

« Episode: AirTalk for June 9, 2011

Prison reform – it’s not just for liberals

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Michal Czerwonka/Getty Images

The California Institution for Men prison fence is seen in Chino, California.

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Pat Nolan knows something about prison – and its problems. A former California legislator who served 29 months in federal custody for racketeering, he experienced first-hand a system desperately in need of reform. Motivated by his stint behind bars, Nolan became an expert on a variety of prison reform issues including rehabilitation, 3-strikes reform, sentencing, recidivism and overcrowding. He also put together Right on Crime, a new national organization of major conservative leaders (including David Keene, Grover Norquist and Newt Gingrich) that promotes alternatives to conventional punishment, new approaches to parole violations and rehabilitation through counseling, education and job training. Conservatives who believe in rehabilitation? Yes. The members of Right on Crime reject the status quo, espousing a bi-partisan, comprehensive approach to prison reform. Critics of Nolan’s approach argue that rehabilitation and early release programs put the public at risk and advocate building more prisons. Can restorative justice work to reduce the growing prison population and recidivism? In an era of shrinking state budgets, which reform plan saves taxpayers money?

Guests:

Pat Nolan, Vice President of Prison Fellowship; Co-founder of RightonCrime.com; former Republican California Assemblyman and the author of *When Prisoners Return*

Michael D. Rushford, Founder, President, and CEO of the Criminal Justice Legal Foundation, a nonprofit, public interest law organization dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice

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Bill C.

20 hours, 18 minutes ago

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Politicians caught up in the criminal justice system often end up with political affiliation permanently altered. The liberal who has been mugged becomes a conservative and the conservative who has been sentenced to prison becomes a liberal.

KPCConservative

19 hours, 59 minutes ago

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Here is where this discussion should start:
http://www.lao.ca.gov/laoapp/laomenus/sections/crim_justice/6_cj_inmatecost.aspx?catid=3

\$50,000 per inmate and that excludes capital costs! So, the question is why incompetent liberals can't manage a prison system with all this money (answers follow).

KPCCConservative

19 hours, 55 minutes ago

[Link to this comment](#)

1. We keep electing liberal senators who greenlight liberal judges that constantly harass the penal system with rulings. That's how it works people--elect dimwits like Boxer and here we are.

2. Democrats use the \$50k to buy votes from unions

3. Liberals are at their core anarchists viscerally opposed to incarceration.

Norma in Lakewood

19 hours, 53 minutes ago

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critics of Nolan's approach are part of why we are in the mess we are in.

Lou

19 hours, 43 minutes ago

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People should never go to jail just because they got high. It makes no sense to do this.

Mark of Fullerton

19 hours, 29 minutes ago

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If the Republicans weren't busy bankrupting America, making sure the recession continues we wouldn't be in the mess were in.

Don

19 hours, 27 minutes ago

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We are in California where its working. Don't fix something that s not broke.

michael from Orange

19 hours, 22 minutes ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Sounds like we need to send more conservative Republicans to prison. How about that KPCC Conservative ? Do you really like paying prison guards \$100k plus in overtime pay while our school systems beg for education funding ?

Yeah blame the liberal democrats all you want but it is "conservative Republicans" who have most pursued the "crime & punishment" political agenda that has built up this unsustainable "prison industrial complex". It sounds al little like YOUR priorities might really be screwed up !!!

Lou

19 hours, 17 minutes ago

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Why are we ignoring the real reason we have these harsh laws in a blue state like CA?

Rich white people who live in places in the Westside and Napa Valley feel safer knowing laws disproportionately lock up black and brown people.

Harsh sentencing - not just for Conservatives

Shawn

19 hours, 9 minutes ago

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Like too much of America our policies for crime have now been corrupted by greed and money. California's three-strikes-law is costly and creates more criminals than it deters. Our bloated and expensive prisons are being filled up by polices promoted and funded by prison unions and private prison corporations at the expense of our tax payers and justice.

- Shawn
Orange, CA

Mike

19 hours, 7 minutes ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I want restorative not punitive justice for property crimes. Why should I pay out of my pocket and file a claim with my insurance if somebody breaks my window or steals my car?

If it were my call, I'd have them make a sincere apology to me and make restitution for the specific offense. I would thank them, accept their apology and invite to my kitchen for coffee as an equal. Restore property and restore everyone's dignity.

robert



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19 hours, 6 minutes ago

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Hey, here's a question.

What's the daily food cost for a prisoner in one of our ritzy prisons?

ralph

19 hours, 5 minutes ago

[Link to this comment](#)

To appreciate just how challenging prisoner rehabilitation really is, just consider how hard it is for ANY adult to lose weight and keep it off. Similarly, anyone with a criminal record seeking to make a comprehensive change of behavioral patterns, lifestyle, and mindset faces an uphill battle the likes of which they've probably never before even attempted. Combined with the fact that many prisoners suffer from substance addictions, abusive or neglectful upbringings, inadequate educational background, and mental health challenges, the odds are quite slim. But to offer NO hope is an even more bleak prospect; prisoners are human beings, they are (usually) American citizens and they are members of our community. If we turn our backs on them entirely we do so only at our own risk.

robert

19 hours, 1 minute ago

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This is also one of the places where guys like me could cut a deal with guys like this.

The issue's pragmatism.

California was insane to do what it did back 20 years ago--mostly at the behest of the Right, and "business leaders," who looked forward to the profits--and radically built up prisons.

Why?

'cause it don't work.

I was at a prison graduation yesterday--you should look at the drops in recidivism rates--and I can tell you this:

- a) we've locked up a LOT of young people who could've been saved on the outside;
- b) we regularly release people who should never, ever get out of prison;
- c) we spend too much time politicking, and too little getting real.

Oh, and P.S. The prison system costs about what everybody was told it would cost, back in the day.

Nobody listened.

michael from Orange

13 hours, 32 minutes ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Victims thirst for revenge driving stupid decisions like the three strikes law.

michael from Orange

13 hours, 29 minutes ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Right on Shawn. Well said !!

robert

9 hours, 47 minutes ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Speaking as perhaps the only guy around who's actually met these guys and been in prisons as part of my work, let me just say (and I hate to shatter illusions about libs) that I agree with Richard Pryor.

There are some guys in the slammer you do NOT want to ever see let out.

There are also more guys who if they had a decent chance, would be about as dangerous as the average guy on this thread.

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