

Cold Open:

PICKUP CASHIER: Here's your change, and here is your King sized tub of Crunchy Broccoli Clumps. Have a nice day!

JED: Thank you.

(SFX - FOOTSTEPS)

ROBIN HOOD: Sir?! Sir!

JED: (mouth full) Are you talking to me?

ROBIN HOOD: Your money, sir. You left it behind.

JED: Oh thanks! Uh, gee, 14 cents. Did I drop this?

ROBIN HOOD: Oh no, sir. I have simply rescued your sales tax from that broccoli shop.

JED: You did what now?

BRIDGET: Hey Jed, eating more Broccoli Clumps? Whoa. Who's your friend in green tights?

JED: I don't know this-

ROBIN HOOD: Tis I, Robin Hood! Perhaps you've heard of me and my exploits? I steal from the rich and give to the poor. Live in Sherwood forest with my band of Merry Men? Handy with a bow and arrow?

BRIDGET: Yeah, I'm familiar. I guess I was just thrown off, since this *isn't* 13th Century England. What brings you to our neck of the woods? And millennium.

ROBIN HOOD: I am on an endless quest to fight the injustice of taxation. Your corrupt king shall no longer line his pockets with his ill-gotten coins.

JED: Coins are right. This is just a dime and four pennies.

ROBIN HOOD: You're welcome!

JED: Also, how did you get this money?

ROBIN HOOD: I stole it. How else? Fret not -- taxes are unfair burdens. They basically robbed you first. I'm merely righting the wrong.

BRIDGET: What?! You can't just not pay sales tax. It's part of the price at the register... You can't get anything without paying it.

ROBIN HOOD: That's why I steal it afterwards. It's easy! Besides, who's going to stop me?

CASHIER: There he is, officer! The one in the green tights!

ROBIN HOOD: Cheese it! It's the sheriff!

TROUBADOUR: (singing)

Robin Hood, Bridget and Jed are headin' for adventure
Learnin' 'bout the tax system and fees they gotta pay
Robin's got a mission to
Stop all taxes that are due
Oh good golly, this'll prob'ly be a real weird day

BRIDGET: You have a troubadour?

ROBIN HOOD: I find that theme music really helps move things along.

<OPENING THEME MUSIC>

Intro:

JED: Hey everyone...welcome back to Million Bazillion. Where we help dollars make more sense. I'm Jed.

BRIDGET: And I'm Bridget. Today, we've got a question about taxes. That's the money people pay to the government, and which the government spends in a bunch of different ways.

JED: Yeah, you know how you might buy something for a dollar but the price at check out is actually maybe a dollar and seven cents? That seven cents is the tax added to your purchase.

BRIDGET: We also pay taxes on things like our homes or property and the money we earn.

JED: So here's the question.

TAPE: "This is Loucinda and Annabelle from Paris, France. Why do we have to pay tax if the government doesn't have to pay for building roads and schools and stuff like that anymore?" :14

JED: So we use taxes to build roads and schools and other things...and Loucinda and Annabelle want to know why we keep paying even after those things are built. Great question! Okay, where should we start with this one?

BRIDGET: You know, we did just meet someone who...seems to have really strong feelings about taxes.

JED: [flatly] You want us to go see that Robin Hood guy, don't you.

BRIDGET: Well, let's just find out what he has to say.

JED: Alright. We'll do that, after this little break.

FURNITURE: ARK:

**And now it's time for Asking Random Kids NOT so Random Questions!
Today's question is: How would you make paying taxes more fun?**

<<TAPE>>

That was Pablo in Seattle, Parker in Virginia, Irina in Massachusetts, Sangam in India, Sylvia Connecticut, Corbin in Oakland and Elijah in Atlanta.

This has been asking Random Kids NOT so Random Questions!

CHUNK 1:

<SFX branches shaking AMBI park/woodland setting>

JED: Hey Robin, what're you doing up in that tree, buddy?

PICKUP ROBIN HOOD: Here in this mighty oak I have a prime viewing location from which to spot your King and his nefarious tax collecting agents!

JED: What are you talking about, we don't have kings!

BRIDGET: Why don't you come on down! [TO JED] His tights are going to be covered in tree sap!

ROBIN HOOD: [THUD landing noise] Then who do your tax collectors gather the taxes FOR, pray tell?

JED: Tax collectors? You mean the Internal Revenue Service? I don't think they actually go around pestering people for more taxes...generally we just pay them... I mean we complain about it sometimes but we still pay.

ROBIN HOOD: Nay I say, nay! This cannot be! And yet...if there is no King to hoard the tax dollars you say your countrymen WILLINGLY pay...what happens to all the money?

BRIDGET: Instead of a king, we *vote* for people who will spend our tax money on the things we *care about*.

ROBIN: [SHOCKED] On what you care about--this is absurd! Who ever heard of such a thing? What do the people of this land even care about then?

PICKUP: JED: Oh, well, here's one way to understand how we spend our tax dollars. And I think you're going to like it. For this, I'm going to need my list of how states spend the tax money they collect...and also, a big ol' sack of ONE hundred gold coins. Are you picturing the gold coins, Robin?

ROBIN HOOD: Ooh yes, I can see it in my mind's eye!

PICKUP JED: The gold coins represent the taxes we pay...so let's see what we spend them on, the programs we care about. (SFX JANGLING COINS) Okay so to start, let's put 22 coins aside to pay for programs that give a little extra to families that might need it, if they lose their income or they need health insurance.

ROBIN HOOD: You don't need a government for that! Me and my Merry Men did this back in Sherwood Forest! We'd steal from those hoarding riches and give it to those in need! Huzzah!

JED: Ok, so 22 coins are gone. That might sound like a lot, but we set aside even MORE for education. Take out another 30 or so coins from the bag... (SFX SCOOPING COINS) That's kindergarten through twelfth grade and also state colleges and universities. More than half the bag is gone!

ROBIN HOOD: Wow, that's a lot of money gone right quick!

PICKUP BRIDGET: Yeah, and the thing about schools...we still build new schools, sure. But we ALSO have to maintain - or keep up - these things we built. And every school year, we've got to pay to keep the schools running. Fund the libraries and that sort of thing.

ROBIN HOOD: I see, yes. And you teach archery and lute repair at these schools, yes?

PICKUP JED: Hey - wait -- that's the answer to Loucinda and Annabelle's question! Not the lute thing. I mean that we keep paying taxes for schools because we need to keep running them! We still care about them year after year, so we have to pay year after year. It's the same with roads and bridges - after we've built them -- we still need to fill those potholes, plow them if it snows -- every year roads need money. Which by the way takes about another 6 coins from the bag.[SFX COINS]

TROUBADOUR:

Robin looks like quite a heel.
The taxes he was gonna steal
Are important. What's his deal?

ROBIN: What? You're on thin ice here Troubadour Larry.

BRIDGET: So, back to the bag of coins -- we've got 10 coins for hospitals and other health programs. [SFX COINS] The average state sets aside about 9 coins total for police, prisons, and courts. [SFX COINS]

ROBIN HOOD: I myself have escaped from MANY a prison with the help of my band of Merry Men! Why, there was one time I--

JED: [CUTTING HIM OFF] Bag's getting kind of light. (SFX TOSSING BAG OF COINS UP AND DOWN)

BRIDGET: Sure, but there's still about 22 coins left! Then we get to programs that get a few coins here, a few coins there...like parks and recreation usually get about 2 coins. States usually spend another two coins on firefighters... ohh! fun fact, they also spend about that much on sewers and drains! Two coins!

JED: That's good money down the drain!

ROBIN: Wait - you pay for sewers? Whatever happened to just pooping in the woods like in the good old times?

PICKUP BRIDGET: Hard pass.

JED: Anyway, this gives you an idea of what things STATES think are important. Every town is making its own decisions with its budget. And these choices are made at the national level too, as a whole country.

ROBIN: This tells me a great deal about what the people of this land find important. But I do think more should be spent on forestry, really a measly 2 coins on parks and recreation, that is no way to live! [PAUSE/BEAT] And say, what if you don't AGREE with what the rest of your countrymen want to spend their tax dollars on? What if you don't like taxes at all?

PICKUP BRIDGET: You wouldn't be the only one. Lots of people argue about how much tax we should pay and what we should spend it on. Plenty of people think the system is unfair.

ROBIN: I knew it! Injustice abounds! I am right to strike back at the taxes that trouble the good people of this land! Fetch my bow so I can take down this system!

JED: Not so fast Tightpants Everdeen. Here in America we have another way to change things if we don't like our taxes. We'll explain in just a minute. In the meantime, if any of you listeners have a question about money you want us to answer...send it to us at marketplace dot org slash million.

TROUBADOUR: (singing)
Robin Hood in tights of green
Discovers taxes aren't so mean
And no one needed all his thieving ways...

ROBIN HOOD: Troubadour Larry, you're out of the band!

--MIDSHOW--

JED: So Bridget...Robin Hood may be the only person we know who can pull off wearing green tights -- *kind of* -- but he isn't the only person who gets upset over taxes. People argue over them all the time.

BRIDGET: And yet we still pay them. What's up with that?

JED: I know someone who knows the answer.

RENU 1: ***And that's me***

JED: Meet Renu (RAY-new) Zaretsky. She knows all about taxes...like why we pay them and how we feel about them.

RENU 2: ***The thing I love most about tax policy is that I could find a tax angle, about pretty much anything somebody wants to talk about.***

PICKUP JED: She told me that in this country, we kinda LOVE taxes.

RENU 3: ***People feel good about paying taxes. We like to do it, we know it's necessary. We're proud. We see it as a patriotic duty to do it.***

JED: It's like a chore we might complain about, but actually enjoy. Like folding towels fresh from the dryer. Mmm, so warm and static-y...But there is a catch. We only like what we think are GOOD taxes. What makes a tax good?

RENU 5: ***A good tax is going to be fair, it's going to be felt equally by everybody relative to their ability to pay.***

JED: So what does that mean? Okay so putting my pristinely folded stack of towels aside...it's like, if my weekend chore is vacuuming, my sister's weekly chore is washing the car...they both take us about the same amount of time and effort to do. Which feels fair. It's not FUN, but it IS fair. [BEAT] A good tax is also--

RENU 6: --going to be understandable. It's going to be clear to people. They're going to understand why they have to pay it, how it's collected and how it's used.

JED: A good tax isn't going to be confusing about why or how we're paying it. Actually, that's true for paying taxes AND doing chores.

BRIDGET: I get it. And when a tax doesn't feel fair...or it's confusing...that's maybe when we start to get annoyed by them. Take that chores example...let's say one weekend, your sister didn't have to...wash the car because it rained. [thunder and lightning] The car is clean and your sister didn't have to do a thing! [tweeting birds, rain is over] But you still have to vacuum [vacuum noise in background] because there's no tiny and specific tornado that can come through and suck up all the dust. [fade out] Ugh, thanks non-existent tiny and specific tornado! Now this chores thing is starting to feel...well, unfair!

JED: SO UNFAIR!

BRIDGET: I'm guessing it's the same with taxes, right?

JED: It is.

RENU 6.5: One of the big things right now that people point to, that they do not like, that they see as terribly unfair, is people or companies that are paying LESS than they think they should be paying. It just seems like they're getting away with something or they think there is a loophole or some kind of trick they're playing with the law. And they're not paying their fair share.

JED: And when it seems like SOME people aren't being taxed in the same way that everyone else is, that's when things don't feel so good anymore.

RENU 7 : And then we get mad. That's what causes fights. That's what causes some anger. Because everybody wants to pay their taxes, but nobody wants to pay more than they have to. That's a pretty normal feeling.

JED: Here's the good news though. We have more choices now, and here, than Robin Hood did back in Medieval England. His land was ruled by a King who decided alone how much to tax people, when he felt like collecting those taxes, and what to spend them on. That's not the case here.

PICKUP BRIDGET: That's right. We vote for the people who work together to decide where our tax dollars go. If you want to know more about how that tax spending works in your area, check out our website, Marketplace dot org slash Million.

JED: Because learning more about your tax dollars and what they do can be as satisfying as a well-folded linen closet.

FURNITURE: KIDS HAVE A SAY (Sevi & Zael)

BRIDGET: Well, look who it is! Robin Hood! I almost didn't recognize you in that suit.

ROBIN HOOD: Good morrow, Bridget! Jed!

JED: (aside) I would've recognized him. Those are the tightest suit pants I've ever seen. Plus, you know, the bow and arrow.

BRIDGET: What's with the new get up? What're you up to these days?

ROBIN HOOD: Well, I've put my thieving days behind me. Now, the merry men and I are community organizers, trying to get the word out to voters about how we think taxes should be used.

BRIDGET: Oh, well that's a much more civically-minded way of handling things. What ways of spending do you support?

ROBIN HOOD: Oh, you know, more money for the poor, of course. And incentives for arrow production.

JED: Of course.

PICKUP ROBIN HOOD: Would you care to sign our petition to increase park funding?

BRIDGET: Why, I'd be glad to-, wait a minute, this isn't a petition. This is a letter granting you access to my bank account and all my money!

ROBIN HOOD: Old habits die hard.

JED: Ok, well, we gotta get out of here. Troubadour Larry, lay down a tune, as we get ready to go.

[PAUSE FOR MUSIC TO COME IN - Gentle Lute music]

JED: Taxes might not be fun to pay -- no one likes feeling like they're spending extra money. But as we learned today, they go to pay for a lot of things our society has decided are important.

BRIDGET: Of course, it's not a perfect system, and sometimes we disagree about them. It's easy for people just to get mad at taxes and say things like, "They're too high" or "We should get rid of them altogether."

JED: It's harder to look into issues and make up your mind about them and really really hard to do something to change things. Next time you hear a grownup saying something like, "Taxes are the worst!" ask them which taxes and what they'd be willing to give up in order not to pay them.

BRIDGET: We bet after a while, they'll stop complaining about taxes when you're around.

JED: Grownups complain too much! They need to chill. It's almost as bad as when you get Crunchy Broccoli Clumps stuck between your teeth. Man, food is the worst!

CLOSE MUSIC + CREDITS

BRIDGET: Well that's it for now. Thanks for listening to Million Bazillion -- where we help dollars make more sense.

JED: Next time we're answering a BIG question about banks! If you've got an idea for an episode, or a question you want answered, email us at Marketplace dot org slash million.

BRIDGET: If you liked this episode and you want to know more, check out our brand new bonus newsletter for kids and their grownups. There's a listener tip sheet and a super fun comic about taxes. Sign up today at Marketplace dot org slash BONUS and we'll send it right to your email inbox.

JED: Plus, you'll be the first to know when we've got new episodes, and other fun stuff from our team, ...like how to get your own Million Bazillion t-shirt. That's Marketplace dot org slash BONUS.

BRIDGET: We had help making this episode. Special thanks to Renu Zaretsky at the Tax Policy Center for helping us understand the answer to this question. And to the voicing talents of Kimberly Adams, Sabri Ben Achour, Marc Sanchez, and Bekah Wineman.

JED: Million Bazillion is brought to you by Marketplace

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JED: To all the grown-ups listening right now – we hope that you and the kids in your life are having some good conversations about money thanks to Million Bazillion. We created this podcast to help kids get an early start on learning about the economy – and to keep it going, we're counting on your support. Donate today at marketplace-dot-org-slash-givemillion, and thanks for chipping in to make our work possible.