



# The Promise of Measure 57 Coalition

Individuals and Organizations Working Together to Find a Better Way to Fight Crime

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B4

THE OREGONIAN • TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2009

## EDITORIALS

Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs

Human Services Coalition of Oregon

Juvenile Rights Project

National Association of Social Workers, Oregon Chapter

Oregon Business Association

Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association

Oregon Education Association

Oregon Prevention Education & Recovery Association

Partnership for Safety and Justice

SEIU, Local 503

Self Enhancement, Inc.

Stand for Children

# On public safety, Oregon loses its balance

### Lawmakers shutter the courts, block state trooper hiring and cut police training while protecting prison spending

**C**utting beat cops and shutting down Oregon courts while insisting that inmates serve every last second of 70-month sentences doesn't seem like a promising public-safety strategy.

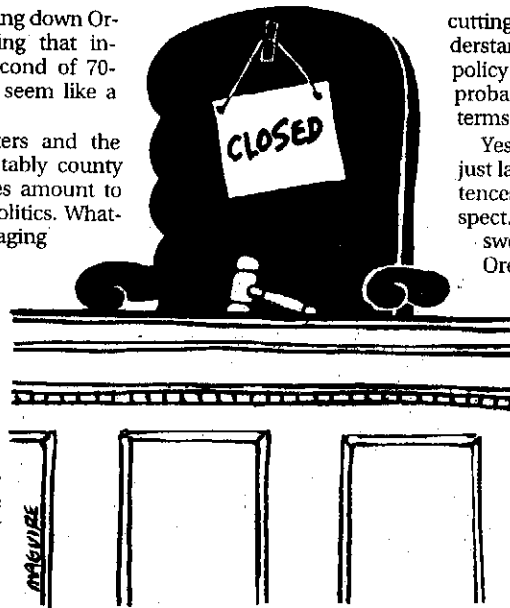
It isn't clear whether lawmakers and the powerful lobbies in Salem — notably county prosecutors — think these choices amount to good public safety, or just good politics. Whatever the rationale, it is discouraging how quickly and easily Oregon is moving to shutter its courts one day a week.

When Chief Justice Paul De Muniz pointed out that a backlog might prevent the state from providing constitutionally protected speedy trials, lawmakers managed to stifle yawns. Maybe they'll sit up and notice when the first cases are tossed out because the courts could not meet statutory deadlines.

Lawmakers also ignored the chief justice when he pointed out that the \$3.1 million in salaries saved by closing courts on Fridays ultimately will cost the state about \$5 million in delayed or forgone revenue. With fewer days in court, fewer defendants will be ordered to pay fines and fees, and staff won't have as much time to collect them.

Meanwhile, legislators also are moving ahead with cuts to the youth authority, state troopers and police training. Cutting police training may have an impact in communities across Oregon. Local police departments may not be able to use federal funds to hire more officers if the state can't train them.

All these spending reductions may be inevitable at a time when the state budget is in a world of hurt, and legislators are



BARRIE MAGUIRE/NEWSART

cutting into bone. But Oregonians ought to understand what is going on: This state is making a policy decision to cut police officers, parole and probation and courts. But so far, corrections, in terms of inmate sentences, is off the table.

Yes, Oregon voters passed Measure 11 and, just last year, Measure 57 to set mandatory sentences. Yes, those voter mandates deserve respect. But voters weren't asked, and didn't answer, this question: Are you willing to close Oregon courts, or sacrifice other key public safety services, to keep criminals in prison the last 30 days of their sentences?

State Rep. Chip Shields has tried to draw the state's district attorneys and other top public safety officials into a discussion in Salem about how best to spread cuts among criminal justice priorities. Shields, D-Portland, and co-chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety, points to studies showing that putting more police on the streets is more effective at reducing crime than putting more people in prison.

Shields wants the state to explore ways to save more money in corrections. One way would be to expand what is known as "transitional leave," the final 30 days of an inmate's sentence. On any given day, about 900 inmates in Oregon are held on transitional leave. Shaving their prison time could save millions.

The state's very strong prison lobby will strongly attack this or any other effort to wring some savings out of the state prison system. But the people closest to Oregon's criminal justice system understand that it stands strong on three legs: police, courts and corrections. If Oregon persists in whacking away at just two of them, the whole thing might just topple over.

**HB 5005**

**DOC**

**Budget**



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