

## Prison Sentencing Needs To Be Re-Thought

Missouri's State Budget is again facing a shortfall for 2012, to the tune of about \$500 million.

Thankfully, our state's Constitution requires our elected officials to have a balanced budget.

Mostly due to "entitlement" growth, the state has been trimming costs for the last several years. Most state employees have had to do without pay raises (like probably most of us in the private sector).

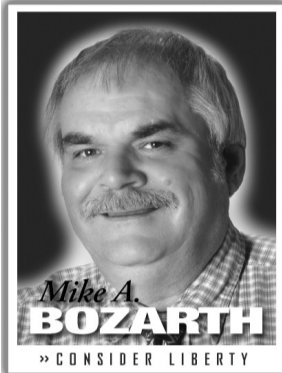
The costs for many social services have been outgrowing revenue growth. That is not surprising when you put it in the context of a tight economy, high unemployment, flat incomes for most wage earners and all of the many things that force people to seek help.

The growth of the prison system has been substantial. I believe costs went up 12% last year--four times the official rate of inflation.

Sadly, I think a majority of the people in correctional centers are there for non-violent and/or victimless crimes.

Frequently the non-violent offenders are there for not paying child support.

I can't blame the judges. They do the best they can. Our circuit court has received several awards for efficiency. The Prosecutor's office has received acclaim for its efficient prosecution of parents who don't, or can't, meet their obligations.



Mike A.  
**BOZARTH**  
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The judges give parents multiple chances to do the "right thing" before they finally send them to prison.

Instead of sending those people to prison, why not give them mandatory jobs with state and local governments?

Missouri has cut back on staff in departments as varied as parks and conservation to transportation. There is a lot of work the state needs done, but does not have the staff or resources to get it done.

If offenders can be sentenced to community service, why can't prisoners be sentenced to work a government job? Especially when part of

the problem may be they had trouble finding a job.

Levy work comes to mind.

Secondary highways are in dire need of repair.

Rest areas need maintained.

Higher education has taken some hits, why can't those behind or not paying child support take over custodial, grounds-keeping and other labor-intensive positions to help colleges spend their limited resources in other areas?

Paying offenders minimum wage to do jobs that are being cut seems so logical.

Offenders would get a paycheck, less payments on their obligations.

I don't think the state would be paying much more for labor than they would to house them in prison.

Taxpayers would benefit by getting more services for less money.

It seems like a win-win situation.

If the courts say we can't do it, maybe the legislature could take up the issue to change the law in order to allow it to happen.

I know sending folks to prison doesn't get their child support paid.

The same could be done for those

serving time for "victimless crimes," such as drug offenses.

Many of those in trouble for selling drugs did so because of the "easy money." Some sold drugs because they didn't have a job and needed the money.

If you put those folks to work in the public sector, drawing a legal pay check, they would have less time to get in trouble and might actually turn their lives around while performing needed services.

I still believe jobs in the private sector are better and more productive in most cases.

It's just I think the public would be better served--and our tax dollars better spent--if we devoted more of our state budget to giving some of these people jobs rather than paying a growing amount of our tax dollars to house them in prison.

I hate to see us continuing to balance our state's budget on the backs of our colleges and universities. An educated workforce is crucial to economic development and job creation.

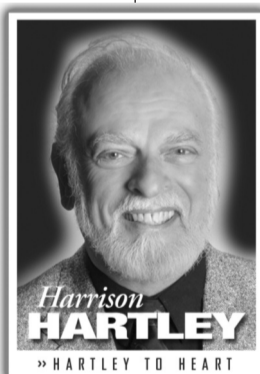
## Who's Your Hero?

When Penn State "super-coach" Joe Paterno died on January Twenty-second, a member of my philosophy class remarked (rather wistfully): "If he'd only died six months ago, he'd have gone out a hero." We had been talking about heroism and the qualities that make a particular man or woman stand out as so much more admirable that an almost mythic status is achieved, and the consensus was not surprising. We humans have an almost worshipful attitude toward extraordinary physical prowess, both in regard to those who demonstrate it and those who develop it in others; hence the lament for Paterno whose star fell for many because of the Penn State molestation scandal.

We reserve an even more elevated place in our cultural hearts for physical prowess when it is coupled with unusual bravery in the service of our nation or in protecting the peace and safety of our communities. To be a member of any of the armed forces or to fight fire or crime on the home front is to place oneself in a position of becoming a hero if circumstances provide a sufficiently desperate opportunity and one proves capable of rising to the occasion. The element of courage figures large in this class of heroes, as it does in the class that includes individual persons not part of a service organization and not obligated by any oath of duty but who nevertheless rise to a desperate occasion with unusual effect; private citizens who fend of thugs in the interest of others; casual on-lookers who perform remarkable feats rescuing strangers from drowning or accidents or avalanches and such; "com-

mon" heroes, as it were.

Of course, notoriety and "daring-do" alone produce a certain kind of hero, though thoughtful consideration pretty quickly leads to the unflattering conclusion that celebrity in and of itself probably ought not be associated with heroism. Some movie stars, for example, really have done heroic things, whereas others only play at having done them. Also, there is often a fine line between courage and outright stupidity, as witness people who try to jump the Grand Canyon on a motorcycle or go



Harrison  
**HARTLEY**  
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over Niagara Falls in a barrel. We seldom acknowledge such phony heroism as clearly as we should... by ignoring it. The dictionary definition of "hero" is interesting in that it includes the kinds of heroes mentioned above, and more. The primary reference is to mythological or legendary figures, often of divine parentage, and

the second is to persons of great martial skill (warriors and fighters). The fourth addresses remarkably noteworthy courage, but the third definitive criterion speaks of those who have earned far more than ordinary respect because of their achievements and noble qualities. (There are other references, of course, but they have to do with

sandwiches and "objects of extreme admiration and devotion," which I take to mean the "phony" heroes we make of entertainers who are merely and only entertaining: the canyon-jumpers, barrel riders, high-steppers, strident-talkers, and all such that appeal to our appetites and baser natures.) In our time, I think the most heroic heroes- those of achievement and noble character - are often ignored.

My personal heroes are almost entirely such. I have much admiration for people of action; no doubt, but generally even those (on my list) associate action with discovery in the sciences or humanities. Roy Chapman Andrews is one: the largely self-taught paleontologist and explorer who located the immense repository of dinosaur fossils in the Gobi Desert. Another is Carl Akeley. Long associated with the Field and American Museums of Natural History, Akeley was also an explorer, possibly the greatest of all taxidermists, an advocate of conservation (particularly mountain gorillas), and an inventor (as of gunnite; the sprayed concrete used today all over the world).

But where our culture really fails is in its almost perverse commitment to remain ignorant of great thinkers who also demonstrated courage and nobility of character. J.B.S. Haldane was one of these. Haldane con-

tributed to genetics, physiology, paleontology, energy science, and more. During WWII, he perfected the decompression chamber to prevent British naval personnel from contracting the bends, but refusing to experiment on them, he used himself (suffering a crushed vertebra and a punctured ear drum, of which he said: "They usually, heal, and if a hole is left, one is only slightly deaf and can blow smoke out of his ear, which is a social accomplishment.") He was far from perfect; could be irascible and outrageous; but his failings were dwarfed by beneficial achievement.

Basically, I look for heroes through a lens provided by one of the most important of my own, Bertrand Russell, who hoped to "live a life of reason guided by compassion." This combination, leavened by courage, seems to me the best we can hope for, and a remark my Grandpa made lights the way to it: "A man does his best with what he has." (Consider that, and envision Stephen Hawking plumbing the depths of the cosmos from his wheel chair; a real hero, not a mere canyon-jumper.) It's interesting to consider: what makes a hero and who are yours? Applied to areas of life that have real depth, it takes on considerable importance: science, art, medicine, philosophy - and politics. Now, that's a tough one. Having sunk far too far toward mere canyon-jumping, where are the real heroes in social policy these days? There are some, I think, though they're hard to hear in all the noise; but we should try to listen. We need heroes in the political sphere - never more than now - and we only hurt ourselves when we keep drowning them out.

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