



Right on Crime Federal and State Call to Action

Prisons serve a critical role in society. In many cases – particularly cases of violent crime – the best way to handle criminal behavior is to incapacitate criminals by incarcerating them. But we can't just build our way to public safety. Low level non-violent drug and property offenders can often be punished and held accountable in ways that aren't as expensive as prison but that are more effective in helping them become law-abiding taxpayers rather than tax burdens.

Because the goals of our prisons are laudable, conservatives have often looked the other way regarding the growing cost and declining public safety benefits of a prison system that locks nearly one in every 100 American adults behind bars. In our earnest desire to have safer neighborhoods, policy responses to crime have too often neglected core conservative values — government accountability, personal responsibility, family preservation, victim restoration, fiscal discipline, limited government, and free enterprise. It is time to apply conservative principles to the task of delivering taxpayers the best possible public safety results for their investments in criminal justice. Our security, prosperity, and freedom depend on it.

State Sentencing and Corrections Reforms

Prison populations and costs exploded over the past 20 years, and yet states were not getting adequate public safety dividends. States have now realized that they can get less crime at lower cost. Starting with Texas in 2007, half of the states, many of which are among the most conservative states guided by respected conservative leaders, have passed important sentencing and corrections reform. These changes have steered lower-level offenders away from prison and reinvested some of the significant savings into substance abuse and mental health treatment and other programs designed to cut re-offense rates. States such as Texas and South Carolina that enacted these policies several years ago have not only eased the burden on taxpayers, but most importantly seen sharp declines in crime. It is time for the rest of the states to follow these examples.

Federal Sentencing and Corrections Reforms

The federal prison system has grown even faster, from under 25,000 inmates in 1980 to over 219,000 at the close of FY 2013. This growth came at a substantial cost: at \$6.9 billion, the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) budget is more than 25 percent of the Justice Department's budget, undermining other public safety priorities. Congress and the Administration should follow the states' lead in revising sentencing and release laws and policies, and reinvest some of the federal prison savings into strategies that will achieve greater reductions in crime and recidivism. It is time to get a better public safety return on the massive federal expenditure on corrections.