

Sick and Elderly Federal Prisoners Are Not Being Released Despite Coronavirus Danger

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The Federal Bureau of Prisons is run by the Department of Justice, and the two are at war with each other. In his memo of March 26, 2020, U.S. Attorney General William Barr's instructions of what to do with prisoners was fairly clear — release those at high risk of dying from the COVID-19 virus. But those simple instructions have different interpretations by the big DOJ bureaucracy and, in turn, has sown confusion.

That confusion has led to the two sides contradicting each other and meanwhile, inmates are becoming ill and dying.

The press is full of stories about how state prisons, which house the majority of prisoners, are acting quickly in releasing prisoners and, in some cases, acting too quickly. Of the roughly two million inmates in the United States, only 153,000 are federal prisoners. And the DOJ has a list of just 4,000 inmates over the age of 60 who are deemed nonviolent, low risk as a threat to society.

Unfortunately, the federal prison system is a sordid tale of bureaucratic mismanagement, ineptitude, political interference and heartbreak.

After weeks of warnings by medical and civil rights lawyers to Texas federal prisons about potential deaths of inmates, little to nothing has been done about it, raising the specter of deadly inaction. Federal inmates are housed in close confines that are endangering the lives of high-risk elderly inmates. Texas federal prisons, some of the largest in the nation, are now struggling with the results of long inaction. As a result, inmates are unnecessarily dying.

Beaumont prison camp is the largest federal male prison camp in the country. Men are packed into very close quarters with all 550 men eating, breathing, and sleeping within a few feet of each other. The roughly 16.6 square feet of living space per man (reflecting subtraction of lockers and tables) at the

<http://conservativehq.com/article/32368-obama%E2%80%99s-naked-power-exposed>

Beaumont camp is less than half as much as the 37.6 square feet of living space mandated by USDA for a sow.

Such close quarters is just part of the conditions that endanger the lives of inmates who are vulnerable under guidelines from the CDC and White House Coronavirus Task Force. Cruise ships, aircraft carriers, and collective gatherings are advised to cease operation and separate individuals. But federal prisons are doing the opposite. Experts recommend, at a minimum, that those at high risk of the virus be sent home and quarantined there.

Federal wardens are instructed and authorized to carry out the directives of the attorney general, but Barr's instructions have by and large fallen on deaf ears. The chief purpose of Barr's March directive was to urge release aging and medically at-risk inmates. The four top CDC risk factors contributing to 80% of the COVID-19 deaths are age, high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity.

It becomes pretty clear who should be transferred to home confinement. Instead, prosecutors are fighting with the BOP, claiming that it is time left on sentences that should determine release. Jerry Dill of Beaumont, who has all four top risk factors, watched as other, younger and in better shape inmates were preparing to leave. Dill said, "it's insane to tell the public you are releasing medically high-risk inmates when, in fact, all they have done is let out a little early those who would be released anyway. It's a farce and a sham — just symbolism over substance."

Beaumont and Ft. Worth have some of the largest populations of inmates in the nation who are elderly and infirm. The repeated warnings and instructions to release inmates who are older with comorbidities have all but been ignored. Ft. Worth, which was once a medical facility but lost its medical license, is now a train wreck of sick and dying inmates laid low with the virus — 217 of them as of April 26. Inmates are on ventilators and at least two have already died. Now they are trying to close the barn door after the horse has left.

Editor's Note: Updated figures show at least 445 inmates at Ft. Worth have been diagnosed with COVID-19, at least two have died and nation-wide at least 1,926 federal inmates are known to be infected.

They were warned more than a month ago, but the federal bureaucrats can't get it together. Though the same warnings abound, Beaumont has been stymied by confusing orders out of Washington.

One high profile case was that of former Congressman Steve Stockman, who is 63 and suffers from high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and scarred lungs. His wife Patti pointed out, "His sentence could turn into a death sentence. Because of political interference and failings of the prison system, his life is in jeopardy, as he has all four of the prime risk factors that lead to death from the virus."

"The way they treated him is cruel," she continued. "They told him he was going home and to pack his things and come to the quarantine area the next day. As he pushed his cart to the door and was ready to walk in, Counselor Battles stopped him and told him she'd removed his name."

"I don't want him to be just another prisoner number who died because of mismanagement and infighting," Patti Stockman concluded.

I join with such prominent persons as 14 Democrat and Republican U.S. Senators, House Judiciary Chairman Jerold Nadler, and numerous advocates from across the political spectrum like the ACLU and Freedom Works — all calling for transfer to home confinement of non-violent offenders who are still very much at risk of the Coronavirus.

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