



Feature

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder Speaks to the ABA about Spending in the Prison System

This article talks about U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder who addressed US lawyers regarding prisons and crime problems. With the economic outlook can the country afford to sustain more prisons? What are the alternatives? This article takes a look at the suggestions from U.S. Attorney General Holder and some constituents.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder commented to the ABA that there are often discussions about law enforcement and how it has become bogged down when dealing with criminals and he believes the discussions should be focused on reform and other creative solutions to the common problems we all have with the criminal justice system.

The Attorney General Eric Holder purposes the country become "smart on crime" in addition to the well publicized saying to be "tough on crime." In Attorney General Eric Holder's first 6 months in the U.S. Attorney General position his goal has been to advance the thinking that "it is time to move past politics and ideology." He encouraged the ABA to move towards a criminal justice system that would be "fair and effective." In summary, we should institute a justice system that works!

What's the problem with the current system? During and since the 1960's and 1970's the prison system has grown to handle the outbreak of crime growth we experienced in the US. The statistics were an increase in crime overall was five-fold. There was a 100% increase in murder and violent crimes outgrew them all. Illegal drug use was on the rise to top off the surge of crime in America. This is when the justice system became "tough on crime." Many States passed the "three strikes and you're out" law in an effort to get "tough on crime." The federal government adopted a mandatory minimum sentencing and eliminated parole.

What were the effects of becoming "tough on crime?"

- The prison system grew seven times greater to hold all the people convicted under these no-nonsense laws. (1970 to present)
- U.S. Government spent billions of dollars for new prison construction.
- Today the U.S. has the highest imprisonment rate in the world.

The crime rate did drop by about 40% for violent crimes in the past six years or so according to reports. Attorney General Eric Holder believes the "tough on crime" approach did have a partial effect on crime reduction. He believes it will always have a component in reducing crime but he thinks everyone can agree it is not the entire answer for the justice system. What are some other outlooks for our justice system in the future? Attorney General Eric Holder believes that we must take a look at the number of re-arrests within three years after prisoners are released. It seems the rate is high, as 45 to 65%, of the ex-convicts released find their way back into the prison system. Attorney General Eric Holder sees "being smart on crime" now means that the Criminal System's work to prevent crime does not end when the prisoner is released. New policies will have to be instituted to track what happens after incarceration and what steps must be taken to assist these men and women to return and contribute to society. Government dollars should be spent smarter to help the released men and women join back into the mainstream with new trades and jobs.

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