



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on April 29, 2011

## Billions Spent by Feds and States to House Illegal Alien Criminals

Figures published in a report issued this week by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) indicate that over the past five fiscal years the number of foreign nationals jailed in federal prisons has increased by 4,000 to a total of 55,000.

A corresponding increase in the criminal alien population in state prisons was revealed, as well. The number increased by 75,000 to an astounding total of nearly 300,000.

How much does it cost states to house these criminals? Says the GAO,



We estimated that selected operating costs (i.e., correctional officer salaries, medical care, food service, and utilities) associated with incarcerating criminal aliens in our nation's state prison systems totaled \$7 billion from fiscal year 2003 through fiscal year 2009. These costs ranged from about \$736 million in 2003 to \$1.1 billion in 2009, about a 56 percent increase.

The GAO report summarizes the findings:

The number of criminal aliens in federal prisons in fiscal year 2010 was about 55,000, and the number of SCAAP criminal alien incarcerations in state prison systems and local jails was about 296,000 in fiscal year 2009 (the most recent data available), and the majority were from Mexico. The number of criminal aliens in federal prisons increased about 7 percent from about 51,000 in fiscal year 2005 while the number of SCAAP criminal alien incarcerations in state prison systems and local jails increased about 35 percent from about 220,000 in fiscal year 2003. The time period covered by these data vary because they reflect updates since GAO last reported on these issues in 2005. Specifically, in 2005, GAO reported that the percentage of criminal aliens in federal prisons was about 27 percent of the total inmate population from 2001 through 2004.

The study indicates that almost 25 percent of prisoners housed in federal facilities are criminal aliens.

The breakdown of the data includes the following statistical information:

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimated that as of fiscal year 2009 the total alien — non-U.S.-citizen — population was about 25.3 million, including about 10.8 million aliens without lawful immigration status. Some aliens have been convicted and incarcerated (criminal aliens).

A story in *The Hill* described the political impact of the GAO's findings:

The study comes as the immigration debate heats up on Capitol Hill and the White House. President Obama ramped up efforts this week, hosting meetings with key business, faith and political officials on the issue. And Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.), the head of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus's immigration task force, is trumpeting the need for immigration reform in



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speeches across the country.

Meanwhile, Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa) used the study to back his push for a fence and a wall that runs along the U.S.-Mexico border as a way to stop people from coming into the country illegally.

Information on the provenance of the criminals highlights how easily lawbreakers pass through the porous southern border. According to the report, about 68 percent of the approximately 51,000 criminal aliens incarcerated in federal prison at the end of December 2010 were citizens of Mexico, and almost 90 percent were citizens of one of eight countries, including Mexico.

Congressman King proposes a familiar solution to the problem:

We have to secure our southern border with a fence, a wall and a fence. That would drastically reduce the ability of criminal aliens to enter the United States, providing needed relief to overburdened state prison systems and to taxpayers. We also have to do a better job of removing criminal aliens who are apprehended.

The anecdotal reports of runaway recidivism among criminal aliens are supported by the figures published in the GAO report.

The data supplied by the GAO reveal that “about 249,000 criminal aliens were arrested about 1.7 million times, averaging about 7 arrests per criminal alien.”

The types of crime being committed over and over by these illegals are serious, says the GAO:

About 50 percent of the criminal aliens in our study population were arrested at least once for either assault, homicide, robbery, a sex offense, or kidnapping. About half of the criminal aliens were arrested at least once for a drug violation.

Despite the rising costs, the federal government continues to subsidize the cost of incarcerating the massive illegal alien criminal population through the program known as the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP).

The federal government bears these incarceration costs for federal prisons and reimburses states and localities for portions of their costs through the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) of the Department of Justice (DOJ).

To compile the data published in the report, the GAO analyzed a random sample of 1,000 criminal aliens.



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