

Incarceration not solution to war on drugs

By Michael Kirkland
The State News
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Paging through a copy of a recent edition of The New York Times, I happened upon an interesting little article. This illuminating collection of words and numbers presented me with a most extraordinary fact: In America today, nearly one of every 150 persons is incarcerated in some sort of correctional facility.

That's more than twice the number of a decade ago, despite the fact that government statistics claim crime rates have fallen sharply for six consecutive years.

The most compelling explanation for this seemingly unnecessary growth in the imprisonment rate is the fact that many of our society's prisoners are drug offenders.

In other words, the main reason the United States is second only to Russia in imprisonment rates is the infamous war on drugs.

Conservative politicians in the 1980s, realizing our society was plagued by savage dope fiends who indulged in horrifically non-taxable substances such as marijuana, launched a nationwide campaign to rid our country of the scourge of casual drug use.

Congress passed the mandatory minimum law, which requires a judge to imprison any drug offender, regardless of the circumstances. Nearly 60 percent of federal prisoners are

drug offenders. On the state level, the figure is 22 percent.

Almost one-third of these convicted drug offenders are incarcerated simply for possession of an illicit drug.

The same government statistics also point out that, on average, Americans do not use drugs more than people in other nations do. So the United States does not have any more illicit drug use than any other nation, but is simply

one of the only Democratic societies that has chosen incarceration as its primary solution to its drug problem.

This is a ridiculous solution that is rooted in ignorance, hypocrisy and puritanism.

Incarceration will not necessarily alter the view of a casual user, nor will it necessarily rehabilitate the dependent user.

Meanwhile, public funds are used to support a gargantuan prison system that has expanded to accommodate people who do nothing but freely choose to ingest a certain substance and people who do nothing but provide that substance to those freely choosing individuals.

Of course, crimes related to the distribution of illegal drugs or resulting from their use are still crimes and should be treated as such.

But, despite the fact that some crime may be connected to illegal drug use, the average user is not compelled to rape and pillage when

they use. At least, not any more than a user of alcohol, a legal drug.

The bulk of drug-related crime is related to distribution. And distribution-related crimes are a direct result of the illegality of the distributed substance. In the 1920s, a nationwide ban on alcoholic beverages didn't stop people from drinking it only gave rise to an illegal market and all sorts of related criminal activity.

Its not unrealistic to think that the decriminalization of drugs in America might reduce certain types of crime associated with their distribution. Just like the repeal of prohibition did with alcohol.

This is, for some reason, not treated as a realistic solution. The consensus opinion tells us that the substances in question are inherently harmful and dangerous to personal health and society.

This surgeon general-style objection doesn't hold water.

Are we to believe that alcohol is somehow less harmful than any other poison a person might ingest? Is there anyone out there that doesn't think that alcohol has ever broken a home or destroyed a life?

Better yet, is there anyone in East Lansing who would say that alcohol-related crimes are unheard of?

While I could continue along these lines for quite some time, it seems to be a pointless exercise. I don't expect drugs to be decriminalized in America soon, and I'm not alone.

Beware Bambina: don't wear those tight pants in Rome

By Myriam Marquez
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

Getting ready for a wedding, I was pulling and tugging on the lycra body slimmer that's supposed to hide the panty lines. Oh, OK, it's really to hide all the "baby" fat caused by two pregnancies long ago and a gazillion bowls of yummy ice cream from then on.

No way could I pull that slimmer thing up the back, though. Called the hubby to come to the rescue.

As he was finishing the job I was thinking of the days when I could pull on a pair of tight jeans in a New York second all by my lonesome. I could take them off just as quickly.

Funny how the mind works. From thoughts of jeans and college days my mind turned to Italy and rape.

Last month, Italy's highest court overturned the 1998 rape conviction of a 45-year-old driving instructor. The Italian justices said the 18-year-old student must have consented to sex. Otherwise, they asked, how was the instructor able to peel off the tight jeans the young woman was wearing?

It's impossible, Italy's Court of Cassation stated, to take off a tight pair of pants "without the cooperation of the person wearing them." It's even harder if the victim is struggling to get away, the Italian justices insisted.

Here we go again. The bambina was asking for it. You know, she was wearing tight jeans and speaking Italian. Irresistible.

And maybe the 18-year-old was one of those young things who is attracted to older men and the power they wield. Oh, the authority of a driving instructor can be ever so alluring.

Maybe some misguided people even see a parallel between this case and our own Monica's grab for White House power.

To me, the rape ruling confirms the disconnect between the sexes, particularly when jurists are older and out of touch. Of Italy's 420 judges, only 10 are women. Enough said.

That the driving instructor is much older, heavier and stronger than the 18-year-old should have rang alarm bells for the justices. The size of the instructor must have been a factor worth considering for conviction at the trial, when the man was sentenced to two years and eight months for the rape.

Fortunately, many Italians don't share the old jurists' feelings. They are appalled by this ruling. "It could be seen as a manual for aspiring rapists," the Rome daily Il Messaggero noted in a front-page story.

Five women in the Italian Parliament went so far as to dress in jeans for a session to protest. They

carried signs that stated: "Jeans: An alibi for rape."

Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema said his government post prevented him from criticizing the court's ruling, but then he said that, as a private citizen, he was in "solidarity" with the women legislators.

Big whoop.

This is the same man who expressed outrage at the U.S. military's recent finding that a U.S. Marines pilot wasn't guilty of manslaughter when his plane hit a ski-lift cable in Italy and killed 20 people. "I think it is a duty that justice be done," D'Alema said after the pilot was let off the hook.

What of justice for women in Italy?

"Nothing can be done," Simonetta Sotgiu, a female justice, told The Associated Press. "Justice in the court is in the hands of men, often elderly, with old ideas."

For now, women's groups worldwide are holding protests. Instead of burning bras, they're wearing jeans.

Hmm. Maybe I should contribute that slimmer. It's just what those old Italian jurists need wrapped around their fat heads to squeeze some common sense into them.

The Behrend Review

CHARLES TESTRAKE

A review of the Academy Awards

The 71st annual Academy Awards show was a mixture of many things. Those things ranged from predictability to surprise, from honors to exuberance, as well as from total boredom to a complete disgrace. That was this year's Oscars.

In an attempt to respond to past criticisms that previous Oscar shows have started too late and have run too long into the night, the Academy this year decided to move their telecast from Monday to Sunday night and begin it a half hour earlier at 8:30pm. However, despite this, the show still lasted over four hours, over four and a half hours if you include that corny and completely unnecessary Oscar pre-show with Geena Davis. In fact after they got through the introductions, the film montage, and the incredibly long and not very funny monologue by host Whoopi Goldberg. It was nearly 9:00pm before they got to the first award of the evening.

That first award was for Best Supporting Actor and in perhaps the biggest upset in a night full of upsets, it went to James Coburn for his role as an alcoholic and abusive father in "Affliction". Unfortunately though the award was such a surprise that even Coburn didn't expect to win, so he thus did not prepare an acceptance speech. So when he went up to the podium to accept it, Coburn basically rambled on and on for about three minutes or so until the orchestra finally cut him off.

Coburn's speech would go on to set the tone for the next hour of the ceremony with lifeless winners accepting award after award and droning on and on at the podium.

However finally we got a break with the award for Best Foreign Language Film. In one of the only two sure things of the night, the other being a Best Director Oscar for Steven Spielberg, "Life Is Beautiful", the story of a Jewish father who protects his son from the horrors of a German concentration camp by pretending that it is all just a game in which the grand prize is a real tank, won the award. Roberto Benigni, who acted, directed, and co-wrote the film accepted the award by climbing atop and walking across the seats in the auditorium, and then running up on stage and hugging presenter Sophia Loren. In his acceptance speech, Benigni in his broken English dedicated the award "to those who are not here (Holocaust victims); they gave their life in order that we can say life is beautiful". Later that

evening Benigni would also win the Best Actor award, becoming only the second actor in Oscar history to direct himself to the prize.

After Benigni's exuberant acceptance speech the tone of the evening was somewhat improved—at least for a while! Especially when Jim Carrey came out to present the award for Best Film Editing. He said in his remarks: "Winning an Oscar isn't everything. It's an honor just to be nominated, oh God", then he pretended to break down and cry. For those of you who don't know, Carrey was making light of his not receiving an Oscar nomination for the "Truman Show". Unfortunately though that was pretty much the last highlight of the evening.

Next came the most disgraceful moment in Oscar history, when the Academy presented the Lifetime Achievement Award to Elia Kazan. While I will admit Kazan was a great director of such classic films as "Gentlemen's Agreement" and "On the Waterfront", he is nevertheless a despicable human being. In the early 1950's, Kazan testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee and gave them the names of several colleagues and friends of his whom he suspected of being Communists. And thus those individuals were blacklisted and had their careers and lives destroyed because of their political beliefs. Kazan never apologized for his actions and at times even bragged about them.

After the Kazan award, the evening concluded with Oscars for Gwyneth Paltrow for Best Actress in "Shakespeare in Love" and Steven Spielberg for Best Director for "Saving Private Ryan". However the Best Picture Oscar did not go to "Saving Private Ryan" as expected, but instead went to "Shakespeare in Love", becoming only the third comedy in last fifty years to win Best Picture. Unfortunately though the camera only showed the "Shakespeare" people celebrating and did not show us the obvious disappointment of Spielberg and the "Ryan" people. However, having actually seen all five nominated pictures, I thought "Life is Beautiful" should have won the award.

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What You Talkin' Bout Willis

WILL JORDAN

What are we paying for? Housing and Food Services needs to wake up

What's the deal with Food and Housing? Many people as well as myself feel very unsatisfied with several aspects of the Food and Housing service here on campus.

The first thing I would like to talk about is the food. I have been boycotting Dobbins and avoiding eating at Bruno's all semester long. Yes I am a lot more hungry than I used to be, but my stomach feels a lot better. To put it bluntly, the food sucks. When I was eating at Dobbins, TUMS became my dietary supplement. I do not feel that Dobbins offers a very healthy menu.

There is a small monopoly here on campus. Why can't there be something closer to campus such as a McDonald's or a Taco Bell or a pizza place? No, the food from these places isn't very healthy either, but at least students would have a choice of where

they want to eat. The only students that have access to these places are those who have cars. That is unless you take the Blue Bus to Peach Street. Since there is a monopoly here, Food and Housing is capable of changing any prices that they want for food, however unreasonable they may be, it seems to me that the portions at Bruno's have slowly gotten smaller since my first semester here 2 years ago. Hey, it's inflation at its best. I mean why is it that when you get a six inch sub from Bruno's, you get one piece of cheese and very little meat. And is it me, or is the mayonnaise chunky?

What was up with Housing kicking us out of our domiciles at 7 p.m. before Spring Break? But it was very nice of them to take the time to find hotels near here with such adequate rates for college students. Come on

now. We pay so many thousands of dollars for housing campus and yet we can't stay in them. Now I'm sure that there is a logical explanation for them kicking me out. I guess they couldn't ask any RAs to stay an entire day to keep an eye on all of us so we could wreak havoc in the buildings. Just how old do they think we are? We know the rules and I know that everyone in my suite is responsible enough not to burn the place down.

Finally, I have to say something about the way they have been handling the handing in of housing contracts the past two years that I have been here at Behrend. Last year when I was trying to get into the suites, several students and I camped out on the steps of Dobbins on a Monday night. It snowed that night and the steps were wet due to the

students using them to gain access to the apartments. Many people were on those steps from 7 p.m. Monday night until 8 a.m. Tuesday when the office finally opened. All of the people in line seemed to get along a lot better than the people who were waiting in line this semester. I don't understand why your semester status means absolutely nothing as far as housing goes, unless you are trying to get into the apartments. I waited there in Dobbins that whole night and I didn't even get into the suites at first. I wasn't notified that I could be in the suites until the end of July.

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