

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

Wisconsin's Corrections Policies Are
Both Costly and Ineffective

December 18, 2015

The Wisconsin Budget Project sponsored a study called "Prison Price Tag: The High Cost of Wisconsin's Correctional Policies," which compares Wisconsin's cost and effectiveness of its policies with those of neighboring states. In every area, Wisconsin comes up short. Here are some details from that report.

In 2013, Wisconsin's state and local governments spent \$1.5 billion on corrections - 12% more than the national average. Only 11 states spent a greater amount per state resident on corrections. Wisconsin outspent every neighboring state in per resident spending on corrections.

State	Per capita Spending	Per capita incarceration
Wisconsin	\$259	780
Michigan	252	790
Minnesota	163	380
Illinois	157	700
Iowa	152	530

(the per capita incarceration is based on 2013 figures and represents how many citizens per 100,000 are imprisoned)

Much of the extra cost can be attributed to the fact that Wisconsin incarcerates a higher percentage of its population than all but one of the neighboring states (see above).

Wisconsin had to make sacrifices to grow its prison spending this much. When comparing expenditures from the 2003-05 and 2015-17 budgets (adjusted for inflation) Wisconsin has increased its spending on corrections by 7% while decreasing state support for K-12 schools by 14% and the state university system by 21%. This means lower quality public education which in turn leads to a greater likelihood of engaging in criminal activity which in turn leads to increased incarceration rates.

One of the shocking facts contained in the study is that Wisconsin incarcerates a greater share of its black citizens than any other state - 12.8% (the next highest state is Oklahoma at 9.7% and the lowest state is Hawaii at 1.8%) (based on the 2010 census).

The report goes on to recommend 3 ways to reduce prison costs: 1) greater use of the Treatment Alternative and Diversion program (TAD), which will prevent people with mental health and addiction issues from being sent to prison; 2) stop revoking people on supervision for nonserious rule violations; and, 3) remove barriers which prevent felons from getting a job.

You can find the report on the Wisconsin Budget Project's website.

One discussion missing from the report and of great personal interest to me, is the mindless warehousing of all the old men and women who have been imprisoned for decades and no longer pose a threat to anyone. There are over 2,500 citizens still in prison under the old discretionary parole system, many which could be safely released immediately at a cost savings of millions of dollars.

I am one of those people I refer to. I have been in prison over 31 years for stabbing a man in self defense. I did not get a fair trial and although the Wisconsin court of appeals held I was denied a fair trial by use of erroneous jury instructions, I had to serve life in prison because I procedurally defaulted on my appeal.

I have been parole eligible for 20 years. I worked my way down to community custody status and worked in a factory in the community for 19 months. In 2010, I drove a state van unescorted over 30,000 miles throughout northwestern Wisconsin as I took men to and from their work release jobs.

In 2010, when Scott Walker became governor, I was returned to medium security based on my current offense and prior criminal record - where I remain to this day.

Wisconsin's correctional policies are an intentional ideologically-driven policy choice based on Scott Walker's conservative Republican agenda. In his world-view, it is better that a dozen innocent men languish in prison than one guilty one go free (or get out early).

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

M E R R Y C H R I S T M A S !

December 20, 2015

People have been celebrating the winter holiday season for thousands of years - long before Christ ever walked the earth.

The event which is celebrated is actually the winter solstice - the day with the least amount of daylight in the northern hemisphere. More accurately, the day after the winter solstice is the day to celebrate because the amount of daylight begins to increase on that day. It does so daily until the summer solstice which is the day with the most daylight.

The cold winter weather and limited daylight is a depressing time of year. It is said that people used to propitiate the sun god at this time of year to restore the waning daylight. I don't know if that is true. In Roman times, it was known as Saturnalia - a 5 day festival of feasting and orgies. When the Christian sect began to reach ascendance in the Roman Empire, they wanted to stop the unbridled celebrations. They came up with the idea of declaring December 25th as Christ's birthday. They hoped to convert the pagans to Christianity by this means and put an end to the "sinful" behavior.

Over time, as Christianity became the dominant religion, the holiday season became known as the celebration of Christ's birth. There is nothing in the Bible to support this and it is generally acknowledged by Biblical scholars that Christ was born earlier in the year. That's why Jehovah Witnesses and some other Christian fringe groups do not celebrate Christmas.

It is also why it's so ridiculous for Christians to decry the commercialization of Christmas. It wasn't a Christian holiday to begin with - it was hijacked by the Christians. People have always celebrated this time of year to get through the winter doldrums. They reach out in love and brotherhood - which is probably Christianity's greatest contribution to the season (and the gift-giving, of course). Everybody in the northern hemisphere should celebrate this season regardless of their beliefs. It's a human tradition older than recorded history. We owe it to ourselves and our loved ones to spread love, joy and happiness in this darkest time of the year.

May God bless everyone who reads this blog.