

Chair Cogen says in City Club speech that the county should dare to be great

Friday, 2/1/13 - 3:11 pm



Chair Jeff Cogen addresses the crowd at the City Club of Portland on Feb. 1.



Chair Jeff Cogen conversing with an attendee before Friday's State of the County address.



Chair Cogen during the Q & A portion of Friday's State of the County address

Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen said Friday during his annual State of the County remarks that the willingness to take measured risks is what's enabled the county to successfully help vulnerable people and to

willingness to take measured risks is what's enabled the county to successfully help vulnerable people and to build complex bricks-and-mortar projects.

Cogen told the [City Club of Portland](#) on Feb. 1 it's that same record of excellence that will continue to inspire the needed spirit of innovation for even more groundbreaking community efforts in the year ahead.

"If we want to do things differently, we've got to be willing to take risks," Cogen told a City Club audience at the Governor Hotel in downtown Portland. "Taking risks does not require being reckless. I'm talking about smart and measured risks."

The chair said with a smile that he was modeling the willingness to take a measured risk by speaking without a prepared text, relying only on a couple of notecards with topic areas to discuss.

The chair said too often stalemate, gridlock and a "kick the can down the road" attitude hamstring governments, prompting a deep cynicism among citizens. By happy contrast, the chair said, Multnomah County has a proven recent history of success improving residents' quality of life, protecting the county's most vulnerable people and keeping the community safe.

Cogen said that work and collegial ethos could not succeed without the collaboration of the county's employees and his colleagues on the board -- Commissioners [Deborah Kafoury](#), [Loretta Smith](#), [Judy Shiprack](#) and [Diane McKeel](#). The chair similarly praised Auditor [Steve March](#), Sheriff [Dan Staton](#) and District Attorney [Rod Underhill](#).

As one example of a smart risk, the chair pointed to the recent successful move of the [Sellwood Bridge](#) that employed a [shoofly](#) method to save up to \$10 million and allowed the bridge to open one year earlier.

The chair also cited voter approval last fall of a [Library district](#) as another clear example of the county embracing innovation to step up to support a world-class system instead of accepting a gradual demise.

"Our libraries did not have time to wait," Cogen said. "We had to preserve this tremendous community resource."

Cogen noted the successful openings of the [East County Courthouse](#) and [Crisis Assessment and Treatment Center](#) -- and the upcoming conversion of the [Morrison Bridgehead](#) into an innovative public market. And he lauded both the [Department of Community Justice](#) for figuring out smarter, more cost-effective ways to supervise parolees and probationers; and the [SUN schools](#) for responding to community-wide hunger by expanding its ambit to include food options for children in the evenings, weekends and summers.

Looking ahead to the rest of 2013, Cogen spoke about the importance of the county's lawsuit against [Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems \(MERS\)](#), benefiting consumers and county coffers alike.

And he promised to press in the Oregon Legislature to lift restrictions that prevent the county from devising local common-sense solutions to local problems like the health impacts of tobacco and gun violence.

A large piece of a comprehensive approach to gun violence, Cogen said, is an innovative mental health first aid training program he is proposing to help hundreds of county employees and community members recognize the signs of mental illness.

Improving the mental health literacy of the community, the chair said, is just as essential as efforts to improve physical health literacy.

"This program is essentially the mental health version," the chair said, "of [CPR](#) or the [Heimlich maneuver](#)."

For additional media coverage:

Feb. 1, 2013 in *The Oregonian*: "[Multnomah County Chairman Jeff Cogen uses State of County address to call for taking calculated risks](#)"

Feb. 1, 2013 in *The Oregonian*: "[Multnomah County board Chairman Jeff Cogen to propose 'mental health first aid' training program](#)"

Feb. 1, 2013 in the *Portland Business Journal*: "[Cogen touts county innovations](#)"

Feb. 1, 2013 in *The Skanner*: "[Multnomah County: Kids, Guns, a Lawsuit and a Green Sheriff](#)"

Feb. 1, 2013 in *The Skanner*: "Multnomah County: Kids, Guns, a Lawsuit and a Green Sheriff"

Feb. 1, 2013 on KEX: "Multnomah County - draws down on gun violence"