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Spring!

Are We There Yet?

How you define the first day of Spring depends on whether you follow the astronomical or meteorological seasons.

If you follow the meteorological calendar, Spring starts slightly earlier, between March 1 and May 31.



The astronomical calendar determines seasons by the Earth's rotational in relation to its orbit around the sun – marked by equinox and solstice events.

The meteorological seasons are based on the annual temperature cycle and the state of the atmosphere, and split the year into four three month seasons. **As March begins, meteorologically speaking, Spring has Sprung!**

This year, Spring will take place between March 20 and June 21, if you use the astronomical method.

thesun.co.uk/news/2907360/spring-2018-first-day-date-meteorological-march-1

Surging Bond Yields in 2018 May Pinch Homeowners & Retirees



A surge in bond yields may have ripple effects outside Wall Street, as home ownership costs rise and nest eggs shrink.

Consumers have started to feel the pinch of rises in rates that are closely linked to the bond market.

It is unclear when bond yields will top out. The 10-year yield inched toward 3 percent initially during the last week in February, 2018 before edging lower that Friday.

cnbc.com/2018/02/26/surging-bond-yields-to-pinch-home-owners-and-retirees.html

High-Dollar or High-Interest: Which Debts Should You Pay Down First?

It comes down to the interest your investments earn versus the interest your debts carry. Some personal finance advocates contend that you should attack your largest debts first, but the rationale for whittling down your highest-interest debts first is more compelling.



Typical investment earnings are generally less than the average credit card's high interest costs, so the net result could be a loss.

Reducing credit card balances to zero reduces the "drag" of those regular monthly payments. If you need to add

A typical household may set aside \$10,000-15,000 annually to saving and investing for retirement, but the average American household also shoulders \$16,000 in revolving consumer debt.

If you save \$10,000-15,000 yearly, while retaining more than that in credit card debt, is that progress?

cash flow to eliminate your high-interest debt, perhaps a tax refund will provide it.

Lower credit card balances may also have another positive financial effect: they have the potential to help your FICO score. Sustained big balances can keep your credit score below desirable levels.

fool.com/credit-cards/2017/11/02/when-paying-off-credit-card-debt-is-the-first-thin.aspx

Gluten-Free Waffles



1 ½ Cups Gluten-Free Flour
1 ¼ Cups Milk
2 Eggs
4 tsp. Granulated Sugar
2 Tbsp. Vegetable Oil
1 ½ tsp. Baking Powder
1 tsp. Pure Vanilla Extract
½ tsp. Sea Salt

Pre-heat your waffle iron on a medium to high heat setting. Next, separate eggs and beat yolks, vanilla, and oil together in a large bowl.

Whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, and sea salt together in a separate bowl; then, add to the large bowl and whisk. It is not necessary to whisk away all lumps. Whisk until the only remaining lumps are very small. Gently fold in egg whites.

Pour or scoop batter onto your pre-heated iron, and ensure batter is distributed evenly. Cook for 4-6 minutes (or until your automated iron alerts you).

Serve with whipped cream and fresh berries, honey, or pure maple syrup

IRS Alerts Taxpayers About Refund Scam

The IRS warns of a new twist on an old scam. Criminals are depositing fraudulent tax refunds into individuals' actual bank accounts, then attempting to reclaim the refund from the taxpayers.

Thieves hack tax preparers' computers to steal taxpayer data, then use that stolen information to file tax returns as the taxpayers, having therefunds deposited into the taxpayers' bank accounts.

They contact their victims, about money mistakenly deposited into their accounts and ask them to return it.

While the IRS is aware of variations of this scam, more could evolve.

Here are two current versions:

Criminals pose as debt collection agency officials acting on behalf of the IRS. The thief contacts the taxpayer to report an erroneous refund deposit and request that the taxpayer forward the money to the thief's collection agency.

The taxpayer who received the erroneous refund gets an automated call with a recorded voice saying the caller is from the IRS. The recording threatens the taxpayer with criminal fraud charges, an

arrest warrant and blacklisting his or her Social Security number. A recorded voice gives a phony case number and telephone number to call to return the refund.

Here are some things taxpayers should remember if someone contacts them about an erroneous refund:

Follow the established procedures to return erroneous funds to the IRS. See Tax Topic Number 161 - Returning an Erroneous Refund for details about how to return the money, including the actual mailing addresses where a taxpayer should send a paper check, if necessary. By law, interest may accrue on erroneous refunds.

The IRS encourages taxpayers to discuss the issue with their financial institutions because there may be a need to close bank accounts.

Taxpayers receiving erroneous refunds should contact their tax preparers immediately.

More Information:



Taxpayer Guide to Identity Theft
<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/taxpayer-guide-to-identity-theft>

Erroneous Refunds
<https://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc161>

It Happened In ...



MARCH

March 9th 1864 – Ulysses S. Grant was commissioned as a Lieutenant General and became commander of the Union armies.

March 13th 1943 – A plot to kill Hitler by German army officers failed as a bomb planted aboard his plane failed to explode due to a faulty detonator.

March 24th 1989 – One of the largest oil spills in U.S. history occurred as the oil tanker Exxon Valdez ran aground in Prince William Sound off Alaska, resulting in 11 million gallons of oil leaking into the natural habitat over a stretch of 45 miles.

March 31st 1933 – The U.S. Civilian Conservation Corps, the CCC, was founded. Unemployed men and youths were organized into quasi-military formations and worked outdoors in national parks and forests.

<http://www.historyplace.com/specials/calendar/march.htm>



You Will Probably Pay More for Medicare in 2018

Was your monthly Medicare Part B premium less than \$110 in 2017?

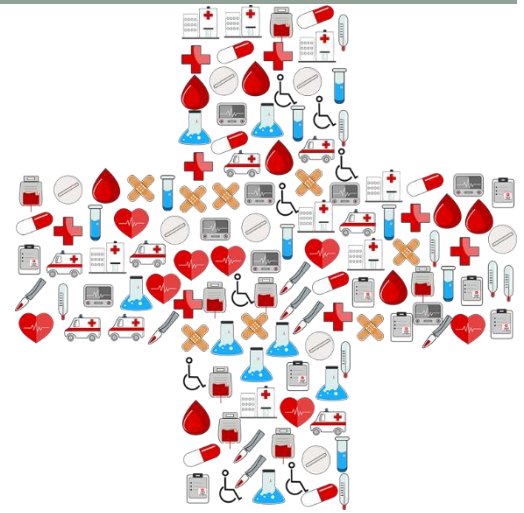
You may be paying more this year for the same coverage. In 2018, over 40% of Medicare recipients are paying monthly Part B premiums of \$134.¹

Why? The biggest factor is due to a 2.0% cost-of-living adjustment to Social Security benefits for 2018.¹

Social Security is getting its first significant COLA since 2015. There was no COLA in 2016, and benefits grew just 0.3% in 2017. In these years, Medicare's "hold harmless" clause helps many of its enrollees because Part B premiums cannot increase more than Social Security's COLA, keeping medicare costs low for enrollees.¹

The "hold harmless" statute held Part B premium costs down for about 70% of Medicare enrollees in 2017. Around 30% of Medicare recipients paid \$134 per month for Part B coverage.^{1,2}

For 2018, the standard monthly Part B premium is



\$134 – unchanged from 2017.

Due to 2018 COLA increases, more Medicare recipients will pay their standard Part B premium this year, rather than a discounted one as in 2016 and 2017.²

For 2018, the annual increase in about 42% of Medicare recipients Social Security benefits will equal or surpass the increase in their Part B premiums, causing them to pay the standard premium. Around 28% will have a lower increase in their Social Security benefits than the increase in their Part B premiums, so will pay less than \$134 a month for Part B.²

1- cnbc.com/2017/11/17/medicare-part-b-premiums-jumping-23-percent-for-many-retirees.html

2 - thetstreet.com/story/14404346/1/most-people-with-medicare-part-b-will-pay-higher-premiums-in-2018.html