

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/04/13/obamas-2014-budget-confirms-plans-for-adx-thomson-new-federal-supermax-prison/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | April 13, 2013

The Obama Administrations 2014 budget request for the Department of Justice, released this week, confirms that the federal government will open a second ultra-secure supermax prison within the next two years. The new prison will be an Administrative Maximum U.S. Penitentiary. Administrative Maximum is a security classification currently held only by the [notorious ADX Florence](#) in Colorado, where some 400 individuals are held in isolation and sensory deprivation so extreme that it has been challenged in a [series of lawsuits](#) and widely denounced as torture.

The new supermax will be created by renovating Thomson Correctional Center, an unused maximum security prison in Illinois, which was purchased by the federal government last year. Originally, the Obama Administration envisioned Thomson as a future home for Guantanamo detainees a move that was blocked by Republicans in Congress. Instead, while Guantanamo remains open, the Bureau of Prisons is moving ahead with plans to open hundreds, and perhaps thousands of new isolation cells at Thomson to reduce crowding in high security facilities.

The following summary appears in a Budget Fact Sheet on Prisons and Detention, released along with the federal budget numbers last week:

The FY 2014 Budget requests a total of \$8.5 billion for federal prisons and detention, a 3.5 percent increase over the FY 2012 appropriated level. Of this amount, \$6.9 billion is requested for the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), which is a 4 percent increase (\$195.1 million) over FY 2012

For BOP, the current services level includes resources to fully activate two prisons: Federal Corrections Institution (FCI) Aliceville, AL, and FCI Berlin, NH. These prisons received partial activation funding in FY 2012, and full activation will increase federal prison capacity and alleviate overcrowding and related security issues.

Program increases totaling \$236.2 million provide for the activations of newly constructed prisons and for new contract beds, allowing BOP to keep pace with the increased number of inmates. Specifically, increases for BOP include \$53.4 million to begin activating two prisons: FCI Hazelton, WV (1,280 beds), and U.S. Penitentiary Yazoo City, MS (1,216 beds), for which construction will be completed in FY 2013. **There is \$15 million to renovate the Thomson Correctional Center and \$43.7 million to begin activating the facility as an Administrative-Maximum U.S. Penitentiary in FY 2014.** [Emphasis added.] The request also includes \$26.2 million to procure 1,000 new contract beds. These resources are essential for ensuring the secure detention of a growing inmate population.

A subsequent section of the Budget Fact Sheet, detailing Program Increases, states that Thomson will have 2,100 beds, employ 749 corrections officers, and cost \$58.7 million to renovate and operate.

ADX USP Thomson, IL: \$58.7 million and 1,158 positions (749 correctional officers)

\$15 million to renovate the Thomson Correctional Center for high security federal prison use. \$43.7 million to begin activating ADX USP Thomson (2,100 beds) as an administrative-maximum high security facility. ADX USP Thomson is expected to reduce crowding in high security facilities from 59 percent by 43 percent by the end of FY 2015

Solitary Watch has requested additional information from the Bureau of Prisons to determine precisely what conditions of confinement will be for the 2,100 prisoners held at Thomson. When we asked about Thomson for an [article](#) published back in February, BOP spokesperson Chris Burke said in an email that Thomson will be a high security prison holding inmates with various security needs, including SMU and ADX type inmates. Federal SMUs, or Special Management Units, such as those found in [Lewisburg Penitentiary](#) in Pennsylvania, hold their prisoners in 23-hour-a-day lockdown in two-person generic form of clonazepam cells. At ADX, prisoners are in 23- to 24-hour solitary confinement. 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 often amounting to torture.

The Bureau of Prisons is planning to open new supermax cells even as it agrees to undergo a comprehensive and independent assessment of its use of solitary confinement in the nations federal prisons. The assessment, to be conducted by the National Institute of Corrections,

will reportedly be oriented toward reducing the population of segregated prisoners in the federal system. In fact, according an [announcement](#) made in early February, 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. As we reported following the announcement:

When asked by Solitary Watch why the BOP needed to build new supermaxcells 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 SMUs 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. 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 Bureau's segregation practices.

When asked about the fact that Thomson would include supermaxcells, Durbin spokesperson Max Gleichman 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 America's 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 BOP's segregation policies and practices. One important step in solitary confinement reform, and prison reform generally, is to reduce high rates of overcrowding. The BOP's 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.

For more on what to expect from the new ADX Thomson, see [Susan Greenes The Gray Box](#) and [Andrew Cohens American Gulag series](#), both of which vividly describe conditions at ADX Florence.

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 could go on WHATs the use. HE WILL STILL HAVE LOTs of time to finish off the U.S as we know it !he was placed to be President to further the cause, take away OUR AMERICA AND GIVE A STRONG TOEHOLD. To the type of GOVERNMENT HE BELIEVES I IMY SURE WE ALL SHOULD KNOW BY NOW- IT IS NOT DEMOCRACY welcome to THE START OF your NEW WORLD ORDER , I DID VOTE FOR HIM THE 1st Time i am now ashamed to say. 65 year Old F, wife of Vietnam Vet & a CHRISTIAN.

First of all I have been following this deal since day 1. FIRST THE PRISON IS 14 years old & never occupied, 2. It is a mess & missing things galore. 3. Obamas HOME STATE HAS BEEN TRYING TO GET RID OF IT FOREVER- SINCE THEY ARE SO IN DEBT THEY COULDN'T AFFORD TO OPEN IT ! 4. JUST BEFORE OBAMAS 2nd ELECTION- he TRIED TO GET CONGRESS TO BUY IT-THEY SAID NO SO OBAMMA USED HIS EXECUTIVE ORDERS (Privilege) TO TAKE THE ALBATROSE OFF THE NECK

OF ILLINOIS TAX PAYERS AFTER 12 years AND BY USING HIS EO POWER HE PERSONALLY ORDER IT TO BE BOUGHT FOR \$165 M so now ILLINOIS is off the hook AND ALL U.S. TAXPAYERS OWN THIS MESS. This was done JUST BEFORE OBAMA'S 2 ELECTION & kept very quiet DUE TO ELECTION TIME COMING. He used an EXECUTIVE ORDER ONCE AGAIN TO GET WHAT HE WANTED ! I live near by.

@Carol and @Andrea; you should read the list of inmates housed at AFX Supermax Florence.. those men are there because they SHOULD be. Unless you want them living next door to you, stop complaining about them being in prison! They deserve to be there. Im human, have empathy for others, and am a loving person, but we have to hold those who hurt people accountable for their actions. In these cases, most were convicted of terrorism or murder, or large scale crimes.. stop feeling sympathy for them and instead use that energy to make a difference to abused children or homeless veterans!!! (people who deserve our help!)

There are a bunch of experts in here. Some mention we need to rehabilitate them instead of throwing them in the hole. Guess what every inmate in federal prison goes through a G.E.D program, if they dont already have a diploma. That then helps them get a better paying job inside the prison. We have mental staff that deal with mentally ill inmates. No one is thrown in the hole or seg for doing nothing. The ones that are in ad seg usually have a cell mate and we go through a process to make sure they are not put in with an inmate that they do not get a long with. So now what excuses do you have? Sure there will be some messed up story about something bad happening to an inmate, there are also messed up things that happen to law abiding citizens every day. You do the crime, you do the time. I do agree though that some laws are unjust and people are unfairly sentenced. I think the war on drugs is a huge failure and people are way over sentenced, but what are you going to do about it, cry about how a few inmates have been mistreated? thatll get things changed..

Jay- well said. Josian, THANK YOU. Unless you have worked in a prison and have seen these inmates on a daily basis, you have no business saying anything about how they should and should not be treated. Those who are being sent to a Supermax belong there. Personally I think the death penalty isnt used enough. Some individuals are so far past being human there is no hope for reform.

How many of you work in a prison?

I love how everyone on here is an expert. The people that are in prison are the people you cant live with. I work IN one and let me tell you, you get what you earn in life. if you earned to be treated like a inmate then that is where you are. Prison is suppose to be hard, whatever you did to get her you should have to suffer for it.

Also I want to address people who kill or hurt other inmates in prison is a lot of times in self defense the guards will see them into it and would still place them by each other and pretend they dont know nothing as usually a lot of things is pushed up under the carpet they do not do all the things for a prisoner that they get paid to do for them they just get the money and treat them like dirt but will put on a good speech to the public and society like they care when treat mistreat them cruel unusual punishment 24\7 everyday of their lives its a everyday battle for people in prison these people cry their selves to sleep at night these people commit suicide these people harm and cut on them selves these get raped in prison including the guards even have secret sex with these people are scared in these facilities because if they talk out they would be harsher punished for it so people need to know the real facts what they dont want you to know what really goes on to people in prison behind prison walls these are people that forgotten about that no one seems to really care about no one but there love ones and some of them dont even have that this society is wicked,evil,cruel and corrupted there are no family value or morals anymore everyone mind is brainwash no one hardly thinks for them own self they let the media,rich people,superstars,TV ,politics, think for them and these the people who do not care 2 cents about them

People have no real idea of the real cruelty and danger people endure in these prisons unseen the mental ,physical, emotional, abuse some people are innocent but are profiled as bad a lot is covered up to the public a lot of people are placed in there because of a corrupted system and cooked cops these people get treated like there is worthless and they not human beings false reports,daily abuse,verbal abuse,lied on, things taken from them,wrote up false tickets,programs held back to keep them from getting out,sick with no proper medical treatment and they have died because of this because the guards wont help them these people are defend less! They need help just like anyone else do they are human beings how dare someone say they need to be there everyone there isnt a criminal! The real criminals are the ones who run this world who make all the laws who want to take our rights and want to imprison everybody and promote homosexuality and teach our kids bad things on TV though the media,hidden gay cartoons,kill Christians, sell very high food prices ,take our homes,tell us how we should live tell us how to raise our children,what we can buy and sell so say who the real people should in jail none of us really have freedom

There are too many left wing morons that have no idea how a prison actually works. You would rather see a convicted copkiller child molester, serial killer on the streets than in a hole somewhere that the general public cant see them. I hope that one day a rapist or worse gets out and moves next door to you and that you hide in fear as no one is there to help you because you wanted them free.

Last year a prisoner in a Wisconsin prison was put in the hole because his cell mate was moved and left girlie mag pics in the trash and he was accused of having contra-band.. Id say ad-seg is over used and against human rights There are lots of Mentally ill prisoners in isolation and some become mentally ill while subjected to isolation the best thing we the people can do is write officials and tell them we oppose long term, indefinite isolation for our prisoners. Pete Earley has taken up the cause of the mentally ill in prison

Some of the mental patients ended up in privately run nursing homes using the new 1965 social welfare program, Medicaid, but undoubtedly many others landed in prisons over time, creating a need that was filled by such institutions as Vacaville's California Medical Facility or CMF which opened in April of 1955 and Atascadero State Hospital ASH which opened in 1954.

Although never a patient myself I visited these and others in the 60s.

<http://solitarywatch.com/2011/05/14/voices-from-solitary-a-mothers-story/#comment-13626>

Prisons and asylums have had from the beginning shared methodologies of confinement based on similar principles of reforming deviant behavior.

Both were intended to be therapeutic, as opposed to simply custodial, institutions.

Both served as laboratories for new techniques of behavioral management.

Both attempted to use architecture as a force for moral development.

Both were created with a burst of reformist optimism but neither has been successful.

Abuse, neglect, and mismanagement soon replaced the reformers high ideals.

Just as Eastern State Penitentiary's mythology was later found to be inhuman, so too were the methods used in our nation's asylums.

In 1946 Life magazine did an expose titled Bedlam 1946 on the abusive conditions found inside this nation's asylums based on the findings of WWII conscientious objectors who had served as attendants at state mental institutions rather than in the war.

Read the 1946 Life article in its entirety, and see some of the pictures that horrified Americans.

Excerpts:

Abuse and the punitive use of restraints, overcrowding, underfeeding and dilapidation might all be condoned if only these hospitals achieved a reasonable standard of treatment and cure. But the fact is that the vast majority of them fall far below the achievements of the far better hospitals and far, far below what could be achieved if cure rather than mere custody were the primary objective.

Given the facts the people of any state will rally, to put an end to concentration camps that masquerade as hospitals and to make cure rather than incarceration the goal of their mental institutions.

Robert Merton called this goal displacement a common phenomenon within large bureaucracies as the original goal of the bureaucracy is displaced with the goal of continued funding.

As a result of Life's expose The National Mental Health Foundation (NMHF) was founded and it became an impetus toward deinstitutionalization. The NMHF's push for deinstitutionalization resulted in new laws protecting the rights of the mentally ill. So effective were these laws that even as the number of incarcerated Americans has ballooned to over 2.3 million today the states hospital populations had declined by enough that the total number of institutionalized persons in the year 2000 had barely reached the peak level of 1955 when 640 persons per 100,000 adults over age 15 were held in asylums, mental hospitals, and state and federal prisons.

(The total number of mental health patients institutionalized in state hospitals went from 559,000 in 1955, to less than 80,000 by 1999.)

<http://www.law.uchicago.edu/files/files/institutionalized-final.pdf>

Yes, concerned citizen. Everyone should read Zimbardo's The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil about the Stanford Prison Experiment. It all comes from the top down. Most of state mental health hospitals were closed in my state, and the prison system agreed to take over mental health treatment. Good luck. The treatment consists of locking these kids down for decades. The reason they can't be rehabilitated is because no effort is made to do it. When a psych worker appears to be getting through to his inmate caseload, he's taken off the cases. The bottom line is money money money. Job security. Outside contractors do as little as possible for as much money as possible. Job security. The system is gestunken. Read The Lucifer Effect and get educated.

Robert, how many of the people who are placed in solitary confinement for years fit your description?

Personally I think a prisoner that shows no remorse for their crimes, and is nothing but a hazard to other inmates should be caged like an animal for the rest of the natural life.

They forfeit the right by having absolutely no regard for human life that includes killing guards and other prisoners. If they are in prison for a crime and commit another crime while in prison obviously the system can't do anything for them. In that case lock them down and feed them through a hole in the door. It is not torture, the guards shouldn't have to fear that they may get a shiv in their back just because they chose to work for the corrections system.

People that post it is inhumane or argue for prisoner rights forget to realize that prison is much like a zoo. You let the animal out of its cage and it goes wild.

Richard you should be ashamed of yourself. More and more of our fellow Americans are being put behind bars. Many of these offenders are nonviolent. Meaning they haven't killed, raped, robbed etc. Anyone. Many are people who became addicted to drugs and were caught possessing them, a man that was caught stealing or writing bad checks. So their being locked up for decades at a time because of new federal laws and mandatory minimum sentences. How dare you say that nonviolent drug offenders etc. Are not human beings? You my friend are not a human being. You are just another robot walking around with no feelings or compassion. People like you are why our country is in the state it is. Well you and the law makers.

I truly don't know what has happened to our country when views like those expressed by Richard are more and more common. Have we lost our humanity?

These inmates are clearly not human beings that can be, or desire to be, rehabilitated. I can't, for the life of me, understand how anyone could possibly express concern, compassion, or sympathy for a, lack of a better term, human being, who has terrorized, brutalized, slaughtered, and maimed United States citizens, who clearly have absolutely no regard for our country or its greatness thereof. These individuals were exactly what the guillotine and electric chair were designed for. Thank you.

What about all of the mentally ill that are being locked up in solitary? Are they bad people? Coming from someone that has bipolar, I know I couldn't handle it. I would lose my mind, quickly.

The Stanford Prison Experiment: A Simulation Study of the Psychology of Imprisonment

<http://www.prisonexp.org/>

The House I Live In: New Film Exposes Economic, Moral Failure of U.S. War on Drugs. 2 of 2 YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioYkho-iyN8>

@Lisa: No one gets to prison at least 99.5% without having broken some law; and to get to the Federal joint it has to be a Federal Law illegal-emigration is just that. It is illegal. Taking your anger out on the people who are just doing what the Citizens of the US hire them for is a bunch of bull. If you're angry, get on the people who vote and put crap heads in office that desire what is going on. Blaming guards is ridiculous.. Guards and the administration has no power to set overall policy. No, who you should be fighting rather than wasting your valuable time on the wrong people who can not change one thing.

I am saddened that the federal government is working hard to keep punishing and more severely punishing people when it has been proven by animal trainers and parents that punishment just doesn't work. Punishment creates sneaky criminals. We could spend half as much on rehabilitation and get better results. Many people make mistakes when they're young, let's spend our resources on helping them learn to make better choices.

It has also been proven by science and anecdotal evidence that solitary confinement is a form of torture: humans need social contact in order to survive and thrive. Why are we regressing in our treatment of our prisoners?

A large percentage of inmates in Federal Prison are illegal immigrants. Why are we spending precious American dollars to lock people up for years because they crossed the border looking for a better life?

These prisons are being built on the "If we build it, will they come?" premise. You know if they build the prisons, they will make more laws and more ways to fill them.

Many of the people in Administrative Segregation are there because the lazy prison guards cannot protect them from other inmates in General Population: they are homosexual, or sex offenders, or they snitched on someone. These are not BAD people, they are weak and need protection.

If we spent our resources on rehabilitation, psychological treatment, job skills, parenting classes and the like, and quit having exorbitant sentences, our resources would be put to better use.

Sorry you feel that way Russ because I have never tried to run anyone off. On the contrary I encouraged T to stay on here. I think the affects that are mentioned in the article above, and expressed by someone still held there is part of the discussion. SW posted this article below this link for that very reason. That is where I read it first.

You can disagree and I have no problem with that.

I wish you a good day.

@CYA: I have to admit, I am leaning toward T's view that you may just be here to dilute the conversation? Or run people off?

@Alam CYA: again you are diverting the questions, that need to be answered to change or not change the Solitary method of Correction. These stories that you post though sad, do not get to the issue. Everyone in the World has a sad story and can be a victim. That is not the point of these threads. They are just for crying. I am in the wrong place. To get yourself to solitary you had to be one serious screw up. I have been around a long time and did too much time to not know that fact. Very rarely, very rarely is one put in to Seg. cause they are a good guy.

Is the unused Colorado State Prison next? The states can't afford them so the Federal government takes them over. But this is an example of the good they do.

<http://coloradoindependent.com/127520/ebel-friend-suicide-note-shows-parolee-%E2%80%98ruined%E2%80%99-by-solitary-bent-on-revenge>

Ebel Friend: Suicide Note Shows Parolee Ruined by Solitary, Bent on Revenge

Second prison mate of alleged shooter details trauma tied to isolation

By Susan Greene

Thursday, April 11, 2013 at 10:12 am

He was consumed by what they did to him [in prison].

Anderson says four days before Ebel was to be set free, the prison delayed his release by three weeks.

They tried to provoke him at every turn, he wrote. They create such a sense of [frustrated] hope and anger. They steal your hope.

Anderson says Ebel ultimately was set free from prison straight out of the same solitary confinement pod, or unit, where Anderson lives.

I think that the fact they released him directly from seg[regation] to the streets is huge and a total violation of what should of [sic] happened, he writes.

As Anderson tells it, Ebel couldnt shake his prison-based rage even after he walked free in January, that he tried and failed to acclimate to work and social interactions. Andersons family met with Ebel after his release to help support him in his new life. Ebels frustrations after his release and bitterness about his prison experience seems to have morphed into a a need for vengeance, Anderson says.

Anderson wrote that he laments Clements death and the pain it has caused his family. He said he hopes the tragedy results in awareness about the effects of solitary confinement and, ultimately, leads to reforms.

You know? What they do through their solitary policies is akin to rape. They steal such a precious part of our souls, our humanity, our ability to be. They committed such hateful acts on us. Through contempt and disdain, they breed rage, Anderson wrote. They stole his chance at any real future.

My Question is, what determines the placement of an individual in such a place? Is there a justifiable need? Is there away to humanly deal with combative anti-social beings that is in fact not tortures to the eyes and morals of the common man? It is my belief that there is, no such way, that you can deal morally with and immoral individual in attempting to get this individual to conform to your rules.. It is a, lost battle, unless you can yourself be as immoral with the use of tactics as he or she is which most common folk are not equipped to deal at this level.. To bring a Wolf to bay, you must be stronger and smarter than the Wolf Otherwise you get eaten That is coming from a Wolf Who is well aware of your limitations.. The complexities of man are in themselves a problem; when man is dealing with matters beyond your own ability and laws, you are screwed and at the loss to what ever he/she has in store for you One always has to remember he/she is capable to be a docile as you require in order to gain the advantage in their own timing to become the raging beast that you will never be; nor understand In my situation I waited nearly 20 years to beat the crap out of guy who robbed and beat me up when I was 12. I got him in a blowing ally when I was in Brighton MA I was then thirty, and I beat the crap out of him, in front of everyone.. Sammy Whites Ally At seventy certain people could trigger the beast in me, even though he is on a very strong chain (correction folks are there to do a job for the Community) Those that take on being the beast themselves and turn prisoners in victims deserve to be locked away also Guide lines and rules get blurred in Hell, and whether guard or prisoner in these places it is Hell on Earth

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