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A Decade Of Challenges And Success For OPEA And DOC

The Oklahoma Public Employees Association has a 33-year history of strong advocacy for state employees. Because of the serious challenges facing the Department of Corrections and its employees, OPEA has been especially active in DOC issues. The success of these efforts can be attributed to OPEA members, leaders and staff working together to improve the pay, benefits and working conditions of DOC employees and ensure the safety of Oklahoma's citizens. When OPEA speaks for state employees in any agency, thousands of co-workers from all agencies across the state stand with them. This report includes OPEA's major initiatives and successes over the last 10 years.

CLEET Certification

During the 1997 legislative session, OPEA passed legislation that required certain DOC employees – K-9 officers, CERT teams, those in transportation units – to be certified as peace officers so they would be trained to help with manhunts and other law enforcement activities.

Probation And Parole Privatization

In 1997 and 1998, OPEA closely monitored the passage of truth in sentencing/community corrections legislation to ensure that probation and parole officers continued to monitor offenders in the community. Some early proposals would have allowed private vendors to supervise offenders. OPEA and DOC sponsored a forum that brought probation and parole officers together with members of the legislative committee to discuss the importance of qualified state employees supervising offenders in Oklahoma's communities.



During Public Safety Lobby Day in May 1997, OPEA held a press conference supporting criminal justice reform with Attorney General Drew Edmondson.

Interim Study On DOC Compensation

In September 1997, OPEA staff and members presented a

report on Department of Corrections compensation and turnover to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Public Safety and Transportation. The groundwork laid in this presentation led to a law enforcement pay adjustment during the 1998 legislative session.

Correctional Corporal Series

OPEA worked with the DOC in implementing a correctional corporal series that expanded the career ladder for correctional officers, who received a pay raise of \$90 to \$100 per month.

Conference On Prison Privatization

OPEA sponsored several speakers at the first national conference on prison privatization in Oklahoma City in November 1997. During the conference, OPEA and the Tennessee State Employees Association held a press conference to discuss concerns with the growing number of private prisons in their states.

Private Prison Regulation

During the 1997 and 1998 sessions, OPEA worked with the DOC general counsel to pass legislation that would establish standards for private prisons by requiring minimum insurance levels, plans for emergencies and reimbursement to local law enforcement for escapes, riots and disturbances. The law also would have required prisoners assigned to private prisons to be representative of the population, therefore prohibiting contractors from cherry-picking the best inmates. After OPEA worked to pass the bill through both houses, Gov. Frank Keating vetoed it.

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Inmate Testing

During the 1998 session, OPEA passed legislation requiring that inmates be tested for certain communicable diseases if their body fluids come in contact with an employee of the Department of Corrections.

Privatization Of Medical Services

At the request of privatization supporters in Gov. Keating's office, the Department of Corrections made a move to privatize medical services with Corrections Medical Services (CMS). OPEA took the issue to local legislators and then to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation and Public Safety. During a hearing in September 1998, OPEA presented information on lawsuits pending against CMS and on issues from nurses at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary. Privatization efforts were immediately reversed.

The following January, the Board of Corrections requested that the agency develop a request for proposal to privatize medical services. OPEA fought the RFP and killed legislation that would have mandated privatization.

Privatization Of OSI

At the January 1999 Board of Corrections meeting, board member Tony Caldwell asked his colleagues to review selling OSI and leasing it back from a private operator. This proposal was also discussed in the subsequent legislative session. OPEA was there to fight the privatization proposal and remind state leaders of the service that OSI provides in training inmates and providing goods to state government.

Prison Construction

During the 1997 and 1998 sessions, OPEA sponsored legislation

and held a press conferences calling for the state to build a 1,000-bed state-operated prison. As part of the process, the Association introduced the design/build/lease/purchase option of construction. Unfortunately, Gov. Keating rejected the idea and continued to champion private prisons.

20-Year Retirement

OPEA sponsored and passed legislation in 2000 that provides a 20-year retirement with a 2.5 percent multiplier for corrections and probation and parole officers.

Corporate Image

In 2000, OPEA worked with legislators to fight the DOC Corporate Image program, which utilized important resources on paint, special uniforms and upgrading the "image" of the agency. DOC employees were concerned that funds that could be spent on staff and programs were being diverted to window dressing.

The Ultimate Sacrifice

OPEA immediately responded to the June 6, 2000, stabbing death of correctional officer Sgt. Joe Allen Gamble and the serious injury to Officer William Callaway at the Oklahoma State Reformatory by continuing the call for safety equipment in DOC facilities. Over the years, OPEA has advocated for stab-resistant vests, pepper spray and expandable batons to help officers defend themselves against attacks from inmates. The association called for a special session to address safety equipment and staffing issues. OPEA also stopped the premature reopening of the yard at OSR until additional safety measures were addressed.

Shortly after the attack, OPEA members brought their case to the Capitol, asking for additional staff, safety equipment and pay to help retain employees.

Privatization Of Community Corrections And Work Centers

The privatization of work centers and community corrections was placed on the July 2000 Board of Corrections agenda. OPEA wrote a letter to all members of the board, citing precedent for legislative action prior to privatization. At OPEA's request, Sen. Cal Hobson made a call to the agency, and the proposal was removed from the agenda.

Interim Study On Corrections

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation and Public Safety held an interim study on



Rep. Danny Hilliard and Rep. James Dunegan at a legislative hearing on the problems with the OSP Medical Services Unit.



OPEA members Brian Palmer and James Kroth plan OPEA strategies for 2000.



OPEA members at the House interim study on corrections issues in 2000.



Rep. Wallace Collins, right, talks with OPEA members.

safety and compensation at the Department of Corrections. More than 150 corrections employees packed the House chambers for a presentation from OPEA staff and members on



OPEA members took a day off to picket DOC headquarters on Veterans Day 2000.

critical issues facing DOC workers. Legislators agreed with OPEA members and pledged to make a corrections pay raise a top priority during the 2001 legislative session.

Pay Raise For Corrections Employees

In response to OPEA's efforts, the Legislature passed pay raises of \$2,000 to \$4,000 for corrections employees during the 2001 session.



OPEA members met with Gov. Frank Keating over the DOC pay raise in January 2001.

Furloughs

During the economic downturn of 2002 and 2003, DOC was scheduled to have as many as 23 furlough days. OPEA worked with the Legislature to obtain additional funding for the agency and identify

savings to reduce the proposed furlough days to two.

Electronic Monitoring

During the 2004 and 2005 sessions, OPEA worked with DOC to pass legislation providing for electronic monitoring for some offenders in the community, helping to reduce prison overcrowding.

DOC Budget

During the 2005 and 2006 legislative sessions, OPEA worked with DOC to provide detailed information on the agency budget during OPEA Lobby Days. As in the past, OPEA worked for additional funding and staffing.

2005 Interim

OPEA sponsored "A Day in Oklahoma Prisons," bringing sever-

al state senators to the Oklahoma State Penitentiary to work a few hours as correctional officers. Afterwards, OPEA made a presentation to the panel of legislators and held a press conference about concerns with low pay, staffing and overcrowding. Sen. Kenneth Corn responded by establishing a Senate working group on the Department of Corrections and appointing OPEA staff to serve on the panel. The report that was later issued by the task force included a pay raise for corrections employees and additional funding for the agency.

2006 Pay Raise

Following the Senate Task Force, Corn sponsored and passed a corrections pay raise of \$2,800. OPEA stopped a legislative proposal that would have excluded DOC from the state employee 5-percent pay raise in October. As a result, DOC employees received two pay raises in one year.

2007 Audit

When legislators proposed a performance audit of the Department of Corrections, OPEA supported the legislation, knowing that the audit would affirm the association's call for additional funding and staff and less dependence on private prison beds. The audit confirmed OPEA's 10-year call for increased funding, facility improvements, additional staff and new state-operated beds.



Sen. Kenneth Corn, center, at a press conference during his short stint as a correctional officer.



OPEA Membership Representative Alicia Wright and DOC Director Justin Jones. Wright earned a bachelor's in criminal justice at Oklahoma City University and is a CLEET-certified peace officer. She worked for DOC probation and parole before coming to OPEA.

OPEA's 2008 Legislative Program

OPEA is at the Capitol every day working to pass its 2008 Legislative Program, which includes:

- Obtaining a \$2,700 across-the-board pay raise for all state employees;
- Protecting the state employee benefit allowance;
- Providing a 4-percent cost-of-living adjustment for retirees;
- Fully funding the Department of Corrections;
- Removing the governor from the parole process;
- Building a 1,000-bed state-operated prison.

OPEA works for DOC and all state employees. For more information, contact Alicia Wright at (800) 880-6732, (405) 524-6764 or aliciawright@opea.org.

OPEA's Accomplishments

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| <p>1982 -Longevity pay created
-Dental insurance paid for employees</p> <p>1985 -Disability insurance paid for employees</p> <p>1986 -The State Employee Bill of Rights was created to ensure state employees full participation in the political process.</p> <p>1987 -Death benefit for retirees</p> <p>1988 -Retirement insurance subsidy established</p> <p>1989 -Family leave policy implemented for state employees before federal bill was passed
-SoonerSave program was established</p> <p>1990 -Leave sharing program was established</p> <p>1991 -Electronic deposit</p> <p>1992 -Alternative Dispute Resolution Program was established to help resolve workplace grievances
-Pension Protection Plan was created to keep state leaders from spending retirement funds</p> <p>1996 -Increase in annual leave for employees with 10 years or more of service
-Severance package was established for state employees who are RIFed</p> <p>1997 -SoonerSave match was established
-Mileage reimbursement rate raised to the IRS allowable</p> | <p>1999 -Dependent insurance subsidy established at 50 percent
-Process established to allow state employees to compete for their jobs when privatization is proposed</p> <p>2000 -Dependent insurance subsidy increased from 50 percent to 75 percent
-Insurance subsidy for retirees increased</p> <p>2001 -Benefit allowance changed to guarantee that the subsidy will increase as the insurance cost increases</p> <p>2001 -Annual leave increased to 15 days for employees with up to five years of service and 18 days for employees with five to 10 years of service</p> <p>2002 -Privatization process strengthened to ensure employee rights</p> <p>2003 -Strengthening employee rights in progressive discipline and hiring</p> <p>2005 -Employees given the right to appeal evaluation to the Merit Protection Commission
-OPM oversight of process to unclassify positions</p> <p>2006 -Blending the active and retiree insurance premiums to provide retirees with more affordable health insurance</p> <p>2007 -Minimum pay for state employees established at the federal poverty rate for a family of three
-Education loan reimbursement for state employees</p> |
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Pay Raises

1980	10 percent	19946 percent
1981	Pay raises based on Hay study	1996	\$.1,200
19858 percent on the first \$30,000	1998	The higher of 4 percent or \$1,250
19885 percent	2000	\$.2,000
1989	\$.400	2004	\$.2,100
1990	\$.1,000	20065 percent
19922.5 percent		