

Problems with state accounting, again

The Oregon Secretary of State's Office audits tell us what we know but need to be reminded about: State government makes mistakes with money.

Every year there's a roundup of these mistakes. And it's clear it's necessary. For the fiscal year 2020, state auditors found \$6.4 billion in accounting errors. That's right, \$6.4 billion.

Those were unintentional mistakes. It's not like somebody was trying to abscond with \$6.4 billion. They were mistakes. Basically, numbers were put in the wrong column and later caught, thanks to state audits.

What can be more important is when the audits uncover weaknesses in the policies for handling money.

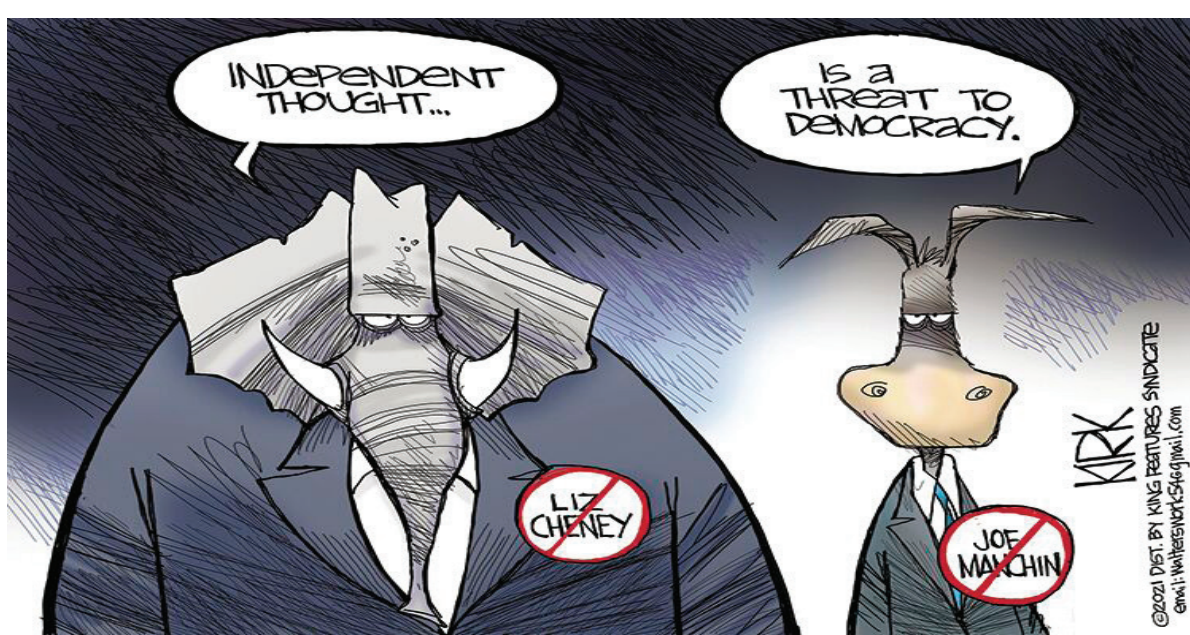
For instance, the Department of Consumer and Business Services is a state agency dedicated to consumer protection and business regulation. It failed to properly follow new accounting rules required for fiscal year 2020. Other state agencies got it right. The department misinterpreted the new rules and reported

about \$400 million incorrectly. That department also failed to have required documentation explaining how it made decisions about handling money in two areas, such as determining what is uncollectible money.

And there's more. When state auditors tested some spending to ensure proper procedures are followed so federal funds may be used to pay for them, it found mistakes. The biggest problem was in the child care and development fund. That is a federal grant program that helps provide child care services for low-income families and improve child care overall. Auditors found \$4.2 million in errors. Numbers were miscalculated, provider copays were off, there was a lack of documentation to back up payments and more.

New report. Similar conclusions. Without state auditors peering over the shoulders of other state agencies, even more mistakes would be made.

Fortunately, they caught these mistakes, all \$6.4 billion of them. It does make you wonder, though, what wasn't caught.



FARMER'S FATE

Muscle car marriage

My husband and I recently hiked to some natural hot springs to celebrate 16 years of wedded bliss. After a pleasurable 2-mile hike, we were soaking in a beautiful spring in the middle of a snowy forest. While laying with our backs against some large rocks, breathing in the mountain mist and watching our two boys splashing and building dams, we reminisced...

"Hard to believe it's been more than 20 years since we met," I said. "Hopefully you're not ready to trade me in for a newer, younger model," I teased, splashing water in his direction.

"Not a chance," he said, reaching for my hand. "I have a classic muscle car — that's a keeper. You don't trade those off for a new Geo Metro."

We laughed, but as I closed my eyes and leaned back to soak in the soothing hot water, his words kept rattling around in my head, "I have a classic muscle car..."

Relationships are like cars. Are you getting one that will last the duration? Or are you planning to upgrade every few years?

Everyone says, "they don't make 'em like they used to," a phrase I think can be applied to both women and cars. In some ways that's an advantage — I mean, I love my heated seats in the winter — but vintage cars had a certain style and class that satellite radios and heated seats just can't make up for. They had distinct body lines, and the extras were more than just apps on a digital dashboard.

There was substance to the women and cars of yesterday. They were beautiful and functional. They could churn the butter, wash the laundry, raise the kids, tend the animals, cook a lovely dinner for their husband all while wearing a dress with their hair in a lovely up-do. From hand cranks to push button starts, women and cars have definitely changed. Gone are the white gloves and calling cards, and no



Brianna Walker

longer do we have a foot dimmer switch or dual fuel tanks.

Kids today probably have no idea that most cars used to come equipped with cigarette lighters and ashtrays — although most of the ashtrays I ever saw, were just a place to store loose coins and gum wrappers. The ashtrays have been replaced by USB ports and 12-volt outlets much like the gloves and netted derby hats have been replaced by tattoos and low rise jeans.

There is just something beautiful when a well-cared for muscle car drives up. It's like watching Audrey Hepburn step onto the stage or Jackie Kennedy Onassis elegantly poised next to her husband — Lady Gaga in a raw meat outfit just can't compare, just as a Ford Pinto holds no glory next to a Chevy Chevelle SS.

The classics had their hood ornaments — rockets, marlins and jaguars. Once these multidimensional hood ornaments and decorative trunk badges doubled as latches and tag lights. They were the brooches of yesteryear. Today, emblems have become little more than a bunch of logos trapped inside trapezoids and circles.

Whitewall tires were like slipping into a pair of heels, while the tail fins — the most recognizable staple of American muscles cars — acted like a set of earrings to complete the ensemble. Spare tires were full size, not little doughnuts, and in many old cars were actually used as part of the decor — form and function. Let us not forget those great little wing-windows — when you wanted just a bit of fresh air blowing through the car — perfect for car-sick kids.

And the chrome ... on everything. I admit it, I just can't get into the "blacked out" look of today's gener-

ation of wheels and bumpers. Maybe I'm part magpie and attracted to sparkly things — but there is just something about chrome wheels and accessories that really make a car pop. Guess my husband's beard really isn't turning gray — he's just accessorizing with a little chrome, all in the name of timeless classic.

All of these thoughts were going through my head while I soaked in the hot springs.

"You're lips are twitching," my husband commented. "What are you thinking about?"

"Just thinking how lucky you are to have a classic car instead of a low mileage, metric-mobile."

"Yup," he teased, "they run hotter, louder, have different timing than everything else and never worry about emissions."

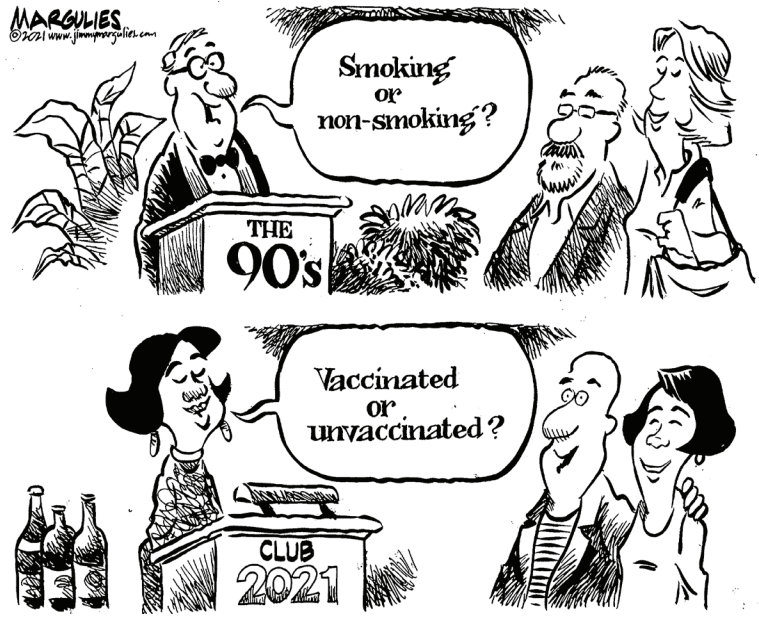
I rolled my eyes. Then with just a hint of a smile he said, "And then there's the wood paneling that could be reminiscent of varicose veins..."

"Guess it's a good thing you bought a Shelby GT and not a wood paneled station wagon!" I stuck out my tongue.

Our trip ended, but I still haven't been able to shake the thought that marriage is much like taking care of a car. It's so important to pick out the right one, and then with the right care, it can last your lifetime. In our marriage we have hit a few unexpected potholes that have caused minor dents and dings — but we were quick to fix them, and over the last 16 years, I think the value of our classic car marriage has only increased.

Pulling into a parking lot, there are times the rumbling engine and white wall tires draw a few looks of envy — but it's no secret. It's just love and maintenance and an air freshener that smells like freshly cut alfalfa!

Brianna Walker occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.



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EDUCATION CORNER

Keep them writing

It's hard to believe school is out for the summer or soon will be. There was no in-person schooling all year in some places, and others had all different modes of learning happening. No question, as far as education goes, this was one atypical year worldwide, and here we are back to summer vacation and that age-old question, "How do I keep my child/children engaged in academics?"

Writing is the highest form of language processing we have in communication, making it one of the most challenging skills for some students, and also why children often resist it. Writing is a learned skill, not a natural skill like eating. Therefore, it requires more brainpower and work. The question becomes how do we keep children writing over the summer or other times when they are not in school? One thought might be through letter or note writing during the summer. They can write one or two notes each day. They can write to family and friends or even members of your household. The objective is to have them write.

Having children write cards to others, no matter what age, forces them to use multiple cognitive skills they will need in their adult life. Because it's hard, you can expect some possible



Dr. Scott Smith

resistance because they have to recall information, transcribe that information into words and then write it. Taking the time to tell you who they are writing to and what they are writing about first scaffolds the skills to assist them in writing to the person. Their card or note should be at least three to five sentences. With young children, you can have them draw a picture and then tell you about their image, while you write it out for them, but older students need to write their own. Also, having them tell you and writing it out for them can be beneficial for younger children. They can read it back and, better yet, copy it to their card or paper.

Over this past year, with the pandemic, most everyone has felt disconnected at some point or on some level. It has been an emotional time for everyone, from kids to the elderly. Steven Petrow states in his column that handwritten notes and cards have a more significant impact not only for the person receiving but also for the person writing the message. This creates a multi-purpose use of this time to have your children write notes to others over the summer.

Reading is not left out in this process either. Once written, have them read it back and edit as needed or as you wish. Don't stress over mistakes because as they continue writing cards, their writing will improve, and friends and grandparents will love cards in any condition.

Hand-written notes are the best if possible. There is research showing that handwriting is linked to higher brain function. Younger children's manuscript is excellent. Cursive penmanship can help struggling students' brains process to connect the letters and focus attention.

Hopefully, they will also receive notes from people they have written to, which will engage their reading and comprehension skills when those notes come. This type of passive learning will have a more educational impact on your children than trying to have them read and write as if they were in school every day.

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