

ALLEN'S PRISON PLANS, PORK-BARREL POLITICS

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Most of the discussion about Gov. George Allen's prison plans has focused on the real or illusory nature of the impact of sentencing reform on crime. Almost no attention has been focused on the pork-barrel content of the legislation and the more than \$800 million in construction costs and \$450 million in operating costs to be doled out by the commonwealth over the next 10 years. These are big long-term dollars.

During the congressional debates over the recently passed federal crime bill, social spending and prevention programs were labeled "pork." The sight and sound of U.S. Sen. Al D'Amato of New York singing "Old McDonald" in front of a picture of a pig highlighted the Republican rhetoric about "pork-barrel politics." But let us remember what pork-barrel politics is all about. Webster's Dictionary defines "pork barrel" as "... a government project or appropriation yielding benefits (as political patronage, increased employment, or public spending) to a political district and its political representative."

With 27 new prisons to be built, with long-term employment possibilities for about 12,600 new line-level correctional employees (based on an extrapolation from figures provided in a 1987 JALARC report on staffing in Virginia's Prisons), and who knows how many relatively high-paying political appointments to administrative positions in prisons, regional Department of Corrections offices, and in Richmond, it is clear that all legislators have a stake (pardon the mixed metaphor) in bringing home the bacon.

This is not the small, short-term pork directly benefiting children attending Boys and Girls Clubs that the federal legislation hopes will prevent crime. Construction and operating costs are long-term commitments which involve salaries, fringe and retirement benefits paid out for years to come to people living in districts where prisons are located.

In addition, dispensing large-scale prison site-selection, planning, design and construction and supply contracts provides many opportunities for politicians to build allegiances in their districts and in the state as they seek to generate support for future political campaigns.

Yes, there appears to be a great deal of "pork" in the governor's proposal. If we think of this as a "jobs" bill rather than a "crime bill" it forces us to think about it in a different light. Are there not more productive ways to create jobs than paying one group of people to watch another? Clearly this is something we need to investigate further.

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Norfolk, Sept. 9, 1994