



No Place to Go

By Emerson Johnston

549,928 people go to sleep every night without having a bed to sleep on, without any food to eat, and most importantly without any assurance of safety. For them, every day is new “adventure”, moving from place to place, always in search of shelter or food. This is the image of the over half a million American people living on the streets of our cities. What’s more alarming than the amount of homeless people is the amount, or lack thereof, of policy and proposals seeking to stop this rising number. It’s concerning that in light of the recent election, the media has decided that it’s more important to cover scandals and rumors than the actual American people; people that are hurting every day that we choose to ignore issues like this one. This issue stems from multiple places but nowhere is it more prominent than the prison system. No one can deny that our justice system needs reform, however, most people are unaware of just how much it needs. Daily, people are let free from our prison system only to learn that they’re stuck in yet another cage. In a study by charities Homeless Link and Resource Information Service, it was reported that one fifth of homelessness projects said most of the people using their services were ex-offenders or former felons. Additionally, it was announced in a 2008 study of the U.S. jail population in 2002, 15.3 percent had been homeless anytime the year before incarceration. When asked why some of the homeless had resorted to crime, it wasn’t necessarily because they needed or wanted money. Some people reported that they’d rather be incarcerated than live on the streets. What congressmen and women fail to realize is that we have two intertwining issues on our hands; one being the increased homeless population and the other being our failing prison system.

There is way more than one thing our government can do to fix this problem and the fact that it hasn’t been brought to their attention is astonishing. Many people forget that in politics, every issue is related to every other issue and this is a perfect of just that. One of the most polarizing issues facing the US at the moment is the legalization of recreational drug use. Many argue that the legalization of drugs including Marijuana or cocaine will help alleviate the problem at hand and regardless of your thoughts on the matter, they aren’t wrong. According to the Bureau of Prisons, there are 207,847 people incarcerated in federal prisons and roughly half (48.6 percent) are in for low level drug offenses. If that 48.6 percent of people hadn’t been charged, more than half of them would have no criminal offense to their name according to the same study. It’s policies like these that are continuously putting people on the streets. More than 650,000 prisoners are set to be released this year. It is the job of our city officials, congressmen,

and senators to make sure that our prison system is accurately equipped to make sure that none of them will become homeless.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2008/feb/19/prisonsandprobation>

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