

OUR VIEW

PPP loans  
shouldn't  
be taxed

The federal Paycheck Protection Program was a blessing for many businesses during the pandemic. The relief helped businesses, including The (Bend) Bulletin, keep people employed when the economy slumped.

But an IRS ruling last month would force businesses to pay taxes on the government aid. It's common that businesses are able to deduct expenses, such as payroll and rent from their revenue. The IRS said on Nov. 18 businesses won't be able to do that with PPP money.

The intent of the PPP was clearly to help businesses stay liquid and not go under. The IRS notice will mean the opposite. The decision should be reversed.

Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat, has joined with Republicans to fight it with a bill.

"Treasury's guidance barring deductions for expenses paid by PPP loans is a gut punch for businesses struggling to stay afloat. It defies common sense for Treasury to provide help on the front end, but then take it away on the back end. Our bipartisan bill would fix this mistake and ensure businesses feel confident using PPP funds to keep their workers employed," Wyden said.

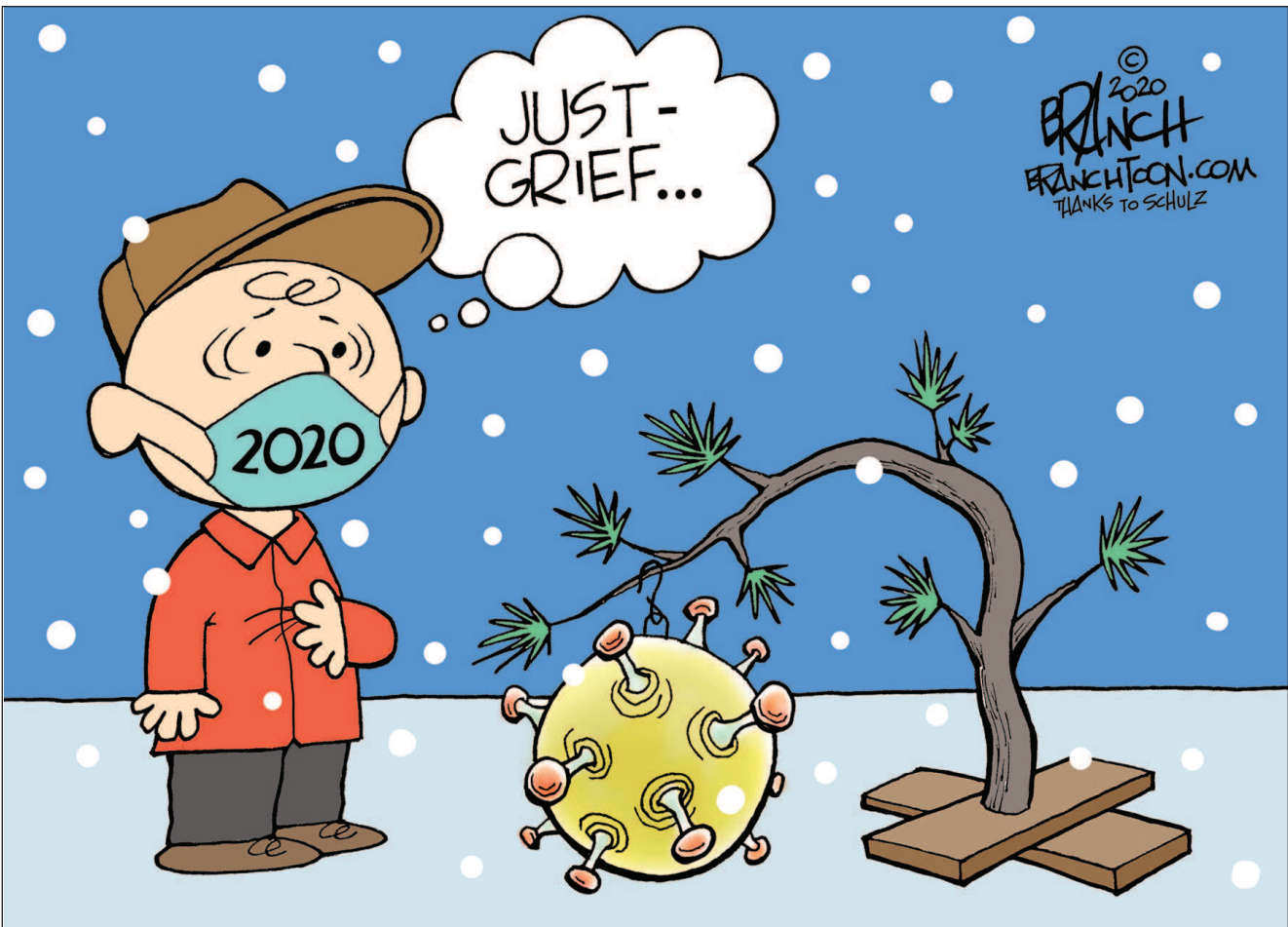
Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley, a Democrat, wants fixes like this, too. He is working to attach a change to a must-pass bill required to fund the government. We did not get a response from Rep. Greg Walden, a Republican, by our deadline.

Yes, we concede the tax code normally does not allow deductions for tax-free income. These are not normal times.

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Testing, not lockdowns, the  
way forward with COVID-19

**By Marie Fishpaw and Paul Winfree**

With COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths climbing, policymakers understandably want a response that protects lives and livelihoods. Many have resorted to an old playbook of blunt mandates, including late-night curfews, travel restrictions, as well as school and business closures. And while we wait at home, our leaders have pinned hopes on a vaccine that remains months away from being widely available.

Unfortunately, these are public health tools predicated on the assumption that it is impossible to know who has the virus. Therefore, we must treat everyone as infected.

However, this doesn't need to be the way. The technology exists to equip everyone with knowledge of their COVID-positive status using self-administered rapid tests. In fact, the Trump administration recently purchased 150 million rapid tests to distribute to those most in need.

But this is nowhere near enough to collapse the outbreak's spread. That would take, according to Harvard epidemiologist Dr. Michael Mina, half the population testing themselves with a rapid test every four days.

That requires more tests — a lot more — to transform the response to the virus. Paul Romer, a Nobel laureate in economics, argues we need to test 50 million people per day, an investment he estimates could cost \$45 billion over the course of three months. This is a snowflake in a storm compared to what has been spent to date in the response and the lives lost already.

Such a model would follow that being used by the NFL, which administers tests to players and other essential employees daily and requires a negative test before entering a NFL facility, along with other mitigation measures including social distancing.

This approach would also meet Americans where they are: Fatigued from both the virus and the response and resistance to additional mandates. It would empower us to know our own status and be reasonably sure others know theirs. Massive distribution of rapid self-tests for use in homes, schools, offices and other public places would replace ignorance with knowledge.

What's in the way? Regulatory barriers, direct funding and leadership.

Realizing the promise of these tests must begin with the Department of Health and Human Services adjusting its regulatory posture. For example, one of the cheapest, most effective rapid tests — delivering results for \$5 in 15 minutes — can give results at home, but HHS hasn't cleared it for home use — not even under the supervision of a medical provider via telehealth. Instead, users have to mail it into a lab, when what's needed to keep pace with the disease are tests with near-instant results that can be done by anyone. This restriction could be understandable if the test is difficult to perform, but it's not.

Additionally, Congress should immediately provide resources that would commit HHS to prepurchasing rapid tests over the next two years. Even if a vaccine is quickly produced and dis-

tributed, it is unlikely to reach healthy populations until 2022. During that time, additional rapid testing will be needed to ensure that the virus is contained and that schools and businesses can safely open and remain open.

And while testing capacity is ramping up, the CDC needs to provide better, clear guidance about who should get tested when. The CDC's guidance remains conflicting and contradictory, with different web pages recommending different things.

Joe Biden has called for implementing widespread testing; Donald Trump should join him in that call. We have no time to waste. As we have entered a season of rising cases, we have already reached unprecedented caseload levels. Policies currently in place leave us no way to determine, on a rapid and widespread basis, who may have the infection and may be spreading it to others. And in response, people are either increasingly resistant to being told what to do and taking no precautions, or returning to their bunkers to wait.

These are times that require our leaders to ask hard questions, make difficult choices and pivot quickly as new tools become available and new information comes in. It's time for our leaders to look seriously at ramping up access to rapid self-testing, and do what it takes to advance it.

Marie Fishpaw is The Heritage Foundation's director of Domestic Policy Studies. Paul Winfree is the think tank's director of Economic Policy Studies.

Eggnog threatens to wear out its welcome

I nudged the carton of eggnog aside to get at a can of soda in the refrigerator and it occurred to me, rather jarringly, how misplaced that carton was.

In time, not in place.

The refrigerator is of course the proper spot to store eggnog, presuming you prefer the smooth rather than the chunky version of that luxurious liquid.

I like the former.

Indeed I feel the same about most dairy products, cottage cheese being an obvious exception, albeit one that acquires its texture intentionally.

What prompted this minor epiphany, as I stood there letting expensively chilled air spill out, was the reality that if I took a few steps and looked at my backyard, what I would see covering the grass was not snow but rather the leaves of our ash and willow trees.

Christmas, the holiday most associated with eggnog, was on that day more than 2 months away — far enough that I hadn't even started thinking about the best place to get stuck while searching for this year's tree.



JAYSON JACOBY

And yet here was this half-gallon carton, its pale yellow surface decorated with renderings of green sprigs of holly, wedged in between the milk and the soda.

We hadn't even pulled the pumpkin decorations from the closet, much less begun to ponder turkey and dressing, but already we were adulterating our morning coffee as though the yule season were nigh.

It happens that I relish a dollop of sweet, decadent eggnog in my coffee.

But I also know, from experience, that long before the first Christmas gift has been wrapped, I'll tire of the taste, blissful though it is, and begin to feel the inexorable tug of the next season.

I don't mean to take issue with the dairy industry.

It is, after all, merely catering

to its customers. If coffee drinkers didn't wish to start replacing regular creamer with eggnog as early as the autumnal equinox, then eggnog's yearly run would revert to its more abbreviated duration.

It is silly for me to lament this trend when the evidence is right there in the fridge.

I'd as well complain about the brewers being heavy-handed with the hops while I'm quaffing an IPA.

Still and all, it seems to me that eggnog's extended stay is but one symptom of an infection that's been spreading for some years.

This is not a dangerous affliction, to be sure. And happily so, what with the microscopic challenges we've been dealing with in 2020.

And yet this trend toward the premature and lengthened celebration of holidays, and specifically certain of their edible accouterments, strikes me as a dismal rite, a diminution of events that are special in part because of their brevity.

I remember, and with a fondness enriched by nostalgia, the era

when the flavor of spiced pumpkin was confined to pies that didn't emerge from ovens until Thanksgiving.

Today that essence, both in flavor and aroma versions, infuses a range of products so extensive and diverse that even the most sober empiricist might be susceptible to theories about America's marketing gurus engaging in a conspiracy.

Among the items which have been given the pumpkin spice treatment are some potentially sublime examples. Twinkies, for instance, although ambrosial in their standard form, can potentially be, if not improved, then at least have their excellence expanded.

I also endorse pumpkin spice candy corn, which are to my palate only subtly different from the traditional version.

But pumpkin spice potato chips are an abomination, an unforgivable insult to the perfection that is the relationship between thinly sliced potatoes, hot oil and a dash of salt.

And a great many of the other attempts to capitalize on this pecu-

liar phenomenon scarcely deserve mention.

Let sparkling pumpkin spice beverage represent this litany of silliness, and have done with it.

As with most consumer fads I suspect the pumpkin spice obsession will eventually sour and shrivel. Perhaps a few items will persist, having earned their place in the pantheon of America's processed foods. The aforementioned Twinkies, for example, ought to have staying power, even beyond their famously immense shelf life.

But I hope that when the pumpkin spice period ends, the dairies will revert to churning out eggnog only when the tamaracks have gone orange and the Halloween candy stash is, if not gone, then at least noticeably depleted.

I pine for a return of the halcyon days when my appetite for eggnog didn't dissipate before I even had to hunt up the snow shovel from wherever it gets off to every summer.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.