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Prison Reform Debate

Here are 5 myths about the prison system -- busted!

Helen Silvis
Of The Skanner News

After more than a year of study, Oregon's Public Safety Committee has made 19 recommendations to reduce rising prison costs. The result is HB 3194, which will soon be coming up for a vote in the Oregon Legislature.

The reforms would hold the prison population steady and save a projected \$600 million over 10 years. They only affect newly convicted criminals, and would not change existing sentences.

Gov. Kitzhaber; Department of Corrections director Colette Peters; and former Chief Justice Paul Muniz are supporters. But prominent District Attorneys are protesting, saying Oregon's system is working and needs no changes.

But when the myths about Oregon's Public Safety system are busted, those arguments fall flat. Here's why:

Myth 1: Oregon's incarceration rate is already low. We don't need to reduce it.

If Oregon was a country it would be 22nd in the world for incarceration. At 373 prisoners for every 100,000 people in 2009, Oregon is on the same rung as Thailand. But more than 200 countries have lower incarceration rates than Oregon. So sure, if you only compare Oregon to the United States, number 1 in the world, for its prisoner rate, then we're not doing so badly. But if you believe there is no reason why Oregon should be imprisoning five times as many people as Norway, Denmark and Switzerland, then reform makes sense.

Will HB 3194 fix this? The reforms aim to hold the prison population at current levels, and as Oregon's population is rising, that means its incarceration rate should fall.

Myth 2. Oregon is only locking up dangerous criminals: 67 percent of the prison population stands convicted of a violent

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SCIENCE



PHOTO BY HELEN SILVIS

Sen. Jeff Merkley this week traveled to Boise Eliot/Humboldt Elementary and took the opportunity to unveil two bills he is sponsoring in the U.S. Senate. One would create a grant program to improve education in science, technology, engineering and math – the STEM subjects; the other would focus on hands-on career education.

Merkley Bills Support STEM Classes

Boise Eliot/Humboldt students enjoy more hands-on math focus

By Helen Silvis
Of The Skanner News

Students at Boise Eliot/Humboldt School demonstrated their love of science in a visit with Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley, Monday, April 29.

And the senator took the opportunity to unveil two bills he is sponsoring in the U.S. Senate. One would create a grant program to improve education in science, technology, engineering and math – the

STEM subjects; the other would focus on hands-on career education.

"We need to do a lot more to bring these concepts about math, science and real-life applications of them, into the classroom," Merkley told the students.

"One way we can make it (America) work better is to get more programs like you're all going through, into the classroom. So I'm introducing legislation to fund grants to increase the availability of

STEM programs across America."

Boise Eliot/Humboldt is a K-8 school specializing in the STEM subjects. And STEM coordinator Kylene Parks makes sure that learning about science is fun. Lessons are hands-on, and students are encouraged to act on what they learn. Parks also works with Boise Eliot/Humboldt's other teachers to help them integrate STEM subjects into their classrooms.

Judging by the curiosity and

enthusiasm on display, the effort is working.

After asking Sen. Merkley about his work, students took turns to tell Sen. Merkley about their projects and what they have learned.

Students raised salmon in the school and studied them before setting them free into the wild. Every class in the school visited the salmon once a week, to observe how they grew and developed. So it was an emotional day when they

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AMA to Hold Vigil for Kendra James

Sunday, May 5 marks the tenth anniversary of fatal police shooting

Bruce Poinsette
Of The Skanner News

Sunday, May 5 will mark the tenth anniversary of the killing of Kendra James. The 21-year-old Black woman was shot and killed, despite being unarmed, by Officer Scott McCollister during a traffic stop.

The Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition

for Justice and Police Reform will be leading a memorial vigil at 5 p.m. at the Greater Faith Baptist Church at 931 N. Skidmore. This site is just yards away from where the shooting occurred.

According to a statement from the alliance, "James' death was a touchstone for many in Portland who saw the shooting of an unarmed African American woman as a symptom of a Police Bureau needing major

reforms. In many ways her death led the accountability efforts down the path to the changes now being sought as a remedy by the Department of Justice in their lawsuit against the City."

According to reports, the incident occurred when James tried to drive away

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