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# EAST OREGONIAN

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**"I have a good job, but it wasn't enough to keep up with mortgage payments."**  
— **Letitia Kidder**, may lose her Hermiston home on Christmas



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Marine Corps veteran Letitia Kidder may lose her Hermiston home of ten years to foreclosure by the end of the month.

## The brink of homelessness

### Homeless students face extra barriers to success

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN** and **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
*East Oregonian*

A typical student has many concerns: getting good grades, making friends and participating in extracurricular activities are just a few. But for many students, they can come second to a more basic need: finding a place to live. The state recently released numbers for homeless students in Oregon. The state reached an all-time high this year, with 3.9 percent of public school students qualifying as homeless. Hermiston's numbers See **STUDENTS/12A**

### Unforeseen circumstances threaten residents' housing

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
*East Oregonian*

Letitia Kidder had planned to retire with her husband, sell their home and move out to the country. But when he died five years ago, Kidder found herself saddled with expenses she couldn't afford — including her home. The Hermiston house where she has lived for a decade was foreclosed on in June, giving Kidder six months to either come up with the funds or vacate. "I have to be out at midnight on Christmas," she said. While the 2017 count by the state of Oregon found 55 homeless people in Umatilla County, many more like Kidder are on the brink of homelessness. Kidder is a veteran, as was her husband. He died of a heart attack in December 2012, in the middle of fighting for VA benefits. "He was in pain from an ankle injury he received while he was in the service," she said. With three sons in their teens



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

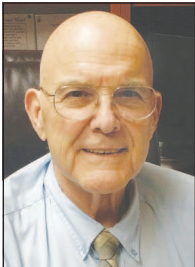
A homeless woman who identifies herself as "Nana" and Christopher Stade of Kennewick panhandle at the Walmart store Monday in Hermiston.

when her husband, Charles, died, Kidder said her first priority was getting her boys through school. But as she waited to file for widow's benefits, she said she was informed that the last stage of the application could take between two and 10 years to process. When her husband died, Kidder was unemployed. She found a job shortly after, but was struggling to pay bills. Eventually, See **HOMELESS/12A**

## County abandons hotel tax after local criticism

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
*East Oregonian*

Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering has abandoned the idea of a county-wide tourism tax on hotels after it was met with stiff resistance by Pendleton hoteliers. The proposed 2 percent tax, added to hotel customers' room bill, would have been earmarked to promote tourism in Umatilla County via grants, product development and marketing. But after Elfering listened to concerns from hoteliers and others during a meeting in Hermiston on Thursday, he announced at a second listening session on Friday that the idea had been shelved.



Elfering

"It's off the table at this point," he said. "As long as Travel Pendleton keeps doing what they're doing and everyone is satisfied with that, then I'm satisfied with it." While hoteliers from multiple cities had concerns about how the transient lodging tax would affect their profits and how the money would be spent, it was Pendleton hoteliers and those affiliated with Travel Pendleton and the Pendleton Convention Center who were most vocal in their criticism. They felt that Pendleton — which contains 15 of the 29 hotels affected — would have been disproportionately paying into a fund that would then be used to subsidize other cities that didn't have their own tourism efforts going. They also voiced concerns that the assessment was just a way to come up with more money to fund the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center in Hermiston. "Please don't hamstring Pendleton to supplement other towns in Umatilla County who haven't committed to tourism and may not have the infrastructure or events to host tourism," Pendleton Convention Center manager Pat Beard wrote in a letter sent to county commissioners after the announcement of the proposed tax. During the meeting Thursday See **TAX/12A**

### HERMISTON

## Teen plots future with trips to Stanford and Yale



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Hermiston High School junior Candan Gutierrez works on his precalculus homework after school Thursday at Hermiston High School.

### Candan Gutierrez explores social justice, degree options

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
*East Oregonian*

Even though he's not sure where his post-high school path will take him, the wheels in Candan Gutierrez's head have been turning since he was in middle school. "If you come from an underprivileged group, you have to advocate for yourself," he said. With a budding interest in social justice and a curiosity about what college has to offer, the Hermiston High School junior has spent summers educating himself about various courses of study, attending camps at colleges around the United States.

The first, two years ago, took him to Stanford University to learn about bioscience and biotechnology. He spent last summer at Yale University. At that camp, Gutierrez said, the groups were divided up into "capstones," each of which focused on issues such as sustainable development, social entrepreneurship, global health and international development. He was placed in a group that focused on gender equality. "Everything centered around different goals," he said. Gutierrez already has another goal in mind for this summer — a seven-week program at Princeton University. The program, "Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America," admits 100 students from across the country who come from

See **GUTIERREZ/10A**



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