

# Editorial

## View from the inside: A challenge to lawmakers

The United States prison population is more than 1.5 million and is expected to grow due to new laws increasing time served for various crimes.

And if the purpose of imprisonment is safety, locking people away meets the temporary goal. People locked inside concrete walls and razor wire are not a physical threat to those outside.

Yet, since only 2.3 percent of Washington State prisoners are incarcerated for life without release, most inmates will eventually return into society. And with them returns the tools for life gained while incarcerated.

As lawmakers continue writing laws to lock away more criminals with the goal of deterring crime, they need to consider whether the end result of those words-on-pages equates to a peaceful solution that supports the ideals of freedom. Because freedom is violated when damaged and enraged people are incarcerated and returned to society still damaged and still enraged.

That reality raises questions: does incarceration in its present form identify causes of crime — especially violent crime? Does it reform behaviors that lead to violence and self destruction?

And, ultimately, does the current prison system in a nation that leads the free world help to build a more peaceful society?

A part of the answer to those questions can be accessed through the Prisoner Awareness Project (PAP), a course taught inside the Washington State Reformatory unit of the Monroe prison.

The group of inmates who teach the course will hold a one-day seminar on April 17, which will be a summary of a 7-session course taught at the prison since the late 1970s. The course was formed to address the increasing prison population with one goal in mind: for outsiders and residents of the reformatory to come away with an educated opinion regarding the current prison system.

Lawmakers should be there to examine what the effect is of the laws they pass, and to ponder what measures of reform would effectively address the growing problem of crime.