

HEY ARNOLD, SWING THAT BLADE THIS WAY!

It seems the governor and our state legislators have once again chosen to make another round of cuts to education, healthcare, and other vital public services to get this year's Band-aid budget to stick. What will it take for Sacramento to finally deal with our broken and over-crowded prison system? CDCR is a huge, but very solvable, part of our annual budget crisis. And left unchecked, it's only going to get worse.

The problem isn't that CA lawmakers don't know of any ways to responsibly shrink the CDCR budget; they do. The problem is simply a matter of politics, one that can be explained in two easy lessons: 1) Politicians are afraid to take on the all-powerful CCPOA, who oppose any prison reform measures that would decrease the inmate population and therefore also the need for any new prisons or more guards. And 2) Politicians can never afford to appear soft on crime, and the propagandists make sure that all progressive prison reform proposals are always looked at as inmate pampering.

The spin masters are relying on the public to continue being too busy and distracted by these tough economic times to pay much attention to the actual facts surrounding prison reform, early release, and public safety.

I know the public gets nervous at the mention of early prisoner release, but that's because you're rarely presented with a well thought out, balanced view of the universal benefits and minimal risks involved when it's done properly. And I believe the key to doing it properly lies in selecting the right prisoners to participate in this opportunity.

Whenever early prisoner release is discussed, the inmates under consideration are always short-timers who are at the end of their sentences. These inmates are only months from being paroled anyway, and so won't really appreciate it in any behavior changing ways. Even from a budgetary relief standpoint, releasing short-timer inmates would save so little it wouldn't be worth the setup costs of the program. But when the conversation shifts to life-term inmates, everything changes.

It currently costs taxpayers \$32,000 a year to house the average inmate. To house an elderly inmate the cost is \$50,000. Under current policy, more people are coming into the system and staying longer, fewer are getting out. On this trajectory, as the prison population ages, the state legislature will soon be looking back on today's Corrections budget as a pleasant memory.

A life-term inmate parole program will not only save the state millions, it would also create jobs in the form of community parole approval boards, community parolee counselors, and staffing for re-entry centers.

It's no exaggeration for me to tell you there are literally thousands of women and men in the system who have rehabilitated themselves and would gladly submit to lifetime parole supervision, GPS monitoring, and whatever other requirements the public may wish to impose.

Lastly, I'm asking you to consider the fact that it's universally accepted that poverty and emotional illness are the root causes of crime, and that poor education coupled with inadequate healthcare are the root causes of poverty and emotional illness. Cuts to education and healthcare almost always affect the poorest segments of society exclusively.

By cutting deeper and deeper into critical public service budgets, Sacramento legislators and the Governor's office are only strengthening the culture of criminality that plague our troubled communities. For too long "safety and security" has been the easy answer for why Corrections is the last and least affected of all budgets when it's time to bring out the blade. Look at the news, if what we've been doing was working, we wouldn't be where we are. It's time to have an honest conversation about how these annual raids of education and healthcare funding are the greatest safety and security threat of all. For more information or further discussion, email or visit:

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