

Prison: Committee doesn't ask for menu change

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statement said. "More opportunities need to be made available to the current inmates as well as the new inmates who will be housed at the newly constructed barracks."

The panel set a Sept. 30 deadline for at least a progress report, which lawmakers said should also outline the number of inmates with jobs, the number of inmates who would like jobs and the number of inmates not interested in working.

Springfield Warden Bob Dooley said he created a committee of staff members to assess opportunities for both jobs and education and to recommend changes.

"Those are concerns of ours, too," Dooley said in an interview Wednesday. "We aren't just standing by waiting to see what happens and when it happens."

The expanded prison will mean

"right off the bat" more jobs for inmate janitors and groundskeepers, as well as for workers in the dining hall and laundry, Dooley said.

He also said that, while the prison expansion includes a barracks for 400 additional low- to medium-security inmates, the population increase will be gradual.

"The first year, we're looking at an increase of about 227 at Springfield," Dooley said. "I expect it to stay that way awhile. I don't see us getting up to that 400 for some time."

A draft version of the Legislature's request had included only job information. Republican Sen. Jason Gant of Sioux Falls and Republican Rep. Deb Peters of Hartford asked that education be included.

"I was wondering if we could add something about increasing the ability for the prison to put together more of the training,

teaching or education courses to learn different skills," Gant said.

That would give prisoners better chances of getting jobs when they finish their sentences, he said.

Peters agreed, saying, "If they can get their education level up even by one thing, working hard to get the degree, whatever it may be, even an associate degree, they're more apt to stay out of prison."

The skills inmates learn while locked up improve their chances of going straight, Republican Rep. Mike Buckingham of Rapid City said. "This is important, and data shows that it will lower recidivism," he said.

Buckingham also said the education and training must be relevant to the outside world.

"The last thing we want to do is assist people out of prison with skills that don't meet the expectation of employers."

Dooley said he intends to give

the legislative committee regular progress reports.

"We'll continue to plan to keep those inmates working and give them opportunities for education," he said.

The panel decided against recommending that DOC work to provide larger portions and a more varied food menu to inmates at Springfield.

"Just how much do we want to micromanage?" asked Republican Sen. Jerry Apa of Lead.

"Penal institutions will always have inmates complaining about food," added Republican Sen. Bill Earley of Sioux Falls.

The discussion was the result of a visit by committee members to the Springfield prison earlier this month.

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