside, or are just lost, are never redeemed for their deposit. State auditors now say Oregon has a chance to collect those deposits and use the money for environmental and recycling programs.

That's according to a report issued Tuesday, Nov. 10, by the Secretary of State's Audits Division, which called for a modernization of the groundbreaking Bottle Bill, produced nearly 50 years ago. Those deposits could add tens of millions of dollars to the state's budget.

Under the current system, beverage distributors keep unredeemed deposits. The proposed changes would allow the state to collect the deposits as uncollected property — a potential boon for government environmental programs but at the same time a financial hit for beverage distributors.

The changes stem from Oregon's bottle bill, a landmark program developed in 1971 to help combat rampant litter piling up in forests and along highways. Lawmakers at the time saw



Paula Edgren of Bend recycles bottles at Knott Landfill Recycling & Transfer Facility in Bend.

the idea of a deposit as the best incentive to get Oregonians to return their cans and bottles.

The 5-cent deposit per can was significant in 1971, when a six-pack of beer cost around \$1.05, or about 39% of the sales price. A six-pack of beer today averages around \$10, so the existing 10-cent deposit per can represents only around 6% of the sales price.

Nine other states and British Columbia have since followed Oregon in imple-

menting their bottle deposit rules.

But Oregon is facing budget cuts in upcoming years, according to the audit, and it recommends that the Oregon Liquor Control Commission work with the unclaimed property division to pursue unclaimed property related to the Bottle Bill.

According to the state audit, \$30.6 million in unredeemed deposits were collected last year by beverage distributors. Bryant Haley,

alcohol spokesperson for the state's Liquor Control Commission, said most of that went to the Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative, and the remaining funds were collected by other distributors.

Of the 10 states that have a bottle bill, eight collect unredeemed deposits to support environmental programs or the general fund. The state auditors also recommended expanding the scope of the bottle bill to include wine and

liquor sales.

"Oregon has an opportunity to enhance state revenues by adopting the practices of other states by collecting unredeemed container deposits," according to the audit. "Natural resource programs are facing budget shortfalls and unredeemed containers could help solve some of the gap."

The cooperative, which operates the Bottle Drop recycling centers, is largely funded by the current system and has the most at stake if changes are made to the way unredeemed deposits are handled. Around 10% of bottles are not redeemed, according to the cooperative.

In 2019, the recycling cooperative had a \$44 million budget and received \$18.2 million in funding from unredeemed deposits in Oregon, said Jules Bailey, chief stewardship officer for the recycling co-op. That shortfall required co-op members to pay nearly \$26 million into the system.

"If the state had taken all those unredeemed deposits, it would have increased costs in the system by 69% for our members," said Bailey.

"Frankly, our members would not be able to absorb that, and they would have to

pass it on to their customers. All in all, it would mean the end of the BottleDrop system as we know it and that Oregonians have come to rely on," he said.

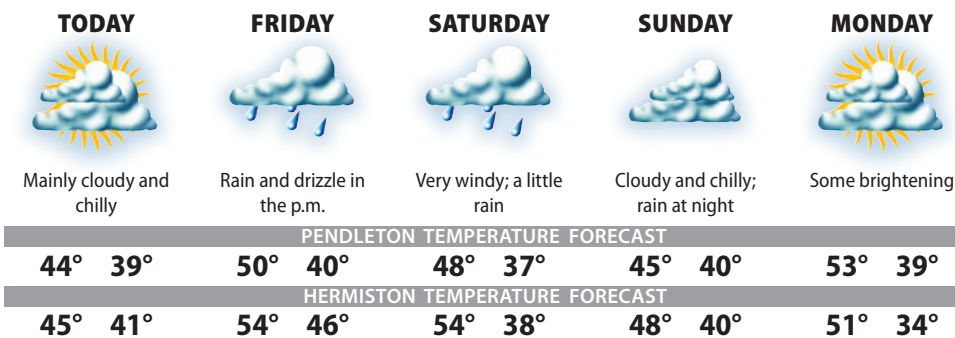
The cooperative, which has over 200 members, including Columbia Distributing and Bigfoot Beverage, argues that states that claim unredeemed deposits achieve less success compared to Oregon, with lower can and bottle return rates.

"Most of those systems are struggling, with return rates below 70%. California just announced their redemption rate has fallen to almost 60%. As a result, other states are looking to copy Oregon's success and program, not the other way around," according to a statement from the cooperative.

Mark Pettinger, spokesperson for the Liquor Control Commission, said the commission's role in changing the rule is limited to compliance and enforcement of the Bottle Bill.

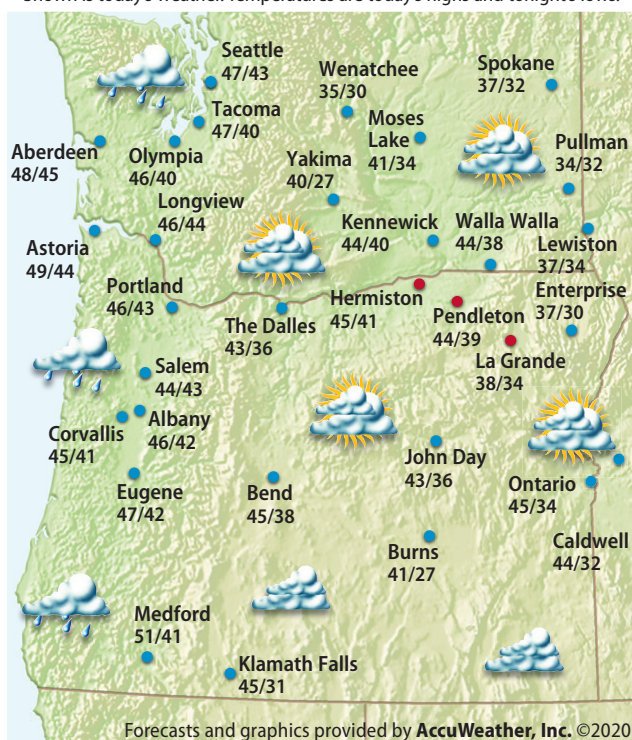
"The audit provides an opportunity to stand back and assess how one of Oregon's most iconic laws could continue to evolve," said Pettinger. "At the governor's direction, we will work with other stakeholders regarding existing unclaimed property laws."

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



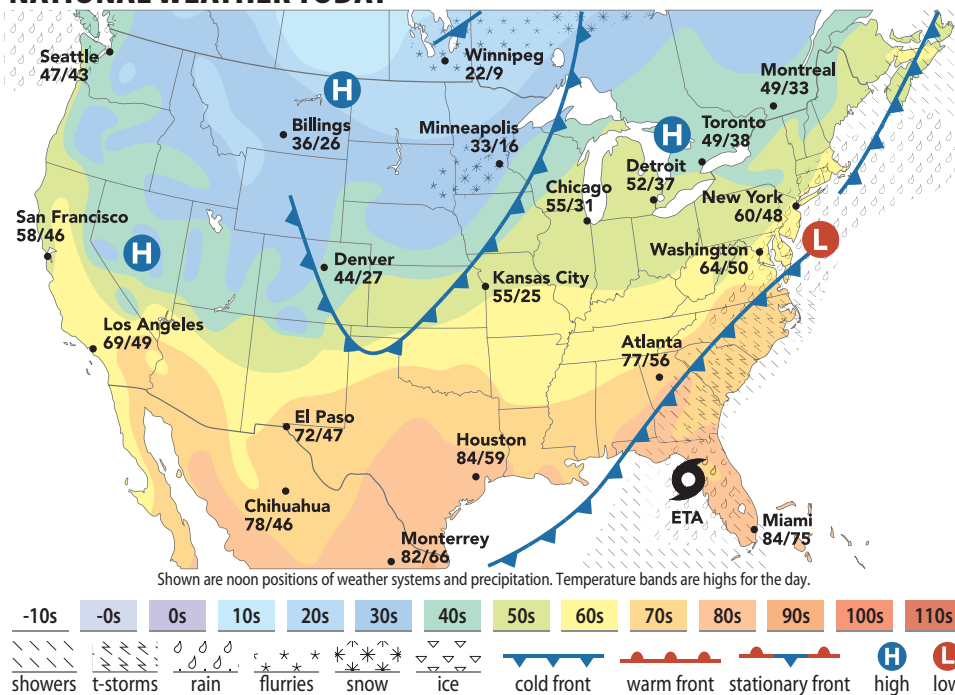
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	45°	32°	
Normals	51°	34°	
Records	69° (1999)	6° (1978)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.22"		
Month to date	1.88"		
Normal month to date	0.45"		
Year to date	11.64"		
Last year to date	11.31"		
Normal year to date	10.48"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	50°	37°	
Normals	53°	34°	
Records	68° (1990)	4° (1978)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.09"		
Month to date	1.25"		
Normal month to date	0.41"		
Year to date	3.54"		
Last year to date	4.94"		
Normal year to date	7.72"		
WINDS (in mph)			
Today	Fri.		
Boardman	SW 4-8	SSW 8-16	
Pendleton	S 4-8	SSW 8-16	
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	6:51 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	4:27 p.m.		
Moonrise today	3:18 a.m.		
Moonset today	3:28 p.m.		
New First Full Last			
Nov 14	Nov 21	Nov 30	Dec 7

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 89° in Zapata, Texas Low -8° in Crested Butte, Colo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Oregon elections director was fired after he detailed problems

By ANDREW SELSKY
Associated Press

SALEM — Oregon's elections director was abruptly fired in a text message by the secretary of state after he pointed out serious issues with the state's aging and vulnerable technology for running elections.

Elections Director Stephen Trout learned in a text message on Nov. 5 — as his department and county elections officials were still counting votes from the Nov. 3 election — that he was out.

On Nov. 6, Secretary of State Bev Clarno, a Republican appointed to the position by Democratic Gov. Kate Brown, announced to county clerks and other elections officials in Oregon's 36 counties that "today is also Steve Trout's last day with the Agency."

Election officials in the state were stunned.

Steve Druckenmiller, the veteran Linn County clerk, said Clarno's action was "dangerous and so ignorant."

"We are still in the election process right now. We are reconciling, we're dealing with problems right now as far as your signatures and communicating with voters who didn't sign the ballots," Druckenmiller said. "We're going to have to do recounts, all of these things."



Bend Bulletin, File/Bend Bulletin

Secretary of State Bev Clarno, a Republican appointed to the position by Democratic Gov. Kate Brown, announced to county clerks and other elections officials in Oregon's 36 counties on Nov. 6, 2020, that "today is also Steve Trout's last day with the Agency."

She doesn't understand elections."

Clarno's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Trout, in a letter emailed Nov. 2 to the Republican and Democratic candidates

to replace Clarno, who did not run, described problems with the internet technology side of the Secretary of State's Office.

He also said federal money had been misspent and that \$11.7 million from the federal government must be returned by Dec. 31 because the Oregon Legislature did not authorize to "spend a penny" of the funds.

This happened even as

the Oregon Centralized Voter Registration system is so old that Microsoft no longer supports the Windows Server 2008 system that it operates on.

The Secretary of State's Office was going to take bids — officially known as a request for proposal — in October for a new system, but Clarno paused this project without consulting with the county clerks or Trout, the ousted election director said.

Furthermore, Trout said calls by himself and other election officials for third-party verification systems to protect Oregon from hacking of election systems went unheeded.

IN BRIEF

Oregon sex workers can apply for relief grants

SALEM — Nearly \$600,000 in federal COVID-relief funds is available for Oregon strippers and sex workers of color who have been financially impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Anyone "who has made income from using their or other people's sexuality to financially assist themselves" can apply, said Cat Hollis, founder of PDX Stripper Strike and Haymarket Pole Collective, which is administering the grant. Priority will be given to Black, Indigenous and transgender applicants, those with minor dependents liv-

ing in the household and those experiencing homelessness.

The funds are part of \$45 million in health equity grants distributed by the Oregon Health Authority.

The grants will allow Haymarket Pole Collective to provide financial assistance to 75 people, who can receive up to \$1,600 in rent assistance, \$500 in utility assistance and \$150 toward internet services.

Applications will be taken through Dec. 1, with funds distributed by Dec. 30.

Most strip club dancers are contractors, not employees, and aren't eligible for traditional unemployment.

— The Oregonian

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