

STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED



for operations and \$326.9 million for capital outlay, including the construction of additional prison space — and last month approved a \$25.3 million supplemental appropriations request, some \$6 million more than corrections officials had first indicated they would seek in August.

The Corrections Corporation announcement comes on the heels of two announcements concerning the construction of private women's facilities in the state, one to be located near Atoka and the other to be located near El Reno.

—SHAWN ASHLEY
11/12/96

LEGISLATORS OBSERVE JAIL CONDITIONS

■(GIT) Approximately \$48 million annually and additional personnel funding is required for Oklahoma sheriff departments to meet the national sheriff departments average, said Rep. C. Michael Thornbrugh, R-Tulsa.

Members of the Jail Task Force, a joint interim study, visited the Wagoner County Jail on Wednesday to observe conditions that John Walsh, executive director of the Oklahoma Sheriff's Association, said exemplified the disrepair of most of Oklahoma's county jails.

"I think (the tour) reaffirmed what we already suspected," Thornbrugh said. "The situation must be addressed financially from a state level. But the state can't afford to support all the county jails."

He said the members of the Jail Task Force, who are studying the problems associated with the jails, discussed possible options, but did not make any decisions.

One option included the possibility of setting up a jail trust authority or oversight committee. The task force also discussed community sentencing, problems the sheriffs had with the previous bill and regional jails.

Thornbrugh said that corrections would be the most dominate issue to be faced during next year's session.

*"In time of war the loudest patriots
are the greatest profiteers."*

August Bebel
speech to the Reichstag
Nov. 1870

Rep. Thornbrugh said that in 1993, the nationwide operational expenditure for sheriffs' departments was \$124.7 million while Oklahoma sheriffs' departments were underfunded \$84 million annually.

The national average for base starting salary for entry-level sheriff employees was \$19,393 while Oklahoma's starting salary was \$15,000, less than the average.

Fourteen percent of Oklahoma's elected sheriffs make less than \$20,000 per year and 45 percent make less than \$25,000 per year, Thornbrugh said.

He also added that two sheriffs were elected recently that had no law enforcement experience or CLEET certification.

Solutions to the problems faced by the county jail system that the legislature might consider include regional jails, privatization, the appropriation of more resources to the jail system and video arraignment. (Legislation is in place to provide for video arraignments, however, no funding was appropriated by the legislature to allow counties to buy the equipment.)

"The sheriffs didn't get the cost per diem they were promised last year," Thornbrugh said.

He said there would be a bipartisan approach this year to raise the cost per diem paid to the county jails from \$7.

Walsh said Oklahoma's county jails are suffering from a lack of funds for maintenance, personnel and alleviation of overcrowding.

"The buildings were built in the early part of the century," Walsh said. "We have totally outmoded facilities. Our system is incapable of dealing with today's inmates. The jails are drastically undermanned."

—MICHELLE BOYD WATERS
11/13/96

CRIME & JUDICIARY

DISTRICT ATTORNEYS' COUNCIL MEETS TO DISCUSS LAW ENFORCEMENT

■(GIT) The state of Oklahoma only spends a nickel — or 5 percent — of its annual revenue on police, prisons and prosecutors, said Bruce Walker, executive coordinator of the District Attorney's Council. The council and the Law Enforcement Alliance will hold a town meeting in Stillwater on Monday to discuss the problems associated with

Oklahoma's underfunded justice system.

"The Law Enforcement Alliance is trying to inform the public about what is truly happening in the criminal justice system, so that the public can decide how much public safety it wants," Walker said. "The cost to the average Oklahoman to make our criminal justice system funded at the national average level is fifteen pennies a day."

Each Oklahoman would be spending approximately \$55 on law enforcement per year. Currently, each person is spending just over \$18 per year. The additional money would go to funding agencies involved in investigating, arresting, prosecuting, defending appeals of, imprisoning and supervising criminals, Walker said.

Oklahoma came in 48th when its criminal justice spending per crime was compared to all 50 other states.

The council has planned several more meetings.

—MICHELLE BOYD WATERS
11/14/96

EDUCATION

FEE HIKE APPROVED FOR OSU

■(GIT) At a special meeting last Saturday, the Board of Regents for Oklahoma A&M Colleges approved a proposal for a \$2 per credit hour fee for the renovation of Oklahoma State University's Gallagher/Iba Arena, a sports facility on the university campus in Stillwater.

Total projected cost of the enlargement of the basketball arena is \$45 million, which will bring the seating from 8,000 to 12-14,000, Natalea Watkins, spokesperson for OSU President James Halligan's office, said Tuesday. The student fee will bring in \$15 million over the next 20 years Watkins said. The university hopes to tap the City of Stillwater for half of the remaining funds needed and private donors for the rest, she added.

The fee, which would charge students enrolled in six or more hours \$2 per credit hour, was supported by all members of the regents. The student government association also approved the measure Nov. 6 with a vote of 30-3 by student representatives. Promises were made to the students when they were notified of the pending proposal, Watkins said. "If they pay one-third of the cost, they

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