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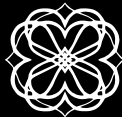


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'ZERO TOLERANCE' FOR MIGRANTS

Nonprofit corporations make millions off locking up refugee children

Locking up migrant children seeking refuge in the United States is a multimillion-dollar business that makes a lot of money for the jailers.

That's become especially clear under the new "zero tolerance" program, ordered by President Donald Trump, under which immigrant children are being taken away from their families and locked up in private contract facilities.

The biggest corporation benefitting from the new Trump program is Southwest Key Programs Inc. of Austin, Texas. Southwest Key, according to its website, operates 26 immigrant children's shelters in Texas, Arizona and California under contract to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement. That's about a quarter of the HHS/ORR children's shelters in the country.

Registered as a nonprofit, Southwest Key presents itself as a good-hearted organization helping migrants in a time of crisis.

"During the 2014 youth immigration crisis at our southern border, Southwest Key was called upon by the federal government to act as a humanitarian first responder in the care of those children, providing round-the-clock services including: food, shelter, medical care, clothing, educational support, supervision and reunification support to over 20,000 unaccompanied minors," its website says.

But Southwest Key is secretive. Police were called and Oregon's U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley was barred from entry on June 3 when he tried to visit a Southwest Key facility in Brownsville, Texas. (The company has since apologized.)

Though it's legally a nonprofit, Southwest Key pays high salaries to its top executives. CEO Juan Sanchez, who founded the group in 1987, drew more than \$1.5 million in pay and benefits in 2015 from Southwest, according to its most recent public tax filings. His wife, Jennifer Sanchez, is on the Southwest Key payroll as a vice president for \$262,000.

On the company website Sanchez lists his title as "El Presidente."

According to a 2015 story by the *Arizona Daily Independent*, when children arrive at a Southwest Key facility "they are shown a presentation that includes a tribute to El Presidente. Images of El Presidente feeding masses of children flash before their eyes as they are told that without his kindness they would not be here."

In the *ADI* story, former Southwest Key employees painted a bleak picture of the actual care given to children in their care.

"They see a prison-like facility operated by an organization that views children as commodities and the employees as rent-a-cops, whose most important mission is keep their mouths shut while the organization does all it can to keep costs down and kids coming,"

the *ADI* story says.

"To that end, staff must ignore the complaints of kids who are hungry, who are given nothing more than a quarter-sized dollop of soap with which to bathe, or given someone else's underwear to use because — after all — these kids should just be grateful that El Presidente was kind enough to give them some place to land."

More recently, a former Southwest Key employee named Antar Davidson told *The Los Angeles Times* in a story published June 14 that children in the company's Tucson shelter, Estrella del Norte, were not allowed to hug one other. (The company has disputed his account.)

Davidson resigned his job, saying, "I can no longer in good conscience work with Southwest Key programs. I am feeling uneasy about the morality of some of the practices," the *Times* story says.

Here in Oregon, just one company contracts with HHS/ORR to incarcerate "unaccompanied" immigrant children.

Morrison Child & Family Services, a nonprofit in Portland, received 14 HHS/ORR contracts in 2018 for a total of \$10.7 million. The company provides a wide range of services to families and children, according to its website, including care of sexually exploited children.

The Morrison website says little or nothing about its role in holding migrant children for the government, except for a single line on its website: "Transitional Services for Immigrant Youth." The website offers no further information about Morrison's programs for immigrant youth.

But a note in its 2016 federal tax filing expands this slightly: "Morrison partners with the Division of Children's Services (DCS), within the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), as well as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services for the following programs: staff secure, shelter, long term group home, post release and home study, and foster care (closed November, 2016)."

On its nonprofit tax filing, Morrison reported \$18.6 million in grant income and donations during fiscal year 2016. According to HHS records, in the same year it received about half that amount — \$8.9 million — in HHS grants for "shelter and staff-secure residential services for unaccompanied alien children."

Unlike his counterpart at Southwest Key Programs, Morrison's CEO Drew Henrie-McWilliams received a mere \$170,000 in salary, according to the group's 2017 nonprofit tax filing.

Morrison's press spokeswoman, Patricia DiNucci, declined to give any details of its refugee housing program. "Morrison is proud of the many programs that we operate to serve the children in our community. Spotlighting specific service populations in the media can be a detriment to all children in our care," she emailed.

SLANT

• **Where's Walden?** Call and write his offices in Oregon and D.C. We have not heard one word from Oregon Congressman Greg Walden about the disgraceful separation of families at our southern border. This is one more reason to vote against him in November.

• Casey Barrett, vice-president of Obie Companies and grandson of Brian Obie, gave the City Club of Eugene an impressive report on June 15th on the **proposed \$60 million westward expansion of the 5th Street Market District**. One niggling question: both this project and the development of the former EWEB property along the river call for retail and commercial space. Where does this leave retail and commercial development for downtown Eugene?

• **What we're reading:** William L. Shirer's little journalistic book on *The Rise & Fall of Adolf Hitler* to refresh our memories on Hitler's belief in telling big lies, not little ones, and the inability of Germans who did not agree with Hitler to stop him. It's a chilling but important read for this time in America.

• **Happy Solstice!**