Name: Michael Winkler

Topic: The problems with private prisons in America

Organizational Pattern: Problem/Solution

General Purpose: To persuade

Specific Purpose: To persuade my audience that the America should stop doing business with private prisons

Central idea: America should stop doing business with private prisons because the conditions for the inmates held in them are terrible and because they contribute to poor recidivism rates.

Introduction:

1. So as we all know, America is the land of the free, right? No, wrong! In fact, America leads the world in incarceration rates, both on a per-capita basis and in terms of raw numbers.
2. Stat: According to the International Center for Prison Studies, our next closest competitor is China, which has 800,000 less prisoners than the U.S. And, and an increasingly large percentage of these prisoners are being held in private prisons.
3. So, today I’m going to talk about those private prisons. I’m going to talk about how bad conditions are for the citizens in those private prisons, how private prisons produce poor recidivism rates, and finally, how the government can (and should) address this issue.

Body:

1. Conditions for prisoners in private prisons are awful.
   1. And this matters because private prisons are a booming business, and they hold an ever-increasing proportion of convicted Americans. In fact, according to an article published on the website motherjones.com, “The Corrections Corporation of America, the nation’s largest owner of private prisons, has seen its revenue climb by more than 500% in the last decade”. So this is not just one prison out the backwoods of god-knows-where; these prisons operate all over the country and the percentage of prisoners they keep is only increasing
   2. Look, unlike the American government, whose obligation is to the wellbeing of its citizens, the obligation of private prison companies is to make a profit for their shareholders. Basic business logic dictates that they should make operating costs as low as they possibly can, for the good of their profit margins. That leads to stories like this:
   3. In Ohio, the state had to step in after prisoners found maggots in their food.
   4. And, in case you’re thinking that this was a one-off event, I have a quote for you:
   5. According to Terry A. Kupers, a psychiatrist who studied the inmates in the East Mississippi Correction Facility (a private prison in Mississippi) wrote the following, and I quote: “All inmates report significant weight loss since arriving at EMCF, from ten to 60 pounds, and from my direct observation it is clear that all the men are much thinner, almost emaciated, in comparison to the old snapshots I view in their charts…”
   6. And it’s not just the food – I could tell you about the lack of safety, the lack of physical and mental health care; I could tell you about an inmate who was only able to see a doctor after one of his testicles had swelled to the size of a grapefruit and his testicular cancer had spread to the rest of his body. But: I’ve tried to just focus on the food today because I don’t have enough time to talk about those, and the extrapolation you can make from the quality of food provided to prisoners is obvious: if private prisons can’t even be bothered to supply their prisoners with food, a basic necessity for human life, then how do you think prisoners are treated in other aspects of their lives?

Transitional Statement: So, now that I’ve talked a little bit about the conditions found in private American prisons, I’m going to talk about how and why the contribute to high recidivism rates.

1. Private prisons produce poor recidivism rates.
   1. I’ll say it again: the obligation of private prison companies is to their shareholders, not to their prisoners.
   2. This means that there’s no reason for private prison companies to try and lower recidivism rates.
   3. In fact, a presentation to its investors that was discovered by CBN news, Corrections Corporation of America (America’s largest for-profit prison company), listed a number of reasons to invest, and I’ll read a few to you:
      1. Highly compelling correction industry dynamics, CCA is well positioned within the industry, and then their next big point was: high recidivism rates in America
   4. To CCA, high recidivism rates are not a con, but a pro, because they mean more business. And you might just say, well, they’re just taking advantage of a trend that already exists, but no, they’re actually exacerbating high recidivism rates as well.
   5. According to the research and policy center In the Public Interest, private prisons have begun signing agreements with local governments that contain clauses guaranteeing high prison occupancy rates. What this means is that the local government and the prison agree on a percentage One specific example they found is that three privately run prisons in Arizona have contracts that guarantee a 100% occupancy rate. In other words, the government pays the prison up front as if all of its beds will be full for the length of the contract, regardless of the actual number of prisoner incarcerated there.
   6. What this does, is create an incentive for the government to criminalize its own citizens. Even if crime falls, the government still has an incentive to lock up the same number of people, or its money goes to waste. And if those beds don’t get filled? Well, then taxpayers foot the bill. It’s a lose-lose situation, except for the prisons.

Transitional Statement:

1. So, I’ve outlined two major problems with private prisons in America: the poor conditions they create for their prisoners, and the fact that they produce poor recidivism rates. The solution that I propose is straightforward:
   1. The American government should stop doing business with private prison companies and move to a system in which 100% of American prisons are run by the government. Obviously, the government can’t snap its fingers and teleport all the prisoners currently in private prisons into governmental prisons, but what it can (and should) do is:
      1. stop signing new contracts with private prison companies
      2. Once all the current contracts the government has signed with private prisons expire, don’t renew them.
      3. Transfer the inmates who are currently held in private prisons to governmental prisons
   2. It won’t be perfect, because obviously governmental prisons have problems of their own, but it would be a step in the right direction.
   3. It would mean moving away from a system in which poor conditions and high levels of recidivism are baked into the incentive structure.
   4. And there’s both a moral reason to do this (which is think is fairly obvious), but there’s also a practical reason. Lower recidivism rates mean less people in prison, which means less American tax dollars getting spent on providing for them.

Conclusion:

1. So, in conclusion…
2. In my speech today, I’ve really highlighted two of the biggest problems with private prisons in America: the poor conditions to which prisoners within it are subjected, and its failure to help prisoners reintegrate into society, as opposed turning back around and immediately getting thrown back in prison. And, finally, I’ve persuaded you (hopefully), that the American government should move away from dealing with private prison companies.
3. I’m just going to end with two quick questions: how many people in the room like to save money? And how many have a moral compass? Then you should be in favor of reform in the American prison system.