



In Prisons We Trust

With some 2 million Americans behind bars, it's no secret that the cost of prisons has skyrocketed over the past two decades. But a new database compiled by MotherJones.com underscores how prison spending has increased far more rapidly than funding for public programs like higher education.

Adjusting for both inflation and population growth, state spending on prisons nationwide

nearly tripled between 1980 and 2000—while spending on higher education grew by less than a third. Prison expenditures shot up in every state and in Washington, D.C., while funding for colleges and universities dropped or barely budged in 11 states and the nation's capital.

The accompanying chart shows the largest shifts in spending; topping the list is Alaska, which directed \$309 more per resident to prison cells than to public classrooms. The gaps have persisted even as crime has declined over the past decade—and despite an infusion of funds into higher education in recent years.

The spending data were compiled as part of MotherJones.com's "Debt to Society," an on-line resource that details the hidden costs of incarceration in every state. A fully searchable version of the database is available at www.motherjones.com/prisons. —Vince Beiser

Change in Spending per Resident

| | PRISONS | HIGHER EDUCATION | GAP |
|-------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| Alaska | \$67.83 | -\$241.29 | \$309.12 |
| D.C. | \$200.72 | -\$89.68 | \$290.40 |
| Arizona | \$87.60 | -\$22.93 | \$110.53 |
| New York | \$95.22 | -\$14.23 | \$109.45 |
| Oregon | \$134.14 | \$32.01 | \$102.13 |
| California | \$95.95 | \$2.46 | \$93.49 |
| Montana | \$71.86 | -\$15.37 | \$87.23 |
| Michigan | \$134.82 | \$50.60 | \$84.22 |
| Wisconsin | \$108.74 | \$30.21 | \$78.53 |
| S. Carolina | \$56.18 | \$3.37 | \$52.81 |

Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Department of Education