

John Christopher Burton replies to letters on the death penalty, parole and the California prison system

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John Christopher Burton, the candidate supported by the Socialist Equality Party in the California recall election, has received a number of letters concerning his campaign's attitude towards the death penalty, parole and the prison system in California. We reprint several of them below, followed by his reply.

Dear candidate,

What is your stance on the corrupt prison and parole system? Our politicians have for too many years declared they are “tough on crime.” True they have been; but they have not been smart and just on crime. Californians are in jeopardy with this barbaric attitude. One hundred and sixty thousand Californians are incarcerated in our state's prisons, many of whom have had two and three paroles granted only to have both our ex- and current governors abusing Prop. 89, and revoking those who have been found suitable for parole.

DM

Dear Mr. Burton:

If elected governor of California, what would be your stand on parole? More specifically, if elected governor, would you follow Governor Davis's example of continually reversing parole granted a model prisoner, even when the Superior Court has found that all (Davis's) reasons for said reversal are invalid?

Sincerely,

SL

Hi, I'm part of a organization called PTO prison talk online. I would like to know how you feel on the prison system. Gray Davis has taken parole away from people who rightly deserve it, also no family visits for lifers, which is so wrong. Because when you think about it,

there are kids and family that would like to see their loved ones and parents for those special two days out of the month. Like me, thousands of people have loved ones in prison, and that's thousands of votes for the governor that will do the best for the inmates and their families.

Sincerely,

KP

What is your stand on the death penalty? Would you be for life with the possibility of parole?

Thank you,

JG

Thank you for your letters.

I am an opponent of the death penalty. The death penalty is symptomatic of a society steeped in brutality and violence. It does not in any way deter crime or, more fundamentally, alter the conditions which create crime in the first place—social want and social inequality.

Furthermore, I believe that Governor Davis's denial of parole to prisoners approved for parole by the Parole Board, which itself generally errs on the side of not granting parole, is outrageous. I was aware of the efforts of attorney Rowan Klein, whom I have worked with in the past, and others to challenge Davis's opportunistic interventions in the parole process, and I strongly supported that challenge.

The parole question raises the more general issue of what should be the goal and function of the prison system. In any humane and enlightened society adequate resources would be devoted to raising the educational and cultural level of prisoners, and generally to promote measures that reduce the risk of violent and criminal conduct. That would reduce recidivism, and thereby benefit prisoners, their families

and society at large. It is barbaric to view punishment as the foundation of incarceration.

I also oppose the three strikes law and all other rigid sentencing regimes. Many prisoners made unfortunate mistakes, or were driven to crime by economic necessity. Diversion and other efforts short of incarceration should be explored in many situations.

Ultimately, most crime arises not from greedy human nature, but from privation and the social dislocation that accompanies it. As a socialist, I support fundamental restructuring of the economic basis of society to end the source of most crime.

Sincerely,

John C. Burton



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