

Spring 2016 U.S. Immigration Alert!

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Remember March 25 2006 Los Angeles No HR4437 March! Look Forward For Our New Fight At May Day 2016!

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Remember March 25 2006 Los Angeles No HR4437 March

Lee Siu Hin

National Coordinator - National Immigrant Solidarity Network

Last week we marked the 10th anniversary of Los Angeles Grand Marcha March 25th million people immigrant rights march against HR4437 to criminalized the immigrant community, our victory had changed the U.S. for ever!

As part of the March 25th and May Day 2016 organizing, we had many great memories, and tense moments, at the following years we had limited achievement on immigrant rights; mass immigrant raids and deportations, the so-called anti-terrorism bill, and now the racist Donald Trump's anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric.



We should never forget the great historical moment of 2006, but also need to continue mobilize at 2016, **calling for May Day 2016 to fight for our human and civil rights!**

3/10: A Shocking Glimpse Inside America's Privatized Detention Facilities For Immigrants

Erica Hellerstein - ThinkProgress

The opening of Maribel Zelaya's letter was bleak.

"I cannot bear this punishment any longer," she began. "I'm dying of desperation, of this injustice, of this cruelty. We are immigrants, not criminals. To treat us like this, it's as if they must not have hearts, as if we weren't human. They treat us like dogs."

Zelaya was fed up. For more than six months, the 29-year-old asylum seeker had been locked inside the T. Don Hutto Residential Center, an immigrant detention facility in rural Texas. The building, formerly a medium security prison, is a bleak concrete complex surrounded by a wall of chain link fence. Zelaya found the conditions inside the center disturbing; her health began to deteriorate and she fell into a deep depression. At the end of October, she released a searing letter in Spanish describing life inside Hutto, the nation's only all-women's detention center.

Like so many of the women at Hutto, Zelaya — whose attorney asked that her full name not be used to protect her safety — was fleeing abuse and a city held hostage by gang violence. But she soon became disillusioned with the grim reality of detention, and decided to stop eating in protest. "I am glad to participate in this hunger strike," she wrote. "It's an insult, I came here to find shelter but what I got instead is punishment."

Zelaya was joined by at least 26 women who also refused to eat until they were released from detention, according to Grassroots Leadership, a nonprofit working closely with the women at Hutto. Their actions made headlines after the organization published handwritten letters from 18 of the women, describing their treatment in detention and reasons for striking. "I do not have the help of no one and I am asking as a favor if you can help me I would appreciate it so much because they do not want to lower my bail," wrote a woman from Mexico protesting the facility's "inadequate" medical care.

The issues many of the women identified aren't unique to Hutto, however. They are the product of a sprawling immigration detention system increasingly reliant on partnerships with private prison companies. Those corporations have found a lucrative market in the growing detention of immigrants. Today, nine of the 10 largest detention centers in the country are run by private prison companies. Hutto, for example, is run by the nation's largest for-profit prison corporation, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), through a contract with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

When Zelaya arrived at Hutto, she found herself caught in this complex partnership. Her decision to go public arose from a deep sense of disappointment with her treatment in detention, especially after enduring trauma and violence in Honduras. The asylum seeker fled harrowing abuse at the hands of her ex-husband, who was rumored to be a sicario, or hitman, for a dangerous gang. "Everyday I discovered a [bad] secret about him; he was a monster disguised as a person," she recalled in a detailed declaration to her attorney. "He would snort cocaine, and also he would invite his colleagues and friends to drink; they would go to the club and get women and when he was drugged, he would kill them." Sometimes, he would lock Zelaya up and refuse to feed her.

Zelaya eventually left her husband and moved in with another man, but her situation didn't improve. After she refused to carry drugs into the city jail for his gang, her home was broken into and she was brutally raped. A few days later, gang members stormed into her house with M16s and AK47s, warning her to leave or face death. Zelaya escaped Honduras, but was arrested by Customs and Border Protection and sent to Hutto after arriving in the U.S. She spent more than six months detained at the center before writing the letter and making her grievances publicly known.

ICE, for its part, quickly denied all reports of the strike. But the events raise questions about the agency's oversight mechanisms and its response to protest, especially in privately run detention facilities. Although ICE outsources to CCA, the for-profit corporation is not subject to federal public records law, making it difficult to know what happens to detainees who enter centers like Hutto through ICE's tangled bureaucracy. But Freedom of Information Act request (FOIA) requests to ICE give us a peek behind the curtain of this secretive world.

As Immigrant Detention Spikes, Private Corporations Move In

The women at Hutto weren't the only detainees protesting the conditions of lockup, however. The reported strike emerged as similar actions popped up at immigrant detention centers throughout the country. In October, more than 60 detainees reportedly launched hunger strikes at detention centers in El Paso, Texas, and LaSalle, Louisiana. A month later, hundreds

of men began a hunger strike at a detention center in Adelanto, California, and more than 100 detainees launched a series of hunger strikes to protest conditions at detention centers in Alabama, Colorado, Texas, and more.

Considering the numbers, resistance to the conditions of detention should hardly come as a surprise. The immigration detention system has exploded in recent years, nearly doubling its capacity over the past decade. The system's expansion is partly due to a Congressional mandate known as the detention "bed quota," which requires that the Department of Homeland Security make more than 30,000 beds available every night for immigrant detention. Thanks to the bed mandate, the total number of people in detention each year has risen dramatically, from 230,000 people in Fiscal Year 2005 to 440,600 in 2013.

The growth of the industry has also helped create a lucrative market for private prison companies, which have welcomed the immigration crackdown as an opportunity for profit. Now, 62 percent of all ICE immigration detention beds are operated by for-profit prison corporations, compared to 49 percent in 2009. The nation's two largest private prison companies, CCA and GEO Group, have benefited from the surge in particular. Together, they run eight of the country's 10 largest detention centers, and operate 72 percent of the private immigrant detention industry. Unsurprisingly, both companies reported surging profits in their quarterly earnings this summer and have more than doubled their revenues since 2005. In 2014, CCA earned \$195,022,000 in net revenue, compared to \$133,373,000 in 2007.

Of course, this isn't coincidental. The industry's major players have a vested interest in the expansion of the detention system and have pushed hard to protect their bottom lines. Over the past decade, the nation's three largest private prison companies have spent upwards of 45 million dollars on campaign contributions and lobbyists to push legislation at the state and federal level. Between 2008 and 2014, CCA alone spent \$10,560,000 lobbying as it advocated on issues related to immigrant detention and immigration reform.

This cozy relationship may help illuminate legislation like Arizona's controversial "show me your papers law," which allows police officers to check the immigration status of undocumented immigrants and was projected to increase the number of people in detention centers. Of the bill's 36 co-sponsors, 30 received campaign contributions from private prison lobbyists and companies, including CCA and GEO.

The industry's growth has accompanied troubling revelations about the treatment of detainees, including human rights and due process violations. Well before Zelaya drafted her letter, Hutto was the subject of a 2007 landmark ACLU settlement addressing the "prison-like conditions" for children and families who were held there in detention. The center, which opened in 2006, was originally created to hold immigrant families. The lawsuit alleged that children were required to wear prison jumpsuits, held in small cells, and limited to an hour of outdoor playtime per day. The case sparked outrage and a whirlwind of negative press. After the settlement, conditions for detainees at Hutto reportedly improved, and the scorned family detention center was converted into an all-women's detention center two years later.

Since then, ICE and CCA have made an effort to reform Hutto's image and are particularly sensitive to negative reports about the facility, advocates say. According to Denise Gilman, the director of the Immigration Clinic at the University of Texas Law School, Hutto has better conditions than other detention centers, and is now seen as a "model facility" by ICE.

"It's the standard they lift up for why detention is not a bad place," Bethany Carson, immigration policy researcher and organizer at Grassroots Leadership, said. "They tout their programs inside, and it's the facility for asylum-seeking women. If there are reports that at that type of facility that there's a hunger strike, that women are resisting eating, that would do a lot of damage to their image."

Inside The Strike

It's not easy to find out what happens inside the walls of ICE's numerous detention centers. Critics complain of a persistent culture of secrecy within the agency, and details about the circumstances of hunger strikes can be sparse even on the occasion that ICE will acknowledge one. Rarely will the agency grant more than a yes or no confirmation.

But through a FOIA request to ICE, ThinkProgress obtained a document that provides some clarity: CCA's emergency food strike plan. The disciplinary nature of the company's policy (embedded below) stood out to Carl Takei, a staff attorney at the ACLU's National Prison Project who specializes in immigration detention.

"The thrust of the policy is to squelch the protest rather to address any medical or health concerns," Takei told ThinkProgress after reviewing its content. "It's very different from ICE's hunger strike policy, because ICE's hunger strike policy is primarily about medical procedures and medical concerns. This policy is about security and control."

For example, CCA's plan states that supervisors are instructed to "secure the facility" if they determine that the strike threatens the center's security.

“That’s a very long way of saying that the facility goes on lock-down,” Takei explained. “That means that everybody’s movements within the facility are going to be restricted. Since Hutto is set up with people in two-person cells, that probably means that they would be required to stay in their cells for a substantial portion of the day.”

Mary Small, policy director at the advocacy organization Detention Watch Network, said that the threat detection provision was “an absurd part of the policy. In what way does a food strike threaten the security of the facility?”

The policy explained that detainees significantly decreasing their food intake for at least three consecutive meals “may be protesting in a passive-aggressive manner.”

The policy also carved out punishments for food strikers, noting that participants would have their all of their commissary purchasing privileges suspended, and could have radio, visitation, and phone privileges removed if the center’s commander chose.

“I think it’s telling that it describes a food strike as a passive-aggressive form of protest,” Takei said. “I haven’t seen a detailed policy like this that lays out both the punitive attitude and the punitive procedures. Usually this is something that is done much more informally.”

But punishment for the October incident allegedly went beyond what was written into CCA’s policy. Grassroots Leadership claims ICE and/or CCA retaliated against strikers by placing them in solitary confinement and then sending them to other detention centers. In response to a FOIA request, ICE told ThinkProgress that Hutto does not use solitary confinement.

But Zelaya claims she was placed in isolation at the detention center and sent to a frigid room by herself. “When I participated in the hunger strike for my life and health I did it because I didn’t feel that they took good care of me... and for participating they punished me,” she said in a statement provided to ThinkProgress. “I was put in a room alone with so much cold, cold. I cried because my bones hurt from so much cold.”

Days later, she was transferred to a different facility, in Laredo, Texas.

Two Different Stories

Although ICE publicly denied the strike, emails obtained via FOIA indicate that ICE and Hutto employees were referencing the incident as the news broke. In an October 29 email with the subject line “hunger strike,” a Hutto employee sent out CCA’s emergency food strike plan, writing, “Currently, we are monitoring who returns to the housing unit too quickly which indicates the resident did not eat. We are monitoring how many residents come through the dining hall from each pod and do not take a tray.”

ICE press secretary Gillian M. Christensen reiterated the agency’s position on the strike in response to ThinkProgress’ inquiry about the email exchange: “While certain advocacy groups made allegations about a hunger strike at the T. Don Hutto Detention Center in late October and early November, those allegations were and are false. There was no hunger strike at the facility, nor have there been any since the false allegations were initially raised. Any suggestion to the contrary is absolutely false.”

Christensen added that the agency monitors “cafeteria eating behaviors as a matter of due diligence to ensure appropriate oversight of any potential health issues. As a precautionary measure, any time advocacy groups announce or encourage hunger strikes in ICE detention facilities, medical professionals advise the individuals in our custody of the negative health effects that can occur with any prolonged refusal of nourishment.”

ThinkProgress reached out to CCA for comment on the incident and its policy, but were contacted by an ICE official and told the company’s official response is the same as the agency’s.

ICE’s position doesn’t surprise Grassroots Leadership’s Bethany Carson, but it does show a clear rift between the agency and advocates’ official take. “Everything [ICE] has done shows that they are very determined to cover up what shows what happened inside the detention center,” Carson pointed out. “In everything I’ve seen, ICE maintains that there was no hunger strike taking place at Hutto. And that was directly in contrast with what we were hearing.”

In fact, the source of disagreement between the two may come down to the agency’s precise definition of a hunger strike. According to ICE and CCA policies, a detainee must refrain from eating for more than 72 hours, as observed by staff, to be on a hunger strike. If not — for example, a detainee refuses meals for 48 hours or makes a commissary food purchase — the definition won’t apply.

CCA's policy also differentiates between a hunger strike and a food strike, noting that the two terms should not be confused. According to its policy, a food strike can be defined by detainees decreasing food intake by more than 25 percent for three consecutive meals. Christensen, the ICE press secretary, told ThinkProgress that there was no food strike at Hutto during the time of the reported incident.

But it doesn't appear as though ICE even has a separate definition for a food strike. The agency's National Detention Standards policy, which outlines the terms of a hunger strike, makes no mention of food strikes. When ThinkProgress asked ICE to explain the difference between hunger and food strikes, Christensen replied: "It's the same thing" — even though CCA's policy says otherwise.

It's precisely these kind of semantic disputes that make it increasingly difficult to get a clear story from ICE. Moreover, the agency's willingness to contract with private companies adds another layer of complexity, advocates say. "The more levels of contracting you introduce, the less transparency you have," Mary Small of Detention Watch Network (DWN) pointed out. ICE, which is in charge of handling press for Hutto, has a different policy and definition for a food strike than the private company that operates the facility.

"On the one hand you have CCA playing word games with hunger strike versus food strike, and then on top of that you have ICE playing word games about what really happened as well," Small added. "So there's sort of two levels you have to dig through to find out what really happened. I think this points to the larger problems of transparency for the department."
Who Is In Charge?

CCA's policy and its lack of uniformity with the ICE standards is not the only thing that concerns watchdogs and immigration advocates. They're also troubled by the agency's process for inspecting detention centers, including Hutto. A recent report by the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) and DWN found major flaws with ICE's inspection process of detention centers, including a culture of secrecy within the organization, lack of independent oversight, and a failure to adequately capture the true conditions for people inside the centers. As NIJC's director of policy Royce Bernstein Murray put it: "Inspections are not frequent enough, they're not independent enough, and they're not of sufficient quality."

ICE's inspection process can be difficult to navigate. The agency uses three main detention standards to inspect facilities against: the 2000 National Detention Standards, and the 2008 and 2011 Performance-Based National Detention Standards. A center's contract with ICE determines which set of standards it will be held to. "Most of the big facilities are on the 2008 or 2011, but most of the small facilities are on still back on the 2000 which is significantly weaker," said Detention Watch Network's Mary Small.

Not only does ICE measure different facilities against different standards, it also conducts three different kinds of inspections in detention centers: Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) inspections, Office of Detention Oversight (ODO) inspections, and self-inspections. The ERO inspections, which determine whether or not a detention center will have its contract renewed, are conducted annually. They apply to detention centers that hold 50 people or more and essentially consist of a checklist of detention standards. The ODO inspections aren't done with the same frequency, but they tend to be more thorough than the ERO. Finally, there are the self-assessments. These are for facilities that hold less than 50 detainees, or people for less than 72 hours overall.

Of ICE's current 200-plus detention centers, Small estimates that about half are subject to this self-review process: "There's basically no inspection process at all," she said. "Given how much of a joke the actual [ODO and ERO] inspections are, I can't imagine the self-inspections."

ICE doesn't make any of its inspections public, and it took NIJC years of litigation to obtain the reports. Moreover, the entities tasked with conducting the investigations are paid by ICE — either through contracts or as employees — and inspections are announced to facilities in advance. "Inspectors are not independent from the ICE hierarchy," Small quipped.

"One of our key recommendations is that the inspections become more independent or out of the ERO chain of command," NIJC's Murray said. "Inspection reports can be edited before they're ultimately submitted to ICE, and those changes aren't tracked. Finally, detention centers rarely fail ERO inspections. In 2010 and 2012, no detention centers failed ERO inspections, and only four failed in 2011. Since 2009, ICE has not failed any detention center twice in a row, the provision necessary to terminate a contract.

Still, complaints of human rights and due process violations in the detention system persist. "In many cases, the poor conditions and mistreatment individuals suffer are explicitly prohibited under ICE detention standards," the report concludes. "Instead of reporting on these violations, the inspectors focus on completing checklists and fail to engage with detained

immigrants or follow up on issues raised in public reports. It is easy for facilities to pass inspections without actually upholding the standards' intent."

Stuck In Limbo

Zelaya was finally released on a \$8,500 bond in February after spending more than a year in detention. Her health had seriously declined during that time, however. She struggled to manage her sickle cell anemia, developed stomach problems, and fell into a deep depression while at Hutto and Laredo. When her attorney visited her in November, she found that Zelaya had a swollen, irritated face, and couldn't digest most of the food she was given.

Although she is no longer in detention, Zelaya's saga is far from over. For now, it's unclear what fate awaits her. She is still waiting on a decision in her asylum case and worries about her children, who remain in Honduras. "I want to take them out of Honduras before they get killed by the gang members or raped by their father, since he is a psychopath maniac he is capable of doing something," she said in a statement. Zelaya's partner, who she moved in with after leaving her ex-husband, tried to enter the U.S. but was deported and, she believes, was murdered back in Honduras.

As for what happened at Hutto, Zelaya feels she was gravely wronged.

"For being in a hunger strike for my health and my freedom, they punished me in a punishment cell of CCA Don Hutto," she said. "Then they sent me punished to another detention center CCA LAREDO. I can't take it, for God, public help me with my freedom and my life so I don't get killed too."

3/23: Educators, Legal Aid Providers and Members of Congress Urge Federal Government to End Immigration Raids Targeting Unaccompanied Children

Emilie Surrusco - American Federation of Teachers

WASHINGTON—Educators, community partners and legal aid providers came together today to urge members of Congress to act immediately to address the myriad issues impacting unaccompanied children seeking refuge in the United States and to call for an immediate end to "rocket dockets" and deportations targeting unaccompanied children and other vulnerable individuals.

In a congressional briefing focused on what has become a growing international humanitarian and refugee crisis, featured speakers demanded that the federal government put the safety and well-being of the tens of thousands of unaccompanied children first, while working to resolve the root causes of the forced migration. Speakers also drew attention to the increased policing of communities and damaging enforcement measures that have caused a number of students to be detained on their way to school.

In addition, Rep. Linda Sanchez (D-Calif.), chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.) provided an update on the Fair Day in Court for Kids Act—a bill introduced in the House late last month that would ensure access to counsel, legal orientation programs and post-release services to children and other groups in immigration proceedings.

Following are statements from the speakers at today's briefing:

"Targeting women and children for deportation who are fleeing violence and persecution is wrong. Until we can be sure that no mother or child will face abuse, torture, or death in their home country, the United States should end raids and deportations. The time-honored

American values of offering refuge to those fleeing violence and persecution around the world must be maintained," said Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.).

"As educators, we have the responsibility to protect the educational rights of all children. The human impact of deportations is incalculable—tearing families apart, interrupting children's education and school attendance, and disrupting communities and workplaces throughout the country," said Louis Malfaro, president of the Texas American Federation of Teachers. "We must respond with empathy and in accordance with our American values. We cannot erode fundamental protections for asylum seekers and victims of persecution and trafficking, and violate the principles of fairness and due process that are the foundations of the American legal system."

"It's clear that escalated enforcement operations have caused harm to children, their families and their communities," said Bruce Lesley, president of First Focus, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization. "Our American values call on us to

defend those most vulnerable, especially children, in their greatest time of need. We are deeply concerned that the administration continues to support enforcement actions that separate families—actions that take sleeping children from their beds and back into harm's way. We urge the administration to treat Central American children seeking refuge fairly and with the compassion that every child deserves.”

“There’s a clear hemispheric bias in the way we treat women and children fleeing violence from Central America. Our legal and political system should be working on preventing these families from being forced back into dangerous situations, not raiding their homes and funneling people into the detention and deportation system,” said Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center.

“Without legal representation, families and unaccompanied children face a complex and unfair legal process that is nearly impossible for them to navigate,” said Wendy Young, president of Kids in Need of Defense. “All need and deserve due process, without which we risk returning them to grave harm. A robust asylum process that ensures due process and fundamental fairness is the most critical component in addressing this refugee crisis.”

“America has laws that allow for people to seek asylum and protection. But Kimberly never got a real chance to do that. She needs to be free, to be able to fight her case, and she needs to be with her family,” said Kelsey Rivas, the classmate of a student directly impacted by Department of Homeland Security enforcement actions.

“The influx of children who have fled the violence in parts of Central America is creating a humanitarian crisis in local jurisdictions throughout the nation,” said Nancy Navarro, member of the Montgomery County Council in Maryland. “Many children require medical attention, are victims of sexual abuse and have experienced severe trauma. It is important for local governments to understand the scope of this issue in order to be prepared and respond to the needs of this vulnerable population of children.”

“Our nation’s immigration courts are where noncitizen children have their first experience with the United States’ system of justice. The challenges to them in this venue, where appointed counsel are not provided and the law applied is complicated (and sometimes poorly understood even by lawyers), are overwhelming. Immigration judges strive to provide due process for all, but children are a vulnerable population that many times is not able to successfully navigate the immigration court system without special accommodations that our current court structure cannot provide. We plan to highlight problems and suggest realistic, achievable solutions at this important, multidimensional briefing,” said Dana Leigh Marks, president of the National Association of Immigration Judges, IFPTE.

3/24: DHS and State Department Prepare Mass Deportation of Hundreds of Muslims

After Years of Prolonged Detention and Abuse, Bangladeshi Detainees Would Return to Imminent Danger of Imprisonment, Disappearances, and Death

Fahd Ahmed, DRUM; B. Loewe, #Not1More

March 24, 2016 - New York, NY: Immigration authorities have begun transporting South Asian detainees to Florence, Arizona, as a staging ground for impending mass deportation. Many of the Muslim migrants from Bangladesh being transported were participants in the #Freedomgiving hunger strikes at the end of 2015 that roiled a dozen detention centers across the country and brought attention to the prolonged, unjustified, and discriminatory detention of Muslim and South Asian migrants.

One of the detainees, who gave a name of Manik and is scheduled to be deported as well, said that “they are gathering all of us here from across the different jails, but none of the men here want to be sent back. Most are terrified and crying about what will happen to them if they are sent back.”

As Candidates Trump and Cruz stir anti-Muslim sentiment calling for the surveillance, ban, and deportation of Muslims -- the Department of Homeland Security under the Obama Administration is already racially profiling and discriminating against Muslim migrants, by holding detainees for indefinite and extended periods of time, setting unusually high bond amounts, and now preparing to deport Muslim detainees en masse to their potential deaths.

“It is alarming that the State Department is getting involved in matters of immigration, detention, and deportation, and so recklessly jeopardizing the lives of asylum-seeking migrants who are escaping repressive and dangerous conditions,” said Fahd Ahmed, Executive Director of DRUM (Desis Rising Up & Moving). DRUM has coordinated hunger strikes and advocacy efforts for the detainees over the last 6 months. He added that “their lives have been further endangered by the mishandling of their cases and confidential information by the U.S. government.”

In violation of international law, the names and personal information of the detainees were given to the Bangladeshi government by the U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh, and their names were then leaked and published by the Bangladeshi media. And in violation of their own protocols, the detainees may be expelled despite being witnesses and victims to civil rights violations that are under open investigation by the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties within DHS.

"While many have rightfully condemned the anti-Muslim rhetoric spewed during ongoing presidential campaigns, our current policies are just as terrifying. We call on the State Department and DHS to immediately halt these deportations and for administration officials to end these policies that single out Muslim migrants," adds Linda Sarsour, Director of MPower Change.

Activists raise grave concerns for the men's safety and have begun using the hashtag #Deported2Death to highlight the consequence of their potential removals and are calling on the State Department and Department of Homeland Security to cancel their removals and allow them to pursue their asylum claims.

3/29: Pasadena, CA: Meeting to Discuss High-Tech H1-B Immigrant Workers Rights

Lee Siu Hin - National Immigrant Solidarity Network

A new immigrant rights organization call FWD.US focus on rights for high-tech immigrant workers with H1-B visa.

The so-called "high-tech" H1-B visa, unlike H2-B, is working visa for a professional skilled foreign workers, ranging from scientist/engineers, or gourmet cook, even religious workers, graduate from U.S. college want a stay and work in the U.S., or want a come to work in the U.S., whose U.S. need these types of skilled workers but not enough in the domestic market, allow them to apply work visa to work.

Currently hundreds of thousands of H1-B workers in the U.S., many are also strangle in the bureaucratic and even racist immigration policies.

Silicon Valley high-tech companies among the major employers for the H1-B workers, facing foreign engineer shortage due to the government H1-B policies, they organized themselves to form a partisan lobbying group call FWD.US key founders includes Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, advocate the rights for the H1-B workers as well as comprehensive immigration reform.

They hold a public meeting last Tuesday 3/29 at a high-tech startup center in Old Town Pasadena, speaker includes a Caltech PhD astronomy student from Russia, she's facing uncertain immigration future when graduate.

3/31: 8 Biggest H-1B Employers In 2015

Dawn Kawamoto – Information Week

The impact of H-1B workers on American tech jobs has been a hot-button issue, and now the controversial topic is a talking point in the current presidential race. So, now is a good time learn more about last year's 8 largest H-1B employers.

The H-1B visa program has been a hotly debated issue for some time, fueled by concerns over job security for American tech workers and an attempt to balance it against corporate America's need for an adequate supply of IT workers -- even if it means hiring temporary workers from foreign countries. So, it's not surprising that the controversial topic has worked its way into the rhetoric during this year's highly charged presidential race.

"H-1B workers have never been discussed in the presidential election before. It's only been immigration issues," Ron Hira, associate professor of political science at Howard University, told InformationWeek. He said the topic has gotten attention during debates because this is the first time candidates have had active H-1B related bills during an election year.

Some of the discussion in the presidential campaign has arisen from legislation that candidates have introduced. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton supports raising the limit on H-1B visas beyond its current 65,000 cap, while Sen. Ted Cruz and Sen. Bernie Sanders each proposed reform bills to tighten the H-1B program, a stance shared by Donald Trump, who has also outlined ways restrict H-1B visas.

With so much attention focused on H-1B workers this election year, it pays to know who the major H-1B employers are.

For the most part, the majority of the top eight H-1B employers are outsourcing companies that are heavily dependent on H-1B workers. In order to be classified as heavily dependent on H-1B workers, 15% or more of an employer's workforce must

be comprised of H-1B workers, according to the US Department of Labor. Of the top eight employers, only Accenture and IBM, the second of which includes its wholly owned subsidiary IBM India Private, were considered non-H-1B dependent, according to Hira's research.

Each year the US government approves up to 65,000 H-1B visas, as well as up to 20,000 H-1B visas for applicants with a master's degree or higher, according to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). But demand for these coveted visas far outstrip the available caps. For example, of the combined 85,000 H-1B visas allowed under the two caps every year, a record 233,000 applications were submitted by employers in fiscal 2015, USCIS reported.

The top eight H-1B employers, as a group, scooped up a total of 49,539 H-1B visas out of the 85,000 available. That's 58% of the total number of visas available in 2015, according to data the USCIS provided to InformationWeek under the Freedom of Information Act.

The data provided included a list of the top 10 H-1B employers, but because Cognizant Tech Solutions and Infosys each were listed twice, the figures for each of the two companies were combined, bringing the list down to eight companies.

In addition to the approved H-1B visas for each of the eight companies, other figures, drawn from Hira's research, are also included on each of the slides.

That data includes the most prevalent occupation, education level, and country of origin between 2005 and 2012. It also includes the share of H-1B workers sponsored for a green card in 2014, the share of these workers with advanced degrees from US universities for 2013, and the median wage in 2013. The data for IBM India Private was folded into Hira's research under IBM overall.

Here is a look at the top eight H-1B employers in 2015 in ascending order. Tell us in the comments below what you think of the current H-1B policy and whether or how it should be changed.

- No. 8 -- IBM India Private
- No. 7 -- Tech Mahindra Americas
- No. 6 -- HCL America
- No. 5 - Wipro Ltd.
- No. 4 – Accenture
- No. 3 -- Tata Consultancy Services
- No. 2 – Infosys
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3/11: ICE Has “Accidentally” Deported Thousands of American Citizens

Kevin Mathews Care2

Stories of immigration detention centers are already upsetting enough, but can you imagine how traumatic it must be for legitimate U.S. citizens to be put through this process? It happens more often than you'd think. As Vice News reports, since 2003, over 20,000 U.S. citizens have been either wrongfully detained or outright deported from the country by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Let's be perfectly clear: U.S. citizens are absolutely protected constitutionally from being deported or even detained in this manner. However, the system we have in place is such a mess that a large number of Americans slip through the fairly wide cracks and become unjust victims of ICE.

Jacqueline Stevens, director of the Deportation Research Clinic at Northwestern University, has studied these accidental detentions and deportations and found them to be surprisingly, and horrifyingly, common. Since there's no official citizenship database, even U.S. citizens can have trouble proving they were born in the country, as even the current president can attest.

On top of that, immigration courts are overwhelmed, meaning many cases are pushed through quickly without proper research. People accused of being in the country illegally aren't even guaranteed legal representation; As such, many go through the process without understanding their own rights or someone to help verify their citizenship. Essentially, the system is so flawed that wrongful deportations are the natural conclusion. "It would be truly shocking if this did not result in the deportation of U.S. citizens," Stevens said.

U.S. leaders may choose not to be too vocal about these errors, but rest assured they are aware of the problem. According to documents obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request, between 2011 and 2014, 26 percent of people held in detention centers by ICE were subsequently found to be U.S. citizens. Considering that ICE is getting it wrong at such a high percentage by its own acknowledgement, it only makes sense that legitimate citizens are being tossed out of the country when ICE's mistakes aren't caught.

To better understand how this trigger-happy deportation affects real people, check out a couple of specific cases:

1. Though Ricardo Garza was born in Mexico, he legally became a U.S. citizen later in life. After an arrest for drunk driving, the police asked ICE to come get Garza. Garza told authorities multiple times that he was a naturalized citizen, but no one bothered to verify his story. He spent 5 weeks in an ICE detention center before an immigration attorney, Eric Puente, was able to get him out.

"Mr. Garza had his social security card and driver's license on him when he was arrested," said Puente. "Had ICE done their due diligence and listened to him and... looked at their own records, they should have known he was a citizen." An attempt on the agency's part to verify Garza's claims would have probably settled this issue immediately.

2. One of the more shocking cases that Vice references is the saga of Roberto Dominguez, a man who was detained by immigration agents in 1999. The government encouraged him to say he was born in the Dominican Republic to get him out of detention more quickly, leaving out the fact that that coerced admission would have him deported to the Dominican Republic where he'd spend the next decade of his life.

Dominguez has a legal American birth certificate, but U.S. officials argue that it could have belonged to someone else originally. The U.S. government acknowledges after all these years that they still haven't found an alternative individual who they believe the birth certificate could belong to, but Dominguez's citizenship is still somehow a matter of dispute 17 years later.

The fact that these many mistakes are already occurring makes bold immigration proposals from leaders like Donald Trump even more frightening. Looking at Trump's plans, the Washington Post theorizes that tens of thousands more U.S. citizens could be profiled and put through this shameful process in the name of rooting out undocumented aliens.

Most white Americans will probably never realize what a privilege it is to not have their citizenship questioned and threatened. It's clear that, with the U.S.'s current gung-ho approach for finding undocumented immigrants, low-income, Hispanic American citizens are being incorrectly profiled because of the way they look.

As a country, we shouldn't even be allowed to discuss deporting immigrants in large numbers so long as we have a faulty system in place that already deports thousands of honest-to-gosh U.S. citizens by accident.

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3/30: Border patrol union defies AFGE, endorses Trump

Carten Cordell - Federal Times

An affiliate of the American Federation of Government Employees decided to break ranks with the union and endorsed Donald Trump for president.

The National Border Patrol Council, which represents approximately 18,000 border patrol agents, said that the issue of security led it to make its first presidential endorsement for the outspoken Republican on March 30.

"We think it is that important: if we do not secure our borders, American communities will continue to suffer at the hands of gangs, cartels and violent criminals preying on the innocent," the group said on its website. "The lives and security of the American people are at stake, and the National Border Patrol Council will not sit on the sidelines."

The move could be seen as bewildering to some, especially since AFGE endorsed Hillary Clinton in December 2015. The pick didn't sit well with the NBPC at the time, as it said AFGE acted without its endorsement and didn't address its concerns over border security.

"We recognize that our agenda is not always AFGE's agenda and so do our supporters on Capitol Hill. This is why, our strategy to work both sides of the aisle to advance legislation has benefited agents and their families as well as border security," the group said in a Dec. 11, 2015 release.

In its release, the NBPC said Trump’s outsider, populist appeal has drawn attention to the challenges its members face in enforcing border security. It also took shots at President Barack Obama and Trump’s primary rival, Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas.

“America has already tried a young, articulate freshman senator who never created a job as an attorney and under whose watch criminal cartels have been given the freest border reign ever known.”

AFGE officials directed inquiries to the NBPC.

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2/25: Private Prisons are Cashing in on Refugee Desperation

Antony Loewenstein – New York Times

Berlin — IMMIGRATION and Customs Enforcement calls the detention site in Dilley, Tex., a “family residential center.” But to the 2,000 migrant children and mothers who live there, it’s something else: “People who say this is not a prison are lying,” Yancy Maricela Mejia Guerra, a detainee from Central America, told Fusion last year. “It’s a prison for us and a prison for our children, but none of us are criminals.”

The Dilley center holds people detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, a government agency, but it is run by the Corrections Corporation of America, America’s largest private prison and detention company. It is one part of a worrisome global trend of warehousing immigrants and asylum seekers at remote sites maintained by for-profit corporations. The United Nations estimates that one in every 122 people on the planet is displaced. This is a crisis that requires a humanitarian solution; unfortunately, some people view it as a business opportunity.

In recent decades, many Western governments have increasingly outsourced prisons to private companies, claiming that doing so saves money. As the number of migrants and asylum seekers has grown, governments have found a new use for the private-prison model.

It has become a multimillion-dollar industry. The company Hero Norway runs 90 refugee centers in Norway and 10 in Sweden, charging governments \$31 to \$75 per refugee per night. Australia’s government has contracted the company Broadspectrum to manage two detention camps in Nauru and Papua New Guinea for asylum seekers. In Britain, Prime Minister David Cameron’s government awarded the security firm Serco a seven-year contract in 2014 worth over \$100 million for running the Yarl’s Wood immigrant detention center.

These private companies are too often plagued by scandal and accused of abuse. The Corrections Corporation of America has a long history of ignoring detainee safety and federal laws. Serco has been accused of inadequately training its guards and overcharging the British government for substandard work. One doctor who worked at a site run by Broadspectrum in Nauru told The Guardian that the detention center was “reminiscent of Guantánamo Bay.”

The global flows of refugees are unlikely to abate anytime soon. Wars in the Middle East continue, as does the epidemic of gang violence in Central America. Climate change will send millions more people fleeing their homes in the years to come. Governments must accept that for-profit detention centers are not the way to deal with this issue.

State-run detention centers don’t necessarily guarantee more respect for human rights, but there is evidence that government control brings improvements: A 2014 report by the American Civil Liberties Union, for example, found that private immigration detention centers in the United States were more crowded than state-run ones, and detainees in them had less access to educational programs and quality medical care. And public centers, while still flawed, are more transparent.

Opacity is a common denominator in the privatized detention system around the world. In Australia, Europe and the United States, journalists have less access to private prisons than they do to public ones; governments maintain less oversight. That’s not a coincidence. As Matthew J. Gibney, a political scientist at Oxford University, told The New York Times: “When something goes wrong — a death, an escape — the government can blame it on a kind of market failure instead of an accountability failure.”

Advocates of private immigration detention claim they are saving taxpayers money. But that seems unlikely. The American government spends more on immigrant detention today than it did 10 years ago, when the number of border crossings was higher. The Corrections Corporation of America and other companies have lobbied politicians to keep more people behind bars rather than deporting them. Congress requires that at least 34,000 people be housed daily in detention centers — a so-called detention bed mandate.

Making a profit doesn’t just require keeping beds filled, it can often lead companies to skimp on services. This means mental health care, outdoor activities and healthy food are far less available in private detention centers than at those run by the

government. Last year, the United Nations described a camp for refugees in Traiskirchen, Austria, that is run by the Swiss firm ORS Service, as “inhumane” because of overcrowding. Similar reports are common not just on Europe’s frontiers but across the world.

Governments that receive migrants and asylum seekers must reverse their reliance on private companies. The current practice is a short-term fix that in the long run will cost governments more and subject refugees to worse conditions. In the meantime, governments from Canberra to Vienna to Washington should institute independent cost analyses to ensure that private centers give taxpayers the best value for their money. They should encourage more oversight of these sites, from government agencies and from the news media. And the 34,000-bed quota must also be done away with immediately.

In its 2014 annual report, the Corrections Corporation of America worried that changes to American immigration policy could cut into the company’s bottom line. Many other such contractors might have similar fears. Let’s hope they do. Unless governments make drastic changes now, these corporations look likely to get richer and richer as more people around the world flee their homes, desperately seeking safety.

2/25: New Report Shows Poor Medical Care Led to Deaths at U.S. Detention Centers

National Immigrant Justice Center, ACLU, Detention Watch Network

A new report, *Fatal Neglect: How ICE Ignores Deaths in Detention*, released today by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Detention Watch Network (DWN) and the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC), examines egregious violations of medical standards by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that played a significant role in the deaths of eight people in detention centers across the country.

Among the report’s findings:

- In nearly half of the 17 death reviews produced by ICE from 2010 to 2012, the documentation suggests that failure to comply with ICE medical standards contributed to deaths.
- Even in the eight cases where death reviews concluded that violations of ICE medical standards contributed to people’s deaths, ICE’s deficient inspections system essentially swept those findings under the rug.
- Three of the eight cases profiled led to wrongful death lawsuits by family members.
- Six deaths involving substandard care occurred at privately operated facilities.

1/26 Austin, TX: Immigrant rights activists confront mayor over deportations

Jack Craver - Austin Monitor

Mayor Steve Adler engaged in a courteous but tense public conversation over the city’s immigration policies with a group of immigrant rights activists outside of his City Hall office Monday afternoon.

ICE Out of Austin – a group pushing for local law enforcement to no longer cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement to detain or deport undocumented immigrants – arrived outside of Adler’s office shortly before 5:30 p.m., belting out chants in English and Spanish and demanding a meeting with the mayor. Group leader Alejandro Caceres rejected an offer from a mayoral aide to meet with Adler in his office, saying that group members wanted the meeting to be public.

Surrounded by activists and media – and speaking even more deliberately than usual, so that an interpreter could translate his remarks into Spanish – Adler emphasized his concerns that federal immigration laws were in conflict with the United States’ heritage as an immigrant nation. He also noted challenges that immigration laws present to local police because undocumented immigrants fear that they risk deportation by reporting crimes.

“It’s important that everyone in this community feel safe and everyone here feel protected,” Adler said. “Our local law enforcement people need to have confidence in the people that are living in our communities, and (people) have to feel comfortable going to law enforcement when they’re not being treated well or when they’re threatened or feeling in danger.”

He added, "It's for that reason that I am a strong supporter of our local law enforcement prioritizing their time and spending their time on our local issues, on our local safety concerns, and not being put in the position where they are called on to enforce national immigration policies."

But Caceres told Adler that his words of support were not enough, and he urged him to put forth a resolution making Austin a sanctuary city. Anything less, he argued, amounted to complicity in deportations.

Adler responded that he was unsure whether a resolution was "the best way" to offer protections to the community.

"But we're telling you that it is the best way, actually," responded Caceres. "We're telling you that we're tired of families getting deported, we're tired of politicians saying we have to be patient."

"We see you as an ally and a friend, Mayor Adler, but if you're telling us that you're not going to put forward a resolution, then you stand with ICE and deportations," Caceres added. "There is no gray line."

Another demonstrator, Sulma Franco, recounted taking evidence of violence against her to the police department, which she said was largely uncooperative and unresponsive because of language barriers.

Adler responded that he would like to hear of such incidents and help members of the community address them.

"If you have people in our police department that are not acting properly, that are doing the wrong thing, that are putting people in jeopardy, then involve me," he said. "I am pleading with you to involve me in those situations so there's something I can do to help."

"Here we are," responded Carmen Zuvietta, who earlier had told the Austin Monitor that her husband was deported to Mexico three years ago. "How many more parents need to be separated from their children?" she asked.

Caceres said the immigrant community needed structural changes to law enforcement rather than help from the mayor on a case-by-case basis. "We're telling you what you can do, and you're saying no," he said.

The demonstration actually began in City Council chambers during a meeting of the Public Safety Committee. Council Member Don Zimmerman, the committee chair, had scheduled a discussion of sanctuary cities and was asking representatives of the Austin Police Department and the sheriff's department about existing policies and whether they knew if public funds directed to nonprofit organizations were being used to evade immigration laws.

The term "sanctuary city" typically refers to municipalities that have established a policy not to enforce federal immigration law, and where law enforcement generally does not inquire about or investigate a person's immigration status.

Brian Manley, chief of staff for the Austin Police Department, emphasized that Austin was not a sanctuary city and that he could answer only for how the police department itself operated, not private organizations.

Caceres, the only citizen speaker, told the committee that "this hearing is a reinforcement of bad politics" and that the group of demonstrators behind him were not going to bother engaging with Council members with little authority on the issue.

"Who we need to be talking to is Steve Adler because he continues to have inaction when it comes to this," he said.

With that pronouncement, Caceres turned his back on the dais and led the demonstrators out of Council chambers and up the stairs to see the mayor.

2016 National Immigrant Solidarity Network Planning

For 2016, we'll continue organize different activist events to support immigrant worker communities

1) May Day 2016 National Immigrant Rights March

- Anywhere in the U.S.

2) June-October: Immigrant Health Justice and Cancer Discussion

- Los Angeles, CA

- In conjunction with e-TeamMed Foundation, bi-monthly meetings focus on health issues, health support and health justice.

3) September: Immigrant Rights Teach-In

- Los Angeles, CA

- Topics: Immigrant detention and deportation, upcoming November U.S. Presidential election impact on immigrant rights.

4) December: immigrant rights conference

- Los Angeles, CA

- A one-day conference includes workshops, performances. Topic includes: post-election analysis, immigration detention and deportation, labor rights, health care.

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NISN is a coalition of community, immigrant, labor, human rights and student activist groups, founded in 2002 in response to the urgent needs for the national coalition to fight immigrant bashing, support immigrant rights, no to the sweatshops exploitation and end to the racism on the community. Please visit our website: <http://www.ImmigrantSolidarity.org>

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