

Obama administration to phase out some private prison use

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration announced Thursday it will phase out its use of some private prisons, affecting thousands of federal inmates and immediately sending shares of the two publicly traded prison operators plunging.

In a memo to the Bureau of Prisons, Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates told it to start reducing "and ultimately ending" the Justice Department's use of private prisons. The announcement follows a recent Justice Department audit that found that the private facilities have more safety and security problems than government-run ones.

The Obama administration says the declining federal prison population justifies the decision to eventually close privately run prisons. The federal prison population — now at 193,299 — has been dropping due to changes in federal sentencing policies over the past three years. Private prisons hold about 22,100 of these inmates, or 12 percent of the total population, the Justice Department said.



In this 2010 photo, the Idaho Correctional Center is shown south of Boise, Idaho, operated by Corrections Corporation of America.

The policy change does not cover private prisons used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which hold up to 34,000 immigrants awaiting deportation.

"Private prisons served an important role during a difficult period, but time has shown that they

compare poorly to our own Bureau facilities," Yates wrote in a memo to the acting director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. As private prison contracts come to an end, the bureau is not to renew the contract or it should at least "substantially" reduce its scope, Yates wrote. She

did not specify a timeline for when all federal inmates would be in government-owned facilities.

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton says the country should move away from using private facilities to house inmates. The Clinton campaign has said it no longer accepts contributions from private prison interests, and if it receives such a contribution, it will donate that money to charity. The private prison industry is a major contributor to Republican political campaigns, particularly in recent years. GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump has said he supports the use of private prisons.

The private prisons on the chopping block are operated by three private companies — Corrections Corporation of America, GEO Group Inc., and Management and Training Corporation. After the announcement Thursday, Corrections Corp. stock dropped \$13.22, or 48.6 percent, to \$14 and Geo Group tumbled \$13.80, or 42.7 percent, to \$18.49. Both companies get about half their revenue from

the federal government. The Management and Training Corporation and Corrections Corporation of America issued statements saying they were disappointed with the decision. They also said they disagreed with the conclusions of an inspector general's audit that preceded the Justice Department's decision.

The federal government started to rely on private prisons in the late 1990s due to overcrowding. Many of the federal inmates held in private facilities are foreign nationals who are being held on immigration offenses, the audit said.

Immigration and human rights advocates have long-complained about the conditions in privately-run prisons. Amnesty International, on Thursday, urged states to follow suit. Some states, such as Kentucky, already have.

Before Thursday, the Bureau of Prisons had been working toward the goal of phasing out private prison contracts when, three weeks ago, it did not renew a contract for 1,200 beds, Yates said.

PARENTS TALK BACK

On raising 'screenagers'

A new documentary, "Screenagers," makes a convincing argument that the hardest thing about modern parenting is finding a healthy balance of technology use.

I asked filmmaker and physician Dr. Delaney Ruston to explain this after I watched her film.

Today's parents worry about many of the same things our parents worried about — drug and alcohol use, risky sexual behavior and mental health. The intensity of problems that can arise from these issues can be devastating, said Ruston. But so can the struggle over kids' tech use.

Ruston's concerns throughout the documentary about raising children in this digital age will feel relatable to parents of tweens and teens.

"I was afraid I was being too strict or not strict enough," she said in an interview, referring to the rules she was trying to enforce around tech use with her children, now 14 and 17 years old. "I didn't know so many other people were dealing with these rules issues."

Unlike other alarmist books and shows that have come out about kids and technology use, there are reassuring parts to this eye-opening documentary.

Ruston learned from brain researchers that the reward center of the brain is more active during the early teen years. That helps explain why it can be so hard for adolescents to tear themselves away from their devices. Those devices are extra stimulating and rewarding to their developing brains.

The human brain learns through consequences, she said. Children won't learn to regulate their behavior left to their own devices, so to speak. In fact, putting rules in place without enforcing consequences or having stronger boundaries is setting up some impulsive children for failure. But given the right guidance, kids can learn better self-control over time.

In the film, Ruston highlighted some of the dangers of too much screen time, as well.

An experiment on mice showed long-term effects on their brains after exposure to a period of intense media stimulation. We don't know if the same lingering damage happens to human brains, but the study should give parents pause.

She interviewed scientists and researchers who show how video game addiction is as powerful as substance abuse addiction. Others demonstrated that our brain is not designed to multitask. And ironically,



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the worse we do on tasks while doing multiple things at once, the better we think we are performing.

But not all the research was gloomy. Social scientist Sherry Turkle said there's research to suggest you can restore

empathy in children with a five-day break from technology.

The documentary also reveals some hypocrisy at play: Parents want to impose limits and boundaries on tech use, but they bristle at the notion of applying some limits on themselves. We tend to minimize our own usage and its impact on others, such as spouses and children.

The three-and-a-half year process of making the film changed Ruston's approach to how she manages technology with her own family.

"I started out overly controlling," she said. Her energy around her kids' screen time had a distinctly negative vibe to it. That automatically makes kids defensive about it. She has since made an effort to start by focusing on the positives, as well.

Other changes Ruston has implemented: She made the morning school commute tech-free. She installed an app on her phone that auto-replies when she's driving, so she's not tempted to text and drive. She's worked on reducing the time she spends on her computer at night. She and her husband created more outdoor activities to keep their children and their friends busy. Her family has started a weekly "tech talk Tuesday" where they discuss the ways technology is affecting them, and she starts the discussion in a positive tone. She added an app on her daughter's phone called OurPact that enables her to turn off all the apps on her daughter's phone remotely, if needed.

So, how can more people watch the "Screenagers" documentary? It's not available online, because Ruston was convinced that it needed to be part of a public discussion. Small groups, like civic or religious organizations or schools, can rent the film. She suggests that interested parents ask a school's PTA to screen it. There have been nearly 600 screenings in the four months since it was released.

It's a worthwhile way to spend some quality screen time with your children.

Aisha Sultan is a St. Louis-based journalist who studies parenting in the digital age while trying to keep up with her tech-savvy children. Find her on Twitter: @AishaS.

Friday Morning

Table with 13 columns (Station, 6 AM, 6:30, 7 AM, 7:30, 8 AM, 8:30, 9 AM, 9:30, 10 AM, 10:30, 11 AM, 11:30) and rows for FOX, KPTV, KEPR, KOIN, KNDU, KGW, KVEW, KATU, KTNW, OPB.

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