

# OPINION

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The Sun welcomes letters to the editor. Letters must include your **name, address and a daytime telephone number**. All letters are subject to editing. Those more than **300 words** will not be considered. Please limit submissions to one a month.

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## VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

### Costs too high

In failing to take into account the real economic costs of incarceration, as well as the societal costs of unemployed parolees and probationers, the Nov. 23 article "Inmate decrease may cause fire crew shortage" erroneously makes it seem like using low-risk inmates to help fight fires saves the state money.

While these fire-fighting inmates may cost CalFire just \$1 per hour when they "work fires," the actual cost to California taxpayers — when you add the \$36,000 it costs to keep one inmate incarcerated for one year — is closer to \$40,000 per year per inmate. Costs like these are the reason that California spends more money on its prisons than it does on its colleges; the reason that thousands of UC students will be forced to drop out of college due to fee hikes while the state foots the bill for CalFire to hire cheap labor.

In addition to the high economic cost of using incarcerated people to work California's fire crews, the policy articulated by Division Chief Arnie White costs our communities. Despite their excellent work on fire crews, about 80 percent of these women will be unable to find work when they are released, meaning they won't be able to feed their children, pay their rent or become contributing members to their communities.

Why doesn't CalFire train these women to fight fires while they're in jail and offer them employment when they are released? Are we to believe these women are good enough to save homes when they're incarcerated but not good enough to be trusted with a job when they're released?

California's economic short-sighted-

ness is responsible for much of the mess we're in today; let's not fool ourselves into thinking we should put prison reform on hold because low-risk inmates are needed to fight fires at a cost that doesn't come cheap to our state's taxpayers, our communities or our kids.

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