

Nonbeliever credits work, not 'blessings,' for success



DEAR ABBY
ADVICE

DEAR ABBY: My husband and I have had some crazy life swings since the beginning of the pandemic, mostly positive. I found a wonderful, well-paying job that I enjoy. In our 16th year of marriage, we have also brought a healthy, happy daughter into our lives. We recently bought a lovely home, and have added another, nicer, used car to our assets. In addition, my job allows my husband to live his dream of being a stay-at-home dad with our daughter.

I come from a very religious

family, although I am no longer religious. We don't attend church services with the family, and it seems they have adopted the philosophy of mostly "don't ask and we won't tell." My dilemma is: How should I respond to their constant comments that we are "so blessed" to be where we are?

I have worked extremely long, hard hours to get to this point in my career. I put myself through school with no support from my family and worked my butt off to get us to where we are. Yes, I'm thankful for the people I've worked with who have helped me to grow and reach this point. However, it feels wrong for me to equate my success to being blessed from God.

That statement comes up

numerous times during family get-togethers. Normally, I ignore it or say we feel very lucky to have what we do. Should I continue saying that or ignore them altogether? Is there a tactful response I'm not seeing in this kind of awkward situation? — **DESERVING IN MICHIGAN**

DEAR DESERVING: In the interest of family harmony, smile, nod and agree with the person making the comment. Of course you have worked hard and are deserving of your success. But to announce it in this instance and with those deeply religious people would be braggadocious and is uncalled for. This is not a personal putdown, so continue to resist the urge.

DEAR ABBY: I have been

happily married for 32 years. My wife is going to a girls' thing this coming Saturday and asked me what I will be doing. I said I'm going to a funeral for a girl I knew in high school. (We were never boyfriend/girlfriend, just friends.)

My wife asked me how I heard about it, and I shared that one of my friends mentioned it during our Monday night football chat. She said, "You haven't talked to her in more than 40 years. You really didn't know her anymore, but you're going to her funeral?" I said yes. Then she said it is "eerie, strange and weird" and it seems inappropriate. I reminded her that people print obituaries to let people know.

I asked the guy who told me

what he thought about me going. He said it sounded fine to him, but I shouldn't go stag. I said, "Doesn't 'stag' mean single and looking? I'm an old married man." I'm perplexed about both of these conversations. Am I missing something? AM I a weirdo if I go? Can I go alone? — **PAYING RESPECTS IN CALIFORNIA**

DEAR PAYING RESPECTS: The answers to your questions are no and yes. If you feel the need to pay last respects to a friend from high school, there's nothing "weird" about doing so. Your football friend may have substituted the word "stag" for the word "solo," which means "alone." (I see no reason why you shouldn't attend the funeral alone if the spirit moves you.)

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

Please hold: Pricy way to jump IRS phone line at tax time

By **FATIMA HUSSEIN**
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — If there's one thing that pains everyone trying to reach the IRS at tax time, it's being stuck on endless hold. Well, not everyone.

E. Martin Davidoff's accounting firm spends upwards of \$5,000 a year to a company that can zip him and others to the front of the line to get through to an IRS customer service representative. He says paying for enQ's line-jumping service cuts out hours every day that he would otherwise spend waiting to talk to an agent.

"It's the epitome of American entrepreneurship," says Davidoff, who heads the National Tax Controversy Practice for Prager Metis in New Jersey.

Consumer advocates are less enamored with enQ, seeing it as a pay-to-play arrangement that gives those who can afford it a

way to get quick access to what should be a free government service equally available to all.

Members of Congress from both parties have concerns, too. The service was expected to come up on Thursday, Feb. 17, during the Senate Finance Committee's hearing on customer service problems at the IRS, where call volumes have reached record levels.

"No taxpayers should have to fork over \$1,000 to a private company to get their phone calls answered by the IRS. It's maddening," committee chairman Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, wrote in an email to the AP. "Rebuilding this agency so it can serve hardworking taxpayers is a top priority, and the committee will again examine the issue this week."

Last November, Sens. Bill Cassidy, R-La.; Todd Young, R-Ind.; Bob Menendez, D-N.J.; and Mark Warner, D-Va., wrote



A sign is displayed outside the Internal Revenue Service building May 4, 2021, in Washington. A private company, enQ, lets those who are willing to pay jump to the front of the line to get their phone calls answered at the IRS. That has attracted the attention of lawmakers who want the IRS to investigate the company's impact on the agency's phone capacity.

to the IRS to urge the agency to investigate how the company's robocalls to the IRS affect agency phone systems.

The company's bots regularly get in the queue for various IRS service lines, and then clients who

dial in to enQ can swap in to spots at the front of the waiting list.

Tax professionals who need regular access to IRS services during the busy filing season say that while enQ may be controversial, it's necessary for them to

do complicated tax work. The service, which can cost \$300 a month or \$1,000 a year, claims to cut phone hold times by up to 90%.

And the problem is immense. At the height of the 2021 filing season, the IRS was receiving more than 1,500 calls per second.

National Taxpayer Advocate Erin Collins, who serves as an IRS ombudsman, told a House subcommittee earlier this month that taxpayers had more difficulty reaching the IRS by phone in 2021 than ever before. Because of staffing issues and an overload of work, just 11% of the 282 million phone calls received last year were answered.

Andrew Valiente, founder and CEO of enQ, declined to comment in detail, stating in an email that he was "hyper-focused on building" the business. In a video on his website, he says his approach may be "unorthodox," but it's

also a "no-brainer" to avoid wasting time on hold.

Mark Steber, chief tax officer at Jackson Hewitt Tax Service, is among the many CPAs who use enQ.

"We're conflicted that it costs money to access a free government service," Steber said, "but in the service of serving American taxpayers, I kind of fault the IRS for not having funding and resources — but they haven't been funded for 20 years."

Legislation that would have given the IRS billions of dollars to bolster its enforcement capacity and update everything from printers to photocopiers to the agency's staffing levels and improving telephone service is stalled in Congress.

Robert Nassau, director of the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic at Syracuse University College of Law, said getting through to an IRS agent can feel like winning the lottery.

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weather

	TONIGHT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED
	A bit of snow and rain	Colder with a little snow	Cold with snow showers	Quite cold	Turning cloudy; very cold
Baker City	26	36 21	32 14	24 3	27 8
La Grande	34	37 27	34 16	21 1	27 12
Enterprise	28	33 21	32 12	19 -4	19 13
Comfort Index™	3	0	0	0	0

Comfort Index takes into account how the weather will feel based on a combination of factors. A rating of 10 feels very comfortable while a rating of 0 feels very uncomfortable.

ALMANAC	THURSDAY EXTREMES
<p>TEMPERATURES</p> <p>High Thursday: 37°</p> <p>Low Thursday: 16°</p> <p>PRECIPITATION (inches)</p> <p>Thursday: 0.00</p> <p>Month to date: Trace</p> <p>Normal month to date: 0.36</p> <p>Year to date: 0.38</p> <p>Normal year to date: 1.06</p>	<p>NATION (for the 48 contiguous states)</p> <p>High: 90°</p> <p>Low: -28°</p> <p>Wettest: 3.63"</p> <p>OREGON</p> <p>High: 71°</p> <p>Low: 11°</p> <p>Wettest: Trace</p>

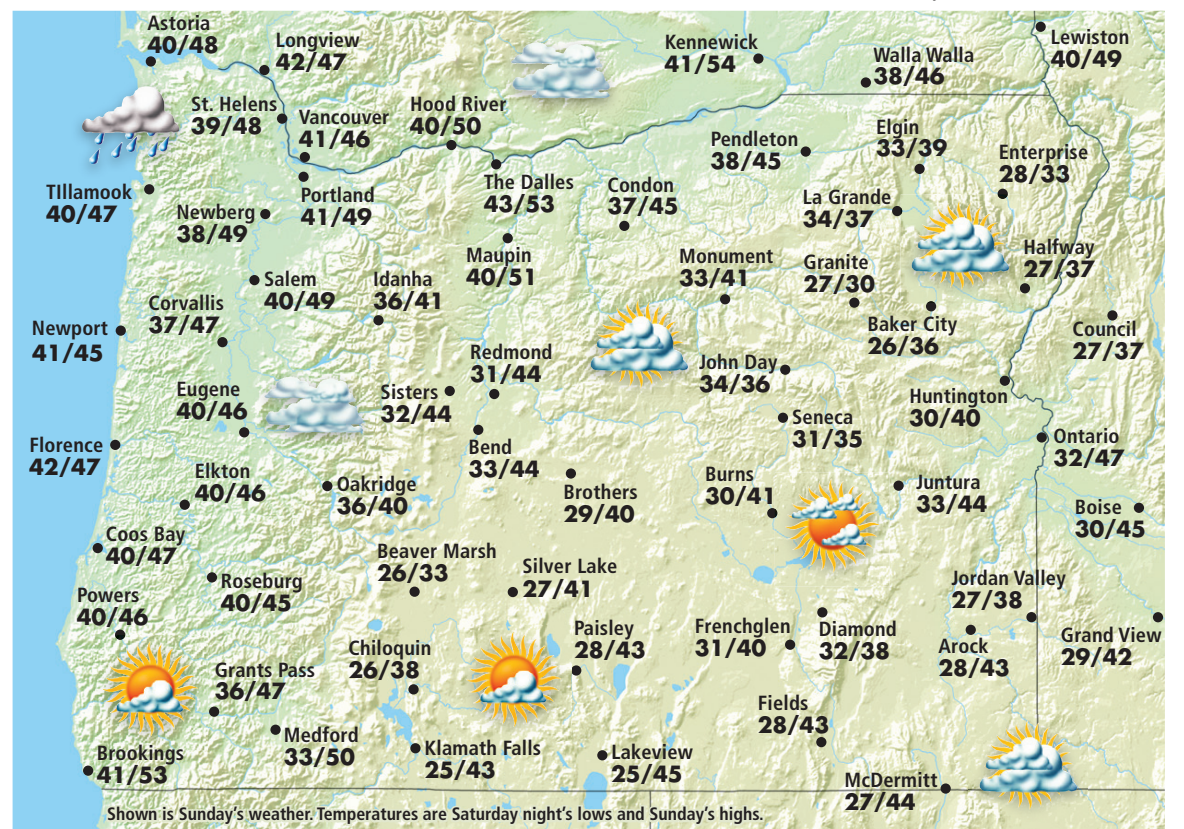
AGRICULTURAL INFO.	HAY INFORMATION SUNDAY
<p>Lowest relative humidity: 55%</p> <p>Afternoon wind: WNW at 8 to 16 mph</p> <p>Hours of sunshine: 2.0</p> <p>Evapotranspiration: 0.04</p>	<p>Phillips Reservoir: 3% of capacity</p> <p>Unity Reservoir: 31% of capacity</p> <p>Owyhee Reservoir: 22% of capacity</p> <p>McKay Reservoir: 40% of capacity</p> <p>Wallowa Lake: 25% of capacity</p> <p>Thief Valley Reservoir: 46% of capacity</p>

RESERVOIR STORAGE (through midnight Friday)	SUN & MOON
<p>Phillips Reservoir: 3% of capacity</p> <p>Unity Reservoir: 31% of capacity</p> <p>Owyhee Reservoir: 22% of capacity</p> <p>McKay Reservoir: 40% of capacity</p> <p>Wallowa Lake: 25% of capacity</p> <p>Thief Valley Reservoir: 46% of capacity</p>	<p>SAT. SUN.</p> <p>Sunrise: 6:48 a.m. 6:46 a.m.</p> <p>Sunset: 5:25 p.m. 5:27 p.m.</p> <p>Moonrise: 9:00 p.m. 10:13 p.m.</p> <p>Moonset: 8:28 a.m. 8:49 a.m.</p>

STREAM FLOWS (through midnight Thursday)
<p>Grande Ronde at Troy: 1690 cfs</p> <p>Thief Valley Reservoir near North Powder: 1 cfs</p> <p>Burnt River near Unity: 6 cfs</p> <p>Umatilla River near Gibbon: 201 cfs</p> <p>Minam River at Minam: 133 cfs</p> <p>Powder River near Richland: 50 cfs</p>

AROUND OREGON AND THE REGION

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REGIONAL CITIES

City	SUN.	MON.	City	SUN.	MON.
Astoria	48/36/sh	48/30/r	Lewiston	49/34/sn	41/22/sn
Bend	44/27/sf	42/16/sn	Longview	47/39/sh	47/32/r
Boise	45/27/pc	41/25/sf	Meacham	36/26/sn	33/16/sf
Brookings	53/38/pc	52/35/pc	Medford	50/31/c	48/29/sh
Burns	41/23/sh	38/16/sf	Newport	45/38/sh	45/33/r
Coos Bay	47/37/sh	44/30/sh	Olympia	49/31/sh	46/28/c
Corvallis	47/33/sh	46/27/r	Ontario	47/30/pc	46/26/sf
Council	37/18/sn	36/11/sf	Pasco	55/31/sh	44/24/sn
Elgin	39/26/sn	34/16/sf	Pendleton	45/33/sh	41/19/sf
Eugene	46/35/sh	45/29/r	Portland	49/37/sh	48/29/r
Hermiston	51/37/pc	47/24/c	Powers	46/38/sh	44/33/sh
Hood River	50/37/pc	49/25/r	Redmond	44/27/sf	42/17/sn
Imnaha	42/30/sn	36/14/sf	Roseburg	45/35/sh	42/33/c
John Day	36/26/sn	32/14/sf	Salem	49/36/sh	48/29/r
Joseph	33/21/sn	29/9/sf	Spokane	42/24/pc	29/12/c
Kennewick	54/34/pc	45/24/sn	The Dalles	53/40/pc	50/27/r
Klamath Falls	43/21/c	39/18/sn	Ukiah	35/25/sn	33/7/sf
Lakeview	45/22/c	36/17/sn	Walla Walla	46/33/sh	39/19/sn

RECREATION FORECAST SUNDAY

ANTHONY LAKES	PHILLIPS LAKE
Snow, 1-2"	A little snow
16 7	34 21
MT. EMILY REC.	BROWNLEE RES.
Snow, 1-2"; colder	A little snow
27 20	39 22
EAGLE CAP WILD.	EMIGRANT ST. PARK
Snow, 1-2"; colder	Snow, 1-2"; colder
20 8	32 24
WALLOWA LAKE	MCKAY RESERVOIR
A little a.m. snow	Rain/snow showers
33 21	43 31
THIEF VALLEY RES.	RED BRIDGE ST. PARK
A little a.m. snow	A little snow
36 21	37 27

Veterans Appreciation Day

at Anthony Lakes

Complementary skiing for Veterans and their families

February 28, 2022

Details at AnthonyLakes.com