

The Right to vote by Convicted Prison Inmates

By David R. Hinman

In 2007, I read with interest an article printed and circulated in Iowa's largest newspaper. The article was headlined "Clinton backs voting holiday giving ex-cons the "Right to Vote." The article further read, "United States Senator Hillary Clinton and Democrats urged that Election Day be made a Federal National Holiday to encourage voting. Senator Clinton also pushed for legislation that would allow ex-felons to vote.

As an incarcerated person, I was encouraged by Senator Clinton's efforts and efforts of other U.S. Representatives and U.S. Senators to include all persons of voting age in the voting process as a "Privilege and a Right."

Some even, many possibly, question "Why allow former and current inmates in jail prison to vote.?"

The greatest reason is that even though in prison or released from prison is that prisoners and former prisoners are "Human Beings." Instead, in many if not most prisons and jails the young, the old, the physically and mentally challenged and even great numbers of inmates of sound body and mind suffer at the hands of those employed in various position to protect the public and maintain order.

Ex-cons that have served their sentence or current jail or prison inmates have no real spokesman. No one who has been there and lived under conditions which in many prisons or jails border on "Living In Hell." No one with courage will or dare speak out in regard to violations of "Basic Human Rights."

Many inmates currently are veterans who "honorably served their country in both times of war and peace." Many were damaged while in the service, physically and mentally, and in many cases---both. Great numbers of veterans have become homeless not wanted in their current conditions by family or friends.

Homeless shelters are full to overflowing their legal capacity. Veterans along with many others are turned away with no place to go. Often turning to living on the streets or in dark alleys. Many quickly become victims of thugs and gangs. No one having told them that as veterans they were eligible for VA assistance and in many cases for pensions.

Large numbers quickly get arrested for low level offenses, become jailed and imprisoned. They joined the estimated 16 to 25% of people in prisons and jails that are mentally or physically challenged.

Almost every day, there are newspaper, radio and television reports of abuse of prisoners, mistreatment of juveniles or those in prison in the United States. Much more goes on unreported. An example recently that even sickens this writer and

prison inmate is a report from a Florida prison where juveniles were held. A jail supervisor told a sick youngster who was retching in obvious pain to "Suck it up" as other guards present had attempted to get the boy help before the boy's appendix burst and he died. Later the supervisor and a nurse wrote their report that they believed the boy was "faking."

In Maryland, a young inmate was strangled after being seated next to a convicted murderer who had told his sentencing judge, he would "kill again."

Five inmates in the Iowa corrections system have indicated as having committed suicide in the last five years or less! Four of the suicides are indicated as occurred in "Special Needs Unit" where inmates were to be visibly seen by staff four times an hour. One suicide victim was reported as having not been seen by staff for more than five hours, was found with his hands tied behind his back and a plastic bag over his head.

The American Bar Association has reported "Local Representatives" of indigent defendants in the United States have been in a "state of crisis" for several years. Indigent defendants are at constant risk of being over prosecuted, being wrongfully convicted, to "unjust punishment, even the death penalty."

Over four million Americans stripped of their right to vote because of even minor felony convictions. Over 2% of the population of the United States cannot vote. Well over a million African Americans or 13% of all eligible Black Americans for voting age.

America not only has the highest rate of incarceration in the industrialized world, the United States accounts for 25% or more of the all of the incarcerated people in the world.

You may care personally, read your local newspaper, listen to and write your local news. Check for reports of condition in state, local and other places of incarceration.

Ask your elected officials to examine mandatory sentencing laws especially those that allow no consideration of release for any reason.

And ask for "The Right to Vote" to include all people of voting age. Consider if inmates could vote, there would be less violence and safer prisons.

For more information on this topic, you may care to write to David R. Hinman, #025374, Anamosa State Penitentiary, 406 North High Street, P.O. Box 10, Anamosa, Iowa 52205-0010. If you write you must include my full name, prisoner #, and address and your full name and address on the envelope. I will answer all letters.