

PRISON REFORM

Tennessee ranks 42 in crime. Of those released from prison, forty to fifty percent of former inmates are back within three years. I am against probation or parole of violent and habitual offenders. These criminals should serve their full sentences and not be released back into society where they prey on other people.

Without a real threat of punishment, criminals are not going to obey the law. I believe in a balanced approach to this issue. People who are first time offenders or non-violent should be placed in facilities that are not as costly as prison. Juveniles who are non-violent and non-habitual would attend "boot camps" instead of tying up bed space in a more secure prison.

I believe that by addressing the needs of first time offenders, we can prevent some of them from committing more crimes. The State has a duty to protect its people and also help them as well. A balanced approach to the problem is the best approach. All of society benefits from lower crime rates. Businesses move into the area thereby creating new jobs, fewer taxes are needed due to lowered prison costs, and society benefits from peace of mind. By letting crime go unpunished it will only serve to encourage the criminal to commit even more crimes, which become even more violent and serious.

Recently police caught a man who had built a prison underneath his back yard. The police know of two 17 year-old girls that he had raped and held there. As I was watching the news he was going to his bond hearing. My question is why would anybody even consider turning this animal loose at all. How many other girls did he rape or kill?

Another example is an individual who was arrested for murder (he should have already been in prison for past crimes committed). After paying his bond he then proceeds to the home of the witness to try to murder him as well.

It is insane to give violent, habitual offenders bond, bail or early parole. Five percent of criminals commit fifty percent of crimes. So it should make sense that if you lock up the five percent, crimes will go down by one half.

Tennessee prisons are full so what can be done to fix this problem? To begin with, we should only use prisons for violent offenders who are a threat to the community. By having prisoners sleep in beds on a rotating basis, we can double or triple the number of prisoners that can be housed. The beds can be given to other prisoners for eight hours to sleep. After their eight hours is up, another prisoner will use it. When the prisoner is not in their bunk, they will be housed in another building in which he can work. After their work shift is over, they will then go to another facility.

Prisoners who are not threats to society and have a low escape risk will be taken to farms and parks to work and live. These prisoners will help with growing food for the State, cleaning our parks and building walking trails, etc.



These prisoners will live in cabins or tents. They will not have air-conditioned facilities. Our troops do not have air-conditioned rooms, and prisoners will not have them either.

Prisoners have a return rate (i.e. recidivism) of 40-50% after three years. This needs to stop. Prison should be punishment, but criminals see it as a type of college. They do not mind going there because they can learn new criminal skills, be fed, and work out. (Life is better for them in prison than it is out on the street.) We need to make prison a place they do not want to go.

In Tennessee, inmates with sentences of 4 years or less number 57.2% of the total population. In order to keep them from committing more crimes, we need to break the cycle of crime. Some steps to take that will stop this cycle involve the following:

We need to take the profit motive out of crime. Criminals are business people. They weigh the odds of getting caught with the likelihood of punishment. That is why more cars are stolen than there are banks robbed. Having criminals pay restitution to the victim and state is not enough. The victim should receive three times the amount of money that they are out in punitive damages. Insurance companies also need to be reimbursed. It is not fair that I have to pay higher premiums for a criminal's actions. Nor is it fair that the insurance companies pay for the criminal's actions.

I know a person who was in prison 15 years. When he was released, he was in trouble within hours. We need a system to better prepare prisoners for release. My idea is to build a series of apartment complexes. The apartments will be two bedroom units. Four prisoners will be in each apartment. Two years before release, prisoners will be transferred to these facilities (which will free up more space for violent criminals). They will then go into training as to how to live successfully in society. They will learn job and people skills as well as how society works. Some of these areas include building their credit and paying bills. Most criminals are poorly educated so training in this field is a must. Entrance into the program will be based on the prisoner's acceptance of the rules. This will not be a mandatory program. However, the prisoner's chances of being paroled will be significantly less without attending the program.

This facility will be a jail. Prisoners cannot come and go at will. The prisoners will be placed in each unit by the amount of time in the program. For example, a prisoner, who is new to the program, will be paired with others who have more time in the program. Each room will have cameras and other security devices in each room.

Once the prisoners have been paroled, they will need a place to live away from their former friends. What is the point of all this work if we just abandon them? They can now move into another apartment facility in the city. This facility will have restricted access only for the prisoner's family and an assigned guest list. We need to keep the neighborhood drug dealer and other "friends" away. The now free prisoner can take the bus to work. The state can provide a van to take the prisoners to temporary work agencies. The prisoner now has a place to live with his family. The peer pressure from the other inmates and his family may encourage them to succeed.



He now has transportation to work and the skills to perform a job that he can feed himself and family (and hopefully get off welfare). He is also paying rent to the state and providing funds for his additional training while in the complex. In the evening, multiple workshops and other training will also be a part of this program. The employer will direct deposit the prisoners pay check into an account which will automatically be billed for victim restitution, rent, and other expenses.

This program sounds like I am soft on crime, but I am not. The goal of this program is two fold. First, by having these prisoners in lower cost facilities, we can incarcerate more violent and habitual criminals. My goal is to stop the parole of violent and habitual offenders and to make them serve their full sentences. Secondly, by having this program, we can reduce recidivism.

This will have an impact on all of society. Less crime is the main benefit. However, other benefits will occur as well such as restitution to the victim and state. Being able to walk down the street without fear is something you cannot put a price tag on.

Criminals are people too. They work on rewards. As long as we “reward” them with reduced sentences, probation, and early parole, they will continue to commit crimes.

