

## FARMERS: 'If you're going to invite the public out to visit, you have to make sure it's safe for them'

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and livestock for any unusually dangerous conditions and let guests know about any threats ahead of time. They must also post warning signs on their property that let the public know they assume the risk for inherent dangers that come along with being on a farm or ranch.

Jack Bellinger, owner of Bellinger Farms in Hermiston, said they provide you-pick pumpkins and hay rides for kids every year during Halloween. He said he can't remember a single instance of someone getting hurt during as part of the event.

Bellinger is in favor of protecting the rights of farmers, he said, but that farmers should ultimately take responsibility for keeping their property safe if they plan to invite the public.

"That's my main concern when I have visitors on the property I'm farming, to make sure it's safe," Bellinger said. "Farms can be potentially dangerous areas. If you're going to invite the public out to visit, you have to make sure it's safe for them."

SB341 is now awaiting its first reading in the House.

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## WINTER: Massachusetts used 600,000 tons of salt

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of the association's Snow and Ice Cooperative Program.

A single season snowfall record was broken in Boston, with virtually all the 110 inches coming in a six-week stretch from late January to early March when temperatures rarely rose above freezing.

"In January, we were talking about what we were going to do with the surplus snow and ice funds," recalled Thomas Tinlin, Massachusetts' highway administrator. The Department of Transportation wound up spending \$154 million on winter maintenance, well above its \$107 million annual budget. Additional money was appropriated to assure the state's private snowplow contractors got paid.

Massachusetts used 600,000 tons of salt and 1.6 million gallons of liquid deicer. Crews removed 17.5 billion cubic feet of snow from state roadways, equivalent to 40 times the volume of dirt excavated during the massive Boston highway project known as the Big Dig, state officials noted.

Pennsylvania, which budgeted \$203 million for winter maintenance based on a five-year average of previous expenditures, spent \$272 million to keep traffic flowing on the state's 40,000 miles of roadway, according to Erin Waters-Trasard, a transportation spokeswoman.

Pennsylvania also was among several states that sent crews and equipment to help out in Massachusetts, she said.

It wasn't just the typical northern snow belt states that felt winter's wrath.

"Normally we don't budget for ice and snow because we don't get it that often," said Melinda McGrath, executive director of the Mississippi Department of Transporta-

tion. But recent winters have brought several dangerous ice storms to the south, and this year Mississippi spent \$3.1 million, used 887 tons of salt and devoted 64,704 work hours to keep state roads safe.

An even larger and longer-term expense, McGrath said, are potholes. It's a universal headache for motorists and highway officials as freezing and melting cycles cause pavement to expand, then crack. Maryland was among several other states reporting a large increase in potholes this spring.

The actual taxpayer cost of winter road maintenance was much higher than measured by the survey. Not all states responded and the expenses incurred by municipalities for plowing local roads were seen as comparable to state governments.

Unlike the previous winter, AASHTO said there were no serious shortages of salt this year.

When lawmakers and the general public consider transportation funding, winter maintenance needs can often be overlooked said Bud Wright, the group's executive director.

"When we think about funding transportation, we need to consider the total amount needed to keep people and goods moving throughout the entire year," he said.

States are prohibited from using federal highway funds for snow and ice removal, but some sought federal disaster assistance to offset costs. President Barack Obama approved disaster declarations for Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut for a January blizzard, making those states eligible for 75 percent reimbursement. But a broader request from Massachusetts to consider all the major storms a cumulative disaster was denied.

## GUNS: Republicans attempted unsuccessfully to replace the bill

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Senate Bill 941 extends background checks to cover nearly all gun sales by requiring private sellers and purchasers to appear in person at a gun dealer, who would do the check. If the gun owner and recipient live more than 40 miles apart, the owner can ship the firearm to a dealer close to the purchaser. Gun transfers between family members would be exempt. The governor has already expressed her support for the bill.

Oregonians currently must pass background checks in order to purchase firearms at licensed dealers and gun shows. It is illegal for people in the state to have firearms if they are convicted felons, or were civilly committed to a psychiatric treatment facility or prohibited by a court from having firearms due to mental illness. Senate Bill 941 will also allow judges to decide whether people mandated to receive outpatient mental health treatment should be allowed to keep their weapons.

Republicans attempted unsuccessfully Monday to replace the bill with two separate minority reports.

The first proposal would have created a Firearms Investigation Division within the Oregon State Police and required the

agency to assign at least eight full-time troopers to investigate people who fail background checks that are already required under state law at licensed firearm dealers and gun shows. The proposal would also have required the state police to hire two full-time employees to work on public education and outreach on firearm safety.

That minority report failed on a party line vote. The Oregon State Police started investigating people who fail background checks nearly a year ago at the request of then-Gov. John Kitzhaber, after Senate Minority Leader Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, pointed out the state was not conducting the investigations.

Senate Bill 941 will clarify in statute that the state can legally conduct these investigations, since OSP had previously believed it was unclear whether they had legal authority to investigate.

A second minority report also failed on a party line vote. It would have increased the penalties for people who illegally attempt to purchase firearms, and it would have earmarked \$44 million from the state general fund to increase mental health services.

"We're adding real teeth to these laws that are already in existence," said Rep. Carl

**"We're living at a time children are practicing live shooter exercises."**

**— Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth**

Wilson, R-Grants Pass, of the proposal to increase penalties.

Republicans also unsuccessfully pushed for Democrats to remove an emergency clause from the bill, so voters could hold a referendum on it. An emergency clause on the bill will prevent voters or the Legislature from referring it to the ballot.

Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth, said he felt conflicted over the bill, but ultimately decided to vote for it because the potential benefits outweighed inconveniences to law-abiding gun owners. Evans, who served with the Oregon Air National Guard in Iraq and Afghanistan, said his military background and experience as a gun owner were central to his decision.

"This is a 50-50 call for me, probably closer to a 51-49," Evans said. "There's a cost for this. For gun owners like me and many of you, it's going to be inconvenient."

Evans said background checks on private gun sales would be "an adjustment,"

but society has already made other adjustments in response to gun violence.

"We're living at a time children are practicing live shooter exercises," Evans said, referring to school drills to practice how to respond during mass shootings. "We have a responsibility to do what we can, where we can, to try to save as many lives as we can."

At the same time, Evans said Senate Bill 941 is not a cure-all for gun violence and the Legislature needs to provide more mental health services.

Rep. Barbara Smith Warner, D-Portland, said that she and many other parents remember where they were when they learned of the December 2012 massacre of students and staff at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. Yet despite the emotional impact shootings at Sandy Hook and Clackamas Town Center the same month, Smith Warner said Senate Bill 941 is also intended to prevent the shootings that occur regularly yet do not receive news coverage.

"Every person who can legally buy a gun now will be able to legally buy a gun if this bill passes," Smith Warner said.

*The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.*

## BMCC: Pierson graduates this year with a transfer degree

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Pierson described the response as typical.

"Feedback has been good," she said. "People have been really positive."

Carlson, like the rest of the names on Pierson's clipboard, is someone who votes in most every election.

Pierson and other BMCC student leaders also spent time on campus helping their classmates register to vote.

"We were surprised at how many students weren't registered or were registered at their parents' addresses," she said.

The recently married student won't reap any direct benefits from her hours of pavement pounding if the bond passes. She graduates from BMCC this year with a transfer degree and will study education in Hermiston via Eastern Oregon University's online program.

The Hermiston native said a healthy BMCC will attract local high school graduates like her.

"I wanted to stay home, to go to school, but stay in my community," Pierson

said. "That, for me, was a big factor."

To do that, she said, the college must offer relevant programs and maintain its infrastructure. Pierson has experienced the school's vintage air conditioning and heating system. When the climate is too warm or too cool, she said, "I know firsthand how difficult it is to focus in the classroom."

Additionally, she said, bond passage would indirectly help keep tuition down. Pierson works 30 hours a week at Banner Bank and 15 hours as a student ambassador at BMCC. Still, money is tight.

"An extra couple hundred dollars a term for tuition could prevent a student from going to school," said Pierson, who said she is the first member of her family to attend college.

Camden VanOcker, who serves with Pierson in Associated Student Government, has helped support the effort by taking part in bond presentations. Along with other students, he shares his personal academic journey and puts a human face on the bond. VanOcker, who

plans to eventually earn an agriculture education degree, loves the idea of the precision agriculture program that would be kick-started with bond funds.

"Elite programs such as precision agriculture will draw more people to BMCC," VanOcker said. "It's the next big thing in agriculture."

Students aren't the only ones jumping headlong into the effort. After the last bond failed, board members and administrators recovered from the shock and got busy. The college started with a series of listening sessions around Morrow and Umatilla counties to find out what happened. They used the information to design a trimmer, less Pendleton-centric bond.

Yard signs, about 500 of them, now dot the two counties. BMCC President Camille Preus and Vice-President of Public Relations Casey White-Zollman have made daily appearances to answer questions about the measure.

"They have done about 100 presentations between the two of them, sometimes

four in one day," said Board of Education Chairman Ed Taber.

Last time around, Taber said, supporters had a false sense of security. He, like many others, is putting more skin in the game this go-round by knocking on doors and working the phone. The feedback encourages him.

"People are seeing that it's a great deal for them," he said.

Taber took pains not to be overconfident, though he thinks voters will come through.

"If it doesn't pass, it's not for lack of information out there," he said.

Pierson, too, feels good about the bond's chances, but she won't slack off until May 19.

"We need to tell people what it's for," she said. "We're asking for their tax dollars, but it's for a really good reason."

Details of the BMCC bond measure are available at [www.bluecc.edu](http://www.bluecc.edu).

Contact Kathy Aney at [kaney@eastoregonian.com](mailto:kaney@eastoregonian.com) or call 541-966-0810.

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