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# EAST OREGONIAN

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2017

141st Year, No. 248

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One dollar

## Unknown progress collecting \$3.3M in back taxes, fines, fees

State piloting another program to garnish wages for vendors in debt

By **CLAIRE WITTHYCOMBE**  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Five months after Gov. Kate Brown ordered the state to shore up its debt collection practices, the revenue department says it's too early to tell how much money it's brought in as a result.

As of mid-2016, the state was owed about \$3.3 billion in unpaid taxes, fees and fines, according to a December analysis by the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Office.

About \$600 million to \$800 million of that sum is owed to the state's general fund, and 95 percent of that is unpaid taxes, the Governor's Office said in April.

The governor also ordered other state agencies to report the money they're owed to the state's Chief Operating Officer, as well as how much of it is collectible.

As Oregon lawmakers scrambled to balance the state's budget this legislative session, they too renewed efforts to collect some of that money, pushing for more oversight and hiring at the Department of Revenue.

Although it can't say whether the governor's executive order has made an impact, the revenue department is preparing to implement a system that allows state agencies to determine whether vendors owe the state money, said spokeswoman Joy Krawczyk.

Using that system, the revenue department can garnish payments to vendors to cover the debt.

DOR is piloting the system with the Oregon Department of Transportation. At first, the focus will be on tax debt. If it's successful, the department will use it when it helps

See **BACK TAXES/8A**



A skiff pulls an oil boom up the Columbia River during an oil spill training exercise on Wednesday near Hat Rock State Park east of Umatilla. Staff photo by E.J. Harris

# DRILL, BABY, DRILL

Emergency oil spill plans put to the test with exercises on the Columbia River

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
East Oregonian

Motorboats dragging thousands of feet of containment booms swept over the Columbia River Wednesday at Hat Rock State Park, working to contain an imaginary oil spill while incident commanders staged at the nearby McNary Yacht Club.

David Byers, spill response section manager for the Washington State Department of Ecology, explained how in the event

of an actual spill, the booms would prevent oil from washing into shallow water habitat along the shoreline, where small fish, insects and birds tend to congregate.

"Shallow water habitat is the food engine for the Columbia River system," Byers said. "We're just protecting our sensitive areas."

Though Wednesday's exercise was only a drill, Byers said it is incumbent on the agency and companies that transport crude oil to be

**"We didn't spend any time fumbling around, wondering what was important to protect."**

— **David Byers**, spill response section manager, Washington State Department of Ecology

prepared in the event of a potential disaster — such as the fiery train derailment near Mosier along the Oregon side of the river.

Byers was part of the unified command team at

Mosier, which also included the Environmental Protection Agency, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Union Pacific Railroad, Yakama Nation and local fire departments. The single

biggest lesson, Byers said, was the value of preparedness.

"We had a lot of equipment staged and ready," he said. "We didn't spend any time fumbling around, wondering what was important to protect."

That is why oil spill contingency plans are so critical to success, Byers said. As far back as 1990, the federal Oil Pollution Act has required oil companies

See **SPILL DRILL/8A**

## HERMISTON

# Students with stress have ally in RISE

School district and county health team up for new mental health program

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
East Oregonian

A new school-based mental health program aims to help Hermiston students deal with the emotional and social challenges they face on a daily basis.

The district has partnered with the Umatilla County Health Department to create the Resilience, Inspirational, Success Education program. RISE offers small-group sessions for students at every school level, and targets specific skill development for everything from anger management and dealing with bullying to handling grief and substance abuse prevention.

The program is funded by a grant from Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc., or GOBHI. B.J. Wilson, Hermiston School District's director of special programs, said the goal was to offer some preventative measures

rather than just curative ones. "We try to get kids on the path for good coping mechanism skills," he said. "When you're seven or 13, you may not be able to seek the skills you need. We want to give them tools while they're young."

Wilson said the two

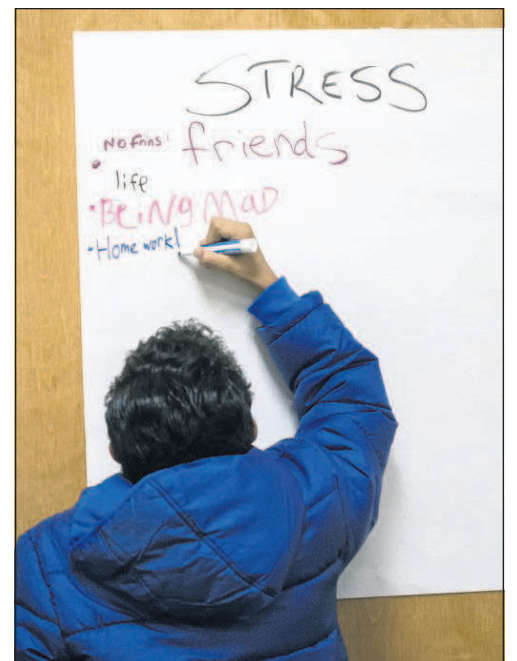
ways of tracking progress in students are through attendance and behavior referrals.

"We'd like to reduce the number of behavior referrals," he said. "It's a delicate matter. We don't ever want to indict parents, or say they're raising their kids wrong. But we want to give them skills."

While RISE is a new program, it's not the first school-based mental health service the district has had. Wilson said for the past three years, Lifeways was serving as the schools' mental health service, but the district wanted to go a different direction.

"Lifeways is a more clinical mindset," he said. "With the RISE people, it's more classroom (based), more lesson delivery. It's great for kids for whom just a couple of tips would be helpful, or for others who need more

See **RISE/8A**



LEFT: Taylor Wilson, a mental health counselor with the RISE program, works with a small group of girls Tuesday at Armand Larive Middle School in Hermiston. RIGHT: Armand Larive students take turns writing down what stresses them out.

Staff photos by Kathy Aney



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