

My 22 Cent Sense

By CASEY ALLEN HEFLIN

Slavery, indentured service, sweat shop labor. All of these oppressive behaviors are condemned by the world populace as atrocities on man-kind. America is amongst the civilized world leaders whom set examples by detesting such natures of oppression, although the American prison system is one of the biggest forced labor regiments in the world.

U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons "Program Statement" Policy states "Sentenced inmates physically and mentally able to work are required to participate in a work program."

What this program statement / policy fails to mention is the Federal Bureau of Prisons is forcing labor upon the inmates with pay lower than the worst paying sweatshops in the world at .22¢ per hour. At the same time dispensing harsh punishment in various forms to inmates who refuse to be subjected to under compensated labor or choose higher education pursuits.

For a nation which is vocally adamant about sweatshops across the world and boycotting the goods of these onerous enterprises is like the pot calling the kettle black.

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Inmates that do not work or refuse work assignments are locked into segregation, lose privileges I-E. (phone calls to family, loss of visits with family, ability to spend money on the necessities of basic living, etc. etc.) On top of all these restrictions the inmates good-time is taken which forces the inmate to stay in prison longer, contributing more on society's burden of allocating tax dollars supporting the prison system.

Being forced into a 8x12 cell 23 hours a day with little or no rehabilitative programs. Only having little communication with family and no programs, seems to me counterproductive towards the ultimate goal of reducing recidivism and rehabilitating inmates for society.

Now if this is not forced labor in your eyes then stop reading this right now because there are only more facts to come.

While forcing inmates to work, comes a megar pay which America outcast 50 many foreign third world countries for their labor laws and wage scale. Open your eyes America, your doing worse in your own back yard.

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A Voice for the Voiceless. As I finish my federal prison sentence I have first hand experience with the "Labor laws of Americas prison system." In my own opinion these practices by the Federal Bureau of Prisons are atrocities that are not discussed in the front of all the debate on mass-incarceration, recidivism, prisoner rights etc, etc.

For the record, if asked do I think inmates should not work? The answer is no. I believe all inmates should work, this instills a routine and work ethic. I also think that inmates should be better compensated for the hours and labor. It is my belief that if a inmate would rather further his or her education then they should not be punished for not working.

American citizens are demanding a minimum wage hike, its time for a hike in prison wages as well. 22¢ an hour is not cutting it, now you can make up to \$1.20 an hour but this is few and far between. Its prisons peanuts for penitence. There are so many ways that raising the federal prison wage which would be beneficial to society and inmates.

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Inmates are not asking for minimum wage or above minimum wage. We are asking for a decent compensation for our work which upholds the Federal Prison System. Without us the system would have to run with public and private sector workers, who you and I know would not work for a starting wage of .22¢ per hour.

The majority of inmates make \$25.00 to \$40.00 a month, while a minority make over \$60.00 per month. The cost of living in prison far exceeds these monthly stipends.

For example a call to family is \$3.45 for 15 minutes. Inmates are charged for a free service to the public which is E-mail at a rate of .5¢ a minute, reading or typing. A 15-30% increase on M.S.R.P of commissary goods, such as cloths, cosmetics and food. Needless to say it cost money not only to house inmates but for inmates to live behind these walls.

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A minority of inmates have family or friends who can afford to alleviate some of the expenses in prison. Multitudes are reliable upon the wage they are given for labor in the prison.

This type of oppression leaves little room for saving money for release, paying fines incurred for the crime too which the inmate is serving time for and helping with child support.

In turn these few factors in themselves leave inmates open to the revolving door of recidivism. Released with no savings, no cloths, no trade at all because the inmate is forced to work for nothing.

There are so many aspects of the Federal Prison System that need attention. Raising the inmates wages is around the top of that list. In my opinion recidivism would drop dramatically if a inmate was able to save money for release.

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If you ask any inmate who is classified as a recidivist what made him or her come back the top two answers will be, "I was trying to get money to get on my feet." #2 "My addiction got whored of me again."

So lets look into ways to drop the recidivism rate by ending the forced labor perpetuated by the Federal Bureau of Prisons and raising the sweat shop wages allocated for this labor.

All a matter of opinion on what could and would work to achieve the main goal of rehabilitating inmates. I feel very strongly that addressing the issues in this article would be steps toward the main goal.

Raising the inmates wages with certain stipulations on how the wage is dispersed would be a beginning. For instance a stringent 25% of the monthly net pay would be placed into a pre-release account accessible only when released, unless the inmate is subjected to life in prison.

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Inmates Making \$40⁰⁰ a month can not save anything for release much less take care of their bare necessities of life while incarcerated.

Increasing the wage from .22¢ an hour to a minimum of \$2.00 per hour with a maximum of \$4.00 per hour would be beneficial for society and inmates.

The ability to save funds would ease the burden on society once an inmate is released. Once released a person needs shelter, cloths and food which all comes from tax payer dollars through Government programs.

A man or woman released from prison with a few thousand dollars in savings could buy their own cloths and food while residing in a halfway house seeking employment. This savings would fast track the reintegration process while simultaneously decreasing the cost of placing someone back into society.

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On top of the benefit of having the ability to provide for themselves an inmate could pay support for their children with a percentage of the net income in prison. This would greatly help inmates with the burden of mounting child allowance while incarcerated, and at the same time easing the amount of welfare provided to children by the government. In turn the government could allocate those tax dollars towards other endeavors.

There are so many possibilities that could take effect with raising the prison wage. I believe the cost that would be incurred through raising the wages would be offset by the amounts saved in other areas like welfare programs for released inmates.

The profit from phone calls, commissary and other charges could also be redistributed in wage raise. Checks and balances could be administered through various techniques to achieve the goal of helping inmates earn their way to rehabilitation and reintegration.

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Costing \$ 30,000 + dollars to house one inmate for one year is a expense that could be saved by releasing a inmate with financial smarts, work ethic and savings so the person would not become a statistic of recidivism, thus saving \$ 30,000 for every inmate released that does not re-offend or violate probation.

Not accounting for the tax dollars that the once inmate is now paying. All in the goal of rehabilitation to produce a decrease in mass-incarceration, stopping the forced labor practices and creating contributing, tax paying members of society.

Lets get the voices of advocates together and all join as one to bring attention to the forced labor with meager wages in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Doing this would decrease prison population, recidivism and better prepare people for society.

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By Casey Allen Helms.

I want to thank everyone who took the time to read this article. With my release coming in a couple years this is a issue that I feel very strongly about. With so many things wrong in the world today this is just a ripple in the ocean but a ripple will turn into a wave.

If anyone would like to communicate directly too me please feel free to look me up at WWW.BOP-GOV/Inmate locator. My name and reg# is, Casey Helms #09013-033. Type this in to find what prison I am being housed at and put pen too paper. I'm open for any and all conversation as correspondence soothes a inmates soul.