

OPINION



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**2 Cleaning Areas or
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Pre-Spray Traffic Areas
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*Includes Pre-Spray Traffic Area
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Area/Oriental Rugs:
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Area/Oriental Rugs (Wool):
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Heavily Soiled Area:
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(Requiring Extensive Pre-Spraying)

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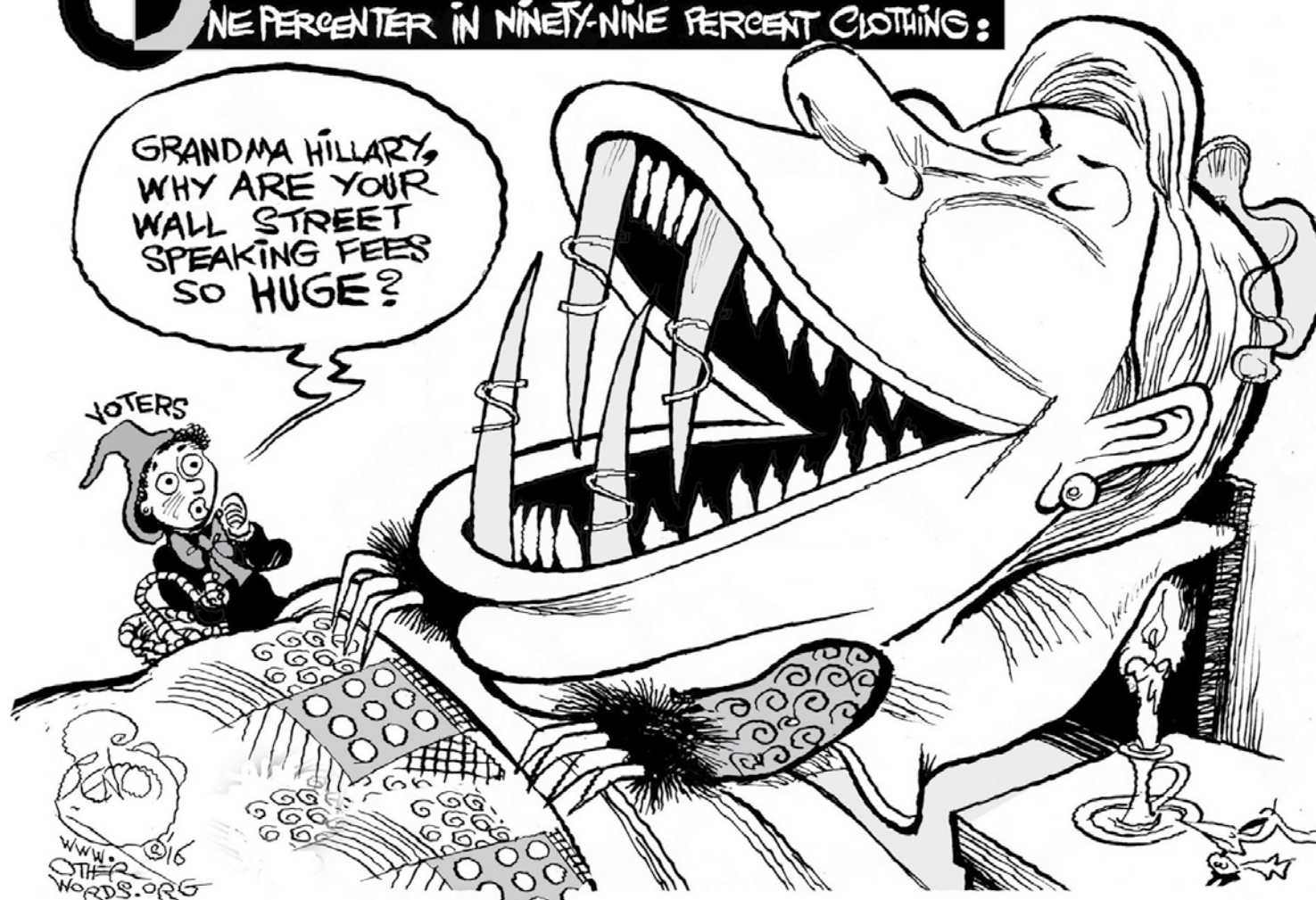
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ONE PERCENTER IN NINETY-NINE PERCENT CLOTHING:



Inmates Die Because of Substandard Medical Care

America's killer prisons

BY JOHN KIRIAKOU

I get a lot of letters from people who've been incarcerated, or are now behind bars.

Legally I can't respond directly, because I'm an ex-con myself: I was locked



up after blowing the whistle on the CIA's illegal and immoral torture program. Direct contact with current and former prisoners would be "consorting with known felons" — which is banned under the terms of my probation — so I keep my distance.

Most of the letters I receive are complaints about prison conditions and requests for help. In most cases, these folks just want somebody to vent to. I wish I could help them. In most cases I can't.

But I do have this column. And I can tell you about some of the horrors that land in my mailbox.

I received a letter recently from a female inmate in a state prison in Arizona. She wrote about some of the same things I complained about when I was incarcerated.

It's too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter, she said. It's overcrowded. There aren't enough

jobs, and even if you get one, you make a slave's wage — often just 10 cents an hour. There's no money for training programs, prisoners are never actually "rehabilitated," and the food is inedible.

None of these were surprising to me. The American prison system is broken. I know that from first-hand experience.

"The health care here is horrible," the writer said. "Check to see how many women have died here in the last two years because of improper health care. Women who complain of chest pains are sent back to their cell and told there is nothing wrong, to drink water, and to take an aspirin."

I believe her. My prison bunkmate complained of chest pains for months and was told to take an aspirin. He finally had a massive

There was a woman there, she wrote, who "was bleeding for months." The inmate "kept putting in requests to see a doctor and was told repeatedly that there was nothing wrong. Finally, eight months later, she was sent to an outside specialist and told that she had cervical cancer that was so far progressed that all they could do was to put her in chemo to slow it down."

The prognosis? "The doctor said her time is limited. She's going to die."

The real tragedy of this situation is that it's so common. Prisoners across America die every day from substandard medical care.

If the people running prisons know there's a problem and do nothing about it, is that not manslaughter? Is that not depraved indifference? A person who should be alive is not — all because of the incompetence or apathy of prison administrators.

This isn't an issue of who did what or who broke what law. Every American deserves decent health care. That includes our prisoners.

If we can't say that much for the most vulnerable among us, we can't expect any better for the rest of us.

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But one issue the writer raised was especially concerning. I've written before, including in my blog posts from prison, about medical care there. I sometimes wondered if things were any better in women's prisons. Apparently they're not.

heart attack. After a month spent chained to a bed in a local hospital, he was transferred to a prison hospital 11 hours away from his family. He'll never make it to the end of his sentence.

The woman who wrote me this letter had seen the same thing.