

largely due to "truth-in-sentencing" laws that limit early releases, mandatory drug sentences, get tough anti-crime policies enacted in the 1980s and 1990s, and "three strikes and you're out" laws for repeat offenders. Over 2,000,000 prisoners are now held in Federal and State prisons and local jails. Nearly 925,000 Americans are convicted of felony offenses in American courts each year and some 600,000 are incarcerated as a result.

As the national inmate population has increased, the impact on minority communities has been devastating. Two-thirds of the prison population are now racial and ethnic minorities, and for African American males in their twenties, one in every eight is in prison or jail on any given day. Even more upsetting is that African American males born today have a one in three chance of going to prison during their lifetime, compared to a one in seventeen chance for white males. At year-end 2003, African American inmates represented an estimated 44 percent of all inmates with sentences of more than one year.

Despite the notion that the Scales of Justice is blind, it is no secret that racial bias plays a deplorable role in the disproportionate conviction and sentencing of African American men compared to their racial counterparts (who are charged with the same or a similar offense). In addition to racial bias, the high rate of minority involvement in the system reflects a complex set of social, economic, and community problems often tied to poverty, lack of access to education, and unemployment.

While some would assert that "if one does the crime, then he must do the time," it is imperative to remember that once these individuals have done their time and "repaid their debt to society," they should not be thrown back into the fray without the proper tools they need to overcome the factors that initially led to their involvement in the criminal justice system. The transition from prison life is inherently difficult, especially for individuals who have served a lengthy sentence and received little preparation for life in a law-abiding society. In addition to being stigmatized with a conviction, former offenders face challenges finding employment, housing, health care, and public assistance. Often they are also alienated from their families and communities. All of these negative outcomes contribute to increased recidivism, public health risks, homelessness, unemployment, and disenfranchisement.

Perhaps the most significant costs of prisoner re-entry are the impact on children, the weakened ties among family members, and destabilized communities. The long-term generational effects of a social structure in which imprisonment is the norm and law abiding role models are absent are difficult to measure but undoubtedly exist.

African American males are a critical component of African American families and communities. I, like my CBC colleagues, remain poised to take action to reverse the negative trends surrounding African American males and their incarceration and to reinforce this group's positive characteristics.

It is for this reason that Congress members JOHN CONYERS, Jr., BOBBY SCOTT, and I introduced H.R. 5075, which identifies programs and policies that would encourage the successful reentry of incarcerated persons into the community after their release. For similar

reasons, I have continually pushed for the reauthorization of the Community Safety through Recidivism Prevention Act (The Second Chance Act of 2004).

Consequently, I co-sponsored Congressman ROB PORTMAN's bill, H.R. 4676, to reauthorize the grant program of the Department of Justice for reentry of offenders into the community and to establish a task force on Federal programs and activities relating to the reentry of offenders.

While members of the CBC and other conscientious national and state legislators have worked to reform the prison system and provide programs and policies that eliminate many of the barriers that ex-offenders face upon reentry, there is still much work to do. We will continue to fight for the passage of federal legislation to provide former offenders eligibility for public housing assistance, funding for students loans and grants, and assistance in retaining or re-establishing voting rights. We will also continue to push for legislation that would provide tax incentives to businesses that hire former felons, helping them to become self-sufficient upon reentry.

I sincerely believe that we can assist these men, our brothers, to reach their potential when they return to society. I know that this requires the creation of a support system that begins during their incarceration and continues after their release. I believe that we must not give up on these men, but provide them with the resources they need—during and after their incarceration—to contribute to their families and society in a meaningful way.

HONORING CONGRESSMAN AMO HOUGHTON

HON. THOMAS M. REYNOLDS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 7, 2004

Mr. REYNOLDS. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to recognize Congressman AMO HOUGHTON of Corning, New York, as he retires from the U.S. House of Representatives after 18 years of exemplary public service.

Throughout his time in the U.S. House of Representatives, AMO HOUGHTON was one of those individuals who showed us what a noble calling public service can be. AMO has been a bright, compassionate and valued leader, and he retires as one of the most respected members of Congress, on either side of the aisle. And despite his great responsibilities, AMO always remained deeply rooted in his community, and in our Western New York values.

Throughout his entire career, he remained a fiscal conservative committed to responsible government spending. As the sixth ranking Republican on the House Ways and Means Committee, AMO has played an important role in ensuring that our Nation's tax policy was shaped with the best interests of New Yorkers in mind. His service on the International Relations Committee and as vice-chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa allowed him to use his deep understanding of international affairs to manage important foreign relations matters. AMO also earned a reputation for terrific constituent service; it is easy to see why, for he truly cares about the well-being of each and every one of his constituents.

I salute AMO HOUGHTON for all that he has done for Western New York and New York state in his time here in Congress. Our community owes him a tremendous debt of gratitude. I will certainly miss his friendship, his intelligence, and his warm personality; but I wish him all the best in all his future endeavors.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that this Congress join me in thanking Congressman AMO HOUGHTON of Corning, New York, for his years of service to Western New York, New York state, and our Nation, as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

HONORING MOBILE, ALABAMA'S BAKER HIGH SCHOOL MARCHING BAND FOR ITS PARTICIPATION IN THE 2004 MACY'S THANKSGIVING DAY PARADE

HON. JO BONNER

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 7, 2004

Mr. BONNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the members of the Baker High School Marching Band for their participation in the 2004 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City.

Baker High School, located in Mobile, Alabama, is without question very proud of the efforts of its band. For several months, the 220 members of this group, both musicians and flag corps participants, worked tirelessly in preparation for a performance which took place in front of thousands of men, women, and children lining the streets of Manhattan, and for an audience of millions watching the parade on television here in the United States and around the world.

The members of the band spent the past two years holding multiple fundraisers to raise the money necessary to make this trip to New York. These efforts, which included gift wrapping, selling coupon books to friends and neighbors in the Mobile area, and bagging groceries at local supermarkets, were extremely successful and provided the band with the means to travel to this event. Even the recent devastation caused by Hurricane Ivan could not dampen either the enthusiasm or determination of these fine young men and women to participate in this Thanksgiving Day tradition.

The one hour, 45-block walk down Broadway from Central Park to 34th Street in lower Manhattan gave the band and flag corps ample opportunity to demonstrate its abilities, and they did not disappoint. The total of 96 songs performed by the band were enthusiastically received by the thousands along the parade route, and their talents were showcased even further when NBC gave the band the chance to perform for its nationwide television audience on that morning's broadcast of the "Today Show."

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Mobile, Alabama, are extremely proud of all of the young men and women who participated in this event. I ask my colleagues to join with me and with the families of all of these students in praising them and their band director, Tripp Morris, for a fine showing for south Alabama and a fine performance for the entire country.