

Petitions being circulated

State Parole Board criticized by Morrow D.A.

by Steven A. Powell

Randall Fred Gaehring was sentenced to five years in the state penitentiary in Salem in Morrow County Circuit Court Jan. 4.

After only serving four months, he was set free from the prison on May 15 thanks to the state parole board.

Because of cases like this one, District Attorney Dennis Doherty is helping to circulate a statewide initiative petition that will limit the authority of the parole board.

The petition will amend present statutes to authorize actual sentencing by the courts rather than the parole board, in establishing initial parole dates for convicted felons; prohibit the parole board from releasing felons before that date; and reduce the number of members on the

parole board from five to three.

Doherty said the initiative will "Restore credibility to the courts and the criminal justice system, eliminate parole board tampering with the sentences imposed by local judges, and transfer the authority to determine when felons should be released from an appointed, inaccessible non-accountable bureaucracy to the local, elected judges who hear the cases and are most familiar with the facts."

The initiative is being sponsored by Douglas County District Attorney Bill Lassell, who became dissatisfied with the system after prosecuting a man that received his third "life" sentence.

Doherty said he would have supported the initiative anyway but the recent release from prison of Gaehring has made him even more determined to see that the

initiative gets on the ballot.

When Gaehring was arrested, Oregon State Police found \$9,692 in cash, .67 ounce of hash, 22.55 ounces of marijuana and 14,576 amphetamine tablets. He bragged to an undercover investigator that he could set up a deal for 100,000 amphetamine tablets. He was convicted in Umatilla and Morrow Counties for selling and trafficking in large quantities of drugs for illicit profit. He served just four months of a five year sentence.

"In cases like this one, the police and courts do their jobs only to be thwarted by the parole board," Doherty said. "It happens too often. It is a failure of the system and a frequent source of complaints. Are we going to continue on with this absurd system or are we going to change it?"

Doherty said there is plenty of waste in the parole board system. When sentencing a felon, the court must prepare a pre-sentence investigation, which is a thorough background of the criminal. The judge then uses that investigation in helping to determine his sentence.

The parole board receives all of this information and then does virtually the same investigation again using persons on the parole board staff. The parole board then has a hearing and arbitrarily decides when the earliest parole date is that the felon can be released.

If the parole board no longer has the power to set the earlier release date since if the initiative passes it would be in the hands of the local judges—the staff of the parole board could be cut and the number of members on the board could also be cut.

Doherty said.

If the initiative passes, the parole board would still exist and have the power to decide if felons would be released at the earliest parole date or serve a longer portion of judge's sentence. If a felon violates parole when released, the parole board would still be there to be sure the felon is put back in prison.

"It is a worthy petition, long overdue," Doherty said. "People are unhappy with the system and the terrible parole board decisions. Criminals are laughing at the penitentiary system. If the petition fails, it means people have accepted this system."

Doherty admitted that there are not enough beds at the penitentiary in Salem to house all of the criminals. "We have to protect ourselves," he said.

"We are either going to have to turn them loose or build. Some criminals have to be released but more careful consideration has to be made on who they are. Not all of them should be released at the earliest possible date."

Doherty said there are 1,800 beds at the state penitentiary while there are more than 100,000 felonies committed in Oregon every year so "most felons are not going to serve."

Anyone who is interested in signing the petition or circulating one throughout the area may contact the district attorney's office. Doherty hopes to mail the petitions by June 24.

"We do not have much time because it should be voted on in the Fall election," he said.

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by Don Gilliam

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Strike possible at Kinzua Corp.

Union employees at Kinzua Corp. in Heppner are contemplating a strike.

The union met Sunday night to vote on the possible strike but kept the results quiet to the press.

Union bosses negotiated Monday and Tuesday this week with Kinzua management in an effort to avoid the strike. If the strike does

occur, it could begin as early as this week.

"Negotiations with the union have begun because their contract expires this month (June 10)," said Kinzua General Manager Harry Kennison. "It is unfair labor relations to release any information about the contract during negotiations. That information is guarded."

School board to meet

The regular June meeting of the Morrow County School Board will be held on Monday, June 16 at 8 p.m. at the School District office in Lexington.

The board will consider bids for a number of items, including fuel, tires and

vehicles.

The Board also will take action on proposed revisions in the transportation policy.

In other business, the board will consider hiring of several teachers for the coming school year.

Heppner won't sell water bonds without dam, official says

The City of Heppner is in an unusual situation having approved a water bond issue for \$430,000 at the May 20 Primary Election but not knowing if it will sell the bonds.

The project rests in the hands of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and its work on the Willow Creek Dam. The Corps is waiting to see if it will receive funds for the project.

If it does not, Heppner Water Commissioner Clifford Green said Monday that the city will not sell the \$430,000 worth of General Obligation Bonds because that will not be enough to pay for all of the improvements needed in the water system if the Corps does not help.

Instead, Green said the city will try to pass a different bond for a lesser amount to

just pay for the work that urgently needs to be done.

"We will not go with this project without the Corps," Green said.

Green added the city passed a water bond for a similar amount a few years ago that did some good for the system but the city had trouble with the Corps then too. This time, the city will not sell the large amount of bonds without the Corps but will try instead to pass a water bond issue that will pay to replace the deteriorating Wilkenson line on Willow Creek.

"That is our highest priority," Green said.

Bids are scheduled to be taken for the project by the Corps in September and Green said if the bids are taken, the project will go through and the

bonds will be sold.

The city is hoping to sell the bonds to the Farmer's Home Administration at 5 1/2 percent interest but that deal "is not for certain," according to Green. The city may have to sell the bonds on the open market so the cost in interest could be much more.

If the FHA does buy the bonds, Heppner will have 40 years to pay it back. To pay for the bonds, Green said the probable system will be to pay half in taxes and half in water receipts.

Green said the repairs will "not solve all of the city's problems—just the most pressing ones."

City officials tentatively plan to meet with the Corps this Monday night at City Hall to discuss the project.



Heppner's Joedy Marlati bursts out of the chute and attempts to lasso a calf in the senior division calf-tying event at the Morrow County Junior Rodeo last Sunday. (See more on pages 6 and 7)

Willow Dam project receives \$7.7 million in appropriations from House subcommittee

An appropriation of \$7.7 million for construction of the Willow Creek Dam has been approved by the House Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee, Congressman Al Ullman has announced.

Ullman said the subcommittee's recommendation will go to the full Appropriations Committee for consideration this month.

Ann Warren, an Ullman assistant in Salem, said this week that it will be months before anyone knows for sure if the Willow Creek Dam funding will be approved by

the House, Senate and the President because of the long funding process.

She said the Senate is discussing the Willow Creek Dam project. Senate-House debates will then take place. For final approval, the bill will go back to both the House and Senate for a vote and, if passed, go to President Jimmy Carter for his signature.

"There is a good indication it will be funded because it was in the President's budget request," Warren said.

Corps of Engineers Public Affairs Officer O.C. (Dug)

Dugger said the Corps still has not purchased its first piece of real estate in Heppner for the dam project. He said the Corps still has a "freeze" on spending with a maximum of \$25,000. Dugger said real estate agents have been in Heppner the last week talking with the six or seven landowners that are within the \$25,000 limit.

"The Corps has asked for supplemental appropriations but because of the demands caused by the Mt. St. Helens eruption, it could be a long time," Dugger said. Because of the slowdown in the land acquisition phase, the dam

"It will be difficult to finish the roads as planned," Dugger said. "The finishing date for the overall project should not suffer but the start will be delayed."

Dugger said the biggest problem is that the Corps cannot obtain real estate because of the freeze. He said the relocation of the roads and water is behind schedule but the Corps hopes to still start the project this summer or at the latest when the new fiscal year for funding begins Oct. 1.

A small model of the Willow Creek Dam is being constructed at Troutdale so engineers may study the design, strength and materials for the dam. The materials

are available and bids have been taken to construct the model dam. The bids are being evaluated by the Corps, and Dugger said construction

should begin in about two weeks, and it should only take a few days to build the model dam.

Pioneer Memorial Hospital survey shows people favor a local Health District; physical therapy needed

Persons in the Tri-County area of Morrow, Gilliam and Wheeler Counties favor the establishment of a Health District to operate Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner, according to a survey that began in February.

About 30 percent of the persons that responded to the mail survey marked that they would favor a Health District rather than having the hospital county owned and operated under the direction of the Morrow County Court. Approximately 22 percent of the respondents said they would like to leave it county owned.

The hospital operating board is appointed by the County Court and the hospital budget is approved by the County Court Budget Committee, subject to voter approval. If a Health District is created, voters in the Health District elect the Board of Trustee members who are responsible for the budget and

obtaining voter approval for district taxes.

Of the persons who marked on the survey that they would like a Health District created, 18.5 percent would like it near the service area of the hospital while 13 percent want it Tri-County and eight percent county-wide.

The survey had a very good response record, said Hospital Administrator A.K. Felt. He said a normal response is five to seven percent for mail surveys while this one collected 19 percent of the surveys mailed.

There were 3,518 health surveys mailed to 11 zip code areas surrounding Pioneer Memorial Hospital, Heppner, Lone, Spray and Arlington had the best response record with better than 20 percent of the questionnaires mailed being returned. Lexington and Spray had the worst response rate.

"There is a lot of research and weeks of work that went

into this study," Felt said. "The hospital planning committee is in the process of determining what the hospital needs as a result of the survey. '19 percent is way better than average for mail response. And there is no single group or interest group that dominated the survey. People of all ages and incomes answered it.'"

Of the 647 persons who answered the survey, many of them did not know what types of services are available to them in their respective counties. The Mental Health and the Ambulance programs in the counties were listed as "adequate" in most cases while the drug rehabilitation programs were often listed as "inadequate." Attitudes were split on the alcoholism programs, home health services, emergency medical services and emergency telephone numbers.

As for additional services that respondents thought

should be offered, the most popular ones were physical therapy, first aid, preventive therapy, first aid, preventive medicine and rehabilitation. Survey did not know what types of services are available at Pioneer Memorial Hospital. Forty from Heppner and 74 overall did not know the hospital has medical-surgical hospital care. For pediatric care for children, 111 of the survey respondents did not know Pioneer has these facilities.

More than 200 persons did not know that the hospital has coronary intensive care, 92 did not know it has an emergency room, 273 did not know it has gynecology surgery, 179 did not know it has general surgery and 247 did not know Pioneer Memorial Hospital has respiratory therapy.

Most of the participants said that they carry group insurance for their medical needs. When asked in the survey if "Pioneer Memorial Hospital is meeting your community

needs," 35 said "it meets all of our needs," 283 said "it meets most of our needs," 95 said "it meets some of our needs," and 148 said "it meets only a few of our needs."

The health survey asked the participants if they presently have a health problem that is not being cared for and why?

The most common problems not being cared for are allergies, arthritis, ulcers, vision, blood pressure and depression. The most common reason for not receiving treatment was that the person had been to see a doctor before and had not been cured. Other reasons were lack of money, lack of confidence in the medical profession and distance to medical care.

Most of the survey participants marked that they made \$10,000 to \$50,000 with the numbers being evenly distributed. They were mostly either on salary or retirement and most had lived in the area for 20 years or more.