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## Governor's prison plan spelled out

**By Andy Furillo - Bee Capitol Bureau**

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Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger provided details Thursday on a new \$10.9 billion prison construction, sentencing overhaul and parole review plan that his administration hopes will provide a long-term fix to the crisis permeating California's correctional system.

The plan promises to provide 78,000 new beds in prisons, jails, hospitals and community correctional facilities at the state and local levels, while at the same time taking a look at California's sentencing structure and how the parole system will deal with offenders once they're returned to the streets.

Joined by key Democratic and Republican legislators and backed by a dozen local law enforcement officials from around the state, Schwarzenegger said at a Capitol news conference that getting a fix on California prisons is going to be "tough, but it is possible" -- and necessary to avoid a federal takeover of the system.

Crucial to finding the answers, Schwarzenegger said, will be the same kind of bipartisan cooperation that marked the last legislative session.

"Why is it possible? Because decisions will be made this coming year just like the decisions that were made this year, and that is (based on) what is best for California rather than what is best for your party," Schwarzenegger told reporters.

"We're a model for the rest of the nation because of what our legislators have done ... and I know this year they will do the same thing," the governor added.

The plan calls for adding 16,238 beds at existing prisons across the state and building 10 or more community "re-entry facilities" that would house 5,000 to 7,000 short-term offenders.

At the county level, Schwarzenegger is asking for 20,000 jail beds for local offenders and 25,000 more for inmates committed to state prison. He also wants 5,000 new juvenile beds at the local level and 10,000 new hospital beds at "small facilities statewide" to comply with federal court monitors overseeing health care and treatment of mentally ill inmates.

"If we don't clean up the mess, the federal court is going to do it for us, and that means bad news because they will order the immediate release of criminals and they will dig into our general funds, which means they would take money away from education and from health care," Schwarzenegger said.

Funding for the package would include \$8.7 billion in lease revenue bonds, a \$1.1 billion local match, \$800 million in contracting authority and \$300 million from the general fund. The

money also would go toward a new correctional officer training academy and a new death row at San Quentin State Prison.

With 174,000 inmates jamming the state's 33 prisons to more than twice their designed capacity, Schwarzenegger earlier this year declared an overcrowding emergency that paved the way for 2,200 planned out-of-state inmate transfers; a little more than 100 prisoners have been moved so far.

Some administration critics, however, expressed opposition to the plan Thursday as a repeat of the construction boom of past decades that failed to catch up to the rising inmate population and left the system stacked with problems.

"There is no immediate solution here," said Rose Braz, a longtime anti-prison activist and spokeswoman for the Oakland-based Californians United for a Responsible Budget. "We know what we need to do here -- reduce the number of people who go back on probation violations every year. We all know that if we build the prisons, they will fill them."

State Sens. Gloria Romero, D-Los Angeles, and George Runner, R-Lancaster, appeared with the Republican governor Thursday to endorse the broad outlines of the program. Both said the plan could bog down in the Legislature, however, when the administration and lawmakers act to fill in the specifics on a sentencing commission and parole changes.

Schwarzenegger is seeking a 17-member commission, which he would appoint from a pool of legislators, the attorney general, the corrections secretary, law enforcement and crime victims groups. The commission would make recommendations on sentencing guidelines and analyze bills, and as its first order of business, take a hard look at parole. But no language was presented Thursday indicating whether the commission would be advisory or have a direct voice in establishing a new sentencing structure for the state.

As for parole, Schwarzenegger's plan calls only for an examination of the system that currently returns 70 percent of released offenders back to prison within three years of the time they hit the gate. The only specifics he identified was a plan to redirect 200 parole agents to enforce the new Jessica's Law statute intended to keep a closer eye on released sex offenders.

Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Secretary Jim Tilton said in an interview that the agency is looking to dust off state statutes already on the books that would allow him to discharge from supervision parolees who stay clean for a year once they get out. He said the sentencing commission also will be looking at the idea of eliminating parole for low-risk offenders.

Other details of the plan call for reserving prison space only for offenders who are sentenced to three years or longer, with the shorter-term inmates kept in jails at the local level. It also is proposing to house nonviolent juvenile offenders in new facilities closer to their communities instead of being sent to the Division of Juvenile Justice, formerly known as the California Youth Authority.

It seeks to increase parole program funding from \$52.8 million to \$93.9 million and bump up state assistance to local probation programs by \$50 million, and it again calls for a program to send 4,350 nonviolent women from prisons to community correctional facilities.

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