



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

New insulation lines the ceiling in the paint shop at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton.

EOCI: Moves went beyond power saving

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“MOST OF THE STAFF AND THE INMATES ARE WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE EOCI.”

Mike Cleveland, EOCI's physical plant manager

in 1913 as the Eastern Oregon State Hospital for the care of long-term mental patients. Among the state's 14 corrections facilities, only the penitentiary in Salem has buildings older than EOCI.

Insulating attics was an obvious choice, he said, and other big improvements have cut down the cost of utilities at the prison. Since 2011 the prison upgraded its three boilers, installed new chillers and this past October finished replacing 106 high-pressure sodium lights around the perimeter with LEDs.

“We just started taking bits at a time on what we could do to save taxpayer dollars,” Cleveland said.

The LEDs, for example, provide two-thirds more light at two-thirds less wattage and come with a 10-year warranty. Switching to LEDs also decreased maintenance. Crews had seven or eight work orders a week to fix old ballasts and sodium lamps.

“Those have dropped down to one or two a

month,” Cleveland said.

The LED project cost \$82,000. Cleveland said the nonprofit Energy Trust of Oregon paid the prison \$32,000 in incentives to make the switch and the savings in four years will cover the rest of the cost.

“It may be quicker than that, but that's conservative,” he said.

Energy Trust has become the prison's go-to partner for big or small projects, reporting it has given EOCI more than \$383,000 in cash incentives since 2006. The \$57,000 check it cut for the prison a couple of years ago helped pay for the new chillers. Two summers netted the remaining \$40,000 in savings.

“It literally saved \$5,000 a month on our electric bill,” Cleveland said.

The trust also worked with the prison's personnel to implement “Strate-

gic Energy Management.” Cleveland said that's basically changing behavior and attitudes about energy use, and the inmates even play a role.

“Most of the staff and the inmates are working together to improve EOCI,” he said. “The inmates live here, so that's their home.”

He recalled one unit where security staff kept lights on 24/7. Inmates reported that, and the prison administration addressed it.

EOCI's age and location have made it an easy target for closure when state budgets are tight. Cleveland said operating the prison more efficiently than the rest of the facilities in the Department of Corrections makes it hard to close.

“We got staff to buy into the concept,” he said.

That was evident in 2013, when the governor mandated state agencies to cut

20 percent from building and facility costs by 2023.

“We had already hit that mark,” Cleveland said.

The prison's utility budget back in 2009-10 was about \$5 million for the biennium. Now, Cleveland said, it's closer to \$3 million.

The moves to be more energy and ecologically conscious went beyond power savings. Miles said the prison converted swaths of grass to gardens, which require less water, and the landscaping crew changed two large sections of lawn into dry landscaping to further cut back on water use while still making the prison look good.

Those \$100,000 gas bills are another thing of the past. Cleveland said the bill for December 2018 was \$33,175, and that was more than \$3,000 lower than December 2017.

The savings speak for themselves, he said, and allow the state to reinvest in other projects, such as the new fitness and training center for employees, which should be fully operational this summer.

Outbursts: Teachers shared experiences at forums across the state

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Pendleton School District officials said the only data they could provide were the number of worker's comp claims. In 2018, three of 13 claims were caused by student behavior, and the previous year, two of seven were caused by students.

Throughout 2018, teachers around the state were able to share their experiences at a series of 14 forums around the state, including in Hermiston. OEA representatives asked teachers to discuss barriers they face to a safe school environment, and what changes could be made to improve that environment.

“It kind of helped us realize the problem,” said Chris Demianew, a teacher at Sunridge Middle School in Pendleton. “I think as teachers, we were taking it really personally. But once we started the listening sessions, there were stories upon stories of teachers that quit — brand new teachers that didn't make it the full year because they couldn't handle the behavior.”

Those forums led to OEA's report, “A Crisis of Disrupted Learning.” Compiling the responses of the more than 700 people who participated, the report identified a “disrupted learning environment” as a class where student behavior significantly interferes with instruction and classroom stability and safety. Educators described behaviors like verbal abuse from students, spitting or kicking, destroying property, and using scissors or pencils as weapons. The report identified contributing problems, including increased



Salem Reporter/Rachel Alexander

John Larson, OEA president and a Hermiston teacher, speaks during a school funding rally Monday in Salem. Proponents for additional funding say larger class sizes and fewer aides increase the number of outbursts from students.

class sizes, not enough adults per student, insufficient resources to support students with special needs, a decrease in physical activity at school, and a lack of training for teachers.

A safety risk for staff and other students, the report said these behaviors also cut into instructional time for students.

The behaviors also negatively impact teachers.

Trauma in the classroom

Julie Smith, Pendleton's director of special programs, said they have to make sure they take care of their staff.

“Teachers love their students,” she said. “When (they) see children struggling, it takes an emotional toll on them.”

Smith said more extreme behavioral problems often stem from students who are dealing with major stressors outside of school, like domestic violence, financial strain on their families, or food or housing instability.

“When you live in a toxic stress environment, you're always surviving,” she said. “You're not able to relate to others — you perceive everything as a threat to your safety.”

That can lead to students getting violent, or running away.

“If there's trauma — one, two, multiple events, long-term trauma — a child could be sitting in class and have an internal flashback, like a PTSD response, and could just lose it,” Smith said. “It seems out of the blue because it's an internal response.”

Understanding that trauma, as well as how to deal with the secondary effects on teachers themselves, is a crucial part of training, Smith said.

Smith said those behaviors aren't new, and teachers have been dealing with them for years. But she said one reason for the spike in schools is the inclusion of those students in general education, where they may have been separated before.

Though there are many factors contributing to the problems, Scanlan said it's hard for teachers to deal with them with limited resources.

“Kind of a Band-Aid, something immediate, is how do you keep creating structure at school?” Scanlan said. He said there need to be more adults per student in schools, including counselors. Though they've added one back, a few years ago, Sunridge had one counselor for 750 students.

Though teachers feel the strain of being asked to do more with fewer resources, Smith said the district is trying to allocate funds to solve the problem.

The creation of safe spaces in the classroom, she said, has allowed children to have a place to calm down. There are also rooms where students can take structured breaks, which Smith said has drastically reduced the number of room clears.

She said they also try to identify problem behaviors early on and take preventative measures.

Scanlan said to truly address the problem, schools need more state and federal funding. More than 4,000 teachers, including Scanlan, marched in Salem on Monday, calling for lawmakers to allocate more funding for public schools.

The root of the problem lies in providing wrap-around services for families, Scanlan said.

“Ultimately, it's a problem that goes beyond the doors of the school,” he said. “We need to be thinking about how we can support families and get kids in a good emotional place to go to school.”

Capitol: ‘Playing this out with a press release or two won’t advance our common goal’

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Legislators came into the session already under a cloud over behavior, relating to complaints and investigations of harassment of legislative employees and others. Legislative leaders were sued twice in the past week for overlooking harassment allegations by employees.

Kotek removed state Rep. Mitch Greenlick, D-Portland, as chair of the House Health Committee for calling a lobbyist “stupid” during a recent meeting. Greenlick has chaired the committee since 2007 and will remain as a member.

The committee this session is handling major legislation, such as the governor's proposal to raise tobacco taxes and a handful of bills concerning vaccines amid a measles outbreak.

A public health researcher, Greenlick has been a stalwart of Oregon health care policy, leading legislative efforts to expand government health care to more low-income Oregonians.

Greenlick also lost his position as chair of the House Conduct Committee, which convenes to review complaints of misconduct by lawmakers.

Kotek also removed Rep. Bill Post, R-Keizer, from his seat on the House Judiciary Committee due to provocative tweets. The committee handles legislation governing the justice system.

Greenlick riled Republicans twice in recent weeks. The first came Feb. 5 when he cut off Rep. Denyc Boles, R-Salem, in a committee meeting in attempt to move on to the next bill. Boles complained on the House floor that she was “shushed.”

On Tuesday, Greenlick publicly criticized a pharmaceutical representative.

“I've been listening to your guys' comments for 16 years,” Greenlick said. “Generally, you're not stupid. In this case, you appear to be stupid.”

Greenlick then accused Rep. Christine Dragan, R-Canby, of “showboating” when she expressed concerns about those remarks during the committee hearing.

That prompted Republicans to boycott a Wednesday evening meeting of a legislative committee focused on improving the Capitol work culture. House Republican leader Carl Wilson, R-Grants Pass, asked Kotek to strip Greenlick of his chair position on the health care committee.

Greenlick declined comment Thursday.

Kotek said in a House speech Thursday morning that her moves weren't politically motivated.

“Mitch Greenlick is a friend and mentor and someone whose service to Oregon has been profound,” Kotek said. “And yet, we must all be held to a high standard.”

Kotek said Greenlick acted inappropriately.

But she also dressed down Republicans, saying their outcry over Greenlick was sensational.

“We will fail in this endeavor if we don't embrace constructive dialogue first before we proceed to public incriminations,” she said.

Kotek warned Republicans of overplaying grievances in public rather than constructively working to fix workplace issues.

“Playing this out with a press release or two won't advance our common goal,” Kotek said.

In a letter to all representatives, Kotek noted Post's history of online exploits. He's known for active and off-the-cuff Twitter usage.

This week, he called state Sen. Shemia Fagan, D-Clackamas, “cray cray” — slang for crazy — in reference to her proposal to lower the voting age to 16.

Post said he later deleted the tweet.

Post caused a stir when he retweeted a tweet from pro-gun control group called Moms Demand Action promoting their upcoming rally at the Capitol. Post tagged the Twitter account of the Oregon Firearms Federation and said “be ready, be there!”

The tweet was viewed as insensitive because of violent clashes between protesters and counter-protesters in Oregon over the past year, and because he sent it days after the one-year anniversary of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

“Given the pattern of his behavior, I believe it is necessary to remove him from his position on the House Committee on Judiciary, effective immediately,” Kotek said.

It's not the first time Post has drawn ire for his posts on social media.

Last year, in the midst of a ballot measure campaign to restrict gun ownership led by three clergymen, Post publicly posted their home addresses and phone numbers.

Post apologized for the offense that his tweets caused Thursday, but also defended himself. Post said body language and tone isn't exhibited on social media, causing statements to be misconstrued. He said he was inviting balanced debate on gun control, not violence or intimidation.

Post also warned about censorship of lawmakers.

“Free speech is free speech,” Post said.

“Words from the presiding officers ring hollow,” Greg Stiles, a spokesman for House Republicans said in a statement. “Instead, an inflammatory and disrespectful atmosphere persists the Capitol.”

Wilson on Thursday said Republican legislators would return to duty on the culture committee.

But he expressed concern about proposed legislation that addresses lawmakers' conduct on social media.

“(The bill) could put any in danger, depending on how someone feels about what you've done, and we've got to be extremely careful about that. I mean we have to be way careful about that,” Wilson told the House. “Social media is implicated, and also other media as well. If you appear on a radio talk show and say something that could offend someone, that happens all the time.”

Wilson declined an interview but released a statement vowing to work toward improving the Capitol culture.

That may take some work. A month into the session, every legislator's comments are facing more intense scrutiny. That attention shows no signs of letting up.

Public lawsuits and investigations allege the Legislature is inhospitable for women to work. The rise of the #MeToo movement and resurgence of mainstream feminism in the Trump era have put a microscope on lawmakers' day-to-day interactions.

This week's events show the friction among individual members about what changes need to be made.

Last year, Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg, was ousted over his unwanted touching of women at the Capitol, and allegations of sexual harassment that surfaced publicly with the labor commissioner's report led to the recent resignation of Senate President Peter Courtney's communications director.

Legislators and their employees recently took sexual harassment training, but several legislators complained that a trainer brought in earlier this month made inappropriate remarks, making light of harassment.