

## Local governments cautiously optimistic on infrastructure bill

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
Hermiston Herald

With Congress passing a \$1 trillion infrastructure bill the first week of November, the Oregon Department of Transportation already is projecting to take home \$1.2 billion for transportation projects across the state. But local officials are taking a wait-and-see approach to figure out how that money may trickle down to cities in Eastern Oregon.

"This is good news," Pendleton Public Works Director Bob Patterson said. But questions remain

over how and when rural communities will see money from the bill.

Patterson said the city hoped the bill would include money for a new road connecting Highway 11 and Highway 30 on the South Hill to open up new land for housing. The appropriation didn't make the cut, but the city is still exploring funding options for the road.

Funding a realignment of the Interstate 84 Exit 209 interchange has been something of a white whale for Pendleton city officials. The city has applied for a grant from the U.S. Department of

Transportation three times and come up short each time.

The city is making a fourth attempt at securing \$24.4 million through the grant, which was known as BUILD under the Trump administration and is known as RAISE now. Patterson said the city plans to stay the course in obtaining money for Exit 209 through the infrastructure bill. Patterson said the city should know by Thanksgiving if it locked down the award.

But like every other city and county in Oregon, there are plenty of other projects

Pendleton could fund with extra money from the federal government. Patterson said the city is waiting for word from the Oregon Department of Transportation as to how it will divvy up its \$1.2 billion, but if it's similar to the state gas tax, half would stay with the department, 30% would be split among the counties and the final 20% would be shared between cities.

Mark Morgan, the assistant city manager of Hermiston, said he was frustrated that attention quickly turned

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Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald, File

The city of Pendleton is making a fourth attempt at securing \$24.4 million through a U.S. Department of Transportation grant for a realignment of the Interstate 84 Exit 209 interchange.

## Local warming stations need help

Lack of volunteers may delay opening of Hermiston station

By ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

A lack of volunteers may be a setback for a Umatilla County warming station, according to one of the station's volunteers and board members.

Brodie Messenger of the Hermiston Warming Station, 1075 S. Highway 395, Hermiston, said the facility usually opens the Monday before Thanksgiving, which this year is Nov. 22, but only if the station can attract enough volunteers. Otherwise, he said, the station's opening will be postponed until enough helpers sign on to serve.

Messenger, one of eight board members, stated this year's delay in opening could be "a week or two," based on the current numbers. The warming stations board plans to determine the schedule at an upcoming meeting.

The station has 33 volunteers, but it needs more than 100, Messenger said. Having more than 100 volunteers will give the board a sufficient pool of help.

The Hermiston Warming Station started in 2011, Messenger said, and its start was in local churches. Each week, during those early days, a different local church would act as the town's warming station, he said. Then, as now, people without a permanent place to reside would come to the station for shelter, food and opportunities to clean themselves. The station has operated at the Highway 395 location since 2017.

### A common problem

Other programs like the Hermiston Warming Station are facing shortages of volunteers, according to Paula Hall, CEO of Community Action Program of East Central Oregon.

Her organization operates the Promise Inn, a former motel converted into a transitional housing facility. Unlike a warming station, which is seasonal and open only when temperatures drop, the Promise Inn, 205 S.E. Dorion Ave., Pendleton, is open throughout the year.

The facility, which opened April 1, does not rely on volunteers, Hall said. Thanks to grant funding, the Promise Inn has paid staff, which includes a case manager, a street outreach worker and an onsite worker.

"Everyone who relies on volunteers, whether it is food banking or homeless services, are really struggling," she said. "Primarily the volunteer pool are those who have retired and have more time to give to their community. Those

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Photos by Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

Above, students from Echo School dress as military figures to honor local veterans during a Veterans Day parade on Thursday, Nov. 11, 2021. Below, Stanley Anderson, a member of the American Legion salutes during a Veterans Day breakfast at the Hermiston Community Center.

## Honoring our veterans

A breakfast in Hermiston, a parade in Echo were part of Veterans Day activities

By ERICK PETERSON and BRYCE DOLE  
Hermiston Herald

Special events in Umatilla County were held Thursday, Nov. 11 to honor local veterans for Veterans Day.

In Hermiston, Aaron Wetterling and around 140 other veterans shared food and camaraderie during an annual breakfast at the Hermiston Community Center.

"It's always a great time," Wetterling said about the event, and he credited Hermiston Parks and Recreation Department employees, including Diana Picard, recreation coordinator, and Kelly Schwirse, clerk, for a "fantastic job helping us."

Brandon Artz, the parks and recreation department's interim director, explained that his department took over the break-



fast to keep it from being a drive-thru event. His department got together with sponsors, including Hale's Restaurant, the Pheasant Blue Collar Bar & Grill and Vern's Food Service, he said. He

added that volunteers, such as the Hermiston Kiwanis Club, helped make the breakfast possible.

Wetterling, who served in the Marines from 1966 to 1970, told stories of his service during the

Vietnam War. His service made a lasting impact, he said, which included 20 years of "jungle rot" on his feet that mostly went away.

The larger effect was on his personality, he said. Wetterling described a "military bearing," which to this day even influences how he dresses.

His service, he said, also links him to other service members, whom he interacts with as "old friends," even when he does not know their names. Wetterling said he talks with these friends about family members and shared acquaintances, reminiscing over old times and discussing life events.

One of these fellow vets at the event was William Hill, 74, of Hermiston, who served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. He said he is proud to have served and he is happy for opportunities such as the breakfast, which allow him to meet other veterans.

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## Frontier grocery stores ready for Thanksgiving

By ALEX WITTWER  
EO Media Group

Supply chain issues gripping the nation have led to shortages in everything from semiconductors to paper trays at school cafeterias, but Thanksgiving looks to be running smoothly and on time, according to grocery stores in rural Oregon cities.

Dave Meade, Colum-

bia Harvest Foods store manager, said that his store is not having trouble getting turkeys. According to Meade, he expects to get all the turkeys he needs, "several hundred," he said.

"The issues that we deal with that cause the most problems have to do with are just getting trucks to get product picked up and delivered to distribution centers," he said. His

store's distribution center is in Spokane, according to Meade.

He said he believes the reported shortages may be regional, not relevant to Umatilla County.

"Turkeys on the table, we've got turkey already in our freezer," said Blaine Huffman, owner of Huffman's Market in Prairie City. "I'm sure there's going to be shorts on but on

the whole we're fine."

Grocery stores have had to adapt to a changing supply landscape that has seen shortages crop up in unexpected places.

"We don't know one load from the next what we're going to get — it changes every time," Huffman said. "The food supply chain is vulnerable, a lot of stuff is still sitting out in the ocean."

Huffman said he had

some issues ordering pre-made pies for Thanksgiving, and the store was out of stock of those items. Supplies for homemade pies, however, were available.

Considering that smaller markets lack the same buying power as larger chains such as Safeway or Walmart, there was a cause for concern that

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