

Platte Chat

*An ongoing conversation about how to best preserve free enterprise,
personal responsibility and limited government in Nebraska*



Platte Institute Teams with Marc Levin to Release Study on Criminal Justice Reform

At a press conference today, the Platte Institute for Economic Research and national criminal justice expert Marc Levin released the study: "Controlling Costs and Protecting Public Safety in The Cornhusker State." This study takes an in-depth look at how Nebraska's overall economy would be improved with a criminal justice system overhaul.

You may download a copy of the study [HERE](#).

Among the highlights of the study's findings and recommendations are:

- Nebraska taxpayers currently pay for a ratio of one corrections employee for approximately every two prison inmates.
- Corrections spending has gone from \$50 million in 1990 to more than \$200 million in 2005.
- In 2007, 57 percent of Nebraska inmates were incarcerated for non-violent crimes. This emphasis on incarceration was presented as a "tough-on-crime" approach that reflected a conservative sensibility. In reality, however, it was neither tough on crime nor particularly conservative.
- Between 1995 and 2005, the Nebraska population grew by less than 10 percent, but the state prison population grew by 34 percent. In 2001, state prisons operated at 164 percent of capacity. The Nebraska Legislature attempted to remedy this problem by opening a new medium- and maximum-security prison for adult males in southeast Nebraska - Tecumseh State Correctional Institute - but by 2006, the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) was operating at 140 percent of capacity, and it was hard to understand how building Tecumseh five years earlier had done much to alleviate the overcrowding issue.
- Geriatric parole legislation signed in September 2010 by California was estimated to possibly save the state \$200 million a year. Nebraska policymakers should carefully consider supporting legislation in their state that would expand geriatric parole and likely help to achieve significant cost savings.
- Drug courts are a proven alternative to incarceration for low-level drug offenders. They offer intensive judicial oversight of offenders combined with mandatory drug testing and escalating sanctions for failure to comply. Drug courts drew bipartisan support last year from White House Office of National Drug Control Policy Director Gil Kerlikowske, Congressman John Boozman (R-AR), Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Senator Richard

Shelby (R-AL).

- According to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, the average recidivism rate for offenders who complete a drug court program is between 4 percent and 29 percent, in contrast to 48 percent for those who do not participate in a drug court program. Similarly, the Government Accountability Office reported recidivism reductions of 10 to 30 percentage points below the comparison group.
- Drug courts have been found to be cost-effective, as their cost can be less than \$3,000 per participant and their estimated net savings, taking into account both reduced corrections spending and avoided victims costs, range an average of \$11,000 per participant.

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