

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

ANDREW CUTLER
Publisher/Editor

KATHRYN B. BROWN
Owner

PHIL WRIGHT
News Editor

ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Editor/Senior Reporter

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 2,

Founded October 16, 1875

A4

OUR VIEW

The kicker may get kicked to the curb

In almost the same breath that state officials announced that an average Oregon taxpayer may get a \$850 kicker tax rebate, they were hinting at changing the kicker.

Oregonians are in for a record kicker rebate because nobody could very well predict the pandemic's economic impact. The kicker law requires very good guesses about revenues by state government or it kicks.

The kicker kicks "if actual state revenues exceed forecasted revenues by 2% or more over

the two-year budget cycle. The excess, including the 2% trigger amount, is returned to taxpayers through a credit on their following year's tax return."

Oregonians are in for a record kicker rebate because nobody could very well predict the pandemic's economic impact.

Oregon is the only state with this kind of law. It is one way, not the most artful way, of keeping a lid on government spending. And voters approved it.

It gets criticized because people who are wealthier tend to benefit more.

You get money kicked back to you based on the taxes you paid. Lower-income people may need a big kicker rebate more, but they get less.

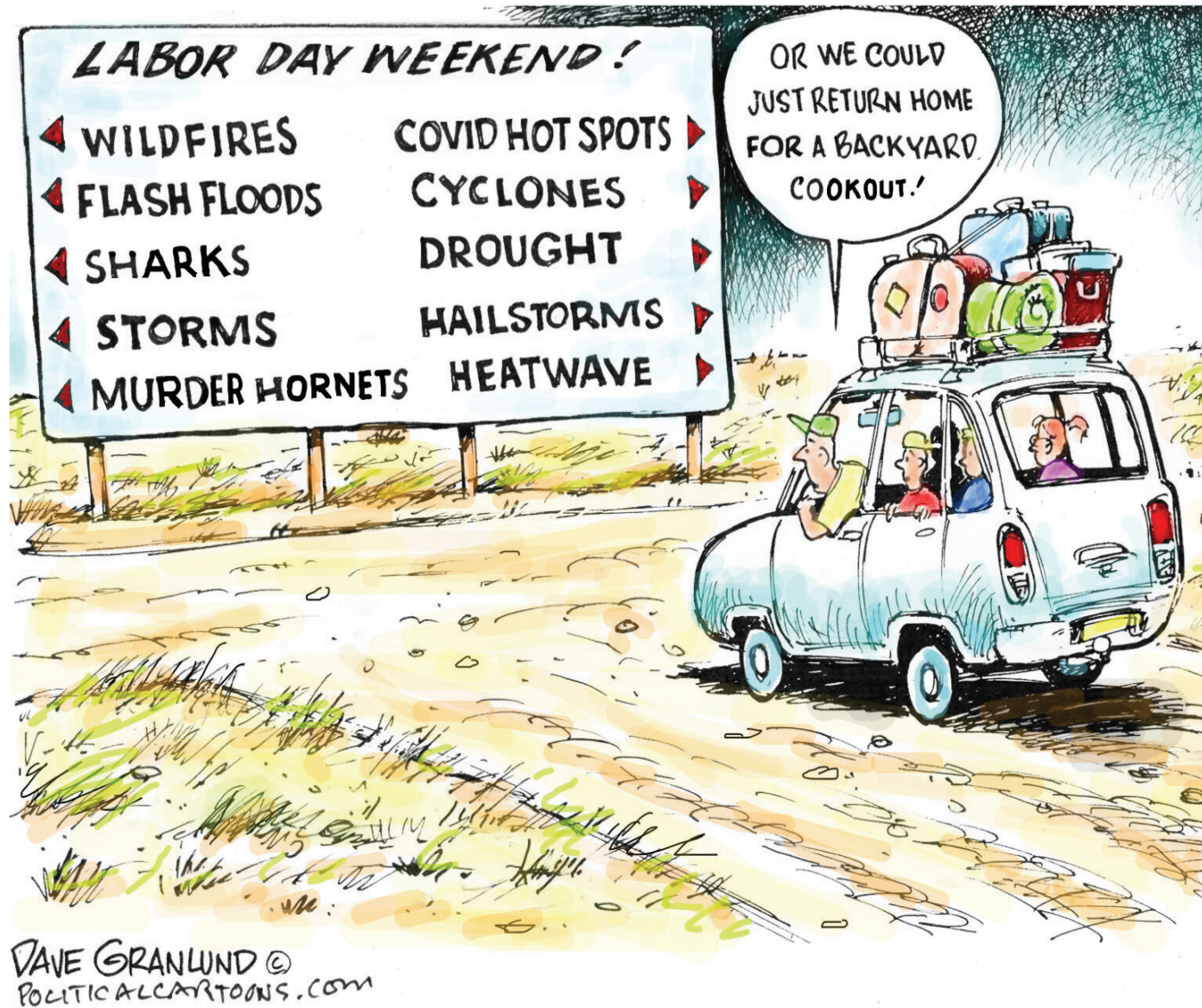
That is an interesting argument because Oregon's income tax system is progressive. So people who earn more pay more in taxes.

So if Oregon were to change the kicker so lower-income people would benefit more from the kicker, that would be a doubly progressive tax system? That may make sense to some.

There also have been proposals to channel kicker money instead to important matters Oregonians need, such as providing more child care or helping to create more affordable housing.

Those are great causes. We'd rather see the money go directly into people's hands and let them decide how it is spent, instead of having the government decide for them.

Treasure your kicker, if you are fortunate enough to get one for the 2021 tax year. It may be the last of its kind.



DAVE GRANLUND ©
POLITICALCARTOONS.COM

Changing our expectations about wildland fire



BILL ANEY
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

Things are different now. In mid-July this year, the Umatilla National Forest had four large wildfires burning at the same time. Conditions were so dry, and firefighters stretched so thin, that for several weeks the entire national forest was closed to any public entry, a heretofore almost unheard-of restriction on public lands in our area.

Now, as we approach September, a fire management team is still trying to corral two large fires in the northern Blues, and there are 16 other large fires burning in Oregon and Washington. To date, more than 1.2 million acres of land have burned in the two states, ringing up almost \$700 million in fire-fighting costs.

If you are numb to these numbers, and are resigned to summer days of smoke-filled skies, then like me you are becoming used to a new normal.

Certainly, climate change and forest conditions have something to do with creating this condition. It really doesn't matter what measure you use; fire seasons are longer, hotter and drier than they were 40 years ago when I started working with wild-fire. This appears to be true globally, with steadily worsening conditions

in temperate zones from Europe to Australia to North America.

In the U.S., our land and forest management practices have contributed to the problem on private and public lands. Since the tragic fires of 1910, when land managers began an all-out war against fire, our forests and shrublands have become more and more choked with biomass. Fire sees biomass as fuel, and large swaths of land covered with dense, dry vegetation are an unending banquet for fire. Coupled with a warming climate, the result is more, larger and more intense wildfires.

Thankfully, the response of fire-fighting agencies isn't simply to throw more firefighters at the problem. This would be a dangerous approach, and no more appropriate than sending battalions of foot soldiers to fight a war against a modern well-equipped adversary. Instead, fire managers work at being smarter, changing tactics in ways that often result in more acres burning but with less risk to firefighters.

More and more often they are using what the landscape gives them to stop fire spread. The old way was to send bulldozers and fire crews to engage in hand-to-hand combat with the blazing menace; the new way is to bring the fire to the firefighters in safer places such as roads, open ridges and other less vegetated areas. In essence, they are fighting fire where the firefighters are more likely to be successful (and

safer). But this approach does result in more acres burned.

As it turns out, this is part of the solution. Our wildlands actually need more fire, not less. Good fires, those burning with low to moderate intensity, create healthier fire-adapted forests. Late-season wildfires that are burning far from homes, communities and infrastructure can and should be allowed to spread until weather extinguishes them.

Fires purposely set by land managers (prescribed fires) are another part of the solution, but as a society we have to be willing to make some sacrifices to make this work at any significant scale. We need to be tolerant of smoke that is created by management-ignited fires in the spring and fall. We need to be willing to accept the risk that comes with burning in the drier portions of the spring and fall, and we need to fund and staff the agencies adequately to carry out burning at a larger scale.

Until that happens, we will continue to have expensive wildfires, and some will be damaging and some will not. Large wildfires that don't cause irreparable harm to things we care about should be seen as a success, allowed to play their role and helping reduce the future risk of large, destructive fire.

Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.

YOUR VIEWS

Rep. Owens a leader we should support

I lived in Burns for a brief time while a military recruiter. The people were kind; I miss them. Even though I'm no longer in Eastern Oregon, I pay close attention to the region. I am always looking for an elected who can help bridge the rural-urban divide.

I believe such a person is found in Rep. Mark Owen, R-Crane. This past year I had a political disagreement with Rep. Owens. At the time I was a Democrat. He certainly received some slings and arrows from me. My points were cogent; he should have folded. No. He was professional, articulate and strong in his defense of Eastern Oregon. And all without yelling. He instantly gained my respect and admiration.

I am an independent on the lookout for unifying politicians. Oregon has been torn asunder by bitter partisan wars. Instead of leading, our elected leaders mangle and evade responsibility. Not Rep. Owens.

The Republican Party of Oregon needs competent leadership. It must learn how to bridge the rural/urban

divide. Tossing rocks at each other over the mountain isn't a viable long-term strategy. Finding strong leaders is how we move forward.

Rep. Owens has demonstrated to me that he understands his mission is to serve the people of Oregon, not his own ego. I wish other politicians in Oregon would follow his example.

Brian Fitzgerald
Happy Valley

We are not isolated, so precaution is necessary

It is common knowledge that the COVID-19 virus is highly contagious. Thus, I find some of the comments made by Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen in a recent East Oregonian article very concerning. "I believe that as Americans, we have the (individual) right to choose," Bowen said.

So, I take his comment by what I read in black and white, and I will not theorize and philosophize on what he could mean. Therefore, by choosing to not wear a mask and not be vaccinated, which go hand-in-hand here in Eastern Oregon, and which greatly increase the spread of the virus, I see such

comments, and choices, as very short-sighted, especially for an elected public servant.

Sheriff Bowen's comments were made in a letter to Gov. Kate Brown after she and her administration issued a mandate that requires masks for everyone inside a public school in Oregon this year. Gov. Brown made it clear her decision was based on science and date.

I agree with a letter in the Saturday, Aug. 24, 2021, EO stating individual "rights" do not give citizens the right and freedom to infect other citizens. Personally, I had my first vaccine shot against COVID-19 before Christmas 2020, and my second two weeks later. However, I still wear a mask as a precaution for the health and well-being of others. As Sheriff Bowen stated, this is my choice, and I do not feel that my rights are being infringed upon.

John Donne's wise words from several centuries ago still hold true: "No man is an island, unto itself." And, of course, the Nobel Prize-winning author Ernest Hemingway borrowed these few words to begin his world-renowned novel, "For Whom the Bell Tolls."

Bob Shippentower
Pendleton

EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

LETTERS

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual letters and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

SEND LETTERS TO:

editor@eastoregonian.com,
or via mail to Andrew Cutler,
211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801