



WATCH VIDEO

- DISASTER IN JAPAN
- FOX 25 TOP STORIES
- BEHIND THE HEADLINES
- DPS DISCRIMINATION?
- DHS & ME MESS
- FOX 25 MORNING NEWS
- SPECIAL REPORTS
- MOST WANTED
- RAW NEWS
- FURRY FRIENDS
- YOU DECIDE

READ

- OKLAHOMA NEWS
- NEWS LINKS
- SCHOOL CLOSINGS
- NEWS TIPS
- WEB POLL
- NATIONAL NEWS
- INTERNATIONAL NEWS
- BUSINESS NEWS
- TODAY IN HISTORY
- CONSUMER NEWS
- GET THIS
- SCIENCE & TECH NEWS

ADVERTISEMENT

EVERY SUPERSTAR BEGINS WITH A DREAM

American Idol

WED & THU 7PM FOX

IN OKLAHOMA NEWS

Bill to ease Okla.'s prison growth clears House
 March 15, 2011 20:16 EDT

Eds: Updates with quotes from Speaker, Texas official and background. Incorporates details from BC-OK-XGR--Prison Funding.

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) -- A plan to slow the growth of Oklahoma's prison population by expanding community sentencing and the use of electronic monitoring was overwhelmingly approved Tuesday in the House, where lawmakers also decided to shift money to prevent more furloughs of corrections workers.

With a \$500 million hole in next year's budget, lawmakers are grappling with how to control spending for the Oklahoma Departments of Corrections, which currently consumes about 7 percent of the state budget.

Republican House Speaker Kris Steele, a minister from Shawnee, has said one of his top priorities this year is changing the state's criminal justice system to divert more nonviolent, low-risk criminals to community sentencing.

"We can be both tough on crime and smart on crime at the same time," Steele said Tuesday. "Certainly if a person is a danger to society or a threat to public safety, that person ought to be incarcerated.

"But as we sit here today we know that our prisons are currently at 99 percent capacity. That means that for those dangerous, violent offenders, there's really no place to house them."

Besides increasing the number of criminals eligible for alternative sentencing, Steele's bill also restricts the governor's role in the parole process. The move is expected to increase the number of inmates released on parole.

Currently, the governor must sign every parole before an inmate is released. Under Steele's bill, the governor's role would be limited to inmates convicted of certain violent or sexual crimes.

For more than a decade, Oklahoma has led the nation in its incarceration rate of women, and the state consistently ranks among the top five in its incarceration rate for men.

Of the more than 25,000 inmates in Oklahoma prisons, nearly 52 percent are incarcerated for nonviolent offense, according to Department of Corrections statistics. The top two crimes, which account for more than 27 percent of inmates, are distribution and possession of drugs.

Steele's proposals are based in part on changes implemented in Texas, which saved \$137 million and saw its crime rate decrease after passing similar laws, said Marc Levin, president of the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

"Instead of pouring more money into the current corrections system, we need to restructure it to make sure taxpayers are getting the most for their money," Levin said. "States can save millions by increasing rehabilitation programs, which are often more effective than incarceration."

Steele acknowledged that finding additional funding for community sentencing and drug treatment for offenders will be difficult.

"We're going to have to fight for some appropriations money up front," he said.

Prison workers already are being forced to take one unpaid furlough day each month through June 30. To prevent additional furloughs as a result of last year's budget cuts, Republican leaders agreed to a plan that allows the Department of Corrections to take \$5.25 million from a fund used to operate a program in which about 1,500 inmates run farms and make furniture and other goods.

Corrections officials have said tapping the fund, which has a balance of about \$6.5 million, will require them to scale back the program.

NATIONAL VIDEO

OKLAHOMA HEADLINES

- Okla Senate approves anti-illegal immigration bill
- Okla. dog's life changes after rising from 'dead'
- Okla Senate OKs bill to overhaul state pensions
- Shortage forces Texas to switch execution drug
- Life in prison for man convicted in fatal stabbing
- Minn. jury convicts man in fatal stabbing
- Court denies appeal of convicted Okla. killer
- Last American veteran of World War I buried
- AAA Oklahoma again offering Topsy Tow service
- Winning Cash 5 Texas numbers
- Daily 4 results -- evening drawing
- Pick 3 results -- nighttime drawing
- Winning numbers drawn in 'Megaplier' game
- Winning numbers drawn in 'Mega Millions' game
- Davenport, Okla., man arrested on arson charges
- Bill to ease Okla.'s prison growth clears House
- Okla. police say 3 killed in car-semi collision
- Oil pipeline delayed for more environmental review
- Salazar says more offshore permits expected soon
- Okla Senate OKs bill allowing open carry of guns

ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT

ALL Local. ALL Morning.
 FOX25 Morning News
 Weekdays 5-10am

MATT LIZ JEFF

OKLAHOMA WEATHER

67°

WED THUR FRI SAT SUN MON TUE

71	81	78	73	75	76	77
----	----	----	----	----	----	----

WED THU - 57 58 51 54 55 54

WED THU FRI SAT SUN MON TUE

From The FOX 25 First Forecast Center...

Windy and warmer weather the next two days! The fire danger will be high but higher relative humidity surging in from the south will keep the fire danger in check in central and eastern Oklahoma. ...

[Details](#)

BUSINESS NEWS

Stocks fall after weak reports

NEW YORK (AP) -- Disappointing U.S. economic news and more worries about the nuclear crisis in Japan have stocks lower at midday.

[More](#)

CONSUMER INFO

Oil prices rebound above \$98 per barrel

NEW YORK (AP) -- Oil prices are rebounding after falling about 8 percent the past week as pro-reform demonstrations heat up in Bahrain, raising tensions in the Middle East. ...

[More](#)

SCIENCE/TECH NEWS

IN THE NEWS: INTERNET RULES-HOUSE VOTE

WASHINGTON (AP) -- House Republicans have taken another step toward repealing new Federal Communications Commission rules that prohibit phone and cable companies from interfering with Internet traffic on their broadband networks.

[More](#)

GET THIS

OBAMA-NCAA BRACKETS

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The basketball-player-in-chief now has his Final Four picks.

[More](#)

LOOKING for a better job?

Oklahoma's NEW Employment Newspaper

JobDig

BECAUSE EVERYONE SHOULD DIG THEIR JOB | www.jobdig.com | 877-456-2344

Copyright ©2011, KOKH-TV Portions are Copyright 2011 Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or distributed. KOKH files and maintains quarterly Children's Television Reports and DTV Consumer Education Activity Reports in its Public File. The Public File is available to the public at 1228 E. Wilshire Blvd. Oklahoma City, OK, 73111 weekdays from 9am to 5pm.