



July 22, 2009

The view from prison: A waste of your money

Jeff Perrotte
Special to The Desert Sun

In 1992, Jeff Perrotte, while driving under the influence, collided with a car in Rancho Mirage, killing Jilly Rizzo. Perrotte was convicted of second-degree murder, sentenced to 15 years to life.

During his 16-plus years in prison, presently at Corcoran, Perrotte has earned three degrees, including a doctorate in business administration. He works as a mentor with groups of inmates in the substance abuse program.

Perrotte is next eligible for parole in June 2010. An observer of prison life, he writes here about the flawed rehabilitation programs in California prisons.

The view from prison: A waste of your money

I killed an innocent man by drinking and driving. As a result, many lives were ruined. I feel deep pain and remorse.

I have had a lot of time to evaluate the state's prison system, which is the largest drain on California's economy without having to be accountable to the taxpayer. Hardworking citizens, struggling to put children through school while at the same time protecting them, should have some expectations to what is being done with money that is being diverted from schools, universities and hospitals to lock up California's criminals. There is none.

Prison officials tell you, Joe Public, that inmates are being rehabilitated so you will be safer when they return to your communities, that these men will have the skills to remain drug-free and find jobs. Wrong. Most of the men being released from California's prison system are men who are more dangerous than when they arrived. I say a silent prayer as I watch them leave, hoping they will not cross the paths of my wife and children.

While there are limited programs available to help men change the direction of their lives, the backlog is so long that men returning to the free world often never make it in time. The prison system seems so concerned with funding these programs that they fill the majority of slots with lifers instead of men who are close to returning to society.

Prior to the accident that killed Mr. Rizzo, Frank Sinatra's longtime sidekick, I was a successful businessman. Since my incarceration, I have completed every self-help program available within the prison environment and several via correspondence, as well as vocational training programs.

After being transferred to Corcoran's substance abuse training facility along with many lifers, we were told that regardless of what we had previously done, all of us were being placed in vocational trade instruction because the warden wanted to ensure funding.

I asked for special consideration given the fact that I have substantial education and arrived with a letter of recommendation outlining the several mental health and literacy programs that I conducted at

Tehachapi Prison. I suggested that I could be used to help send safer men back into society.

All of the alcohol and drug abuse programs at this Substance Abuse Treatment Facility are filled with lifers, making it impossible for those who will be returning to society to get counseling. Are you safer? No. You are getting nothing for the billions that are being stolen from your children.

As I sit in this janitorial vocational class, I can't help but think of a person in the yard who truly wants a way to change his life and get away from crime in order to feed his family, but cannot. I have his seat. Dr. Jeff Perrotte is being trained as a janitor so you will be safer and I will be more parole suitable.

That is an outrageous waste of your tax dollars and an outrageous indifference to your safety by the California Department of Corrections.

Jeff Perrotte can be reach through his Web site, www.drinkdriveprison.com
