

# Politics and Corrections Spending

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Prompted by my colleague Jeff Webster's posting on the [California Department of Corrections](#) I spent some time this week reading up on corrections spending. Via Stateline's website, I came across an op-ed written by Grover Norquist, a well known tax reform advocate. What differentiated Norquist's piece from the many I read was that he presented prison spending reform as an element of the conservative political philosophy. I won't recap his entire article (it's a quick read that you can find [here](#)), but his basic premise is that reducing incarceration rates and spending is in line with conservative principles of limited government, federal accountability, and reduced spending.

Norquist's position of intertwining prison reform with conservative politics is significant because it brings the idea of reducing incarceration rates to an audience that, in his opinion, was not previously associated with that effort. Should this approach gain steam, it could very likely become a major campaign issue in states that cannot keep pace with increases in corrections spending.

In a [November 2009 blog](#), I raised many of the same points as Mr. Norquist, but from a politically neutral point of view:

*Over the past few decades, "lock 'em up and throw away the key" was the standard mentality that pervaded corrections policymaking. Today, in the wake of the economic downturn, legislators nationwide are scrambling to find that key. Policies such as mandatory minimums, three strikes laws and reducing the availability of early parole caused prison populations to swell, and this policy seemed to work out for everyone (except those who were incarcerated). Voters were content that their representatives were "tough on crime;" politicians were able to bring jobs to rural areas by building bigger prisons; and vendors benefited from the increased revenue the prison contracts brought. This era came to an end when the recession forced politicians to rethink their fiscal priorities, and the level of corrections spending was deemed unsustainable.*

Regardless of how the issue of reining in corrections costs is framed by Mr. Norquist or politicians, at its core, it is not a liberal/conservative, red state/blue state issue, but a green (money) issue. There simply is not enough revenue collected at the state level to support corrections spending at pre-recession levels.

What we will likely see is a shift in corrections spending from facilities and guards, to courts, probation and the technological infrastructure that supports these systems. Over the next few years, states will increasingly rely on technologies such as GPS offender monitoring, case management software, and strategic offender management systems to leverage their strained corrections budgets.

**GovWin has released its [State & Local Justice/Public Safety and Homeland Security Market, 2010-2015](#) report, which analyzes the trends for police protection, corrections, and judicial IT as well as homeland security. Demand for vendor-furnished information systems and services by U.S. state and local public safety agencies will increase from \$5.3 billion in 2010 to \$6.1 billion in 2015, bringing \$800 million in new spending to the market at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.9%.**