

# Brown signs bill to pay for Capitol renovations

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Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Capitol is on track to receive a \$50 million renovation after Gov. Kate Brown signed legislation Tuesday to pay for much of the project by issuing bonds.

The project is a win for Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, who tried unsuccessfully last year to gain passage of a \$337 million overhaul of the Depression-era building that would have included a seismic retrofit to help it withstand an earthquake.

The scaled-down version approved by lawmakers earlier this month would not protect the Capitol against an earthquake, although elements of the project would lay the foundation for a future seismic retrofit.

Relatively little of the project cost is related to the security upgrades Courtney cited as a top priority, after protesters who wanted a higher minimum wage caused a ruckus at the Capitol in February. During a press conference earlier this month, Courtney described the Capitol as a dangerous place for women and children due to structural problems and a lack of security.

Spending authority and \$30 million in bonds for the project were included in two bills that the Legislature passed in the waning days of the session early this month.

The state already sank \$23.8 million into the Capitol renovation project in order to plan the initial larger project, legislative administrator Kevin Hayden said in an interview earlier this month. The Legislature did not release a detailed spending plan until Feb. 29, the day before the state House voted on the legislation to partially pay for it.

It was not clear where lawmakers will get the additional \$20 million to cover the project cost.

## Two new vaults

The latest plan calls for the



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The governor has signed a bill that provides for the sale of \$50 million in bonds to pay for renovations to the Oregon State Capitol.

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Peter Courtney  
Senate president

state to build two new vaults under the Capitol to house electrical and mechanical equipment, including a new boiler to replace a system that failed in the fall.

The vaults account for a third of the project cost and could house seismic retrofit systems if lawmakers decide to move ahead with that plan in the future. A legislative document describes each vault as "a cornerstone for the future seismic base isolation of the Capitol."

Other large-ticket items in the project range from adding two entrances accessible to people who use walk-

ers or wheelchairs — only one entrance is currently accessible — to replacing leaky skylights and caulking around all of the marble on the exterior of the building. Hayden said the state discovered the extent of leaks in the existing caulking and sealant around the marble three years ago, when workers pressure washed the building.

There is also \$4.9 million identified for miscellaneous "building system modernization" work that would supposedly be selected from the earlier renovation plan.

Architects hired by the

state estimated it would cost just \$143,000 to move the Oregon State Police office from the basement to the first floor of the Capitol, a change that Courtney has described as a top priority to improve security.

Hayden said other work, such as remodeling entrances and moving certain state offices, will free up space if the state decides to implement metal detectors and bag searches in the future. "But there isn't a plan to do that immediately," Hayden said.

## Security fears

Courtney said the Oregon State Police recently completed a report that revealed it would be simple for intruders to gain access to the building after hours, when the doors are closed to people without security badges. Courtney said the potential for outsiders to gain access to the Capitol was especially worrying for women.

"This report, my wife read this and said, 'I'm not going back in the Capitol again,'" Courtney said during a press conference with reporters at

the end of the legislative session in early March. "My staff read it and said, 'I'm a woman, I'm not coming back in this capitol at night' ... And it was alarming. They actually demonstrated how you can get into this building. You would not believe how easy it is to get into this building."

However, Courtney said he would not release the state police report on Capitol security problems. "Go ahead and ask for a public record," Courtney said. "But you're not getting the report. Because I don't want this falling into the hands of some really bad people who can use it ..."

## Schools in need

The only vocal opponent of the renovation plan this year was Senate Minority Leader Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, who wanted to scale the project back to add only one accessible entrance and move the state police office.

Ferrioli said it would be better for the state to increase the amount of bond revenue available to retrofit public school buildings for earthquakes.

"Colleagues, you heard earlier in this session the \$175 million that was allocated to school seismic upgrades is far oversubscribed because the need is much greater than people anticipated," Ferrioli said during a Senate floor speech. "So colleagues, dollars are needed. There is a wait list. Children are at risk."

Courtney also said he was concerned about the safety of school children, specifically the bus loads of children who visit the Capitol.

"This building is in deplorable condition," Courtney told reporters. "It's a safety threat. It's a health threat. It's a security threat to people that come here, that work here, that visit here, and particularly to the children. And we're not stepping up."

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