

The kicker may get kicked

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."

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, would that 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.

TAIWAN'S WORST-CASE SCENARIO



Farmer's Fate: How full is your glass?

Is the glass half full, or half empty? Henry David Thoreau once wrote, "It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see." And this last week provided many opportunities to look and see. It's been unusually hot for this time of year, which means that everyone has been putting in even longer hours than usual to keep things irrigated and alive. The crops are drying up, the animals are heating up and we are trying our best to keep our chins up as we go through the long, hot days.

We were a few weeks later than usual shearing our sheep — which normally wouldn't have mattered — but this year, the poor animals were so hot. We kept sprinklers on in their pasture trying to keep the temperature down as best as possible, but they looked miserable in their wool coats in triple-digit weather. Elvis, our buck, was getting up there in age, but has been doing well — at least until the mercury topped the thermometer. While waiting in line to be sheared, the poor old guy laid down and died. Elvis has officially left the barn — may he rest happy in those heavenly pastures where the sun never heats over 80 degrees.

Elvis had set the tone for the next few weeks. One of our tractors ended up at the John Deere dealership for some major repairs, while another blew a front tire driving down the road. Even our camp trailer had gone in for work on its slide-outs. And just as quickly as one problem was fixed, another popped up. While swathing one afternoon, I see a plume of smoke rise above the skyline. As it was in the direction of several of our wheat fields, my husband went to investigate. It wasn't our wheat — but it was our straw. My husband, along with many other farmers and neighbors,

spent the rest of the day helping to keep the fire from destroying the surrounding wheat fields.

A few days later, our son called with knotted trouble one afternoon. He'd done everything he knew, but it still wouldn't work. My husband headed out to help. A few hours later, my husband was still digging grass out of the baler. When I finished swathing and got home, I threw together some food for the hungry boys. They'd rolled out of bed at 3:30 that morning, and were very hungry. Lunch in hand, I walked outside to find nothing to drive but my motorcycle. I had to do a little consolidating to get the lunch in the saddlebag. Less than a mile down the road, I shift up, and the bike sputtered and died. I coasted off the road and checked my gas tank — bone dry. By the time I finally reached the field, the gummy bears were more like gummy forests, and the cold drinks were tepid at best. But to a hungry stomach, none of that matters. While the kids were wolfing down their lunch, my husband tried starting the baler again. When the PTO turned on with a loud clunk, his face clouded. Climbing underneath the baler, his shoulders slumped — all six needles just broke. Yet another five-digit repair bill. So, is the glass half empty? Or half full?

As we pulled handful after handful of grass hay out of the chamber, I kept thinking about that glass.

The optimist says: The glass is half full.

The pessimist says: The glass is half empty.

The Eskimo says: Let's talk about the benefits of ice.

The artist uses it to rinse out his brushes.

The engineer says: The glass is twice as big as it needs to be.

The feminist says: A man would probably get a full glass.

The salesman says: Will the glass sell better marketed as half full or half empty?

The accountant says: The glass is 50% in the red.

The sommelier says: It's a standard 5-ounce pour. It leaves room in the glass for the wine to oxygenate.

The mom says: It doesn't matter. Without a coaster, it will still leave a ring.

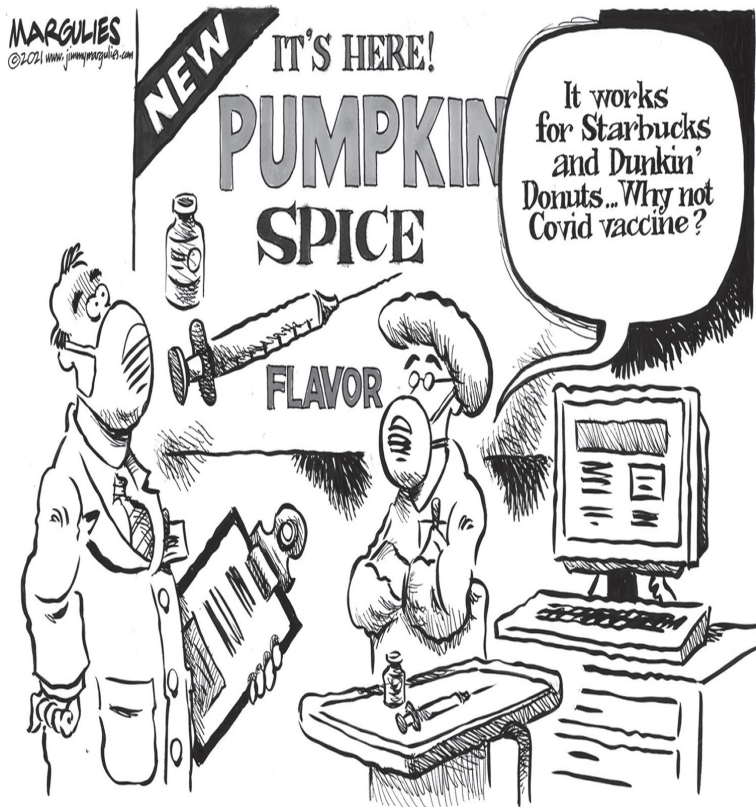
The great-grandpa says: Some just see my teeth in it and get freaked out.

The farmer says: You're missing the point. Finish the line of pipe, turn the pump on and then the glass can be refilled!

When you look ahead in your life, do you expect things to work out for the best, or do you assume the worst? When we envision the future, our rostral anterior cingulate cortex determines whether we see clear, blue skies or dark storm clouds. But optimism and pessimism are not hardwired. We can overcome our natural tendency toward doom and gloom. We can dwell on the miseries of the past and pick at the scabs of every wound — or can we make a fresh start. Be grateful for what we have. Gummy forests taste just the same as gummy bears. Cherish our relationships. How amazing is it that I can spend every day working with my husband and boys? Our lives are richer when we choose optimism.

As my husband climbs out from under the baler, covered in hay and grease, he smiles and says, "The baler's out of commission. Let's take that glass and refill it from the boat."

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



WHERE TO WRITE

- GRANT COUNTY**
- Grant County Courthouse** — 201 S. Humbolt St., Suite 280, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0059. Fax: 541-575-2248.
 - Canyon City** — P.O. Box 276, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0509. Fax: 541-575-0515. Email: tocc1862@centurylink.net.
 - Dayville** — P.O. Box 321, Dayville 97825. Phone: 541-987-2188. Fax: 541-987-2187. Email: dville@ortelco.net.
 - John Day** — 450 E. Main St, John Day, 97845. Phone: 541-575-0028. Fax: 541-575-1721. Email: cityjd@centurytel.net.
 - Long Creek** — P.O. Box 489, Long Creek 97856. Phone: 541-421-3601. Fax: 541-421-3075. Email: info@cityoflongcreek.com.
 - Monument** — P.O. Box 426, Monument 97864. Phone and fax: 541-934-2025. Email: cityofmonument@centurytel.net.
 - Mt. Vernon** — P.O. Box 647, Mt. Vernon 97865. Phone: 541-932-4688. Fax: 541-932-4222. Email: cmtv@ortelco.net.
 - Prairie City** — P.O. Box 370, Prairie City 97869. Phone: 541-820-3605. Fax: 820-3566. Email: pchall@ortelco.net.
 - Seneca** — P.O. Box 208, Seneca 97873. Phone and fax: 541-542-2161. Email: senecaoregon@gmail.com.
- SALEM**
- Gov. Kate Brown, D** — 254 State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-378-3111. Fax: 503-378-6827. Website: governor.state.or.us/governor.html.
 - Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: 503-986-1180. Website: leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
 - Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313, oregonlegislature.gov.
 - Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Valle** — 900 Court St. NE, S-301, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1730. Website: oregonlegislature.gov/findley. Email: sen.lynnfindley@oregonlegislature.gov.
 - Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane** — 900 Court St. NE, H-475, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1460. District address: 258 S. Oregon St., Ontario OR 97914. District phone: 541-889-8866. Website: oregonlegislature.gov/findley. Email: rep.markowens@oregonlegislature.gov.
- WASHINGTON, D.C.**
- The White House**, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20500; Phone: 202-456-1111; Switchboard: 202-456-1414.
 - U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D** — 516 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-5244. Email: wayne_kinney@wyden.senate.gov. Website: <http://wyden.senate.gov>. Fax: 202-228-3997.
 - U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D** — 313 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753. Email: senator@merkley.senate.gov. Fax: 202-228-3997. Oregon offices include One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St., Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; and 310 S.E. Second St., Suite 105, Pendleton, OR 97801. Phone: 503-326-3386; 541-278-1129. Fax: 503-326-2990.
 - U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R** — (Second District) 1239 Longworth Building, Washington D.C. 20515. Phone: 202-225-6730. No direct email because of spam. Website: walden.house.gov. Fax: 202-225-5774. Ontario office: 2430 SW Fourth Ave., Suite 2, Ontario, OR 97914. Phone: 541-709-2040. Medford office: 14 N. Central Ave., Suite 112, Medford, OR 97501. Phone: 541-776-4646. Fax: 541-779-0204.
 - Pending Bills:** For information on bills in Congress. Phone: 202-225-1772.

'Many more hospitalizations among children and young adults'

To the Editor:
In studying the COVID-19 data from the Oregon Health Authority, I found that one statistic stands out.

Grant County has by far the highest rate of infections among residents below the age of 18, around 13%. Only Jefferson County comes close, at around 9%.

Of the 131 child infections recorded through August 21, only 24 were from last spring's school outbreaks. How are kids getting infected?

This problem goes beyond our by-now familiar controversies over masks and vaccines (although I feel these are necessary). Lake, Malheur and Harney counties have lower rates of vaccination than Grant County, but all three have less than half our rate of child infections.

I hope that the Grant County Court and the school districts will consult with public health authorities and seek ways to keep children safe from the virus, which in its current delta variant form is causing many more hospitalizations among children and young adults.

Matt Goodwin
Prairie City

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Liberty comes with responsibilities

To the Editor:

Grant County commissioners just submitted to the governor a very flawed letter on our behalf. In making their case to take back local control of COVID-19 mandates, they made misleading and unreasoned claims. They stated that with only seven cases of COVID this summer, state mandates did not fit our widely dispersed rural population. However, they seriously failed to update the county infection rate surging since early August (highest in the state, Aug. 26), most occurring since the fair where people gathered from all over the county.

Focus needs to be back on prevention of virus spread. But in giving favor to misinformed advocates for individual liberties over community health, commissioners are asking that school employees and health care workers be given a choice to get the vaccine or get tested once a week. How might their policy play out in reality? The delta variant appears to be contagious as early as two days before it's even detectable. If a staff member is tested only once a week, they could spread the virus for up to five days before being diagnosed with COVID-19, expos-

ing many vulnerable patients or unvaccinated young children.

Rather than making public health safety the top priority, county commissioners are enabling individuals who, based on politics, emotions or misinformation, choose not to trust scientifically proven effectiveness of masks and vaccines.

The legal argument for the well-being of the public over individual liberty has been determined for generations. Recently, conservative Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett rejected an appeal by non-vaccinators (who fought Indiana University's vaccine mandate), citing that an individual's constitutional rights do not take precedence over the safety of others. Supreme Court decisions conclude: Personal liberty is not assured without regard for injury you may cause to others; your liberties are limited if the lives of others are threatened by your choices. People who understand this do not see mask or vaccine mandates as an end to liberties or liberties being taken away. They see liberty coming with responsibilities to others. If the county commissioners had the wisdom to understand this, they would have written a reasoned (not an ignorant) letter to the governor. They didn't.

Kay Schurer Steele
Ritter



Grant County's Weekly Newspaper

- Editor & General Manager** Sean Hart, editor@bmeagle.com
- Reporter** Steven Mitchell, steven@bmeagle.com
- Sports** sports@bmeagle.com
- Multimedia** Alex Wittwer, awittwer@eomediagroup.com
- Marketing Rep** Kim Kell, ads@bmeagle.com
- Office Assistant** Alixandra Hand, office@bmeagle.com

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