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Oregon breaks ground for new state-of-the art mental health hospital

[Salem] - Today Governor Ted Kulongoski and Senate President Peter Courtney joined Oregon State Hospital patients, mental health advocates, other lawmakers and local officials for the official groundbreaking of a key component of Oregon's new state hospital system. During the ceremony Gov. Kulongoski also honored Sen. Courtney for his continued work championing the rights of Oregon's mentally ill.

The groundbreaking commemorates the beginning of a five-year construction project that will bring the long-awaited replacement of Oregon's 125-year-old state hospital in Salem.

Construction on the planned 620-bed, 700,000-square-foot hospital in Salem will be completed in 2011. A second hospital with a capacity of 360 beds is scheduled to open in Junction City in 2013.

During remarks at the ceremony Gov. Kulongoski said that the day's events were about more than the construction of a building.

"Today's groundbreaking comes after years of work to build an Oregon system we can all be proud of and that will offer real help and real hope to Oregonians with mental illness," said Gov. Kulongoski. "The construction of these two replacement hospitals will be the centerpiece for a patient-first, patient-focused and patient-driven mental health system of care."

The state's mental health care system has been a top priority of Gov. Kulongoski and Sen. Courtney. Within months of taking office in 2003, the Governor established a 21-member Mental Health Task Force, which recommended, along

with construction of two new state hospitals, a recovery model of care that will provide early treatment to prevent people from requiring hospitalization.

Under the leadership of Sen. Courtney, the 2005-2007 Legislature approved \$458.1 million to construct the two new hospitals as well as provide funding for community-based mental health treatment so that people can get the help they need before having to enter the hospital.

The path to create a better mental health system came after years of neglect of a hospital that became obsolete long ago, Sen. Courtney noted.

“We are well past the time to replace this old and decrepit building,” said Sen. Courtney. “As lawmakers, it is our responsibility to ensure that this vulnerable population is treated with respect and dignity in a safe, secure environment that fosters healing. Constructing new hospitals and growing a mental health system will greatly ensure individuals’ timely return to their communities and their successful long term recovery.”

During the hour-long ceremony, the Governor honored Sen. Courtney for championing the rights of Oregon State Hospital patients and awarded him with an artist’s rendering of the new hospital design.

Attending today’s event were hospital patients and staff, mental health advocates and providers, community partners, legislators, union representatives, City of Salem officials, historical preservationists, and neighborhood association members.

“We are here today to celebrate moving Oregon’s mental health system into the future,” said DHS Director Bruce Goldberg, M.D. “Replacing the current hospital is one step in a longer journey toward comprehensive mental health care system for all Oregonians.”

For more information about the OSH Replacement Project, go to <https://apps.dhs.state.or.us/cfm/oshrp/>.