Tom’s Tidbits
A call for your support

Our Feature Articles

DENY KPOJ!
The chorus of opposing voices is growing

Who do you trust?
Our answer to a client’s important question

Does baby need a new pair of shoes?
How to pick the right tires for your vehicle

Our Monthly Columns

"What NOW?!!" Toons
Our monthly checking with Keith

Drew's Kitchen
Cheddar scalloped potatoes

Shop Talk
Keeping the Washington 522 debate alive

Health Notes-
Keep all your eggs in one basket

Sellwood Bridge Update
New traffic signal makes life easier

Book Spotlight
The Crash of 2016

Humorousness
Take the Grinch test

Popcorn Shorts
Cool and important stuff that’s too short for a big article
- How NOT to relive your childhood
- The state of American education
- ALEC tries to tax the sun
- The cheapest cars ever made

News To Make You Furious
Prisons for Profit update
Greetings!

It’s been slightly over a year since we lost a good friend... November 9, 2012, was the day that Progressive Talk died in Portland. Yes, KPOJ continues as an automated feed of sports talk, but the KPOJ we all knew is gone. As everyone waits for the new XRAY-FM to come on line early next year I still have a couple KPOJ-related issues on my mind to close out 2013. The first is our country’s crippling lack of balanced information and its effect on our democracy. This month’s “DENY KPOJ” article will tell you about the petition we started last month to deny their license renewal, why we did it, how it’s going, and how you can help. The second issue may not have the nationwide importance of media consolidation but it may have an even greater impact on us here at the shop...

KPOJ was a beacon of solid information, but another thing that made it special was the fact that it was a LOCAL station. Today many radio stations’ content is fed to them from afar, and they fill in local traffic and news reports to make it sound like they’re local. As a real local station KPOJ was an excellent venue for LOCAL businesses, especially Progressive ones, to advertise. Over the years KPOJ introduced us to hundreds of new clients, helping our business grow. Now it’s gone, and that stream of new clients is gone with it. It’s a cut that in itself has been hard to deal with, but it’s not the only challenge we’re facing.

You certainly know that the Sellwood Bridge Project sits right on our doorstep. Although the bridge is safe and open, the project has still meant a drop off in business as people avoid the construction. While there are traffic slowdowns, the inconvenience shouldn’t stand in the way of anyone who wants to use our service. Nevertheless, we’ve seen a drop in people coming in. We made plans to weather the bridge rebuild, but the reality of the impact is worse than we had expected.

We are known for quality auto repair, our extraordinary service and being involved in local causes, but something basic can’t be overlooked: we’re a business, and the life of any business depends on new clients. That’s why I’d specifically like to ask for your help. Your personal referrals have always been our number one source of new clients and they are needed now more than ever... To make it easy to refer someone new to us we’re offering a 20% off labor coupon for YOU if you buy a Gift Certificate for $50 or more before the end of the year, which could easily save you more than $50 when you do your next repair! And keep an eye out for more rewards... in January and February we’re planning a “Client Referral Roundup” to encourage referrals and benefit some of the non-profit groups featured in our past Charitable Giving Calendars.

With help from our many loyal clients we will make it through this bridge nightmare so that we will be able to continue our tradition of impeccable service for years to come.

Take Care and Make a Great Holiday season!
What NOW?!! Toons
Our monthly check in with Keith Tucker

THE TRANS PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP!

NOT AGAIN!

YET ANOTHER FREE TRADE DEAL!
AND A MAJOR THREAT TO...
OUR JOBS,
OUR ECONOMY,
AND OUR NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY!

DON'T LET OUR CONGRESS FAST TRACK IT!

© KEITH TUCKER
WWW.WHATNOWTOONS.COM
DENY KPOJ!

The chorus of voices is growing

Knowledge is power, and it always has been. The flip side of that is that ignorance is weakness. KPOJ was an oasis of knowledge in a desert of corporatist and right wing propaganda, and its switch to sports has left us all weaker. Interestingly, though, the licenses for all Oregon radio stations expire in 2014, meaning KPOJ is currently up for renewal. We think this is an ideal opportunity to point out that broadcasters are licensed to “act in the public interest”, so we created a petition to deny their renewal. It’s such a good idea that it’s catching on, and in some surprising places...

As we said in last month’s article, KPOJ will have their license renewed. It’s a forgone conclusion. No matter what we, the public, say or want, it will happen. The FCC has blatantly failed to enforce the mandate of stations to “serve the public interest”, and it shows no sign of starting. ClearChannel, owner of KPOJ, is an 800-pound gorilla in the media world and they’re guaranteed to get what they want when it comes to licenses. And yet, we still feel that the public should be heard.

There are two ways to protest a license. The first is to file a “petition to deny”, a formal legal objection to the renewal. This can get quite involved and expensive, but there is a less formal way. Anyone can file informal objections prior to staff action on the application, so we created a petition that anyone can sign. It says...

“Thomas Jefferson called information “the currency of democracy”, but today’s data blizzard doesn’t equate to information. Bias, unreliability, and outright deception are pervasive. Political talk radio notoriously presents just one side of a many-sided discussion, and KPOJ once served to counterbalance that monolith.

Radio stations only exist because the public sets rules for scarce broadcast spectrum, creating the value that translates into ad revenue. In return they are obligated to act in the public interest by serving the informational needs of that public. By switching to Sports (the third such station in Portland) and dropping its Progressive talk format (the only one in Portland) KPOJ abrogated its responsibility to serve the public. They manifestly failed to act in the most basic public interest, and should have no right to reap the rewards of a society they do not contribute to.

We, the undersigned, ask the FCC not to renew KPOJ’s broadcast license.”

If this sounds like something you can get behind, you can sign it by clicking here, and please forward the link to your friends! We’ll collect signatures until December 31, 2013, and then send the petition to the FCC. We’ll all see what reaction, if any, they have.

As we said, the idea of protesting the renewal is spreading in some interesting ways. If you’re a longtime listener of Thom Hartmann, Progressive radio icon, then you’ve probably heard this story about his encounter with comedian and activist Dick Gregory...

“In the middle of our discussion about the United States and its unfortunate military adventures abroad, Dick dropped on me the most profound comment I’ve ever heard about foreign policy and human nature: “I don’t know why America always thinks she has to run all around the world forcing people to take our way of governance at the barrel of a gun,” he said. He
paused, then added with a sly grin, “When you’ve got something really good, you don’t have to force it on people... they will steal it!””

Our petition may not be as good as democracy, but it has been good enough to inspire an imitator. A couple weeks after we started ours, the folks at BlueOregon posted this one...

“In November 2012, Clear Channel dropped Portland’s only commercial progressive talk radio format and switched to sports, making KPOJ the third sports station in the Portland market. In doing so, Clear Channel failed in its obligation to air programming that is responsive to the needs and problems of our community. Clear Channel has not managed KPOJ in the public interest as required by law. We ask that the FCC not renew Clear Channel’s license for KPOJ.”

This is why Dick Gregory’s insight is so important... a good idea is a good idea, so the more people who participate in it the better off we’ll all be. The FCC needs to hear from as many people as possible, and it doesn’t matter where those voices come from. Sign ours first, but we encourage you to go to BlueOregon’s site and sign theirs as well.

If you’d like to send your own thoughts separately from either petition, that’s pretty easy too. Your comment should identify the station’s call sign (KPOJ), city and state (Portland, OR), the station’s facility ID number (53069), and the license renewal application file number (BR20130930BBC). Mail an original and one copy of your comments to:

Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Room TW-A325
Washington, D.C. 20554
Attention: Audio department

And from all of us, thank you for your support!
One of the biggest complaints about the auto repair industry is the habit some shops have of selling unneeded repairs to naïve customers. Most people are rightly cautious about this, so a main reason clients come to us is for the integrity of our advice. We NEVER recommend any unnecessary services and we prioritize all our advice so you can make informed decisions about your options, but even our clients might sleep easier by confirming our advice against other sources. This month someone did, but they found a significant difference between our advice and the advice of the manufacturers. Who was right? We think our answer to our client may give you an insight into the way the auto industry works, and maybe a little peace of mind if this ever happens to you...

Email from Jim E...

I took [my Yaris] to your shop for an oil change and inspection. I was told the automatic transmission fluid is dark and the transmission needs to be power flushed. The rear brakes also need to be cleaned and adjusted.

Before doing it myself I checked online, as I could find no transmission dipstick. Imagine my surprise to read that Toyota recommends the fluid not be changed *for the life of the car* and that power flushing can *seriously* damage the transmission. I also found that the rear brakes require *no* maintenance until there is a failure of the shoes or wheel cylinder.

I started taking my wife’s car to you because I thought that, supporting a progressive station like KPOJ, you would have higher standards than the gas station on the corner. I’m sorely disappointed. I expect supporters of progressive causes to have integrity and to display it. I hope that this was a one-time fluke, but sadly, given that this is the second time your service manager has recommended *completely unnecessary* procedures, I’m forced to question that integrity.

So... why should I bring my car back to you, again?

Our response...

Hi Jim,

Thank you for taking the time to write to us. You said you thought we recommended unneeded services to you, and I want to correct that right away. The integrity and accuracy of our service recommendations are two of the biggest reasons people come to us, so we take any issue with that very seriously. We never advise any service to a client unless it is necessary to their safety, prevents breakdowns, or makes sense for the maintenance of their vehicle! You had several specific criticisms related to your Yaris that I should address individually, but I think if I can explain what we recommended and why that you’ll have no qualms about bringing your car back to us for many years to come.
The two issues you raised were our recommendation that your transmission needed to be power flushed and the rear brakes needed to be cleaned and adjusted. I need to agree with you on part of this, because we shouldn’t have used the term “power flush”. For many cars “power flush” is the best procedure for transmission fluid changes, but the correct procedure for the Yaris is indeed “drain and fill” (which is what we would have done in servicing). However, the ASE-Certified technician inspecting your vehicle checked your transmission fluid, noted that it was discolored, and recommended it be changed. I do apologize for our inaccurate wording, but we stand by the basic recommendation.

On your brakes, while the rear brakes on most vehicles do adjust automatically they still need attention. Rear brakes can wear irregularly and loose tolerances, fail to adjust properly, and/or become glazed. This causes the rear brakes to stop performing their share of the stopping force, creating undo wear on the front brakes. Shortened brake life, warped rotors, and increased stopping distance can all be caused by rear brakes that do not do their share of the work. Again, we stand by our recommendation for brake maintenance.

The fact that our recommendations disagree with the Yaris owner’s manual doesn’t mean your service wasn’t needed, but I certainly understand why you are bothered by the discrepancy. Yes, Toyota says that the fluid doesn’t need to be changed “for the life of the car” and that the brakes don’t need maintenance, but they may have a very different definition of the car’s life than you (or we) do. To you, the life of the car means “as long as you own it” but to Toyota, the life of the car means its “expected design life”. This subtle difference has very real implications. For example, there is no such thing as “lifetime transmission fluid”. The fluid in your Yaris breaks down over time like all transmission fluids do. It could very well make it to 100k miles without being replaced but the damage to your transmission will not be undone by a fluid replacement at that point. The Yaris has a design life of about 100,000 miles, meaning that if you follow the Toyota recommendations your Yaris is expected to reach the end of its service life in another 62,000 miles.

This ambiguity in wording is becoming more common throughout the industry. As cars get more expensive manufacturers are doing everything they can to increase their price advantages over their competitors, especially on the economy models. “Overall Cost of Ownership” is one of their prime competitive areas. To lower this lifetime cost they are stretching prudent recommendations to their breaking point. As just one example, oil changes should be done about every 4000 miles (less often with synthetic oil), but if the manufacturer recommends changes every 6000 miles then they’ve cut the lifetime oil change expense by 33%. (I’ve seen recommended manufacturer oil change intervals as high as 10,000 miles!) This lowered cost of maintenance is an important sales point for them, but not in your interest if you intend to keep the vehicle for as long as possible.

There are at least two strategies for planning vehicle maintenance. One is the “use it up” plan, in which the owner puts the absolute minimum maintenance into the vehicle with the knowledge that it will have a shorter useful life. The other is the “take care of it and drive it until the wheels fall off” plan, in which repairs are made and maintenance done proactively to extend the life of the vehicle as long as possible. There are many valid reasons to follow either path, and we do offer different advice depending on which path our client is on. Our default position, though, is extending the useful life of the vehicle. This is the position we assumed with your Yaris recommendations, perhaps incorrectly. If your intention actually is to run it as cheaply as possible and then get rid of the vehicle at about 100K miles, then it would be fine to follow the owner’s manual standards.

Your letter brought up the points that our recommendations differed from what you found online, and that you expected more from us than from the gas station on the corner. The more you know about your vehicle the more useful our services will be to you, so we encourage our clients to educate themselves about their vehicles. The net is usually a good place to do it. Please feel free to check anything we tell you against any source you can find, but please also understand the difference between general online information and vehicle-specific advice from ASE-certified personnel based on inspection of your specific...
vehicle! The net cannot diagnose, much less fix your vehicle, and it can’t explain our advice. If, for any reason, you have questions or concerns about what we told you please call us! Our Service Advisors will be glad to answer any question you might have... that’s why they’re here!

Finally, here a few of the most important differences between us and the corner gas station... Unlike the corner station, our Service Advisors are salaried, not commissioned, meaning they have no incentive to sell you anything you don’t need. Our Techs are paid hourly, not flat-rate, so they are incentivized to care for your vehicle as a whole as well as to take the time to do each repair thoroughly and correctly. And, unlike the gas station, we are one of the very few ASE Blue-Seal Certified shops in Portland, ensuring you have the very best facility caring for your vehicle. Everything we do is intentionally designed to respond to our client’s interests, which isn’t usually the case with a gas station.

I’m glad you first got to know us through KPOJ, because the philosophy I was able to convey there is the philosophy I’ve built this company on. I want clients to come to us with the highest possible expectations! Through every repair we do, through every conversation with a client, through the quality and professionalism our employees bring to their work, we do our best to live up to those high standards every day. If you ever think we missed the boat in some way, please don’t assume it’s because we’re being dishonest! Call and let us explain. We aren’t perfect and we do make mistakes, but I can assure you that you’ll never see a situation where we knowingly advised you to do anything that’s not in your best interests.

There’s the owner’s manual, the internet, dealer recommendations, and our recommendations. You’ll find variances between them all, and which one you follow depends on your individual ownership goals and who you chose to trust.

I hope this answered your basic question- “why should I bring by car back to you again”. We think that the more you understand our recommendations and services, the more useful we will be to you and the happier you will be as a client. If you have any further questions our Service Advisors will be glad to help, and we look forward to seeing you on your next visit!

Sincerely,
Our recent cold weather snap was blessedly ice-free, but ice and rain highlight traction problems that are a year-round issue. If your vehicle is functioning correctly then your tires are the only part touching the road, which means four little areas, each only about the size of a paperback book, are all that’s keeping you in contact with the road and in control. The proper choice of tires is critical, but not all tires are created equal. The correct tire depends on your vehicle, your driving habits, the area of country you live in, and more. It’s a lot of information to balance, so we put together a primer that will be useful for anyone needing to replace their vehicles’ shoes…

Before we start telling you about where the rubber meets the road, it would be helpful to define a few basic terms. A tire’s description and specifications can be found in its sales literature, on the sticker applied to a new tire’s tread, or on the side wall of the tire. There are specifications that document everything from the physical dimensions of the tire to its usage, speed rating, load rating, treadwear rating, traction and temperature rating. The most permanent record of these specifications is molded into one of the sidewalls of every tire. (A note- these specifications are only on one side of the tire. Tires can be mounted such that you can’t see the specs on the tires on your vehicle; they may be mounted facing inboard).

One other thing… you may get advice from friends, the internet, or even mechanics about what tires to buy. While you may have many options for quality and types of tires, certain specifications are specific to each vehicle; size, speed rating, and load rating for starters. Your individual vehicle’s tire specs can be found on the driver’s side door pillar, glove box door, or in your owner’s manual, and you should never go outside these recommended standards! Of course, you can always call our salaried Service Advisors to get guidance on the proper tires for your vehicle. And now, without further ado, we plunge into the world of tire descriptions and specifications…

What your tire specification numbers mean
Tire specifications cover seven basic points: Size, Load Rating, Weather Rating, Speed Rating, Treadwear, Traction, and Temperature.

- **Size**
  All tires have size markings, for instance “195/75R14” or “P185/65R14”. Each of those numbers refers to a specific dimension on the tire. Let’s take the example of “195/75R14” and go through each number…

  - **“195” is the width** (in millimeters) of the tire at its widest point. The widest point is at the “bulge”, not at the tread.
  - **“75” is the aspect ratio**, the ratio of the width to the height of a tire. It’s the distance from the bead of the tire (the part of the tire that matches against the rim) to the ground, divided by
the tire’s width (the 195 number above). So in this case, the ratio is 3:4, or 75 percent meaning the tire is 75% as tall as wide. Tires with the same aspect ratio get wider as they get taller.

- “R” means a radial tire. Sometimes you’ll also see “P” (passenger) or “LT” (light truck) as well.
- “14” is the mounting diameter, or the size of the hole in the tire. It’s also the size rim you’ll need for a given tire. Remembering that tire widths are measured in millimeters, guess what units they use for mounting diameter? Inches, of course!

- **Load rating**
The Load Rating is a comparison of the relative load carrying capabilities of the tire. The higher the tire’s load rating, the more it can carry. Typical passenger and light truck load ratings range from 71 to 110, or 761-2337 pounds. **Load Rating requirements vary by vehicle model. Always get the proper load rating for your vehicle!** A common example of a load-rating mistake happens on the Toyota Prius. Although it’s a compact car, the Prius is surprisingly heavy and needs a higher load-rated tire. For example, the Prius (a very heavy vehicle) should use an 89 rated tire, while the Corolla can use just an 87.

- **Weather rating** (AKA: mud and snow rated)
All-Season rated tires are marked with the **M/S (mud and snow) designation** on the tire sidewall. M/S tires are specially designed for traction in wet or slippery conditions. Special tread patterns and rubber compounds are used that maintain pliability in cold weather and minimize the tradeoff between winter grip and dry wear. **In the Northwest everyone should run All-Season rated tires.**

- **Speed rating**
The speed rating designates the tires ability to shed heat built up during higher speed operation. Some tire sizes will have limited speed rating choices, for example, most low profile tires will come with HR or higher. The price goes up along with the speed rating, so don’t buy a higher speed rated tire than is recommended for your vehicle. **In most cases the lowest speed rating will easily cover normal driving.** After all, how often do you drive over 100mph continuously for an hour? Even if you were to run an SR-rated tire at speeds over 100mph for a sustained period the tire would probably not fail. The speed ratings are...

  - SR= 105 mph
  - HR= 115 mph
  - TR= 125 mph
  - VR= 150 mph
  - ZR= 180 mph

- **Treadwear**
The larger the treadwear number, the longer the tire will last. The treadwear grade is a comparative rating based on the wear rate of the tire when tested under controlled conditions on a specified government test course. For example, a tire graded 150 would last 1½ times as long on the government course as a tire graded 100. Actual results will vary, but here’s a rough gauge of the numbering system:

  - Under 200= under 30K miles
  - 260= about 30K miles
  - 320= about 40K miles
  - 360= about 60K miles
  - 400= over 60K miles
  - 400= over 60K miles
  - Over 500= over 80K miles

  A “200” treadwear number is the absolute minimum you should ever get. We recommend treadwear ranges from 360-540.

- **Traction**
The traction grades, from highest to lowest, are AA, A, B, and C. This rating represents the tires ability to stop on wet pavement as measured under controlled conditions. A tire marked “C” traction may have poor traction performance. **Always go with a “B” rating or higher.**
Temperature

Tires are temperature graded as A (the highest), B, and C, representing the tires resistance to the generation of heat and its ability to dissipate heat when tested under controlled conditions. The speed rating and the temperature rating are related. Always choose at least a “B” rating.

Buying the tires

Once you’re armed with the proper information, it’s time to actually go shopping for the tires. You’ll find plenty of ads in the newspaper or on the internet, so you’ll have plenty of choices where to go. While we’re big advocates of buying local, when it comes to tires you should buy from national brands you’ve heard of. The quality will be more consistent, but it’s also much easier to get warranty support for a national brand like Michelin, Dunlop, Cooper, Goodyear, or Firestone than a Solar, Vixen, Jupiter, Pneumant, or other off-brand tires. Wherever you go, make sure to ask some basic questions:

- How much is the tire?
- Does that price include mounting and balancing?
- If I buy your tires how much is an alignment?
- Do you rotate and balance your tires for free?
- Do you repair your tires for free?
- Can I purchase road hazard insurance for your tires?
- How long will it take to have services performed?

Caring for your tires

Once you’ve made your purchase, some simple things can extend their useful life…

- Make sure to have the alignment checked and/or corrected when you purchase new tires
- Keep tire air pressure set to manufacturer’s specification (usually 28-36psi for passenger tires; higher for truck tires. 32psi is a good average pressure)
- Rotate, balance and inspect tires every 6,000 miles.
- Never run a low or flat tire.
- If the steering wheel is off-center or the car pulls have it checked ASAP.
- If you hit a curb, huge pothole, or other object have it checked ASAP

General tips

- A neat trick for looking at relative value between tires is like unit pricing at the grocery store. Take the treadwear number and divide it by the cost of the tire. The higher the result, the lower the per-mile cost. You can compare any tire value by using this method, even tires of different cost and treadwear numbers.
- Tires are not an area to economize. Knowing what the numbers on your tires mean can give you the means to buy a better tire at a lower price, but it’s amazing how much more quality can be purchased for just a few extra dollars per tire!
- Never mix tire sizes on any vehicle! Modern vehicles use tire sizes in many of their monitoring systems, and varying tire sizes can affect their results. Even older vehicles without computer monitoring can have severe drivability and braking issues with mixed tire sizes.
- Please don’t buy recap tires! For a few dollars more one can have a real tire. The savings don’t justify the risks involved.
- All cars have tire fitting information stickers with information like proper inflation pressures and acceptable alternative tire sizes for the vehicle. The stickers are usually either in the driver’s door jamb or the glovebox door.
- Tire manufacturer’s mileage warranties are tricky. The rating is subjective and may not accurately reflect the service the tire will deliver. The warranty is for material defects and does not cover wear from improper inflation or alignment problems. Manufacturers can claim whatever they want for a
mileage warranty, so check out the warranty but look at the treadwear number for a better idea of tire longevity.

Following these tips will help you get the best performance and longest life from your tires. It’s good to know all this, but you don’t really have to remember it all… you can always call us and we’ll answer any questions you might have!

There are lots of other things you should know about tires, when to replace them, and how to get the most out of them. Here are links to several articles we’ve written if you want to dig deeper…

- [What to look out for on your tires](#)
- [Why are tires black](#)
- [When should I replace my tires](#)
- [Tips for studded tires](#)
- [Why we changed our tire rotation policy](#)
Have you been hitting the Christmas party circuit? It’s against the rules to show up empty-handed, but the Fred Meyer fruitcakes never get the smiles you’re looking for. Here’s a great side dish idea that fills all the holiday requirements. It’s simple, quick, and elegant, and who doesn’t like scalloped potatoes? Dig in, and Merry Christmas!

**Ingredients:**

- ¾ pound unpeeled baking potatoes, cut into ¼” slices (2 medium potatoes)
- 1/3 cup chopped red bell pepper (1 medium)
- 1 Tbsp all-purpose flour
- ¼ tsp dried whole marjoram
- ¼” tsp dry mustard
- 1/8” tsp pepper
- ¾” cup skim milk
- ½ cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese (2 oz)

**Preparation:**

- Combine potatoes and bell pepper in an 8” square baking dish; cover with heavy-duty plastic wrap and vent.
- Microwave on high 10-12 minutes or until potatoes are tender, stirring every 2 minutes. Set aside.
- Combine flour, marjoram, mustard, and pepper in a 1-quart glass measure; gradually stir in milk.
- Microwave at high 3-4 minutes or until thickened, stirring every 1 ½ minutes.
- Add shredded cheese, stirring well; microwave at high 30 seconds or until cheese melts.
- Pour cheese sauce over potato mixture, stirring gently to coat.
Keeping the Washington 522 debate alive

When Washington proposed labeling of GMO foods, we thought it was important legislation that would increase the power of consumers. We thought it should pass, and we said so in our newsletter and Facebook page. The GMO companies apparently agreed with the first part but not the second, because they dumped millions into the successful campaign in an effort to kill it. One of our clients, John W., wrote to us on the issue and gave us a long list of the scientific organizations that have declared GMO’s to be safe, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Medical Association, the World Health Organization, and many more. We couldn’t contact John to reply directly, but we hope he gets to see this...

Dear John,

Thanks for sending the GMO info. It’s hard to disagree with that much of the scientific community on the effects of GMOs, but that wasn’t the point of Washington Initiative 522. 522 would have only required labeling of the products. Even if you grant the benign nature of GMOs and the gullibility of GMO opponents, every person should have access to the tools to make informed choices about the products they buy, especially on something as intimate and vital as food.

Health effects (real or imagined) aren’t the only reasons someone may want to avoid GMOs... they may want to support local, organic farms, they may not want to support the companies that produce GMOs, and there may be many more reasons. It may not be appropriate to restrict the production of GMOs, but neither is it appropriate to deny the power of choice to individuals.

522 would have empowered choice without restricting access. I think it was a good solution, and I’m sorry it was defeated.

Thanks for your thoughtful input, John. And to everyone else out there, please write, email, or call us on any issue that matters to you. We read everything you send, and we’ll reply as best we can!

The Dwyer dart juggernaut comes to an end

If there’s anyone (anyone?) wondering about the fate of the Mechanics, the Tom Dwyer dart team, the news isn’t good. We were, to put it politely, towards the back of the pack as the playoffs approached. However, since there were only four teams in our division we did make the final four. Mathematics abandoned us at that point, though, and the Mechanics were knocked out in the first round. Congratulations to all this year’s winners, and if we can choke down the humiliation we’ll see you next season!

Your reviews and referrals matter

We are constantly grateful for the supportive and loyal clients we have developed over the years. Your comments and appreciation keep us on the right road to providing the superior automotive service you deserve. Your reviews and referrals are not only the highest compliments we can receive, but they’re the lifeblood of our new business. If you like what you’ve found at Tom Dwyer Automotive Services, please tell a friend or take a minute to write a review on Yelp, Angieslist, Google, or the review site of your choice. Thank you!
Latest Automotive Recalls

Automobiles are just like any other product; occasional flaws in manufacture or design can cause problems once they leave the factory. When an issue is identified the manufacturers and government work hard to bring the vehicles back in for refit or repair, but not all recalls make the front pages. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration maintains a constantly updated list of recalls from every manufacturer. The last month’s recalls are below, but clicking the button at right will take you to the full list at the NHTSA website.

**December 16:** 1.2 million Michelin LTX M/S tires, Recalled for tread separation, which could cause massive air loss and loss of control over the vehicle.

**December 16:** 76,565 BMW vehicles from 2006-2007, including 300 and 500 series models, Recalled for the front passenger seat occupant detection system which may crack and fail, causing the front passenger air bags to not deploy.

**December 16:** 1,315 Carry-on cargo trailers from 2006-2013, Recalled for door locks that may jam, leaving individuals inside without an exit.

**December 16:** Certain Infiniti Q50 vehicles from 2014, Recalled for power steering software that may disable the electric steering system.

**December 13:** 62,155 Volkswagen Tiguan vehicles from 2009-2011, Recalled for exterior lights that may not work due to a melted fuse.

**December 13:** 19,197 Acura MDX AWD vehicles from 2014, Recalled for the drive shaft which may have been insufficiently tightened, increasing the risk of a crash.

**December 13:** 3,837 Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid vehicles from 2013-2014, Recalled for corrosion that may cause an electrical short and result in a stall-like condition.

**December 13:** 268 Mirage cargo trailers from 2006-2013, Recalled for door locks that may jam, leaving individuals inside without an exit.

**December 13:** 142 Suzuki SX4 vehicles from 2013, Recalled for insufficiently tightened bolts that may get caught between the drive plate and the cylinder block, causing the engine to stall.

**December 12:** 721 Forest River travel trailers from 2012-2013, Recalled for the trailer tire which may contact the bottom of the floor, possibly causing a blowout and increasing the risk of a crash.

**December 12:** 52 ATI Performance automatic transmissions installed in 2013 Chevrolet Camaros, Recalled for potential roll away while the transmission is in park.

**December 12:** 91 Jayco pop-up camping trailers from 2011, Recalled for a component failure in the roof lift system, potentially causing the roof to abruptly collapse to the closed position.

**December 12:** 57 Starcraft RV pop-up camping trailers from 2013, Recalled for a component failure in the roof lift system, potentially causing the roof to abruptly collapse to the closed position.

**December 12:** Certain PROLine travel trailers from 2010-2013, Recalled for batteries that may short circuit, increasing the risk of a fire.

**December 12:** Certain Bridgestone H300 315/80R22.5 18 ply tires, Recalled for a crack in the inner liner splice, causing the tire to deflate.

**December 11:** 3,795 Toyota Tacomas from 2013-2014, Recalled for valve springs in the engine that may break.

**December 11:** 522 Chrysler vehicles from 2013-2014, including the Dodge Avenger and Jeep Compass models, Recalled for potential loss of engine oil pressure, causing the engine to stall or fail.

**December 11:** 175 Spartan Motors motorhomes and one emergency response chassis from 2013-2014, Recalled for castle nuts which may come loose, causing a loss of steering.

**December 9:** 19,597 Harley-Davidson motorcycles from 2014, Recalled for the clutch master cylinder which may allow air into the clutch system.

**December 9:** 2,886 Harley-Davidson motorcycles from 2014, Recalled for an incorrect clutch release plate, potentially preventing the clutch from disengaging.

**December 9:** 2,608 BMW F 800 S and F 800 ST motorcycles from 2007-2009, Recalled for the rear wheel drive bearing and the rear axle, which may wear and affect the control and handling of the motorcycle.
December 9: 725 Forest River travel trailers from 2008-2011, Recalled for failing to conform to Federal Safety Standards regarding the tire inflation pressures.

December 6: 46,375 Haulmark Industries travel trailers from 2006-2013, Recalled for door locks that may jam, leaving individuals inside without an exit.

December 6: 374 Chrysler Dodge Dart vehicles from 2013, Recalled for front seat mounted side airbags that may not have been installed properly.

December 6: 512 Wells Cargo trailers from 2006-2013, Recalled for door locks that may jam, leaving individuals inside without an exit.

December 6: 376 McLaren vehicles from 2012-2014, including MP4 12-C Spyder models, Recalled for the wiper motor brushes which may jam, causing the wiper motor to stop working.

December 6: 130 Mercedes-Benz vehicles from 2013, including SL63 models, Recalled for the occupant classification system which may not detect a very light person in the passenger seat, keeping the passenger airbags from deploying in the event of a crash.

December 5: 3,115 Pierce vehicles from 2000-2010, including Arrow XT and Enforcer models, Recalled for mounts that may fail, causing the cab to fall when in the tilted position.

December 5: 3,558 Exiss/Sooner travel trailers from 2006-2013, Recalled for door locks that may jam, locking individuals inside without an exit.

December 4: 215 Trailex trailers from 2006-2013, Recalled for door locks that may jam, locking individuals inside without an exit.

December 3: 2,475 BMW K1600 GT and K1600 GTL motorcycles from 2012, Recalled for potential stalling of the engine.

December 3: 349 Pierce Manufacturing emergency vehicles from 2009-2013, Recalled for trailer turn signal lights that do not work when the brakes are applied.

December 3: 156 Sutphen Corporation fire apparatus from 2000-2012, including SPH 100 and SAI 110 models, Recalled for bearings on the extension ladder that may seize, causing the extend/retract system to fail.

November 26: 139,917 Ford Escape vehicles from 2013, Recalled for potential oil leaks that may cause an engine fire.

November 26: 9,469 Ford Escape vehicles from 2013, Recalled for a potential fuel leak from the engine compartment fuel line.

November 26: 8,816 Isuzu vehicles from 2003-2004, including Rodeo and Axiom models, Recalled for possible corrosion of the forward mounting point bracket, causing the bracket to detach from the frame and increasing the risk of a crash.

November 26: 4,792 RC Trailers enclosed trailers from 2006-2013, including RC and MTI models, Recalled for door locks that may jam, locking individuals inside without an exit.

November 26: 353 Entegra Coach motorhomes from 2010-2014, including Anthem and Cornerstone models, Recalled for power cables from the exterior freezer that may short circuit, increasing the risk of a fire.

November 26: 247 Jayco travel trailers from 2014, Recalled for increased risk of fire due to poor connection of the AC water heater ignition wires.

November 26: 2,529 Nissan NV200 vehicles from 2013, Recalled for a potential short circuit that may cause the battery terminal to blow, increasing the risk of a crash.

November 25: 42,696 Chevrolet Malibu vehicles from 2014, Recalled for the windshield defroster which may become inoperable when the vehicle is started.

November 25: 14,909 Chevrolet Malibu vehicles from 2013, Recalled for the wiring harness under the front seats which may short circuit, potentially starting a fire.

November 25: 15,500 Hyundai Entourage vehicles from 2007-2008, Recalled for potential corrosion of the front lower control arm, resulting in the loss of control of the vehicle.

November 25: 2,456 Ford Focus Electric vehicles from 2012-2014, Recalled for a software problem that may result in a sudden loss of power.

November 21: 79,867 Kia Sedonas from 2006-2012, Recalled for potential corrosion of the front lower control arm, resulting in the loss of control of the vehicle.

Americans- Why do you keep refrigerating your eggs?
December 7, 2013, By Dr. Joseph Mercola on Mercola.com

If you’re an American, you probably store eggs in the refrigerator – and wouldn’t think of doing it any other way. Yet, the US is one of the only countries where chicken eggs are kept refrigerated. In much of Europe, for instance, eggs are often stored right on the counter, at room temperature. But then, US eggs would be illegal in Europe due to an egg-washing process that may actually make them more susceptible to contamination with bacteria like Salmonella.

In the US, Eggs Are Refrigerated to Help Reduce Salmonella Risks

If an egg is infected with salmonella, the bacteria will multiply more quickly if the egg is stored at room temperature instead of in the refrigerator, particularly if they’re stored for longer than 21 days.1 This is why, in the US, public health agencies advise keeping your eggs in the fridge. And the truth is, the way most eggs are raised in the US – in industrial concentrated animal feeding operations or CAFOs – the risk of salmonella contamination rises. In CAFOs, egg-laying hens are often crammed into tiny quarters with less space to stand upon than the computer screen you are looking at. Disease is rampant, and the birds ARE filthy — not because of their nature, but because we have removed them from their natural habitat and compromised their innate resistance to disease.

Eggs from such large flocks (30,000 birds or more... and some actually house millions of hens) and eggs from caged hens have many times more salmonella bacteria than eggs from smaller flocks, organically fed and free-ranging flocks. They’re also more likely to be antibiotic-resistant strains, due to the flock’s routine exposure to such drugs. It is because of these disease-promoting practices that the US also employs egg washing – a technique that’s actually banned in Europe.

Why Are American Eggs Washed, When Egg Washing Is Banned in Much of Europe?

When you have eggs from tens of thousands of chickens – or more -- all under one roof, there’s a good chance they’re going to get feces and other contaminants on them. The US solution, rather than reducing the size of the flocks and ensuring better sanitation and access to the outdoors, is to wash the eggs. But this isn’t as innocuous as it sounds.

As the eggs are scrubbed, rinsed, dried, and spritzed with a chlorine mist, its protective cuticle may be compromised. This is a natural barrier that comes from the mother hen that lays the egg, and it acts as a shield against bacteria. It even contains antimicrobial properties. US egg-washing strips this natural protectant from the egg, which may actually make it more likely to become contaminated. According to European Union (EU) guidelines: "Such damage may favor trans-shell contamination with bacteria and moisture loss and thereby increase the risk to consumers, particularly if subsequent drying and storage conditions are not optimal.”

Industrial egg washing, by the way, is banned in much of Europe, not only because of potential damage to the eggs’ cuticles but also because it might allow for more “sloppy” egg-producing practices. The chief executive of Britain’s Egg Industry Council told Forbes:2
“In Europe, the understanding is that [prohibiting the washing and cleaning of eggs] actually encourages good husbandry on farms. It's in the farmers' best interests then to produce the cleanest eggs possible, as no one is going to buy their eggs if they're dirty.”

In the US, of course, you'd have no way of knowing whether your bright-white grocery-store eggs were covered in filth before they arrived in your kitchen. Plus, about 10 percent of US eggs are treated with mineral or vegetable oil, basically as a way to “replace” the protective cuticle that's just been washed off. Unfortunately, since an eggshell contains approximately 7,500 pores or openings, once the natural cuticle has been removed what's put ON your egg goes INTO your egg. Meaning, whatever the eggshell comes into contact with can cross over this semi-permeable membrane and end up in your scrambled eggs, from chlorine to mineral oil to dish soap -- to salmonella.

The Other Reason Why the EU Recommends Constant Room Temperature Egg Storage
European egg marketing regulations state that storing eggs in cold storage and then leaving them out at room temperature could lead to condensation, which could promote the growth of bacteria on the shell that could probably get into the egg as well. As io9 reported, the EU therefore advises storing eggs at a constant non-refrigerated temperature:

"EU guidelines therefore stipulate that eggs should be transported and stored at as constant a temperature as possible – a temperature between 66.2 °F and 69.8°F in the winter and between 69.8°F and 73.4°F in the summer."

So, despite what you may have heard, eggs that are fresh and have an intact cuticle do not need to be refrigerated, as long as you are going to consume them within a relatively short period of time. In the US, refrigeration of eggs became the cultural norm when mass production caused eggs to travel long distances and sit in storage for weeks to months before arriving at your superstore. The general lack of cleanliness of CAFOs has increased the likelihood that your eggs have come into contact with pathogens, amplifying the need for disinfection and refrigeration.

So, IF your eggs are very fresh, and IF their cuticle is intact, you do not have to refrigerate them. According to Hilary Thesmar, director of the American Egg Board's Egg Safety Center:

"The bottom line is shelf life. The shelf life for an unrefrigerated egg is 7 to 10 days and for refrigerated, it's 30 to 45 days. A good rule of thumb is one day at room temperature is equal to one week under refrigeration."

Eggs purchased from grocery stores are typically already three weeks old, or older. USDA-certified eggs must have a pack date on the carton, and a sell-by date. Realize that the eggs were often laid many days prior to the pack date.

Most grocery-store eggs in the US should not be left unrefrigerated because they've had their cuticles essentially washed off. If your eggs are fresh from the organic farm, with intact cuticles, and will be consumed within a few days, you can simply leave them on the counter or in a cool cupboard.

Are US Organic Eggs Washed?
Organic flocks are typically much smaller than the massive commercial flocks (typically by an order or two of magnitude) where bacteria flourish, which is part of the reason why eggs from truly organic free-range chickens are FAR less likely to contain dangerous bacteria such as salmonella. Their nutrient content is also much higher than commercially raised eggs, which is most likely the result of the differences in diet between organic free ranging, pastured hens and commercially farmed hens.

As far as washing, detergents and other chemicals used for "wet cleaning" organic eggs must either be non-synthetic or among the allowed synthetics on the National List of allowed non-agricultural substances, which can include chlorine, ozone, hydrogen peroxide, vinegar, and others. Some farmers report rinsing eggs very quickly in water, just to dislodge any debris, and believe this is adequate. Others use a dry brushing process -- no liquids at all -- just a brush, sandpaper, or a loofah sponge.

Since most organic egg producers are typically interested in producing high-quality eggs, many of them—especially small, local farming operations—have implemented gentle washing methods that don't compromise the cuticle. However, you certainly can't tell by looking at them what type of washing process they may have gone through. The only way to know if your eggs have been washed or oiled (and using what
agents) is to ask the producer -- and the only way to do that is to buy from small local farmers you have direct contact with.

Locally Raised Eggs Are Usually Best
The key here is to buy your eggs locally; this is typically even preferable to organic eggs from the grocery store. About the only time I purchase eggs from the store is when I am travelling or for some reason I miss my local egg pickup. Finding high-quality organic eggs locally is getting easier, as virtually every rural area has individuals with chickens. If you live in an urban area, visiting the local health food stores is typically the quickest route to finding the high quality local egg sources. Farmers markets and food coops are another great way to meet the people who produce your food. With face-to-face contact, you can get your questions answered and know exactly what you're buying. Better yet, visit the farm -- ask for a tour. If they have nothing to hide, they should be eager to show you their operation.

Eggs ARE a Highly Nutritious Food
The issue of whether or not to refrigerate your eggs becomes a moot point if you've been scared into believing that eggs are bad for your health. I want to address this briefly, as there is a major misconception that you must avoid foods like eggs and saturated fat to protect your heart. Eggs are an incredible source of high-quality protein and fat—nutrients that many are deficient in. And I believe eggs are a nearly ideal fuel source for most of us. The evidence clearly shows that eggs are one of the most healthful foods you can eat, and can actually help prevent disease, including heart disease. For example, previous studies have found that:

• Consumption of more than six eggs per week does not increase the risk of stroke and ischemic stroke.
• Eating two eggs a day does not adversely affect endothelial function (an aggregate measure of cardiac risk) in healthy adults, supporting the view that dietary cholesterol may be less detrimental to cardiovascular health than previously thought.
• Proteins in cooked eggs are converted by gastrointestinal enzymes, producing peptides that act as ACE inhibitors (common prescription medications for lowering blood pressure).
• A survey of South Carolina adults found no correlation of blood cholesterol levels with "bad" dietary habits, such as use of red meat, animal fats, fried foods, butter, eggs, whole milk, bacon, sausage, and cheese.

As for how to eat your eggs for optimal health, ideally the yolks should be consumed raw, as the heat will damage many of the highly perishable nutrients in the yolk. Additionally, the cholesterol in the yolk can be oxidized with high temperatures, especially when it is in contact with the iron present in the whites and cooked, as in scrambled eggs, and such oxidation contributes to chronic inflammation in your body.

However, if you're eating raw eggs, they MUST be organic pastured eggs. You do not want to consume conventionally raised eggs raw, as they're much more likely to be contaminated with pathogens. The next best option to raw is to eat them soft-boiled or gently cooked “sunny side up” with very runny yolks. One final caveat: I would strongly encourage you to avoid all omega-3 eggs, as they typically come from chickens that are fed poor-quality sources of omega-3 fats that are already oxidized. Omega-3 eggs are also more likely to perish faster than non-omega-3 eggs.
The Sellwood Bridge Project is continuing quietly along. The project is more than 40% complete with the new bridge on schedule to open in the fall of 2015, and is safe and open in the meantime. The big addition this month was a temporary signal light on the west end of the bridge. Traffic on Highway 43 and the bridge will pass through the new signal until the new two-level interchange opens in fall 2015. Details about the new traffic signal include:

- Westbound bridge traffic headed northbound and southbound traffic headed to Lake Owego will have free movement unless the bicycle/pedestrian signal is activated.
- The traffic signal will alternate green time between the southbound to eastbound left turn traffic and the northbound Lake Oswego to Portland traffic.
- Two northbound highway lanes (one through lane and one turning right onto the bridge) will be routed through the signal. The left lane will be the through lane and the right lane will turn onto the bridge. This is the reverse of the old configuration.
- Push buttons will allow bicyclists and pedestrians to activate the signal to safely cross from the north to the south side of the bridge and from the bridge across the highway to River View Cemetery.
- Motor vehicles will continue to access the cemetery at the existing driveway south of the bridge. A traffic signal at the cemetery entrance will be removed. For motor vehicles, the lower portion of the cemetery road is currently open only to the funeral home.
- Westbound bridge traffic headed south on Highway 43 will continue to travel north to the turnaround at the SW Taylors Ferry Road signal
- The new traffic pattern is expected to increase rush hour congestion in the short term. Traffic engineers will monitor traffic flow and adjust the signal timing as needed. During construction the signal will be turned off at times when flaggers direct traffic.

Demolition of two closed highway ramps that pass under the bridge begins next week. In 2014 the highway lanes will shift west against new retaining walls to allow the contractor to build the east half of the interchange. A drawing of new traffic phase can be viewed at www.sellwoodbridge.org.

As always, Multnomah County maintains the definitive website on everything related to the Sellwood Bridge Replacement project, www.sellwoodbridge.org. Construction and closure alerts, archived information, and other resources are all available 24/7 for your convenience. If you’re looking for something that’s not on the website, you can contact Mike Pullen (mike.j.pullen@multco.us, 503-209-4111) or visit www.sellwoodbridge.org.
What’s coming up in the future? We’ve got our fingers crossed that the new XRAY-FM will bring Thom Hartmann back to Portland’s airwaves, but there’s no need to wait until 2014 for your dose of Thom. He’s got a new book out right now that peeks into our economic future. You probably won’t like what he sees, but you can bet he’ll present it in a thoughtful manner backed up by statistics and history. And, being Thom, he’ll give you some ways to get involved to stop it. As always, clicking the link will take you to the Powell’s Books website for the book.

The Crash of 2016: The Plot To Destroy America- And What We Can Do To Stop It by Thom Hartmann

The United States is more vulnerable today than ever before — including during the Great Depression and the Civil War — because the pillars of democracy that once supported a booming middle class have been corrupted, and without them, America teeters on the verge of the next Great Crash.

The United States is in the midst of an economic implosion that could make the Great Depression look like child’s play. In The Crash of 2016, Thom Hartmann argues that the facade of our once-great United States will soon disintegrate to reveal the rotting core where corporate and billionaire power and greed have replaced democratic infrastructure and governance. Our once-enlightened political and economic systems have been manipulated to ensure the success of only a fraction of the population at the expense of the rest of us.

The result is a "for the rich, by the rich" scheme leading to policies that only benefit the highest bidders. Hartmann outlines the destructive forces — planted by Lewis Powell in 1971 and come to fruition with the "Reagan Revolution" — that have looted our nation over the past decade, and how their actions fit into a cycle of American history that lets such forces rise to power every four generations.

However, a backlash is now palpable against the "economic royalists" — a term coined by FDR to describe those hoarding power and wealth — including the banksters, oligarchs, and politicians who have plunged our nation into economic chaos and social instability.

Although we are in the midst of what could become the most catastrophic economic crash in American History, a way forward is emerging, just as it did in the previous great crashes of the 1760s, 1856, and 1929. The choices we make now will redefine American culture. Before us stands a genuine opportunity to embrace the moral motive over the profit motive — and to rebuild the American economic model that once yielded great success.

Thoroughly researched and passionately argued, The Crash of 2016 is not just a roadmap to redemption in post-Crash America, but a critical wake-up call, challenging us to act. Only if the right reforms are enacted and the moral choices are made, can we avert disaster and make our nation whole again.
Humorousness

Take the Grinch test

Does the coming Christmas holiday fill you with warm memories of family and friends? Or, does it fill you with a desperate longing for January? There’s only one way to find out... take the Grinch test. If you pass (ie: ARE a Grinch) then you’ll probably like most of the humor a website so obscure we couldn’t even figure out its name. Weirdly, if you’re looking forward to a Martha Stewart Christmas, you’ll probably like it too. That’s Humorousness for you... Ho Ho Ho!

1. You reuse last year’s Christmas cards and send them out under your own name. (5 points)

2. You steal light bulbs from you neighbor’s outdoor display to replenish your own supply. (5 points, 10 if neighbor's whole light sets or lighted Santa goes out)

3. You have dressed a dog or cat as Santa Claus, elf helper, or reindeer. (10 points for each; if you dressed an endangered species, 5 extra points)

4. You put out last year's stale candy canes for children. (1 point for each piece of sticky candy, 10 points for a chocolate Santa)

5. You enclose a shoddy and inferior gift from Target, Walmart, or K-Mart in a Bloomingdale's or other prestige box to impress your friends. (5 points for each infraction).

6. You make collect long distance phone calls to your family on Christmas day. (5 points, 10 if from a cell phone claiming you are stuck in a phone booth).

7. At the office Christmas party, you horde huge stockpiles of goodies for later consumption at home. (5 points; 15 points if you use this stuff for your own party)

8. You steal the wreath from a parked car to use on your own. (5 points)

9. After an invitation to a friend's house, you bring a commercially produced fruitcake and try to pass it off as homemade. (5 points; 15 points if the fruitcake is from last year).

10. Any stealing from the Toys-for-Tots collection bins is a definite no-no. (20 points)

Evaluate your score on the "Grinch Scale" from 20 to 100.

20-30: You are just a cheeseball.

30-50: You are an apprentice in Yuletide larceny and are probably wanted by the police for overdue parking tickets.

50-100: Grinch, move over. The Meyer Lansky of Christmas crime has arrived.
Just like it says, Popcorn Shorts is about the kind of things we think are really interesting, but don’t really need a large article to explain them. From the sublime to the ridiculous, check in here for crunchy bits of info you’ll love to munch. By the way, much (but not all) of our delicious Popcorn comes from articles we’ve posted on our Facebook page. If you’re on Facebook, please stop by and “Like” us and we’ll keep a fairly-constant-but-not-frequent-enough-to-be-annoying stream of these coming to your virtual door!

How not to relive your childhood

One of our most popular recent posts was people making bad photographic decisions. We all have those embarrassing pictures from childhood... eating the dog’s food, running naked on the beach, playing in the Jello, that sort of thing. Here’s a gallery of people who decided to relive the special moments of their childhoods by recreating some of their very worst childhood pictures. We can probably learn a lot of things from these pictures, but the most obvious is that it’s not a good idea for a pudgy middle-aged man to be photographed in a diaper for any reason.

The state of American education

One of the most critical factors for a free society is an educated populace. Every three years since the year 2000, PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) tests fifteen-year-old students from 65 countries in reading, mathematics and science. This link to their 2012 report gives all the stats, lets you compare any geographical area, and lets you try some of the test questions. So how are we doing as a country on our educational obligation? You’ll have to click this link to find out.

ALEC tries to tax the sun

Have you been keeping up with ALEC, the conservative corporatist group streamlining people out of the legislative process? 800 politicians, lobbyists, and CEOs attended a three-day policy summit in Washington in early December to get briefed on ALEC’s plans for the 2014. One highlight was ALEC’s plan to aggressively push “model bills” to stop development of renewable energy that would threaten their fossil-fuel-company base. Taxing people who put solar panels on their homes is just part of their plan. Read all about it!

The cheapest cars ever made

Still looking for the perfect last-minute Christmas gift? Wouldn’t just about everyone on your list be happy with a brand new car? The cheapest car on the US market today is the Nissan Versa at about $12,780, but there’s better deals to be had if you look. You might start looking at this list of the ten cheapest cars ever sold, courtesy of our friends at Jalopnik. All prices are in inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars, so take a look at these gems priced from $12,500 to ABSOLUTELY FREE! Beware, though, because in many cases you get what you pay for!
In March, we tried to fulminate your fury with a report on “Prisons for Profit”. We started the article with this observation... “Profit is not the only good in our world! Other things are important as well, and some may be even more important than profit.” We then went onto suggest that liberty might be one of those things, and showed several examples of our Justice System squeezing the liberty from regular citizens, storing the desiccated husks in an inadequate prison warehousing system, and pumping the money to judges and corporations. We hoped that was enough to make you aptly appalled, then moved on to the next outrage. We’ve updated “News To Make You Furious” before, but generally we like to give you a little breathing space before we do. However, this month we ran across a couple info tidbits that we just couldn’t sit on...

The first eyepopper we encountered was the overall rate of incarceration in the US. You may know the US leads the rest of the world in the number of people behind bars, both as absolute numbers and as a percentage of population. But do you know how big that percentage is? One in 1000 (.1%)? One in 500 (.2%)? C’mon, it couldn’t be as much as 1 in 200 (.5%), could it? Guess yet again. According to the Pew Center on the States, slightly over 1 in 100 (1%) of the US population is currently behind bars. This doesn’t include the people on parole, probation, or other forms of non-prison “judicial oversight”, it’s just the folks actually behind bars. Let’s say that one more time...

**Over 1% of the current US population is behind bars!**

So what was the other thing that got under our skin? Well, it was once again the role of profit in imprisoning our fellow citizens. An article entitled “Corrections Corporation of America Named Top Dividend Stock with Insider Buying and 5.72% Yield” gave the joyous news about the stunning growth of CCA, Corrections Corporation of America, the conglomerate buying up prisons around the country. OK, fine, we’re all very happy for the people whose 401k’s have grown with them. But then look at this graph... as you can see, it jumps sharply right around 1980. Was there any prison-related event that happened around that time that could have caused the jump? As any statistician will tell you, “correlation is not causation”, but here’s something that happened just about then... CCA was founded in 1983.

If this doesn’t give you enough ammunition to ruin Christmas dinner with the family, let us point you toward a couple more links you may love to hate...

**Corrections Corporation of America Loses Four Prison Contracts This Month**
*from the ACLU*

**Are Prisons Bleeding Us Dry?**
*By Sheila Bedi, The Daily Beast*

**“Beyond Bars”**
*a project of Brave New Foundation*