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The President's Weekly Address
October 31, 2015

Hi, everybody. Today, there are 2.2 million people behind bars in America and millions more on parole or probation. Every year, we spend 80 billion in taxpayer dollars to keep people incarcerated. Many are nonviolent offenders serving unnecessarily long sentences.

I believe we can disrupt the pipeline from underfunded schools to overcrowded jails. I believe we can address the disparities in the application of criminal justice, from arrest rates to sentencing to incarceration. And I believe we can help those who have served their time and earned a second chance get the support they need to become productive members of society.

That's why over the course of this year, I've been talking to folks around the country about reforming our criminal justice system to make it smarter, fairer, and more effective.

In February, I sat down in the Oval Office with police officers from across the country. In the spring, I met with police officers and young people in Camden, New Jersey, where they're using community policing and data to drive down crime. Over the summer, I visited a prison in Oklahoma to talk with inmates and corrections officers about rehabilitating prisoners and preventing more people from ending up there in the first place. Two weeks ago, I visited West Virginia to meet with families battling prescription drug and heroin abuse, as well as people who are working on new solutions for treatment and rehabilitation. And last week, I traveled to Chicago to thank police chiefs from across the country for all that their officers do to protect Americans, to make sure they get the resources to get the job done, and to call for commonsense gun safety reforms that would make officers and their communities safer.

We know that having millions of people in the criminal justice system, without any ability to find a job after release, is unsustainable. It's bad for communities, and it's bad for our economy. So on Monday, I'll travel to Newark, New Jersey, to highlight efforts to help Americans who've paid their debt to society reintegrate back into their communities. Everyone has a role to play, from businesses that are hiring ex-offenders to philanthropies that are supporting education and training programs. And I'll keep working with people in both parties to get criminal justice reform bills to my desk, including a bipartisan bill that would reduce mandatory minimums for nonviolent drug offenders and reward prisoners with shorter sentences if they complete programs that make them less likely to commit a repeat offense.

There's a reason that good people across the country are coming together to reform our criminal justice system. Because it's not about politics. It's about whether we as a nation live up to our founding ideal of liberty and justice for all. And working together, we can make sure that we do.

Thanks, everybody. Have a great weekend. And have a safe and happy Halloween.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:30 p.m. on October 30 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on October 31. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 30, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on October 31.

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