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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/02/08/feds-to-open-new-supermax-prison-cells-at-gitmo-north/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | February 8, 2013



Even as it announces a review and reduction of its solitary confinement practices, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons confirmed to Solitary Watch that a newly acquired prison in Illinois will hold federal prisoners in supermax conditions. Thomson will be a high security prison holding inmates with various security needs, including SMU and ADX type inmates, said BOP spokesperson Chris Burke in an email.

Thomson is the unused prison that the federal government [recently bought](#) from the state of Illinois. ADX, the [notorious federal supermax](#) in Florence, Colorado, holds its prisoners in 23-hour-a-day isolation and near-total sensory deprivation. Federal SMUs, or Special Management Units, such as those found in [Lewisburg Penitentiary](#) in Pennsylvania, hold their prisoners in round-the-clock lockdown in two-person cells. Both are forms of long-term isolated confinement, and both have been denounced by human rights and prisoners rights groups as an [inhumane and ineffective](#) form of punishment, sometimes amounting to torture.

The revelation of the BOP's plans to introduce new supermax cells at Thomson comes on the heels of an announcement that the Bureau has agreed to undergo a comprehensive and independent assessment of its use of solitary confinement in the nation's federal prisons. The assessment, to be conducted by the National Institute of Corrections (an agency of the BOP), will reportedly be oriented toward reducing the population of segregated prisoners in the federal system.

In recent months, according to [Mondays announcement](#), the BOP has already reduced its segregated population by nearly 25 percent. In addition, it has closed two of its Special Management Units, a form of segregated housing, due to the reduction in the segregated population. Prior to the reported reduction, the BOP held more than 11,000 prisoners in some form of isolated confinement. Thomson is built to house 1,600.

When asked by Solitary Watch why the BOP needed to build new supermax cells despite reducing its segregated population, spokesperson Chris Burke replied: The reduction in our special housing unit population does not lessen the need for these beds. The Bureau of Prisons has not constructed any new ADX type units since 1994, when our population was only 85,000 (our current population is approximately 218,000).

He continued: Special Housing refers to units within our prisons where inmates are placed on a temporary basis as a result of misconduct or as a result of circumstances that warrant their separation from the general population. The distinction suggests that Thomson will be used for long-term, sometimes indefinite segregation of the kind common in ADX and the SMU in other words, for the most extreme forms of isolated confinement.

The lucrative sale of Thomson to the feds was [engineered largely](#) by Illinois Senator Dick Durbin. The prison, in the northeastern part of the state, was built by the state of Illinois but never opened. The Obama Administration initially showed interest in Thomson as a [possible stateside home](#) for Guantanamo detainees (and it was quickly dubbed [Gitmo North](#)).

The sale was blocked for years by Congressional Republicans, even after the president promised that it would be used only for overflow from existing federal prisons, and not for prisoners from Guantanamo. But last fall, the administration made an end run around the Republicans on the House Appropriations Committee, and bought Thomson by presidential directive. Finally, the Department of Justice this afternoon is going to present the \$165 million check for the transfer, [said Durbin](#) on October 2. At this point, the president had to intervene and do this directly. I hope people understand he's doing it for his state.

Ironically, Durbin, the Democratic Assistant Majority Leader, is also widely credited with drawing attention to the issue of solitary confinement and pressing for national reform. In June he chaired the first-ever [Congressional hearing](#) on the practice. According to Mondays [press release](#) from his office: In his hearing last year, Durbin emphasized the importance of reforming the way we treat the incarcerated and the use of solitary confinement in prisons and detention centers around the country. Following that hearing, Durbin has twice met with Bureau of Prisons Director Samuels to push for additional reforms and encourage a sufficiently robust assessment of the Bureaus segregation practices.

When asked about the fact that Thomson would include supermaxcells, Durbin spokesperson Max Gleishman responded with the following statement: As the first member of Congress ever to hold a hearing on solitary confinement, Senator Durbin is committed to reforming Americas segregation policies and practices. As a part of his efforts, Senator Durbin has met with the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and continues to work with its director to reform BOPs segregation policies and practices. One important step in solitary confinement reform, and prison reform generally, is to reduce high rates of overcrowding. The BOPs acquisition of Thomson prison will greatly reduce this overcrowding crisis and Senator Durbin will work with BOP to ensure that all of its inmates are treated fairly and humanely.

Recent federal lawsuits have provided a window on conditions inside ADX and the federal SMUs. [Suits](#) filed on behalf of prisoners the all-SMU Lewisburg Penitentiary allege that prison officials deliberately pair people up with their enemies and lock them down for 23 to 24 hours a day, and that this practice has led to at least two deaths. It also claims that prisoners have been strapped to their bunks with four-point restraints if they resist cell assignments.

A [complaint](#) filed last June on behalf of prisoners at ADX alleges that the supermax torturous long-term isolation has produced a variety of psychotic and self-destructive behaviors:

Many prisoners at ADX interminably wail, scream, and bang on the walls of their cells. Some mutilate their bodies with razors, shards of glass, sharpened chicken bones, writing utensils, and whatever other objects they can obtain. A number swallow razor blades, nail clippers, parts of radios and televisions, broken glass, and other dangerous objects. Others carry on delusional conversations with voices they hear in their heads, oblivious to reality and to the danger that such behavior might pose to themselves and anyone who interacts with them. Still others spread feces and other human waste and body fluids throughout their cells, throw it at the correctional staff and otherwise create health hazards at ADX. Suicide attempts are common; many have been successful.

A final irony comes in the fact that after a long battle by advocates and community members, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn reached the controversial decision to close Tamms supermax, which held state prisoners in solitary confinement. Tamms was finally shuttered for good just before the start of the new year. Now it appears that Illinois has lost a state supermax, only to gain a federal one.

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets [@solitarywatch](#).

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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I was at USP, Atlanta when inmate
Battles killed officer Washerton and the word at the that time was that the
#2 officer ran and left Washerton to die
And Washerton was a disrespectful
Officer but he didn't or shouldn't have
Died but like warden Stock said that
Day he knew that he wasn't working in
A day care when he walked through

The gate .

wow none of you work in a federal prison do you! These inmates are inmates that have caused trouble at a USP (United States Penitentiary) they have either killed federal officers or seriously assaulted them. These inmates also are known for murders inside the prison systems by methods of decapitation is just one of the many methods used. Their is a system in which inmates are classified by security level they earned their way there if they are being held in a ADX super max.

did Fr. Russ not see that the black / brown president bought this and that it was done behind the backs of the political system and it was for his home state.

UNBELIEVABLE!

I appreciate the information provided by Solitary Watch. Thank you.

In the end it is all about the money and the jobs The poor, the prisoner are just a commodity, a product to be kept and recycled. like slavery no different Jobs and money, for the rich investor, and screw the black and brown communities It is a genocidal effort of slow death to the black and brown communities; along with dumbing them down, to stop advancement

Time to learn about federal prison regs. Where supermaxes go, legal fights follow.

Big Business. Sad.

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