

"Programs"

On February 25, 2020, Michael Carvajal became the newest Director of the Bureau of Prisons. He has an impressive resumé and a long history in the BOP. He is unquestionably qualified for the job. However it's his most recent position which concerns me and should concern all of us inside the system. That's why I've put pen to paper once again.

Mr. Carvajal is being promoted from Assistant Director of Correctional Programs. Well, unless he was in charge of ~~our~~ our television programming, he was an utter failure.

The BOP has always (at least in my 20 plus years) been program oriented but of late they've gone overboard. Nearly everything in the system is now done in stages and to complete any ^{stage} you must take "programs." This seems logical. In fact, it was probably well intentioned. Unfortunately, it was poorly thought out, hastily constructed and horribly executed.

Programs could have value, instead they are being used as leverage. Since we're required

to "program," it's now just a hoop to jump through. They've lost any educational value and taken on a numerical value. No one asks, "Did you learn about Abraham Lincoln?" No, they ask, "How many programs did you take?" Basically, how many hoops did you jump through? No one cares if we learned anything at all. And yes, I freely admit to my bias. I'm inside the system being affected by it. So let me tell you exactly how it works at ADX, you can judge for yourselves.

We are required to take educational programs at each of three different step-down stages to leave ADX. They broadcast hour long, college style lectures on education channels through our TV's. Right now I'm taking two: English Grammar Boot Camp (very useful) and Thermodynamics (interesting but not exactly useful to a lifer.) They sent me the "Quizzes" before the lectures began and when they do play, the automatic subtitles run across the bottom of the screen and all of the "quiz" questions appear in order and almost verbatim as the lecture

goes on.

Don't get me wrong, since they give us no text books or other material to study, this is probably the only way most of us could pass these courses. Especially something like Thermodynamics. And keep in mind, many of my peers are still studying for their GED. These courses weren't designed for them but there is no one to differentiate. That's because nobody cares if we actually learn anything or not. There's a hoop, jump boy, jump!

Let me be clear, even if these programs WERE meant to teach us, using them in this format renders them useless.

Here is a list of programs someone on my range took over the last two years trying to leave ADX. He has certificates of completion for all of these. Please note the future employment value of these programs:

Zoology

The Celtic World

Forensic History

The Science of Extreme Weather

The American West
The Deadliest Catch Seasons 1, 2, 3
Science Fiction of Philosophy
Understanding Imperial China
Great Ancient Civilizations of Asia Minor
The Physics of History
New York Yankees History
ESPN 30/30 Parts 1, 2
ESPN 30/30 Season 2
Patton 360
The 60's
Shark Week 2014
Shark Week (no date listed)
Understanding the World's Greatest Structures
Games People Play: Game Theory in Life, Business + Beyond
Life of Abraham Lincoln
Robotics
Origin of the Human Mind
History's Greatest Voyages of Exploration
The Black Death
The Human Body
The Great Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt
Polar Explorations
Finding Bigfoot
Through the Wormhole

Hopefully you now understand just how ridiculous the current program system is. So if any of you know Director Cervajal, please make the following recommendations from someone who actually lives here.

There should be three different types of programming:

DBY for the most important should be the programming for anyone with under five years remaining to serve. This program should ~~begin~~ begin with lifestyle programming and by that I mean no longer exposing them to the rest of us. NO ONE can focus on the future while worrying about how to survive today.

As soon as they're relocated, they MUST begin to learn the technology of today. I had a pager when I came to prison. I know a man going home in eighteen months who has been locked up for more than forty years. He's never even seen a pager!

There's also social implications. The world has changed in ways most of

can barely imagine. Without massive programs to help people adjust to the new world, they'll just come right back.

2) Almost as important is programming for fish. That's what we call new inmates. These programs can be set up by the ~~corrections~~ administration but MUST be run by OLD convicts. They should cover everything from prison songs to drug use. From violence to religion. These lessons ALWAYS get taught to the fish but with proper programs it could be done with much less blood. Right now the BOP does something called A and O, its a complete waste of time.

3) This would be programming for those of us with life (or too much time to think about going home.) Its fine to require programming or incentivize it. But let us choose what we'd like to learn. We all have interests of our own and would be much more invested in programs about subjects we care about. My family sent me books on crochet and I

learned the craft. Now I send my grandchildren stuffed animals. This easily could've been a program here at ADX, instead "Sharkweek" is.

~~Many~~ ^{Many} libraries (if they still exist) offer to loan books to prisons so this could be done at a minimal expense.

The most likely outcome is that no one will pay any attention to this essay and Director Carvajal will institute even more hoops for us to jump through. It will look ~~good~~ good on paper and the media loud him. But mark my words - it's all a facade. We're simply doing what we've always done in prison... whatever we must to survive.