

# Bill proposing solar restrictions on farmland dies

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A proposal to make commercial solar projects tougher to build on high-value farmland in Oregon has died, but lawmakers expect to revisit the issue.

House Bill 3050 would have required developers to conduct an “alternatives analysis” to search for other sites before installing solar panels on high-value farmland.

The bill received a hearing from the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee but on April 13, the committee’s chair, Brian Clem, D-Salem, said it would go no further this legislative session.

“I think there is something there, but we’re just not there yet,” he said.

After speaking to both sides, Clem said he’d be putting together a work group to discuss commercial solar development on farmland.

Commercial solar facilities on high-value farmland are currently limited in size to 12 acres, unless developers perform an alternative analysis.

The Oregon Farm Bureau has gotten reports that farmers in the Willamette Valley are receiving solicitations from solar developers looking to lease land for projects.

The concern is that grouping of several solar projects will effectively sidestep the 12-acre limitation, converting high-value

farmland and changing the agricultural character of some areas.

Critics also say that solar developers may drive up rent prices for farmland, competing with crops, even though there’s a risk the projects won’t be decommissioned.

However, representatives of the solar industry argued that existing rules are sufficient and that HB 3050 would impede Oregon requirements that utilities buy power from small-scale producers.

# State parks add campsites to accommodate eclipse seekers

EUGENE (AP) — State park officials say they are opening 1,000 more campsites for people coming to watch the summer solar eclipse from Oregon.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will open up the reservations Wednesday.

The department said it made all their campsites available for reservation nine months ahead of the August solar eclipse and all spots

were quickly taken.

Department spokesman Chris Havel says with the help of the U.S. Forest Service, they’ve identified fields and parking lots can double as campsites. Officials intend to have portable toilets at the sites.

A third of the newly available space will be at traditional sites that are normally taken on a first-come, first-serve basis. There will be no first-come, first-serve

day-use camping at the parks August 18-20, Havel said.

In the path of totality in Eastern Oregon, spaces will be available at Farewell Bend, Unity Lake, Clyde Holliday, and Bates. Spaces are available outside the path of totality at Cottonwood Canyon (south of Arlington), Catherine Creek (Union), Ukiah-Dale, Minam, Red Bridge, Hilgard Junction, Lake Owyhee and Jasper Point.

“We want to make this once-in-a-lifetime event available to as many campers as we can safely accommodate,” he said.

Reservation prices are between \$10 a night to \$31 a night.

The eclipse will begin on the Oregon coast at 9 a.m. and end at 11:30 a.m. August 21.

People can make their reservations online or over the phone.

# IMESD: Hopes to eventually incorporate more local teachers

Continued from 1A

as Eastern Promise,” he said, referring to the program that offers college credit courses to local high school students.

Mulvihill said IMESD Online is a way for school district to stanch the flow of students enrolling in online charter schools.

Every student that takes internet courses through IMESD Online will be enrolled in their local school district, preserving an important funding source in a state where the education department allocates money based on an enrollment formula.

But besides retaining students that might be attracted to other online programs, Mulvihill said what sets IMESD Online apart is its ability to offer local accountability.

Mulvihill cited an Oregon Public Broadcasting story that

showed online charter schools were struggling to match the state’s graduation rate, which is already amongst the lowest in the country.

According to data compiled by OPB, Oregon online charter schools average a 48.4 percent graduation rate in 2016, well below the state’s 73.8 percent average and the 83.2 percent national average.

While many online charter schools recruit statewide, they’re based out of far-flung locales like Baker City, Coos Bay and Clackamas.

Eric Volger, the IMESD director of instructional services, said hiring the right manager for IMESD Online will be critical for the program’s success.

The district is currently in the process of hiring an online coordinator who will not only manage the program, but be an important point of contact for parents and educators with

complaints and concerns.

If an IMESD Online student is struggling with a certain subject area, the online coordinator can dispatch a local teacher to act as a tutor for the child. The teacher would be paid under an extra-duties contract, a stipend frequently given to sports coaches.

District officials also hope to use their physical assets to their advantage.

Under IMESD Online, Mulvihill said students could opt for a “hybrid” approach, where they take some of their classes online and the rest at a traditional school. For instance, a student could take their math and science classes online before going to a brick-and-mortar to participate in electives or extracurricular activities like music and baseball.

At the outset, the IMESD will utilize Acellus, a vendor that provides online instruc-

tion and curriculum, although Volger was quick to add that IMESD Online will tailor its offerings based on what the individual student needs, which could include sources outside Acellus.

The district also hopes to eventually incorporate more local teachers into IMESD Online.

“It’s not so much a pipe dream as much as it is a long-term plan,” he said.

CANVAS, a program Eastern Oregon University and Blue Mountain Community College instructors are already using for online coursework, is a part of the IMESD Online package.

Volger said IMESD Online won’t replace teachers and is hoping to use them to help teach online classes one day.

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Staff photo by Kathy Aney  
**Patriot Guard Rider Merlin Pengelly, of Irrigon, stands in a flag line to honor Staff Sgt. Austin Bieren, 25, as his ashes were delivered to his wife in Umatilla on Friday afternoon.**

# BIEREN: Joined Air Force right out of high school

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District helped form the honorary procession. Umatilla Police Chief Darla Huxel and Umatilla Fire Chief Steve Potts were among those who accompanied Bieren’s remains all the way from Pasco, and fire trucks were lined up along Umatilla’s main street, lights flashing, as a mark of respect.

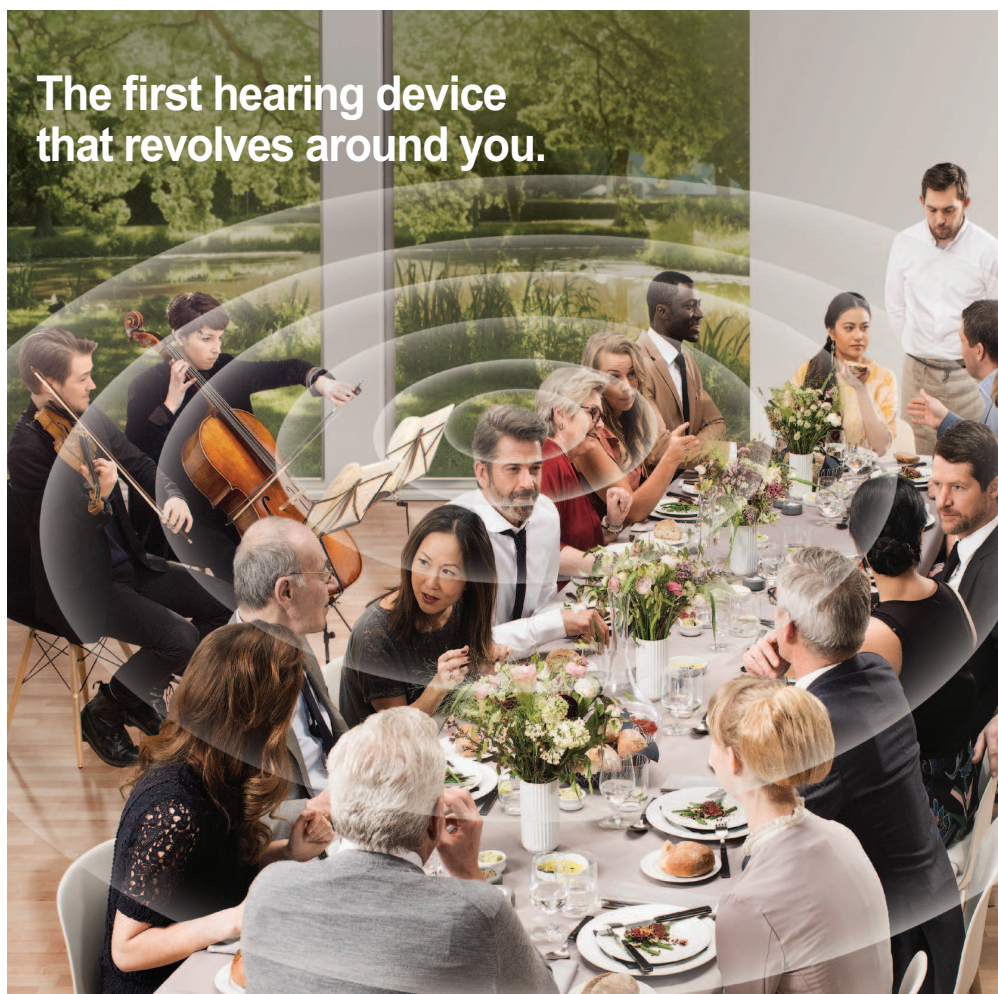
Bieren joined the Air Force right out of high school, and his mother said that was what he had always wanted to do with his life. He deployed three times. He is the second member of the U.S. military to die in Syria while supporting Operation Inherent Resolve

against the terrorist group ISIS.

Bieren was preceded in death by his twin brother Thomas Bieren, and leaves behind his wife Rachel Bieren, mother Tracy Finck, stepfather Jody Finck, father JT Bieren, stepmother Amber Bieren, sister Brianne Bieren, nephew Jaren Journot and extended family.

A celebration of life for Bieren, open to the public, will begin at 1 p.m. Saturday in the Umatilla High School gymnasium, 1460 Seventh Street, Umatilla.

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