

**THE FIRM LINE - IN THIS ISSUE:**

*Cutting Louisiana's prison costs / Two towns have to move elsewhere / Paying the price for the U.S. oil bet / How Scalia's absence could affect major decisions / Robots in the Supreme Court*

**February 2016**

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## **Why did Louisiana spend nearly \$700 million last year on prisons?**

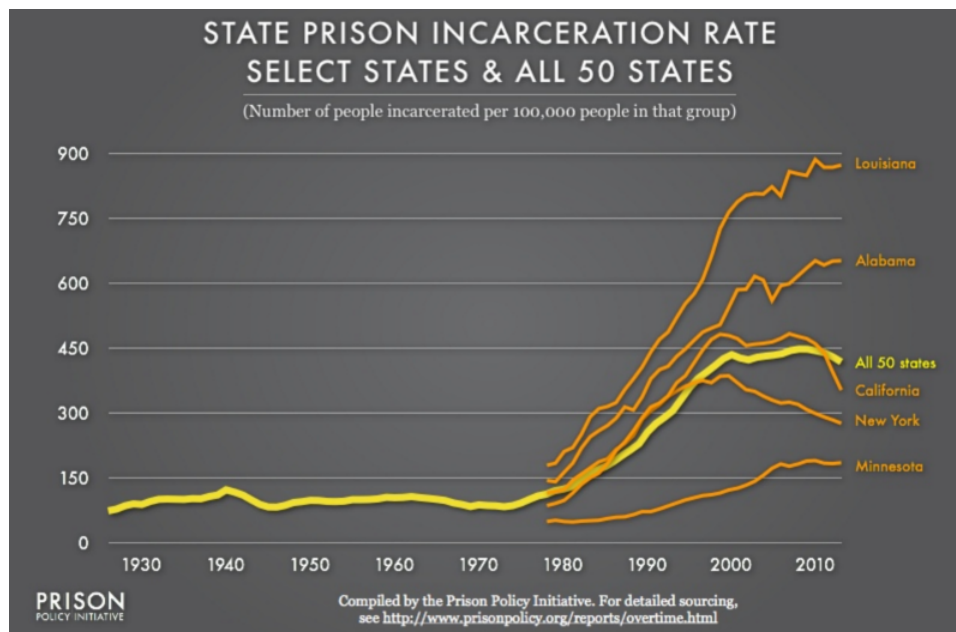
*By Bernard E. Boudreaux, Jr.  
bboudreaux@jonesswanson.com*

Louisiana imprisons more of its own citizens, per-capita, than any other state in the country. But are the people of Louisiana so much more dangerous than people who live in all the states along its borders -- more than in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama? Should its per-capita incarceration rate really be three times higher than the rate in New York? Or is our state's rate of confinement too high?

And if it's true -- as Governor John Bel Edwards, many corrections officials, and legislators on both sides of the aisle now say it is -- that our state's confinement rate is too high, why did taxpayers spend nearly \$700 million last year to keep all those people incarcerated?

Louisianans pay so much for their huge prison population that James LeBlanc, Secretary of Louisiana's Department of Corrections, has said that the state has got to find another way to deal with crime.

"You cannot build your way out of crime," he said, in a 2012 interview with *The Times-Picayune*. "It just doesn't work that way. You can't afford that. Nobody can afford that."



How Louisiana's incarceration rate compares to the rest of the country, 1980-2011.

Source: Prison Policy Initiative

[Click here to read the full article](#)

## These towns are about to disappear

*Isle de Jean Charles and Kivalina both have to move somewhere else*



Kivalina, Alaska in 2011 (left) and Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana in 2008 (right)  
Photos: Bill Roth / Alaska Dispatch News and Ted Jackson / The Times-Picayune

Two U.S. coastal communities -- Isle de Jean Charles, here in Louisiana, and Kivalina, 4,000 miles away in Alaska -- are both preparing to move their entire populations to new locations.

Kivalina has lost nearly all its land to floods and erosion, as the Arctic climate has changed. Meanwhile, on the other side of the continent, Isle de Jean Charles is already practically underwater, after decades of oil and gas activities, subsidence, hurricanes, floods and other factors have destroyed the coast all around it.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will spend about [\\$50 million](#) to help the residents of Isle de Jean Charles relocate -- part of a \$92.6 million package HUD has recently announced it would send to Louisiana to help the state deal with "disaster resilience."

"I'm very, very excited," said [Chief Albert Naquin](#), of Isle de Jean Charles' Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw community. "Our culture will stay intact...Maybe we can be the model community to teach others."

And there will be others. Numerous coastal scientists and engineers have predicted that coastal towns all over Southern Louisiana [will disappear](#) into the Gulf of Mexico over the next 50 years.

The other roughly **\$40 million** in the HUD award will go to Louisiana's Strategic Adaptions for Future Environments Program (LA SAFE), which helps communities deal with land loss and flooding.

Residents of Kivalina are also hoping to get federal funding to help them move. President Obama's budget request to Congress includes **\$400 million** "to cover the unique circumstances confronting vulnerable Alaskan communities, including relocation expenses for Alaska Native villages threatened by rising seas, coastal erosion, and storm surges."

That budget request faces stiff opposition in Congress.

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*From Quartz:*

## **The U.S. bet big on American oil and now the whole global economy is paying the price**

*By Steve LeVine*

*February 1, 2016*

Oil has wrong-footed our leading experts -- again.

At the beginning of 2014, the world was marveling in surprise as the U.S. returned as a petroleum superpower, a role it had relinquished in the early 1970s. It was pumping so much oil and gas that experts foresaw a new American industrial renaissance, with trillions of dollars in investment and millions of new jobs.

Two years later, faces are aghast as the same oil has instead unleashed world-class havoc: just a month into the new year, the Dow Jones Industrial Average is down 5.5%. Japan's Nikkei has dropped 8%, and the Stoxx Europe 600 is 6.4% lower. The blood on the floor even includes fuel-dependent industries that logic suggests should be prospering, [such as airlines](#).

[Click here to read the full article](#)

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*From The New York Times:*

## **Scalia's absence is likely to alter Court's major decisions this term**

*By Adam Liptak*

*February 14, 2016*

Justice Antonin Scalia's death will complicate the work of the Supreme Court's eight remaining justices for the rest of the court's term, probably change the outcomes of some major cases and, for the most part, amplify the power of its four-member liberal wing.

It takes five votes to accomplish most things at the Supreme Court, and until Saturday, that meant Justice Anthony M. Kennedy was in control when the court's four-member liberal and conservative blocs lined up against each other. But with three remaining conservatives, only the liberal side can command a majority if it attracts Justice Kennedy's vote. And if it does not, the result is a 4-to-4 deadlock.

[Click here to read the full article](#)

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*From The Atlantic:*

## **Robots could make the Supreme Court more transparent**

*By Adrienne LaFrance*

*January 20, 2016*

Predicting the outcome of Supreme Court decisions has long been a favorite parlor game for political scientists, attorneys, and legal-system junkies.

People have built statistical models, predictive algorithms, and flow charts, and have used machine learning to try to guess what the justices will decide. Some of these models are reliable. Several of them make accurate predictions around 75 percent of the time. Human prognosticators can be even more impressive than that.

[Click here to read the full article](#)



*This Month's Author:*

**Bernard E. Boudreaux, Jr.**

[bboudreaux@jonesswanson.com](mailto:bboudreaux@jonesswanson.com)

One American Place  
301 Main Street, Suite 1920  
Baton Rouge, LA 70801  
(225) 810-3165

## NEW ORLEANS

Pan-American Life Center  
601 Poydras Street, Suite 2655  
New Orleans, LA 70130  
Phone: (504) 523-2500  
Facsimile: (504) 523-2508

## BATON ROUGE

One American Place  
301 Main Street, Suite 1920  
Baton Rouge, LA 70801  
Phone: (225) 810-3165  
Facsimile: (225) 810-3169

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Jones Swanson Huddell & Garrison | 601 Poydras Street, Suite 2655 | New Orleans, | LA | 70130