

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



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SENATOR LYDA GREEN SENATE DISTRICT G

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I support the expansion of the public prison system in Alaska—specifically at the already developed location just north of Palmer. For four years I have been working on public prison legislation. I was shocked to see my picture on the KTUU-TV website next to a statement that says, “let private firms run state-owned prisons, report urges”. Not only do I not agree with that statement, it simply is not a factual assertion of what anyone in this state should be thinking on this subject. I will not be forced into a contract with a pre-selected sole source contractor funneling money out of this state, pretending to be a typical private prison contractor.

Make no mistake about it—we need to expand our prison system. Our prison system currently is at more than 100 percent capacity. With additional prosecutors, law enforcement personnel, and “get tough on crime” agendas, the number of inmates will continue to increase. Of real concern is that the inaccurate comparison based on Cornell’s incomplete and unsubstantiated information released yesterday will lead readers to the wrong conclusion.

We need to be clear about this. No study comparing the costs of public vs. privately-operated prisons has been completed. The Office of Management and Budget has completed a review of the costs of the public prison. OMB has not examined the costs involved in the privately-operated prison because information from the apparent sole-source vendor, Cornell Corrections, has not been forthcoming. No one in the administration has announced support for the Cornell proposal.

This is not a debate between public vs. private prisons. The two proposals involve (1) a publicly funded, publicly operated prison, and (2) a publicly funded, privately operated prison. In both cases, the public (the state) owns the

prison. The state is liable. The state is ultimately responsible, and the state responds in a crisis.

We need to see the current private prison discussion for what it really is. In the rest of the United States, a private prison company chooses a site, builds a prison and offers its space for rent. In the proposed “private prison” plan being lobbied for, Cornell chooses the site, chooses its builders, and Alaska guarantees that Cornell will be paid at full capacity (regardless of actual beds filled) for at least five years. This proposal would give a private company control over a state asset worth in excess of \$100 million with which to make money – by charging the state for services. This state has been trying to address the need for expansion of the prison system for more than 10 years. This state has wasted time and money on private prison legislation and we have no additional prison beds to show for it. This road to failure ends now.

The decision about addressing the need for more prisons in this state is a serious decision. This is not about Whittier vs. Mat-Su, and it cannot be about wheeling and dealing. The state has real problems and we need real solutions based on real numbers. No one should be permitted to dupe the state of Alaska into a back alley deal. The proposed arrangement is a non-competitive, sole source deal for someone’s buddies. Anyone who understands the process and the needs of Alaskans knows that in the end, that does not work. All of this vigorous special interest misinformation campaign leads to no new prison beds in Alaska. The actual result will be sending more Alaska jobs, Alaska prisoners, and Alaska money to Arizona. That is a travesty and we cannot let that happen.

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