

Prisons Well Run, But Funding Nearing a Crisis, Deputy Warden Says

Support Fading For Financing of High Tech Prison



Kameron Harvanek

The Deputy Warden at Oklahoma State Penitentiary told us last week about a state bond issue for \$170 million, to build a new High Tech Unit prison in McAlester.

The unit would hold 1,044 more inmates and hire 350 prison staff members.

The bad news is that it would take three to four years to build, and that legislative support

for the new prison is not as strong as it was earlier, said Kameron Harvanek.

The reason is that the Corrections budget is close to \$1/2 billion. And although “no other state does a better job” of running prisons, Oklahoma juries believe in locking inmates up and keeping them locked up, the prison official said. Legislators approved a proposal that inmates must serve 85 percent of their time, “so we keep them longer” that the past parole system did, Harvanek said.

“We’ve got to either” increase the Corrections budget or stop sending people to prison, he reported.

The average age now is from 34 and one-half to 35 years of age. So as the age goes up, there are more “health issues,” he stated.

And when legislators compare prison spending with other spending, “it’s like comparing apples and oranges,” he contended.

The “infrastructure” is also a problem. Most of the new prisons are former boys’ homes, he said.

“The walls are going to crumble,” or the state will have to spend more money to keep them up, he predicted.

Democrats and Republicans disagree over prison spending. “But there’s got to be some middle ground,” he declared.

The situation is nearing a “crisis,” he said. “Something’s got to give.”

There are 17 state prisons and the trouble-makers “work their way” to OSP here. Then they try to work their way back from maximum security.

Prison officials “try to teach them a work ethic...We assess their needs...We try to change their needs...and find them a job, if possible.

But when the average inmate is released, he gets a \$50 check and a ticket to where he “fell from.”

The odds are that he will be robbing places soon, and be “back in jail,” said the prison Deputy Warden.

The “H Unit” is the “worst of the worst.”

At OSP, inmates are put into groups of about 10. Prison officials have to “make sure they don’t have a beef with each other.”

Asked about “Death Row,” Harvanek said there are 77 inmates there, with three more involved in current trials.

He said about one-third of the inmates have mental problems. “We evaluate them, then we treat them for that,” he explained.

How many crimes involve drugs or alcohol, he was asked. “I’d say about 100 percent are either drug or alcohol related,” he said. At least that is true when the crime is committed, involving felonies, he added.

Inmates in minimum security may have been involved in bogus check charges, and other misdemeanors, not involving drugs or alcohol. Asked

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Evicks Recommends Trees To Replace Oaks Lost In Storm

OSU Extension Agent Ted Evicks told us March 20 that “tough trees” that don’t need much water should be planted to replace all the oak trees lost in the recent ice storm.

Ted recommended the Chinese Pistache, the Bald Cypress, the Shumard Oak, the male Sweetgum, the Ginkgo, and the Oklahoma Redbud.

He brought information from his office about each of the trees, how tall they grow, and pictures of them.

Area trees had stress from “a lot of weight” on them from the ice. But much of the pruning by “out-of-town” companies that said they had training and experience was very poor, he said.

The “Freeze Line” is moving, and Oklahoma is on the line, between northern and southern temperatures. “This won’t be our last ice storm,” he predicted.

We also will have “drier years” in this area, and we need to plant trees that “don’t need much water,” he advised.

There are some Bald Cypress growing near the McAlester post office, that did not suffer much damage, he related.

The Oklahoma Redbud is “pretty all year long,” the Extension Agent said. And it does not grow so tall that it bothers power lines.

This area has lost most of its Elm trees to the Dutch Elm Disease, he reminded. Many of the oak trees that were damaged by the ice, then poorly pruned, have Hypoxylon Canker that will kill them, Ted reported.

Many of the flowering pear trees, that lost 50 percent of their main limbs, also are not expected to last.

He said never to leave a “stub” on a tree, when pruning.

And when planting new trees, keep a five to six-foot circle free of weeds and turf around the tree. Place an organic mulch one to three inches deep around the tree, but do not “over-fertilize” a new tree.

More information is available at his office.

Channel 2 Weatherman Has Advice For Other Forecasters Too



Dan Threlkeld

Dan Threlkeld had some advice for the weathermen as well as the viewers who watch the forecasts on television, in his talk March 13.

“Every time it thunders, there’s not going to be a tornado,”

said the Channel 2 chief meteorologist in a comment pointed at fellow TV forecasters. He also admitted he “gets all worked up and excited...and I’m saying the same stuff over and

over... “that’s what they pay me to do.”

However, the KJRH weatherman said he talks to church and civic groups around the state, to be sure they “know what to do in bad weather.”

His procedure, he said, is to “go on and stay on,” during bad weather. A tornado watch means just staying up with the weather,” he confided.

He recommends programmable weather radios, and he suggests that civic clubs provide them for area schools.

People used to recommend that you open windows during a tornado, but that is not recommended any more.

It also is not safe for a car to stop under an underpass, he said. “The wind can be twice as strong” there.

He said it is safer to lie in a ditch than sit in a car, during a tornado. And mobile homes are just unsafe during a wind storm, he said.

The forecaster recommends that business firms have a drill, if just for the peace of mind it brings, for people to know what to do.

A “direct hit” is rare, he stated “but that doesn’t mean it won’t happen...You just don’t know... “You can’t say because something hasn’t happened that it won’t happen.”

The state had 28 tornadoes last year, compared to an average of 54 a year.

The subsoil is also dry, all because of El Nino, he said. We haven’t had many “gully washers” lately.

Threlkeld said he is from Weleetka, so he can pronounce the names of most Oklahoma towns.

He advised people to “keep up” with the weather this time of the year, “because it changes so quickly.”

And he tells people don’t “bad-mouth the rain, Rain is good.”

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about the 23-Hour Lockdown, the speaker said that occurred after the 1973 riot, and is still in effect from a 1985 disturbance.

That means they have one hour a day to exercise, and three showers a week, he said.

Asked again about punishment, he noted that Oklahoma is “number one in incarcerating women” and “in the top five” for men.

Yet the state does so well in running its prisons, that officials from foreign nations come here to study their system and adopt a number of them, he related.

Asked about costs per inmate he said the cost is about \$57 per day at OSP, about \$46 in medium prisons, and \$38 in minimum prisons.

Asked about prison industries, Harvanek said there are about 100 jobs for 1,000 inmates.

In the 1973 riot, inmates destroyed most of the industries. Since then, the industries are not all in the same place. The Print Shop is at McAlester, but the Furniture and Tag Shops are located at other prisons.

Maximum Security at OSP “takes a lot of labor,” the deputy warden said.

There were questions about Rex Brinley and other inmates.

Harvanet said he was born in Plano, Tex, but has been in McAlester seven and one-half years.

Slate of Officers Nominated For 2007-08

Steve Brock is nominated for President, on this year’s slate of officers.

Brett Smith is President-Elect nominee. Mike Lowber is nominates for Vice-President, and Jim Henley is nominated to return as Secretary-Treasurer.

The only two changes for Director are An Owens, outgoing President, to replace Richard Gorman and Gary Boyd to replace Mike Lowber, who is nominated for Vice-President.

Other Directors, according to the 2007-07 Roster are Karl Scifres, Betty Talley, Shayne Javersak, and Loise Washington.

Attendance, Visitors, and Handshakers

There were 47 present for the meeting on March 13. The two guests were Arlene Sullivan, guest of Sandy Brock, and City Manager Mark Roath, guest of Don Lewis.



Sara Beale

“GOODCITIZENS” FROM MHS-Our Student Guests were Sara Beale and Bobby Doyle. Sara is the manager of the MHS ‘Baseball team and plans to go to Oklahoma



Bobby Doyle

University. Bobby works at Diamond Trophy. He also plans to go to OU and is thinking about studying marketing. Sara is not sure what she wants to study.

On March 20 there were only 32 present. (The “Attendance Problem”

was discussed by the board.)

Last week there were 44 present. There were no visitors other than the Student Guests.

HANDSHAKERS-George Lampton hadn’t been there in so long that Noble Miller gave him the dollar last week. On March 13 Dick Dudley gave the dollar to Banker Greg McNall. But the piano player, Gary Boyd, has been giving the bankers a hard time. He got it two weeks ago, (again) from Jim Thompson.

The U.S. Flags will be out for Armed Forces Day, May 5. Jim Thompson says you can still reserve a seat in the truck.

Speaking of flags, we’ve had to look for our U.S. Flag at the club meetings. But Randy’s going to take care of it, (or be fined.)