

SOUTH DAKOTA EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

The Associated Press

Argus Leader, Sioux Falls: Dec. 2, 2012

Prison plan a welcome initiative

South Dakota's surging prison population presents many challenges for the state. If it continues to rise at its current rate, we would be faced with needing to build a women's prison within the next five years, and a men's in the next 10. Cost for building and running those two facilities alone are estimated at \$224 million.

With 81 percent of the state's prison population being nonviolent offenders, and more than half incarcerated on drug and alcohol offenses, there are more than just financial concerns on the horizon. South Dakota has a fundamental problem with drug sentencing. Our laws are stricter and less nuanced than neighboring states, and our rates of imprisonment outpace every neighbor — in Minnesota's case, by more than 100 percent each year.

Which is why the recent proposal by the Criminal Justice Initiative, a work group organized by Gov. Dennis Daugaard made up of representatives from all three branches of South Dakota government, is so welcome.

The group, which has been meeting since July on ways to increase public safety, increase accountability for offenders and reduce spending in corrections, recently recommended a set of criminal justice system reforms toward those aims.

The reform package includes legislative changes to introduce a tiered system for dealing with hard drug charges, the expansion of drug courts (there are two in the state, including one in Minnehaha County), a presumption of probation for low-level felonies and a new 24/7 sobriety monitoring program.

To be clear, these are not measures intended on making South Dakota "soft on crime." Rather, these recommendations represent a consortium of creative

thought and expertise melded and aimed at solving some very real problems facing the state.

We thank those involved and think this should be a model the state continues to use going forward with other issues of great import.

Rapid City Journal: Dec. 5, 2012
South Dakotans richer?

It comes as a surprise to many South Dakotans to learn that the state's residents are in the mid- to upper-income bracket among the 50 states and Washington, D.C. Say what? You might ask.

According to the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis, South Dakota's per capita income of \$44,217 in 2011 places the state 13th in the nation, right behind neighbors Wyoming, North Dakota and Minnesota, and at 106 percent of the national average of \$41,560.

The report said South Dakota's income was \$27,865 in 2001 and increased at an annual growth rate of 4.7 percent for the next 10 years.

After years of being told that South Dakota ranks near the bottom in income, it is something of a shock to learn that we're better off than we thought we were.

Per capita income is an average, while median income is the middle where half the residents earn more and half earn less. By that measure, South Dakota is 36th in median income, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

We recall reports that South Dakota has the highest percentage of workers with more than one job -- 10.3 percent in 2010, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. According to a 2011 PBS Newshour report, the percentage of South Dakota children in poverty in 2009 was 19 percent, an increase from 14 percent in 2003. And, let's not forget, that several South Dakota reservation counties are among the poorest in the nation, according to the Census.

So which is it? Are South Dakotans getting richer or

poorer?

As Mark Twain once said: "There are three kinds of lies: lies, (darned) lies and statistics."

A recent Sioux Falls Argus Leader story indicated that the state's income statistics are being influenced by increases in agricultural income.

"In South Dakota, farmers had a great year in 2011," said Reynold Nesiba, associate professor of economics with Augustana College. "I would suspect that that plays a significant role. You need to remember, one-eighth of the population of South Dakota continues to depend on food stamps for their daily bread."

Retired University of South Dakota economics professor Ralph Brown told the newspaper that farm income rose 102 percent in South Dakota last year while nonfarm income rose 5.7 percent.

At the same time, Census figures show the poverty rate for the state was 14.5 percent, or about 1 in 7 residents.

We are pleased that the state's No. 1 industry is doing so well in these trying times. And don't forget, South Dakota remains a pretty nice place to live, no matter how much you make. Still, the next time someone tells you that the data shows South Dakotans are among the well-to-do, just remember what Twain said.

Aberdeen American News: Dec. 6, 2012

It's time for state to reevaluate its incarceration strategy

In 1977, South Dakota's prison population was 546. In 34 years, it has increased more than six-fold to 3,600 inmates. Our incarceration rate is the highest in a six-state area.

From a purely financial point of view, our prison system is costing taxpayers far too much money. And we're not talking just the cost of housing and supervising inmates. There are the hidden costs associated with imprisonment.

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Would you believe it! The emails from the applicants who answered Waaawho's ad for a "female with good computer skills who live in Vermillion or who will be close enough to work over the semester break" ended up in my junk box and were deleted, that won't happen again. Waaawho@msn.com would appreciate you or anyone else applying again.

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