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Out of Reach

Debt keeps 150,000 Washington felons from ballot box

Special Prisons Issue: The art of the last meal • Monroe's concerned lifers • Mental illness in King County Jail • Outsourcing inmates to Yakima

By Chris LaRoche

It's one of the best-kept secrets in Washington state's corrections system: ex-felons are allowed to vote.

Yet recently released prisoners from state institutions have a hard time finding that out. Once they do, they often find that what stands between them and the polls is a debt of thousands of dollars.

As a result, tens of thousands of Washington citizens don't have the right to vote under some of the nation's strictest disenfranchisement laws. It is not unusual for a person to be released from prison with \$30,000, or more, in fines. Until you pay off those fines, you are denied the right to vote.

To get back the ballot, ex-felons must pay off these "Legal Financial Obligations" (LFOs) to receive their Certificate of Discharge, proof needed when registering to vote. Court-imposed LFOs may include the cost of incarceration, fines, attorney's fees, jury fees, clerk's fees, sheriff's fees, crime victim compensation, emergency response and crime lab analysis fees, and costs arising from probation and supervision. Furthermore, certain drugs felonies carry separate, additional fines, which can be doubled if they occur in "certain public places" — within 1,000 feet of a school, bus stop, or school bus route, which practically covers the entire city.

Fines are assessed at the time of conviction; while a criminal is behind bars, fines accrue interest at 12 percent a year. Those who fail to pay them off within 10 years are permanently disenfranchised

— they will never be able to vote. After prison, the government can garnish an ex-felon's wages to get the money. Some counties use collection agencies.

This mound of legal debt is the least of a felon's worries: people convicted of drug felonies can't receive student loans nor certain housing assistance. And every time they look for work, they face that little box that asks, "Are you a felon?"

As Steve Kittel, an ex-felon convicted of armed robbery, puts it, "A guy gets out, he has \$30,000 in fines, he can't get a job anywhere because he has to check 'yes' on that application, and it's like 'I'm so deep in debt, I can't get a job, and that car is unlocked with a stereo inside.' What are most people going to do?"

One DOC official vows that the agency tries hard to help felons pay off their LFOs, but numerous ex-felons and their advocates say the opposite. It does appear that ex-felons fall through the cracks, as did "Tina" — who had such a horrible experience, she doesn't want to use her real name.

A single mother with three kids struggling with low-paying, part-time jobs, Tina was slapped with \$3,000 in fines for welfare fraud — and a felony conviction. "I didn't even know what a felony was," she says now. "They wanted to make an example out of me."

After eight years of diligent payments, Tina thought she was done. "My PO [parole officer] said I'd get my discharge papers in the mail, so I waited. They never came. In the meantime, the prosecuting attorney went to court and de-

cidated not to discharge me. And they didn't even tell me about it." Tina found the ACLU, who quickly discovered that she had indeed paid off her LFOs. The discharge was completed soon after. Tina says that she "got lost in the system."

"I had to fight to get my rights back. I went to attorneys and they were no good. I talked to my POs and the Department of Corrections. No one is interested in getting you discharged. I even called the judge, but he couldn't help me. One PO couldn't figure why I wasn't discharged."

More than 150,000 residents statewide are permanently or temporarily unable to vote, according to a 1998 estimate by the Sentencing Project, a research and advocacy reform group. By and large, they are prisoners, ex-felons with LFOs outstanding, and those who've passed the 10-year cut-off. As of 2001, 46,500 individuals in Washington have finished their prison time but are unable to vote due to their court-imposed fines.

LFOs are a part of a criminal justice system rife with arbitrary factors. "The types of crimes that people commit are not always the ones they're convicted of," says Scot Nakagawa, associate director of the Western Prison Project, a criminal justice reform organization, "due to whether or not you have a good lawyer. Convictions are not always con-

sistent. Law puts an unfair burden on people who are poor. It's effectively a poll tax: if you have the money to pay off your expenses, then you can vote."

Or, in the words of Willie Ray Robinson of the local prisoners' advocacy group Justice Works, "how many times must someone be punished?"

"Law puts an unfair burden on people who are poor. It's effectively a poll tax: if you have the money to pay off your expenses, then you can vote."

Misconceptions abound regarding voting rights. "One problem nationally," says Nakagawa, "is the belief that all ex-felons are permanently disenfranchised. That's not true. In Oregon, voting rights are restored immediately after a person finishes their term of incarceration, but even some county election officials aren't aware of that."

Such was the case of Esther Flowers. Flowers was disenfranchised due to extensive probation and incarceration for crimes stemming from addiction and homelessness. Now after eight clean, stable years, Flowers says she "was under the assumption all along that because of felony convictions, I had lost my voting rights" until she contacted the ACLU earlier this year. Staff there found out that she had been assessed \$100 in fines — but that eight years of compound interest had brought her total to \$800.

"I had no idea," says Flowers. The

Continued on page 8



Doubting David Della

Dear *Real Change*,

I read your article on the new Seattle city councilmembers ("The First 100 Days," April 1). I would like to know if *Real Change* is going to expose how new councilmembers David Della and Tom Rasmussen betrayed the working class and poor people. At the City Council hearing on Monday, March 29, Della and Rasmussen voted for the \$9.3 million in budget cuts from social services.

This budget cut totally eliminated money for the Tenants Union and the Women Homeless Hygiene Center. This comes after Della had promised to vote on securing \$215 million for social services. Yet once again Della has reneged on his promises. This is most upsetting especially in light of your last issue, in which Della states (explaining his vote against tax subsidies for moderate-income housing) "I'm about the poor and I'm about the working class." How soon one forgets where one comes from!

To a person who actually voted for him, Della is no better than the big realtor developer or corporate person who wants to wipe out the poor, the homeless, and working-class folks from Seattle. It's time to show David Della's true colors.

Sincerely,
Toi-Sing Woo
Seattle

Hey Seattle, wake up!

Dear *Real Change*,

Homelessness must be eliminated! Let us all repeat that to each other until it is achieved.

Compassion, hope, action. The right to have housing is a concept understood in any principled society and by international law. The dignity of humanity is expressed by the principal of honorable governance. Honorable governance would recognize on behalf of its people that the right to shelter is a basic human right.

Tenants have formed grassroots, democratic unions for exercising their right to inform and act for their habitation and amenities building by building, by large regions and national bodies, and by international associations of the World Social Forum and the International Union of Tenants we have gained NGO status with the UN. We are unified in our general efforts and expressive actions to end homelessness by establishing policies to promote an affordable, healthy, secure, environmentally sound sanctuary of home. A safe and secure home is the foundation point for individuals, families, and their social and economic resources.

The displacement of low-income people is catastrophic both nationally and internationally. We must be alert to stop housing loss by calling international attention to violations of law, including principles of international agreement, in solidarity with the suffering, weak, ill, aged, and disabled.

It is the duty of citizens, especially of the homeless and those in danger of being homeless, to respond to manipulative statements and unjust political actions, behavior that dismisses basic human needs, and the desperate appeals of those endangered by harsh political decisions. Raw abuse of the right to housing requires a closer examination of the actions, processes, and deficiencies, especially at the local level, that set the bias of those in power to favor the wealthy.

It is shameful for Seattle to have the misfortune to be governed by uncertainties or deficiencies in public policy that cause or contribute to suffering and despair. Why and how has there come to be such a disconnect between the needs of the vulnerable and the city administration? Granting tax relief to corporations like Nucor Steel and at the same time claiming that the city budget required the elimination of \$348,000 in support of the programs sustaining the safety net for the poor ["City Budget: a lose-lose," April 1].

How and when did we begin to accept the callous dismissal of community responsibility by elected officials? What would prompt the acceptance and use of public funds for the benefit of the wealthy while condemning the poor to a reduction in basic support?

Should the City Council sustain the propriety and financial institutions while throwing aside the minimal efforts of social support and development of people? Should the general population shoulder an ever-greater share of the tax burden because of the limited vision, pride, vanity, and greed common to both developers and politicians?

Why is there no public outcry against such constant, blatant, manipulation of tax revenues and budget items on behalf of the wealthy? Will Seattleites accept incompetent responses to homelessness and deprivation so the established will not be deprived of good investments — that Seattle taxpayers will also underwrite?

Can we shed ourselves of people who sit on their hands devoid of leadership skills, honor and/or intelligence when faced with human misery? Or should our citizens accept the imposed budget cuts, and dutifully sit on their hands, shamefaced in Seattle?

Vern Zhuelsdorff
TU Board, Vice President
National Alliance of HUD Tenants
Board, Chair International Tenants Rights Committee
Seattle

Change

Puget Sound's Voice of the
Poor and Homeless

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Mission Statement:
Real Change exists to create opportunity and a voice for low-income people while taking action to end homelessness and poverty.

Goals
Provide a foundation for grassroots organizing.
Publish the views of marginalized communities.
Create direct economic opportunity. Build bridges with a broad range of allies in the struggle against poverty.

The *Real Change Homeless Empowerment Project* is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Programs include the *Real Change* newspaper, the *StreetWrites* peer support group for homeless writers, the *Homeless Speakers Bureau*, and the *First things First* organizing project. All donations support these programs and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

Editorial Policy
Articles appearing in *Real Change* reflect the opinions and perspectives of the authors. We encourage the submission of journalism, opinion, fiction, poetry, and artwork, and hope to create a forum where the many perspectives on poverty and homelessness can find expression. *Real Change* reserves the right to edit any material for length and style. Articles considered libelous or which encourage violence, sexism, homophobia, or racism will not be considered for publication.

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Criminal Negligence

King County Jail stuffs the mentally ill away, then dumps them back to the streets

By Joe Martin

A little noted crisis is stuffed away in the King County Jail, where 100 or so mentally ill inmates are warehoused daily in disgraceful conditions.

Clearly, the entire "prison industrial complex" of the U.S. is a disaster in which those prisoners who suffer from myriad psychiatric disorders are ignored, mistreated, misunderstood, and practically forgotten. The scene at the King County Jail (KCJ) is simply our own local manifestation of this hidden atrocity. What are mentally ill people doing in our jails and prisons? Why aren't they in hospitals and treatment facilities where proper care can be humanely administered?

Rev. Craig Rennebohm has been serving as chaplain to the mentally ill on Seattle's streets for almost 20 years. The mounting stories of neglect that he's been told are making him increasingly alarmed.

"One of the mentally ill folks I know reported that he was alone in a cell for 23 out of 24 hours a day," Rennebohm says. "The plumbing didn't work for four days. He observed a person in another cell, lying naked in his own waste."

"A mute, homeless, profoundly paranoid person was arrested in a park. The person spent a month in jail, was found guilty of trespassing, then released to the street. Now, he's more frightened, and he's still homeless and without psychiatric care."

Hundreds of troubled individuals cycle repeatedly from the jail to the street and then back to the jail. Their crimes are mostly nonviolent misdemeanors, with "criminal trespass" topping the list of violations. Most are not dangerous, yet some are literally swept into an isolated cell and forgotten. Last year, a person who suffers from a psychotic disorder was incarcerated 20 times and spent a total of nine months in jail for multiple misdemeanors. Repeated imprisonment has ensured this individual's deterioration.

Mentally ill inmates are in the care of correctional officers who have little or no mental health training. The paucity of adequate supervision is exacerbated by the jail's reduction in psychiatric nursing positions. Two nurses have been cut recently from both the day and evening shifts; one has been cut from the night shift. Sometimes no psych nurse is on duty. The Public Health Department does not provide coverage for a nurse absent due to illness or a related emergency.

In this environment, treatment is impossible. The most the jail staff can offer is medication, yet severely disturbed inmates tend to refuse meds. To make matters worse, the jail's protective housing unit, which provided asylum to about 40 especially vulnerable inmates, was dismantled in August.

Twenty-five years ago, the flawed policy of deinstitutionalization spilled the mentally ill onto Seattle's downtown streets. Skid Road denizens wondered where all these new arrivals were coming from. Simultaneously, psychiatrically disabled prisoners were crowding the jail. At the time, a young psychiatrist at the jail called the press, so upset was he at the plight of these troubled inmates. It was a shocking story. But, in the intervening years, little has changed. People who need hospitals or comprehensive community-based programs are still rotting in jail or on the streets, and in record numbers.

Rennebohm states: "Punishment does not heal a broken brain. We need a proactive, universal, public health care approach. We need assertive outreach, ready access to treatment, and housing. Our current system is horribly flawed. Disabled people can't navigate it. Will concerned citizens and elected officials find the political will to provide treatment and housing to those with profound brain disorders?"

Last October, Human Rights Watch published a scathing report — "Ill Equipped: U.S. Prisons and Offenders with Mental Illness" — which stated that as many as 300,000 persons in this nation's prisons suffer from psychiatric disorders. Jamie Fellner, co-author of the study, echoes Rennebohm's concerns: "Unless you are wealthy, it can be next to impossible to receive mental health services in the community. Many prisoners might never have ended up behind bars if publicly funded treatment had been available."

"The Public Health Department is neglecting one of the County's most vulnerable populations," says a jail employee who preferred to remain anonymous. Such oversight can only "contribute to further abuse and broader societal endangerment."

Will the mentally ill be persecuted and mistreated for another 25 years? The Public Health Department of Seattle and King County is responsible for the care of mentally ill inmates in the KCJ. What do they and the officials at the jail have to say about this despicable state of affairs? ■

Twenty-five years after the flawed policy of deinstitutionalization spilled the mentally ill onto Seattle's downtown streets, little has changed.



Inside:

Opinion

Criminal Negligence: The fallout from a failed policy
by Joe Martin 3

Features

News You Can Use: Another Tent City?; Tenants Union hunkers down; SPD misconduct meetings
by Adam Holdorf, Breeana Laughlin 4

Adventures in Poetry: The bomb up Rumsfeld's ass.
with Dr. Wes Browning 6

Street Watch
by Emma Quinn 12

Street Talk: Should felons vote?
by Matt Nucci 14

Out of Reach: Debt, Prison, and voting rights for felons
by Chris LaRoche 1

Signs of Life: The art of the last meal
by Kara Hoppe 9

The Man From the Outside: Prison activist Rev. Jon Nelson
by Kaye Allard 11

Hidden Horrors: *Prison Nation* reveals life on the inside
by Heidi Dietrich 13

Calendar
compiled by Sandra Enger 15

News

Miscarriage of Justice: indigent defendants outsourced to Yakima
by Polly Keary 5

North American Newsbriefs
by Patty Lane 5

Interviews

Steve Kittel: Punished and punished again
by Chris LaRoche 10

Esther Flowers: The wrong cure for the wrong problem
by Chris LaRoche 11

Poetry

Insights and surprises from Nohae Park, David Thornbrugh, Earle Thompson, David Sparenburg, Crysta Casey 6-7

Activism

Citizens Participation Project 16

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4/15/04

Another Tent City?

A new tent city will begin May 6 in suburban King County, says the homeless activist organization SHARE/WHEEL.

The group, which operates shelters and oversees the current camp Tent City3, wants to locate "Tent City4" in county-owned parkland. Tent City3 operates under a legal agreement with the City of Seattle, allowing it to stay on privately owned land.

No such agreement exists with King County government, however. County residents who live near parks and government officials have not approved a plan. But Ron Sims, who vetoed a proposed study of the idea earlier this year, is playing ball. Sims' staff is searching for alternative county-owned property — not a park — to be used as a tent camp.

"It's against county code to camp in a park," says Sims spokeswoman Elaine Kraft. "But we own lots and lots of properties, and our staff are doing research to find something that meets their criteria." The group wants a parcel at least 14,400 square feet in size, within half a mile of a Metro bus stop. The county executive will have a list of sites by the end of April.

SHARE/WHEEL pledges to make Tent City4 a reality, with or without Sims' help. Supporters of the idea have said they are willing to get arrested in the attempt to establish the new camp.

Last year, County Councilmember Jane Hague pushed for a study on the feasibility of locating a tent camp in a county park. Hague met with supporters of the Tent City, who offered to provide maintenance services in return for staying on the land. It would be a natural quid pro quo: some county parks have ceased their trash pick-up and janitorial services because of budget cut-backs.

Though the King County Council endorsed such a study, County Executive Ron Sims vetoed it. Sims spokeswoman Elaine Kraft says that Sims prefers "affordable housing and shelters that are permanent. However, if these things are going to be, we might as well work with people."

D'Ane Davis says a tent camp "is not a perfect solution. But if your option is that or being separated from your family, or if your choice is between a tent or not a tent, who would choose a park bench over a tent?"

Davis, who is volunteering for the Tent City4 effort, has personally witnessed the homeless face of the suburbs. She said she was an "Eastside housewife" before becoming homeless and living in her car. During the day, she recalls, people with nowhere else to go would visit a King County library branch. Davis now stays at a downtown Seattle shelter. To her, a suburban Tent City makes good sense: "More and more people are homeless in outlying areas."

The October 2003 One Night Count of people sleeping outside found 73 people homeless in Kent and 24 in Shoreline.

—Adam Holdorf

The OPA: needs improvement

Issues concerning abuse of power are historically difficult to deal with, especially when the abuse comes from those charged with protecting citizens. The Seattle Police Department attempts to address the issue of police misconduct through the Office of Professional Accountability (OPA).

The OPA held a community forum Thursday, April 1, to tell citizens how to file police misconduct complaints. Citizens who claimed they had been victims or witnesses of police misconduct openly voiced their frustration. Sam Pailca, OPA director, led the discussion. Pailca, other OPA spokespersons, and citizen participants agreed that the current process of handling police-misconduct complaints needs improvement.

Even so, Pailca noted, "I wouldn't do this job if I didn't think it added value to the process."

A citizen auditor makes suggestions about how an investigation is carried out. A review board watches for trends in complaint decisions. Their findings help assess how well the system is working.

Citizens are concerned that police officers, who still investigate misconduct complaints, may be reluctant to point the finger at their coworkers.

But Pailca said, "There are some things that internal members can do better and more efficiently."

The OPA publishes police-misconduct complaints and findings on the Internet. When a complaint first comes in, the office makes a decision as to at what level it should be investigated.

"Most are low-level, minor issues that can be resolved," Pailca told the audience. All related documents are gathered and filed, and complainants are interviewed. Then, members of the police department investigate the case and give a recommendation.



Pailca said during the past three years, 12 to 15 percent of complaints were found to be valid. This is higher than the national average.

"Officers have a tremendous amount of discretion," Pailca said, "Sometimes what citizens may be talking about is something that is lawful but that they would like to change."

Forum participant Susan Harmon wanted to know if witnesses are entitled to make complaints. She said she saw two officers bang a boy's head up against a car door. Harmon was outraged, but after talking to the boy she found he was too afraid of police to file a complaint.

Both victims and witnesses of police misconduct can file complaints. Anonymous complaints are accepted. Investigations are usually resolved within 60 days. Complainants will be notified and given a brief explanation of the finding.

The next community forum is not yet scheduled. Updates are posted on the OPA's website; go to <http://cityofseattle.net/police/opa/>.

—Breeana Laughlin

Laughlin is a student in the University of Washington School of Communications News Laboratory.

Sorry, come back later

The Tenants Union of Washington lost out on \$72,000 in city funding on March 29, and that meant that Friday, April 2, was the last day for some important immediate-care tenant counseling.

The agency's office in the Rainier Valley no longer offers help on a walk-in basis; instead, renters in trouble will need to make an appointment for Mondays from 3 to 6 p.m. or Thursdays from 9 a.m. to noon. The agency will also reduce the number of evening workshops it holds in tenants' apartments. TU director Siobhan Ring expects the agency will assist 100 people over the tenants' hotline and 50 people through in-person appointments. That's half the number they served before this cut. "We're managing to serve half the people, even though our budget was cut by 70 percent," she says.

In an April 12 press release, the TU detailed the problems of people who came by on the final day of walk-in services. Among the visitors: an African American mother facing eviction, who learned how to put together a legal defense; a young Latino man living in substandard and dangerous conditions, who wrote a letter to his landlord; and a disabled man facing a rent increase



HANGIN' TOUGH: TENANTS UNION STAFF WEATHER CITY BUDGET CUTS. PHOTO BY KEN DEAN.

in his subsidized apartment which his landlord claimed was retroactive.

Staff are all working fewer hours; one who had worked 30 hours a week is now down to just nine. Ring says several staff will have to find work elsewhere to make ends meet. Still, they're staying.

"The whole staff has shown an extraordinary level of commitment to the organization and extraordinary good will," she says. "If there's a silver lining, it's that this has demonstrated the depth of the community's support and the strength that brings to the organization."

—Adam Holdorf

Do you have any stories we should look into? Call Adam at 441-3247 ext. 207, and just maybe we will.

Miscarriage of Justice

Seattle's indigent defendants must now prepare for court from Yakima, 145 miles away

by Polly Keary

Although public defenders and civil rights activists spoke out against sending people accused of misdemeanors to Yakima to await trial, the Seattle City Council on March 29 overruled them in hopes of easing the city's budget woes and preparing for a coming shortage of jail beds for those accused or convicted of non-felony crimes.

Jailing people in Yakima is cheaper than in King County. When a Seattle resident is jailed for a misdemeanor such as shoplifting, loitering or DUI, the King County jail bills the city. A King County jail bed costs about \$31,700 per year. A jail bed in Yakima costs about \$22,600 per year. In 2000, the council signed a ten-year lease on 155 jail beds in Yakima, promising that those beds would never be used for people who had not yet been found guilty, according to Councilmember Peter Steinbrueck.

Last year only about half the beds were used. Faced with a lingering budget shortfall and a coming shortage of jail space as King County phases out non-felony use of its jail, the council changed its mind, expecting to save the city about \$1 million per year.

Many attorneys worry that they will have a much harder time developing defenses for their clients, who, starting May 1, may be held several hours away.

"The decision was made solely on budget concerns; the needs of the defendants, defense attorneys and the community were given little weight," says Anne Harper, head of the Office of the Public Defender.

Face-to-face contact between a defendant and an attorney will only occur when either the attorney (unlikely, given current case loads) or the defendant (in shackles on a bus) makes the

300-mile round trip. Thus, most contact will occur over video or cell phones provided by the Yakima jail.

"If there are documents I need to go over — police reports, witness statements — I can't do that over a little tiny video link," says Amanda Lee, vice president of the Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. According to a fact sheet prepared by the Defender Association, the Northwest Defender Association and the Associated Council for the Accused, it is not possible to view the contents of documents over the small screen of a video link, the cell phones are actually rarely available, and guards can listen in on defendants' conversations, compromising attorney-client privilege.

Furthermore, all defendants have a right to be present at all hearings, but since any appearance in court will involve about eight hours spent in shackles aboard a bus, attorneys fear that many clients will waive their right to be present.

City Council Budget Chair Richard McIver, however, supports the legislation. "I believe the issues can and are being mitigated," he says. "On 24 hours' notice we are able to bring somebody back to a cell in King County. It's my understanding that public defenders don't even meet with their clients until a week before trial. People will probably be held about 30 days. They'll be here for a week, then moved over to Yakima [for two weeks] and brought back a week before trial."

It is a sad but unavoidable part of the

criminal justice system that, although a defendant is presumed innocent, the experience of being held prior to trial is at the least unpleasant. Transfer to Yakima would certainly worsen the experience. This is even sadder when the defendant is found to be innocent.

"Many will never be found guilty of anything," says Kim Gordon, Misdemeanor Division supervisor for Seattle Municipal Court. "But they will have suffered being sent there, away from access to the community that they're from."

Contact between detainees and their families will become more difficult and expensive.

"You know all these people are poor folks. No one in their families can afford to make these trips," Lee says. "If there's any contact at all, it's by video phone on this four-inch screen." Video visitation is currently offered to fami-

"Many will never be found guilty of anything, but they will have suffered being sent there, away from the community that they're from."

— Kim Gordon, Misdemeanor Division supervisor for Seattle Municipal Court

lies only two days a week.

People held in jail can only call their families collect. A 15-minute collect call to a Seattle number from the King County jail costs \$2. The same call from Yakima costs \$20.

Jail conditions for pretrial detainees may be worse than for those who are serving time after a conviction. Detainees are held in a part of the Yakima County Jail called the "Annex." According to the Defenders' fact sheet, when attorneys and city officials recently toured the Annex, it appeared "filthy" and "far more crowded than any other facility in Yakima." Inmates describe it as "a jungle" and "the worst place on earth."

It is more than a tight budget that is causing city officials to look for alternative housing for offenders and defendants. King County "wants to get out

of the jail business," says Kathryn Harper, public information officer for the Seattle City Attorney's Office. Within three years, Seattle must radically reduce the number of people housed in King County jails, she says.

"By 2012, we're supposed to be out of the county jail entirely," McIver says. "They'll need it for felons." Ultimately, he says, Seattle will have to build new jails or house its misdemeanants in places such as Yakima.

"The city has no plans to build a jail," Kathryn Harper says. "I don't think Ballard wants a jail. I don't think Capitol Hill wants a jail. We're going to have to find another municipality south or north where we can house pre-sentence offenders. Some people, for mental health or other health reasons, can't be sent out of the county. What are we going to do with them?"

Many people, including Steinbrueck and Kathryn Harper, feel that the city needs to find a means other than incarceration to deal with some defendants.

"Everyone knows that most misdemeanants aren't in jail because they are criminals," Kathryn Harper says, "but because they have mental health or drug addiction issues."

Seattle spends nearly \$500,000 a year on booking people into jail who are released within one to two days without bail. The Seattle Police Department is currently looking for ways to reduce such unnecessary bookings. House arrest and deferred prosecution are other measures that have been proposed as alternatives to jail before trial.

Yet Kathryn Harper says it's important to note that people who are held on bail for misdemeanors, about 150 per month, are held because the judge feels that they are likely to reoffend or will flee the area because they have no home address. "Some people need to be in jail," she says.

Moving pretrial detainees to Yakima, though, may face legal challenge.

"There are potential legal problems with separating prisoners by hours from their attorneys," says Steinbrueck, who voted against the legislation.

"You just can't do this. It's not fair. I think it's unconstitutional," Lee says. "I think there will be litigation." ■



NORTH AMERICAN NEWSBRIEFS

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An Ohio woman is taking on a tremendous journey one step at a time. Kim Denmark is **walking across America** to draw attention to welfare reform and the plight of the homeless. During her journey she hopes to gather enough signatures to get her on the floor of Congress, where she wants

to present one million signatures to ask for welfare and other reforms. "I want it to come to the top of the agenda, not the bottom," she tells the *Athens Banner Herald*. She puts in about **10 miles a day** to reach her goal of 2,704 miles during her 52-month trek. She wears an orange jumpsuit scrawled with signatures of those she's met along the way. On the road she eats and sleeps at the mercy of volunteers and communities who have given her support throughout her trip.

On April 8, Detroit police dispatched bulldozers to destroy a shack that had been the home of Ralph Thomas, 56, for more than **10 years**. Thomas, 56, had an hour to gather what belongings he could from the shanty he built out of plywood, blankets, and tires on a vacant lot. "This **breaks my heart**," neighbor Eloise Nash told the *Detroit Free Press*. "Where is he going to go?" Over the years, Thomas had turned his shack into four clean and tidy rooms

with a wood-burning stove for food and warmth and a laundry system with a clothesline. Although his home is gone, Thomas says he's all right, and he has a place to keep his possessions. An outreach coordinator for an organization that assists elderly people in southwest Detroit brought Thomas some sandwiches, clothes and an invitation to a homeless shelter. "He may qualify for some additional financial support," says David Esterbrook of Bridging Communities. "We'd like to talk to him about some long-term options."

Two men are facing charges after a **brutal attack** on a homeless man in Louisville, Kentucky. Police tell WAVE-3 News that Clifton Dale Agnew, 53, was sleeping in an alley behind a Salvation Army shelter when two men attacked him. After punching, kicking, and beating Agnew with a trash can and a crockpot, the men then allegedly stripped the homeless man of his clothes and sodomized him with sticks, boards, and bottles. He was then stabbed repeatedly. Agnew suffered head trauma, broken ribs, and a lacerated colon and rectum. At one point his injuries appeared so severe that investigators were preparing murder charges. His condition is improving and he remains hospitalized. Friends of the victim say he posed no threat to anyone. The shelter's director is calling for more to be done to protect the homeless. "That's the reason we need the Salvation Army and other overnight shelters," says Brenda Mattingly. She hopes the community shares the outrage she feels. "We feel everybody here is an asset to our community and are worthwhile people. We don't see a dividing line as to who should be protected and who shouldn't."

Newsbriefs by Patty Lane

Poetry opposes the war

Oh Bush, in America the beautiful,
A poet must speak to you honestly.

Poetry opposes the war
The flowers oppose the war
The birds oppose the war
The children oppose the war
Mothers oppose the war.

A poet must write of the shouts rising simultaneously
In villages all over the earth.

Lovers embracing oppose the war
Our sons in the army oppose the war
The teddy bears of dead little girls, the stones,
The oil in the earth, the mountains, the fields, even the sky
Everything living on this earth opposes the war.

Oh Bush, in America the beautiful,
Our diligent and gentle friends in America.

Let's carry flowers not guns
Let's wear pyjamas not uniforms
Let's make love not war
Let's ride bicycles not tanks
Let's set off fireworks not bombs

Friends, awaiting news of the flowers on the spring breeze,
Friends, who want to share a peaceful meal.
Let's all hold candles
And oppose the dark war.
Let's hold the hand of an innocent child
And the hands of lovers and friends
And oppose the bloody war.

—NOHAE PARK



I Pledge Allegiance

The country that I grew up loving no longer exists.
Maybe it died with JFK in the backseat of the Lincoln
in Dallas or in the ditch at My Lai.
Maybe it died on the motel balcony with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
All I know is that yesterday when asked to pledge allegiance
I couldn't. The fake gilt eagle atop the staff looked predatory,
steroid stiffened, not regal at all.
Every execution means that the fools who orchestra
our national anthem have wet the bed again.
I don't even know if I want to, or can, love a country, an abstraction.
I love people, my wife, my family, a few friends.
I pledge allegiance to clean air, pure water,
flocks of birds flurrying into a tree,
to lovers embracing at bus stops and the baby I saw
in a shopping cart strapped in with a belt of bananas.
I pledge allegiance to the struggle to make art
and the effort to improve the world,
none of which I felt contained in the red white and blue
patterns of that fabric hanging limp on its pole at the front of the auditorium,
so I just stood with my arms at my side listening to my heart
go thump, thump, thump.

—DAVID THORNBRUGH

Adventures in Poetry with ©Dr. Wes Browning



As you may have already noticed, we here at *Real Change* can't let an April Fools' Day go by without writing some April Fools Day appropriate nonsense. Our sad, frail egos are slightly stoked every year when we hear rumors of some of you being taken in even though our Managing Spoilsport always prints warnings to protect the truth.

But the real news outdid us all this year. Our little fib about the guy arrested for pushing a refrigerator down a street pales in comparison to, say, the story from Fort Meyers, Florida, about the plane searched because a psychic intuited that a bomb was on board.

As a spokesperson for the Transportation Security Administration said, "In these times, we can't ignore anything." That's right, we can't ignore anything that might warn us of terrorism. Psychics, entrails, evil stars, voices in our heads: they all can be put to service defending our great nation from stupid terrorists. We need warnings! Everybody call and warn the government about bombs anywhere you think they might be. Somebody call the White House and tell them Rumsfeld has a bomb up his ass.

Then we heard about British novelist Ian McEwan's difficulties getting in to this country. McEwan wanted to fly in from Vancouver, B.C., and made the mistake of telling our border guys that he would be giving paid speeches in our country. They actually told him that amounted to coming to the U.S. to earn money to "practice his lifestyle." I have no idea what they thought his lifestyle was, apart from novelist.

Speaking of April Fools, McEwan fooled a lot of people a few years ago with a phony psychiatric case report in an appendix to one of his novels. It was so convincing some psychiatrists quoted it and some critics dismissed the novel as merely an elaboration on a real case. Way to go, Ian!

So, anyway, it used to be that British novelists on speaking tours were given visa waivers at our borders, but Homeland Security officials now say

that we have got to be vigilant so that we "don't have another 9-11." You never know when a British novelist might crash himself into a skyscraper on his way to giving a talk at Benaroya Hall.

Our favorite part of this story is the part where, in one of three interrogations he endured, McEwan was asked whether he wrote fiction novels or non-fiction novels. Everybody has read this as evidence that our immigration officials have the combined IQ of a seedless grape, but I like to give them the benefit of the doubt. Maybe the questioner was thinking: If he answers "non-fiction," that'll prove he's a fake for sure, it will.

Finally McEwan was let into this country. The reason given to allow him in was (this is really true) "this is attracting a lot of unfavorable publicity."

So here's the deal. If you are a suspected British novelist slash potential-terrorist slash lifestyle-offender trying to get into the U.S., and our border guys want to keep you out, just call all the newspapers on the West Coast and make a big stink about it. Our guys will whine about what a threat you are, but they'll let you in because otherwise they'd look bad, even though they are sure you will whack us all with your books!

I've saved the biggest April Fool of the year for last. Every major newspaper in the country was fooled by the story from Fallujah about the four "civilian contractors" who were killed and whose bodies were mutilated and dragged through the streets. Pretty brutal stuff to be doing to innocent "civilian contractors."

But just three days later a squad of "commandos" from a private security company were reported repulsing a raid on U.S. Headquarters in Najaf. The "commandos" were working for the same company as the four in Fallujah.

So what were they, "commandos" or "civilian contractors"? Answer: both! They were mercenaries! They were fully armed mercenaries in military-style uniforms playing soldier of fortune in what is, let's face it, a war zone.

Look out: the April Fools' bar has been set very high for next year. ■



Self-Portrait

A self-portrait hangs
above him, sleeping
restlessly on the mattress.
His legs kick like a horse's
pawing the dirt, clump, clump,
tangled in a blue quilt.
In the portrait, his face orange,
the background purple;
the complimentary colors
of a sunset in Vietnam,
but the eyes, the eyes
(and the heart he painted
black below the left breast)
the eyes suffer the sorrow
of a drafted man
who didn't want to kill
and later met the refugees;
strung electric wire
for the relations of those
he bombed. His legs run away
with his dreams, tangled
in the blue quilt of night.

I woke once to my husband,
bare ass naked on all fours
pawing the wood floor
with his bowie knife.
I called him
out of sleep. He fought
the dreamed enemy
and later, when fully awake
committed suicide.
My lover's eyes
closed tonight
beneath blankets,
and though he is not at peace
I will let him sleep.

—CRYSTA CASEY

Urban Romance

Typing this—it is discordant at four a.m.,
it echoes in the studio apartment;
I had placed my manual typewriter on the ledge
separating the kitchen and living room.

I study the angles of her face
once she told me of a blue morning
a heron along the shores of the Yakima River
she lay on her side
my fingertips feel gooseflesh on her skin
I taste her nectarine breasts
and listen to her heart—
breathing
as dawn filters through the room
and she will sleep till mid
morning.

Before we met she related:
"As I waited to be asked to dance,
dancing the cumbia is fun,
and drank a Negra Modelo..."
I asked her if she wanted to dance
and the only dance I knew
I learned in Indian boarding school
a Navajo girl taught me
the Tennessee Waltz
no, she laughingly answered,
deciding to braid my hair
and then we slow danced.

This morning I rub my eyes
Looking out my window I'm, momentarily, lost
among green, orange and yellow
maple leaves as they shiver in November
and seagull scars the
skyline of denuded trees, Seattle rain
and glossy buildings.

I didn't see her naked
until we made love
and she sat at the desk smoking a cigarette,
crossing elegant long legs
and I noticed a tattoo on her ankle.

Again her outline reminds me of a grey
mausoleum
angel.
Rain creates patterns on plexiglass window
and her perspiration
is the wet
earth.
She went home. I tried to reel
in the soft curve of her exit
like a fishing line unzipping the water.
And I don't even have her picture
except these words.

—EARLE THOMPSON

I am Worth

When the first rays of the dawn of
day
touch the rocky coast
of the Atlantic seaboard,
I will be there like a whisper
in the long lines of the unem-
ployed.

When the heat of the sun
in the middle of day
drops like a blanket of splinters
over broad midlands, old Indian
lands
rich with wheat and corn,
I will be there like a murmur
in the ranks of the working poor.

When the last of the sun
at the end of day
bids farewell to the long Pacific
shore,
setting under clouds over turgid
waters,
I will be there as a voice
in the lines of the unemployed.

Look at me: I am dignity. I am
people.
What I seek is work and not
poverty.
What I want is peace and not war.
Give me opportunity and equality,
not rhetorical terms.
Offer to me, with a friendly hand,
the action of honesty,
not the concessions of squalor.

I am not
statistics. I am not charts.
Look at me!
I am dignity. I am humanity.
I am worth.

—DAVID SPARENBERG

FELONS, Continued from Page 1

Department of Corrections "hadn't contacted me in over seven years to tell me that I still owed \$100."

Eighteen states have felon disenfranchisement laws, which started springing up in the 1800s to effectively prevent African Americans from voting. The law serves its purpose in Washington, where compounded with disproportionate incarceration rates, 25 percent of African American males can't vote. Nationally, the figure is 13 percent.

The advocacy group Demos (www.demos-usa.org) has issued "report cards" grading each state on how well they re-enfranchise ex-felons. Maine and Vermont receive an A-plus for "never stripping away voting rights due to felony convictions," according to Demos' report card. Washington and 12 others get an "F" for effectively taking away voting rights for life, either outright stating that "voting rights may not be restored," or requiring a "pardon from Governor" or a complex appeal process.

Florida is still at the extreme end of the spectrum for the infamous "voter purge" of 2000. Then-Secretary of State (and current Congresswoman) Katherine Harris systematically distorted Florida's disenfranchisement laws to illegally deny up to 94,000 people the right to vote. Muckraking journalist Greg Palast wrote in *Salon.com* that, as of November 2002, those people were still prohibited from voting. No word yet if those lists will be rectified by November 2004.

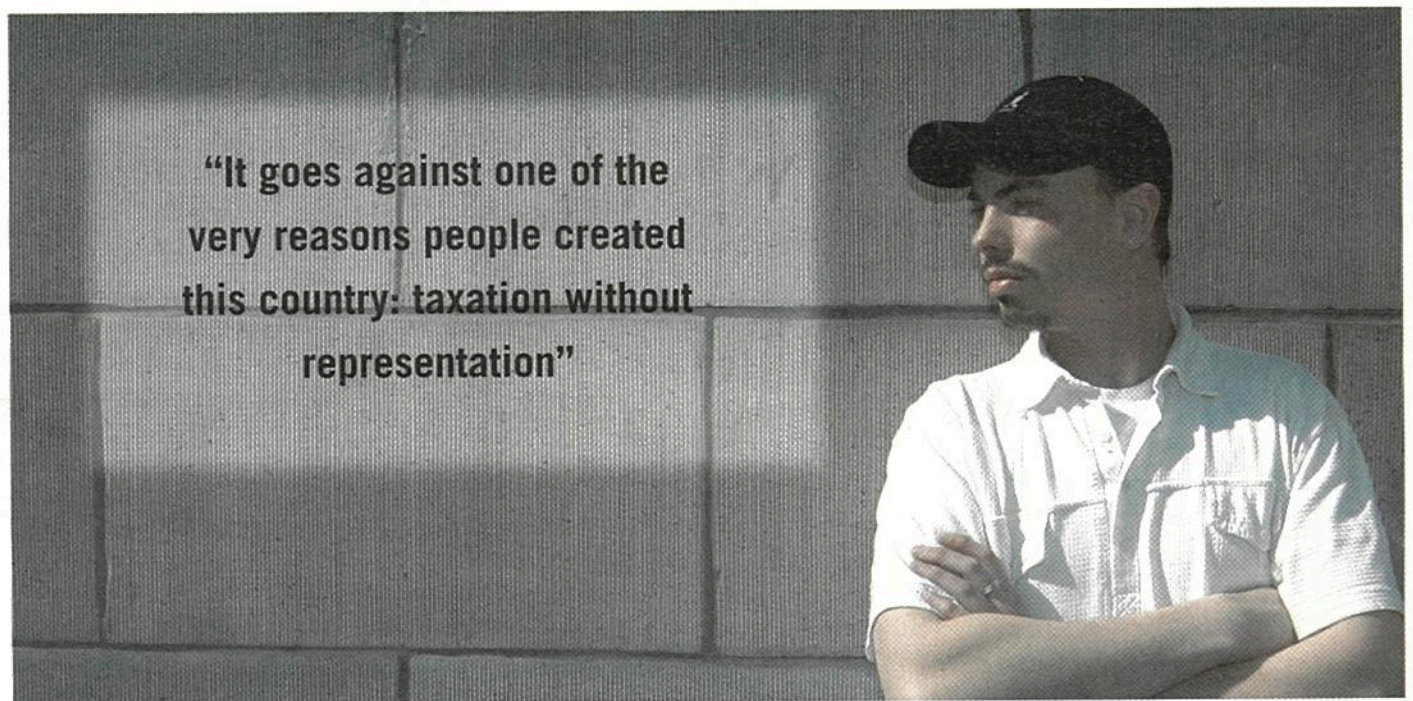
Nationally, state governments are softening their disenfranchisement laws. Connecticut, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania all recently passed legislation relaxing, or abolishing, disenfranchisement laws, and several others are moving to change their policies.

In Washington, according to Nakagawa, "state legislatures have the power to abandon the law restricting ex-felons from voting completely. The governor can issue an executive order. But politicians are often unwilling to act because they don't generally feel a high level of accountability to the communities most affected by these restrictions — such as poor people and people of color, especially African Americans."

In the meantime, a lawsuit (*Farrakhan vs. State of Washington*) challenging the disenfranchisement law has been bouncing around the courts. And the ACLU along with the League of Women Voters and the NAACP have drafted House Bill 2054, which would grant voting rights to ex-felons regardless of their debts. Although the bill died in committee in February, supporters plan to try again in the 2005 session.

Until that happens, "people need to simply talk about the laws, because few people know what they are," says Genevieve Aguilar of the ACLU, which is looking for ex-felons to challenge the law in court. "That and call their legislators and tell them to change these laws."

Next time someone tells you, "I can't vote, I'm an ex-felon," have them call the ACLU at 206-624-2184. ■



"It goes against one of the very reasons people created this country: taxation without representation"

Debtors Prison

Felons pay for their crime, and then they pay again

Steve Kittel is a 26-year-old student at Bellevue Community College, an intern at the American Civil Liberties Union, and an ex-felon.

Real Change: Tell us about your past.

Steve Kittel: I committed my crime, robbery in the first degree, armed, on September 9, 1997. I was 19 years old. I was convicted in November of 1998 and sentenced to 41 months in the penal institutions of Washington. I turned myself in January 11, 1999, and did 28 months out of those 41 for being a good boy. I went to work release in November of 2000 on 21st and Madison and was finally released on April 3, 2001. I'm 26 now, so it's been seven years.

Nowhere between the A of conviction and the B of release was I ever given or shown or even heard of any literature that would educate me on how to go about getting back my civil rights. Actually, I couldn't find any literature as to what civil rights I had lost. I knew I had lost my rights to own a gun because the judge specifically said that in my sentencing, but I didn't know about the restriction on travel until my exit interview when they told me: "Do not enter Canada." I don't even know how to get my passport back.

I got slapped with about \$2,600 in fines in addition to the sentence. I've paid off \$1000. That \$1,600 is literally preventing me from getting my civil rights restored. It goes against one of the very reasons people created this country: taxation without representation.

My fines are meager in comparison to a lot of my friends, who get out with \$30,000 or even hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines. How do they ever receive credit again? How do they get housing?

When you get out of prison, and society wants you to NOT commit another crime — obviously, but I think society needs to be more enabling in order to be successful in that. I'm not saying they should hold my hand, but it's difficult having a felony conviction on my record. It will never wash. When

I get pulled over when I'm 55, I'm still going to have to explain to an officer why I have a felony conviction from when I was 19.

These are all mistakes brought on by the felon, sure, but at the same time someone's got to give you a hand to get out of the hole that you're in sooner or later, or you're just going to dig yourself in deeper and deeper.

I don't think it's the enabling of society, I think it's more of a scarlet letter than helpful. A mistake that I made when I was 19 I will literally pay for for the rest of my life.

RC: What's up on 21st and Madison?

Kittel: Work release, a state-owned facility that's run by a private company, which is a miniature version of the Department of Corrections. They give you a job and pay minimum wage. You live in the house, you're assigned a bed, you check out to go to work. You don't see a dime of your paycheck; it goes to your state account.

RC: I can't imagine getting out of prison and ending up there, in the middle of a major drug zone.

Kittel: What's weird is that the day you get there, they give you a \$40 check and they send you to the bank to cash it,

Continued on page 10

These are all mistakes brought on by the felon, sure, but at the same time someone's got to give you a hand to get out of the hole that you're in sooner or later, or you're just going to dig yourself in deeper and deeper.

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Signs of Life

Artist Julie Green records the intimate last requests of Death Row inmates

By Kara Hoppe

The emotional depth of Julie Green's "The Last Supper" is hidden under some familiar images: dinner, painted on simple white ceramic plates.

Viewing the 185 plates with 185 various dinners stacked side by side covering a wall, one feels initial comfort looking at the dinners. Good food is enjoyed by all. One that catches my eye is a traditional American meal: steak, potatoes, corn on the cob, and a glass of ice tea, with a slice of cherry pie for dessert. But there is no comfort to be found in this meal. It is not just a traditional American meal; this is the last request of an American death row prisoner.

The dinner plates are 185 different last suppers blanketing a blank wall representing 185 American prisoners executed on death row since the Supreme Court reauthorized capital punishment in 1976. They are the first and last choices these men and one woman were allowed after serving an average of 10 years and seven months on death row before their last appeal was denied. Statistically, 14 of these plates should not have been painted; statistically, 14 of these prisoners did not belong on death row because they were innocent.

Green, an art professor at Oregon State University, started this continually evolving body of work after reading of an execution in an Oklahoma newspaper.

The execution was described in stark simplicity. "He asked for a final meal of three fried chicken thighs, 10 or 15 shrimp, tater tots with ketchup, two slices of pecan pie, strawberry ice cream, honey and biscuits, and a Coke. His right foot, clad in a blue slipper, shook nervously after officials began administering the drugs at 12:09 a.m., [he] blinked three times and let out a breath through puffed cheeks. His foot stopped shaking. His eyes slowly dimmed, became glassy, and closed to a crescent."

Disturbed by the impersonal language of the report, and curious about the detail paid to his last meal, Green began to collect menus and record their contents by means of her art. The collection will grow as executions continue.

Since food is universal, the exhibition has a powerful chilling effect. These were real people's last suppers.

Questions immediately pop into one's head: What would I eat for my last meal? Why is one granted a last meal request? What do these meals say about their lives? And ultimately what does capital punishment mean in the United States? Julie Green's work in "The Last Supper" provokes a reaction and provides a forum to discuss the answers to these questions and pose more questions regarding capital punishment.

Mounted together, the plates humanize these prisoners. The plates are stacked like bricks against the wall, and each one tells a different story using food as a medium. They all share a light prison-blue color, but they are different sizes, and each plate has a different border encircling a different meal. The one female prisoner's plate has a little hint of pink that contrasts with the unified blue. The meals themselves are as different as the prisoners, but there is a definite pattern that offers clues about these people's lives.

Most of the executions took place in the South, so there are many prepared foods specific to that region of the country: chicken fried steak, chitterlings, fried chicken, baked potatoes, and snap peas. Other meals hint at Latino roots: Green painted many quesadillas, fajitas, enchiladas, and mole. Green noticed that as she assembled the menus, the meals could

"sometimes tell where the inmate lived and perhaps provide clues to the inmate's race and economic level," she says. "There is a great deal of red meat, but very few lobsters, and no sushi or Godiva chocolates."

Death row inmates come from the most economically depressed areas of the United States. Approximately 52 percent are minorities. Their life experience—having less opportunity to enjoy the perks of being White and middle class in America—establishes a higher probability for criminal activity. Class is also an undeniable factor in their sentencing. When members of the middle and upper classes commit brutal crimes, their money and influence often spare them from having to make a last meal request. One aspect of the brilliance of Green's "The Last Supper" is that food

subtly communicates the facts about the lives of Death Row inmates.

Green says that in painting these meals, she wanted "to point a finger at the system," not at the inmate. Her work provokes discussion and questions on the complexities inherent in capital punishment. Former Illinois Governor George Ryan found an 8 percent margin of error in his state's death sentences. When 8 percent of the people on Illinois' death row are innocent, the American judicial system is obviously flawed.

Ryan, a Republican, consequently commuted the death sentences of Illinois prisoners scheduled for execution.

David Protes, a professor at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism in Chicago, brought forth information that reversed the verdict of four men who collectively served 65 years behind bars for a double murder they had not committed. They have all been exonerated and released. Protes said he was surprised by the number of prisoners who were innocent. "I'd always thought that miscarriages of justice were an aberration and that our justice system, overwhelmingly, worked well," he said. "But I was seeing error rates of 10 to 15 percent. I

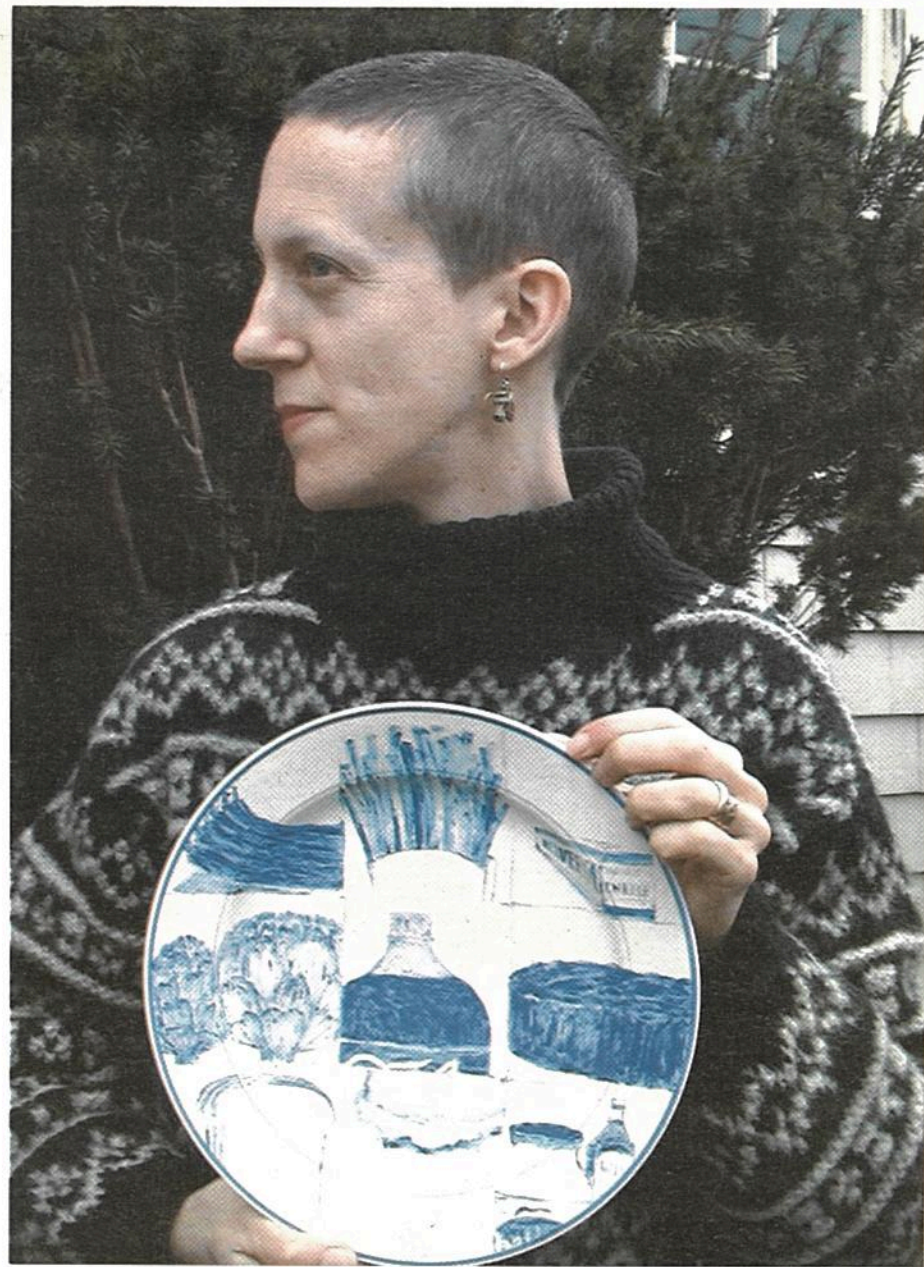
was very struck by how pervasive the problem was." Now, "there is no question" that states have executed innocent people.

The ultimate question that Green's work presents is this: How can we practice capital punishment when it is a virtual certainty that innocent men and women are being executed? Seeing the dinner plates as the legacies of individual people, and knowing that some of them were probably innocent, we reexamine the morality of capital punishment.

Green has stated that "I make art as a way of processing information. A human execution, along with a printed menu and

grisly details, leads me to consider how at times we as a society seem to stray off track. It is my hope that this piece will generate discussion that could result in positive change." ■

Julie Green's "The Last Supper" will be included in the group exhibition "Beyond Talk: Redrawing Race" at Seattle's Wing Luke Asian Museum. The exhibit, Wing Luke's first multi-ethnic group show, is open April 31 until December 12. For more information: www.wingluke.org.



CORVALLIS ARTIST JULIE GREEN, RIGHT, DEPICTS THE LAST MEALS OF AMERICA'S DEATH ROW INMATES. ABOVE, LEFT: "TEXAS, 18 SEPT 2001: WESTERN OMELET, FRIED POTATOES, SLICED TOMATO, PAN SAUSAGE, 3 BISCUITS, WHITE GRAVY, PITCHER OF VANILLA MILKSHAKE, CANTALOUPE." ABOVE, RIGHT: "OHIO, 19 FEB 2002: STEAK RARE, SALAD, GRAPE POP." PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREEN.

KITTEL, Continued from Page 8

and you get to walk back down that street with \$40 in your hand.

RC: How many people fail that test?

Kittel: I'd say a good 30 percent, which is a lot. There are guys on their first day out are down there on crack, immediately.

RC: Have any groups helped you?

Kittel: That's an interesting question. If you want clothing, or food, or God, yes, absolutely they'll help you. There are lots of resources. But for the guy who wants money for school, or to start an internship — that's different. The basic needs are met, but not above and beyond.

So no, I did not have help from anyone. I wasn't in the financial situation that most inmates were when I got out of prison. I didn't need clothing, I didn't need housing.

RC: What have you done since then?

Kittel: I've worked various jobs for the last few years. Then my fiancée and I decided to get married, and that I should finish my education. I'm at BCC now and am transferring to the UW in the fall. In my admission statement to the UW, I used my conviction to my advantage. I used it to my advantage to meet people, too, like [former state Supreme Court justice and Democratic candidate for governor] Phil Talmadge, who wrote me a letter of recommendation.

RC: Is there a movement inside the system to educate people?

Kittel: Inmate to inmate, but not administration to inmate. The administration doesn't seem to want to educate you, they just want to keep you busy. There are all sort of clubs you can join that have their own political or religious views, like the Black Prisoners Caucus. All these guys go to prison and get sober and realize how smart they are, then kick themselves the rest of the time they're in the joint.

RC: Kind of like in the movies?

Kittel: Yeah (*laughs*). There are a lot of contradictions and injustices with the correctional system. For example, in the mid-'90s, the state passed legislation that basically stopped all college education and degrees in the prison system. Now they offer things like welding and HTML and how to make websites. The guys who are earning these HTML certificates are housed in medium- to maximum-security prisons. They're never going to get out. Fifty percent of them are lifers who are learning these skills. Even if they have a 10-year sentence, when they get out their skills are going to be obsolete. Whereas right next door is a minimum-security camp for inmates with less than five years. Those people are learning how to milk cows and pick up shit. These are taxpayer dollars funding these educational programs — and the guys down at the farm milking cows are generally from urban areas who are never going to milk a cow again.

Another thing is prices: a 19-inch TV costs \$400, an outrageous price for a little tiny TV. Or phone calls: GTE charges skyrocketing rates. Calling my mother in Bellevue from Monroe costs her \$14 for five minutes. These guys have a family at home suffering because he's incarcerated and can't work, and now they get this phone bill. At the same time, DOC says they support strong family ties and visits, so it's a big contradiction.

RC: What do you have to do to vote?

Kittel: All I have to do is pay my fines, then go back to a judge and apply for my voting rights to be restored.

RC: Do you plan to do that by the next election?

Kittel: I won't by this election, well... (long pause), I don't know, maybe that's a goal I need to make. I haven't thought about it. I voted one time, when I was 18, for Bob Dole. Then I got that right stripped away from me.

You never get a pamphlet handed to you that says, in black and white, "This is all you need to do." The problem seems so big: I owe all this money, I have to get a lawyer, I have to go back in front of a judge — it's not easy going into another courtroom. It's so insur-

mountable for most people, they don't even try it at all and just live their lives disenfranchised.

RC: Do you think that in general felons want to vote?

Kittel: To be honest, unfortunately, I think most felons don't care. If more of them cared and more stuck up for their intrinsic right, maybe we'd get somewhere.

Most of the ones I know who want to have overcome other obstacles in their life, like drugs or violent tendencies. As soon as they overcame that,

they realized the value of voting. Out of 10 inmates that I know, more than half want to vote and are aware of the issues — probably more so than most people — and can't.

RC: In a sentence, what's the biggest failure of the DOC?

Kittel: Their lack of effort to reduce recidivism by simple measures. It's not surprising to me to see recidivism in this state and why it happens. Maybe I'm absolutely cynical 'cause I'm a convicted felon, but you tend to think after a while that maybe it's intentional.

A Failed System

For addicts, prison is the wrong cure for the wrong problem

Ex-felon Esther Flowers, 49, is currently unemployed and living in Renton.

Real Change: What's your story? Describe your first interactions with the law.

Esther Flowers: I was addicted to crack, which led to homelessness and crime. As my addiction got worse, so did my criminal activities. My first conviction was for theft — I stole clothes because I was cold. There was an assault charge because I was protecting myself because I was homeless. I even turned to prostitution to get money for my addiction.

During this time, they never addressed the *issue*: my drug addiction. They threw me into jail because of theft, but they never addressed the issue. They never gave me any treatment for my drug addiction. Sure, they'd tell me to go to a "drug counseling class," but those things are a joke.

RC: How did you escape it?

Flowers: Things got so horrible — this cycle of addiction, homelessness, and incarceration — it just got to be too much. My family tried to help but got tired of it and gave up on me. I was failing everything. I even attempted suicide a couple of times. Once they even brought me back to life at Harborview! After that, I just broke down and cried and surrendered myself to God. That's when I turned it around. And thanks to God giving me strength, I never looked back.

RC: Did the system help you turn it around?

Flowers: No, I had no help. I was getting GA-U (General Assistance - Unemployable), but it was a catch-22: either stay on GA-U, struggle with \$339/month for a year and try going to school, or work making \$10 an hour. I chose work. If I had to do it over again, I would've stuck it out and gone to school.

RC: How is your son in the same cycle?

Flowers: He's been a drug addict now for 15 years. He started when he was 16 years old. Because of my condition, he lived with foster parents. He was in and out of homes and not very stable. He started smoking crack in high school, quickly became addicted, and started this cycle of homelessness.

His folder now is four inches thick. He's institutionalized — he's more comfortable in the prisons than out. He's got a bed, three meals a day, he can get drugs, all his friends are inside the system. So why should he want to leave?

I've begged them for treatment, that they *treat* his drug addiction. I've begged them, but they don't want to address the *problem*. They don't want to address his addiction. They just want to throw him back in prison.

I've asked counselors in the prison to prepare him for some sort of life skills, but they don't. They do "job preparation," but how does that work for someone who never had a job and is addicted to drugs?

I would like them to develop a real life-skills type of course. When they can see a pattern of drug abuse and institutionalization, they need to attack that problem, not just a basic drug and alcohol class. They need to tackle the deep-rooted issue through extensive one-on-one counseling. And not just for a month or two or a year, but until the issue is resolved, however long it takes.

Continued on page 12

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The Man from the Outside

Monroe's lifers have a friend in Rev. Jon Nelson

By Kaye Allard

Jon Nelson isn't the kind of man you'd expect to see in prison. A thick, snow-white chinstrap beard lines a friendly face; his laugh is laid back and generous. His diction says father and pastor, but for 32 years, inmates at the Monroe state prison have known him as a staunch advocate for prisoner rights.

Every Monday afternoon at 4:30, Nelson rounds up five or so other volunteer sponsors and heads to Monroe. The group is keeping constructive, positive contact with the outside world alive for about 50 prisoners who belong to Monroe's Concerned Lifers Organization.

Prisoners must have sponsors in order to meet as a group, and the Concerned Lifers are incarcerated for at least 20 years — long enough to notice persistent problems in the prison system that deserve some attention. "They really are fighting to keep some hope alive," Nelson says.

Nelson is no ten-foot when it comes to prison reform issues. His parents were prison ministers in Washington, D.C., and they defined their work, he says, as "being present with the pain of the prison." They would take prisoners who had nowhere to go upon release into their home. Ex-convicts would stay for a few days while they found permanent residence. His mother held support groups for women in prisons, and his father would meet with prisoners individually.

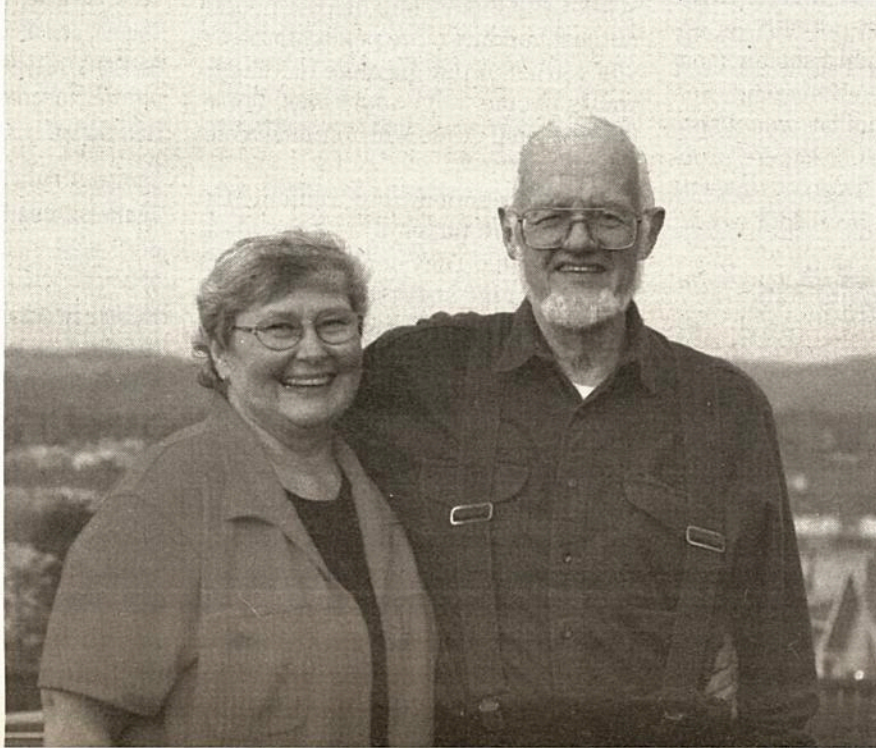
"My father was fond of saying that 'at the foot of the cross the ground is level,'" says Nelson. "There's no ascending scale of people who do better than others."

Nelson was a campus pastor at the University of Washington for 15 years, beginning in 1972. He began Prison Awareness Project classes that were taught by "lifers" themselves through the UW Experimental College.

Paul Wright, editor of *Prison Legal News*, was released from Monroe last December after 16 years. A "self-taught jailhouse lawyer," Wright has won 14 cases against prison systems around the country. He accomplished his legal education and cases while spending time behind bars. Wright says Nelson's sponsorship of Monroe's lifers is something of an anomaly; the reformatory is the only one in the state that allows outsider volunteers to visit. Nelson, Wright says, has "raised something of a stink" that the administration doesn't want to confront.

Wright says Nelson has been an invaluable advocate for inmates; without his dedication, outside volunteers wouldn't be there. His insistence on recruiting volunteers and keeping the program alive is the prisoners' greatest resource, he says: "Jon is my hero."

In the '60s and '70s, many of the staff in prisons had degrees in social work or had social services training. Now, staff typically have experience in criminal justice matters. That trend leads to what Wright calls the "Beat 'em over the head mentality." The fastest way to promotion now, he says, is to provide security, not rehabilitation.



RETIRED LUTHERAN MINISTER JON NELSON HAS BEEN VISITING THE MONROE CORRECTIONAL CENTER TO MEET WITH INMATES SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON FOR 32 YEARS. PICTURED WITH HIS WIFE, JUNI. PHOTO BY KEN DEAN.

Still, Monroe inmates struggle to edify themselves. Some of the programs Nelson has seen the Concerned Lifers adopt are turning books into Braille and putting on puppet shows for second and third graders. The puppet shows gave the inmates a chance to momentarily step outside of their situation and examine their lives in story form while presenting a moral message. They have done Tai Chi. The Lifers also sponsored several at-risk kids, raised a few thousand dollars for a young girl's college fund, and helped a respected guard pay some medical bills after her partner was stricken with cancer.

"I am really impressed with these Lifers and their commitment to the good. These are [guys] who have turned their life around. They've been in eight or 10 years and said, 'This bitterness is not going to get me anywhere,' so then they begin to want to do good things." Some Lifers have been transferred to other prisons because of their strong leadership skills. "Some of these guys could be leaders anywhere," he insists.

Concerned Lifers routinely take newer inmates under their wings, showing them how to deal with the different personalities among the prison population. "They will stand by the newer inmates who are clearly targets for threats and exploitation," says Nelson.

"To understand what the prison conditions are like," he says, "a person really has to take a visit there for themselves. The image some people have is that prison is a very nice, cream-puff existence. I just would like them to come with me and experience what a cell is like; the pain of prisoners, the biggest thing being the danger from other prisoners." Studies have found that as much as 35 per-

Continued on page 14

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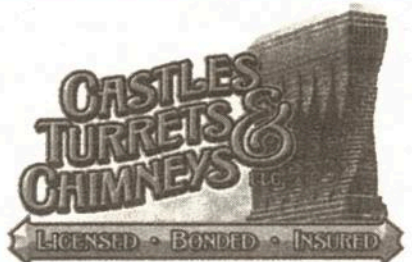
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FLOWERS, Continued from Page 10**RC:** *He does drugs in prison?***Flowers:** I can tell you from personal experience that you can get drugs, cigarettes, *anything*, in jail.

Another example of how flawed things are: once my son was sent to a work release house in a major drug area in Miller Park, just off of Madison. I was sitting with him there on the front porch, and 30 feet away from us people are buying and smoking dope. I could tell that it made him very nervous. It made me upset too. Why have him there? He lasted four days. He got there on a Monday and was gone on Thursday. He started smoking drugs again and broke his parole. I called up his PO and said they could find my son downtown at his same spot using drugs. It took them three months to go get him. All the police and detectives know what he looks like. They *all* know him by face and personally by name. But they let him stay down there and smoke dope and live on the streets for three months.

RC: *Do the judges show any sympathy?*

Flowers: No! He's 31 now. This issue has been going since he was 16 years old. So when he has a file that is four inches thick, and you can see he's been on this merry-go-round since he was 16, and you see it's drug related, and you hear a parent who after 15 years is still pleading to deal with the drug problem and not just lock him up, what do you do? All *they* do is shrug their shoulders.

RC: *Not even concern?*

Flowers: None. The drug problem is just not addressed. A few years later, he'll get out and there won't be a treatment program. They just release him to the streets, to the parole officer's address.

RC: *So if he doesn't have a home, they just release him to the PO's address. Nothing more?*

Flowers: They'll try finding him a shelter to live in, but the shelters are all in the drug-infested areas. How long is a person going to last there? Maybe two days, then they're on the streets again.

RC: *Where's your son right now?*

Flowers: He's in Stafford Creek [Corrections Center, in Aberdeen] for another six months. He got out last September and was incarcerated again three months later. He'll get out and get another PO, who'll find him a shelter, most likely in the Downtown Emergency Service Center, in his familiar area where he smokes dope. He'll last there probably less than a week. It's going to be the same thing. Nothing's been addressed.

RC: *How would you characterize the criminal justice system?*

Flowers: The criminal justice system is failing. But I believe they're doing what they want to do, what they are designed to do: fail the poor, the addicts, the homeless, and cast them out of society. It's a process of elimination: they have the power to eliminate you, if need be, or you can end up eliminating yourself. Whichever one you want to do.

RC: *What would you like to see instead?*

Flowers: The system cannot overlook

the severity and the great number of people who are addicted, homeless, and mentally ill. Don't overlook it, attack THAT problem, instead of just throwing people into prison. Everyone has to suffer the consequences of their crimes, but if you keep overlooking the problem, it's not going to be solved. And the system is overlooking it.

There is government money, but it's being wasted. The whole issue is helping people. Let's put some funding towards ending homelessness, treatment centers, and drug rehabilitation. Let's put more money in sending people to school. Put money into helping people, not just building more penitentiaries. If you don't start putting more funding towards people, then addictions, homelessness, and crime will continue to get worse.

Put more money into training POs. The ones I've talked to need a whole lot of training. They don't know what's going on in the streets. The only thing they see are a pen and a paper and why someone is getting out of prison. Let's give the POs more avenues to go through to help a particular individual. Let's cut their loads a little.

One PO came to my house for a home visit for my son, and he noticed in his file that my son had been in jail since he was 16 years old. He sympathized with me. But he said that his caseload was so large that he could not look at each case individually. That's kind of defeating the purpose! But maybe that's asking too much. ■

"The criminal justice system is failing. But I believe they're doing what they want to do, what they are designed to do: fail the poor, the addicts, the homeless, and cast them out of society. It's a process of elimination."

By the numbers

Number of U.S. citizens currently serving, or having served, jail time: 5.6 million, or 1 in 37.

Where the United States' incarceration rate ranks compared to the rest of world's nations: first.

Our State's current incarceration rate: 5.5 per 1,000 citizens.

Where our state incarceration rate ranks compared to the other 49 states and the District of Columbia: 41st.

Human Rights Watch's lowballed estimate of the national percentage of inmates who are sexually assaulted: 20 percent.

National number of inmates and former inmates not allowed to vote because of state felon disenfranchisement laws: 4,000,000.

Odds that a Black male U.S. citizen will serve jail time in his life: 1 in 3. Odds that a Latino male U.S. citizen will serve jail time in his life: 1 in 6. Odds that a White male U.S. citizen will serve jail time in his life: 1 in 17. The dollar amount spent by Washington state taxpayers to house one inmate for one year: \$63,812.

The amount taxpayers spend to educate one public school student for one year: \$6,501. Washington's rank in spending per student: 42nd. The U.S. average is \$7,376.

Percentage increase in Washington State prison spending between 1980 and 2000: 78 percent.

Percentage increase in Washington State education spending between 1980 and 2000: 11 percent.

Number of prisoners serving life sentences in Washington under the state's "three strikes" law: 220.

Percentage of three-strikes lifers in for murder: 12 percent.

Percentage of three strikes lifers in for sex crimes: 20 percent.

Percentage of three strikes lifers in for robbery: 12 percent.

—Compiled by Jonah Knutson



StreetWatch is compiled by Emma Quinn from reports of the Seattle Police Department.

Sunday, March 14, 11:06 a.m., Terry Ave., St. James Cathedral.

The suspect, a transient male aged 45, is known to the church authorities and has been asked to leave the church premises several times for panhandling church patrons. He was observed loitering in the courtyard of the church, and as officers were aware of his previous trespass admonishment, he was arrested for criminal trespass and transported to King County Jail.

Saturday, April 3, 12:06 a.m., 600 Block South Jackson St.

Suspect, a 48-year-old Black male transient, was observed loitering at a bus shelter with an open container of alcohol. He was booked for DOC (Department of Corrections) violations and transferred to King County Jail.

Saturday, April 3, 11:53 a.m., 1500 Block Western.

Suspect, a 41-year-old Indian male transient, was seen drinking a beer in public. Officers ran his name and found two outstanding warrants. His identity was verified and officers arrested suspect and booked him into King County Jail.

Saturday, April 3, 1:34 p.m., Fourth Ave. gas station.

Suspect, a 42-year-old White male transient, called 911 and stated he was suicidal and was going to commit "suicide by cop," saying he would attack the first cop he saw. He said he had a weapon so the police would be forced to shoot him. Police arrived and spotted suspect at the payphone. They approached him with guns drawn and at 30 feet. Suspect looked in their direction, dropped the phone, and turned to officers in a deliberately hostile manner. Suspect reached for his waistband and officers yelled, "Show us your hands and get on the ground." After a pause, the suspect complied and was handcuffed without incident. He was taken to Harborview Medical Center for a mental health evaluation and then transported to King County Jail for unlawful use of a weapon.

Saturday, April 3, 5:10 p.m., City Hall Park.

Suspect, a 23-year-old Asian male, had a one-year park exclusion ban from all city parks and was observed by officers entering City Hall Park and having a seat. Suspect was arraigned and booked into King County Jail for trespassing in the parks.

Saturday, April 3, 10:33 p.m., South Atlantic Bus Way.

Officers responded to assist King County Metro for a sleeper complaint. The Metro worker stated that the suspect, a 41-year-old White male transient, has done this to him several times in the last month. He further stated that the suspect has trespassed on all Metro buses. A routine name check showed this to be true, and suspect stated that he lives on the buses. He was taken into custody and booked into King County Jail for trespassing.

Do you have your own story to tell? Call Real Change at (206)441-3247 ext. 207, and we'll get the scoop.

Hidden Horrors

Prison Nation: The Warehousing of America's Poor
 Edited by Tara Herivel and Paul Wright
 Routledge, 2003
 256 pages, \$19.95

Review by Heidi Dietrich

Don't take *Prison Nation* on your next beach getaway, unless you can handle prison rape and torture served up with your margarita.

This collection of essays, edited by attorney Tara Herivel and former Washington state prisoner and activist Paul Wright, is not a light read. But it does provoke some tough questions. Anyone with a smidgeon of a social conscience would be hard-pressed to not feel outraged about what's going on behind our country's bars.

Most effective are the sections that delve into personal case studies. The book makes the case that our nation's prisons are filling up with prisoners who don't deserve to be there. A woman who retrieved hidden drug profits so her husband — a major ecstasy importer — could post bail was sentenced to 24 years in prison. Her husband, who offered up testimony about his associates and his wife's involvement in his finances, did just four years. Minor criminals incarcerated through

tough sentencing laws endure brutal prison rape and emerge from the system far worse off than they went in.

Equally compelling are essays exploring how towns across the U.S. are transformed by the nation's growing prison industry. For some communities, prisons have become their means of economic survival. With prisons come jobs, grocery stores, Wal-Mart, and craft fairs filled with prisoners' homemade goods. But real estate sits vacant because transient prison employees are reluctant to settle in. Guards' families face the fallout of relatively low-paying jobs in a stressful, oppressive environment. Alcoholism, domestic abuse, and juvenile delinquency are not uncommon.

Especially hard to read are stories of abuse — from both juvenile offenders and adult prisoners. Sometimes graphic descriptions of torture accompany tales of youth "boot camps." The squeamish might be better off skipping passages. Physical harm inflicted upon

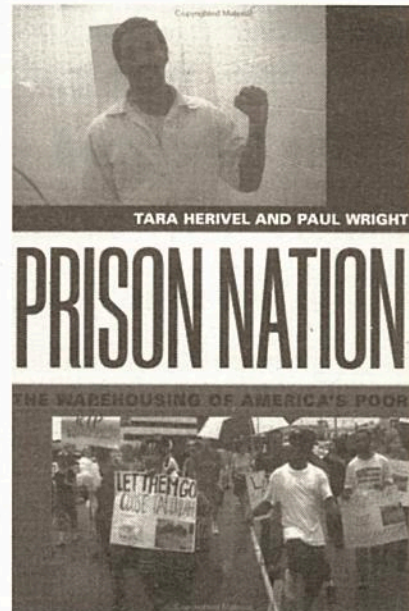
adult prisoners is no less harsh. One Indiana prisoner convicted on a DUI offense describes repeated rapes by fellow inmates. He worries that he has AIDS and admits to frequent nightmares. Other prisons are accused not of rape or beatings, but of denying proper medical care to HIV patients.

Less engaging are preachy essays that fail to use human faces to illustrate the problems in our prisons. Be the subject legal representation or racism in the courtroom, the essays lean heavily toward statistics and court case examples. While informative, the more casual reader will have to wade through the academic-speak before landing on essays with more colorful examples.

Prison Nation takes a step back from those most directly affected by American prisons in a section that critiques prison labor. Though some praise the value of teaching prisoners job skills, essayists point out that corporations are saving big bucks and costing

the non-incarcerated jobs by choosing prison labor. Among those fingered: Starbucks, Boeing and Microsoft. The essays don't pretend to be objective, nor does the editors' introduction to the section, which describes unpaid prisoners toiling in the fields of former slave plantations, just as slaves did 150 years ago. The essays stick mainly to one viewpoint: prison labor is not a good thing. There's no one advocating for prison labor or saying that we've made great strides in our nation's prison systems. And there's no evidence presented for such a claim.

While *Prison Nation* includes essays and case studies from around the country, it is Northwest-heavy. Liberal Seattleites are a likely target audience. Those whose hearts don't bleed as profusely may feel over-satiated with the leftist views. Likewise, anyone looking for a light read shouldn't turn to *Prison Nation*. It's impossible not to get angry at what's going down in American prisons. ■



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LIFERS, Continued from Page 11

cent of the prison population is severely mentally ill. There are separate cells for those determined by the courts to be a threat to other people, but the others are in the general population.

Nelson is retired from his formal duties as a pastor in the Lutheran church. He has had his own experience behind bars, and found when he got there, he was a familiar face to some of those incarcerated. So far, he has been arrested five times for civil disobedience — once with his mother, then 70 — protesting nuclear arms transports.

Along with the family tradition of prison activism, Nelson and his wife Juni have adopted 14 children from many national and cultural backgrounds. They beam when they show pictures of their children and 22 grandkids. The couple has been married for some 45 years.

"I think the key to our wonderful relationship" — they burst out laughing as John begins — "is that we share similar thoughts. We care about the future of the world. We don't care a lot about material things."

Jon was the lowest paid in the church for his district, but after raising all the kids they are debt-free. "My wife is an excellent manager with our money, and was good with shopping at Value Village," he says. "Our kids were a big help, too. They helped pull things

together. They weren't pressing for the newest pair of Levi's; they weren't impressed with that type of materialism."

Nelson says people in the community helped his family as well. They had "a saint" of a neighbor who did their dental work for free. "It's unbelievable how well it's worked out for us," Nelson says. "It's just, if you look for a way, there will be a way."

Marriage and family life for inmates is another important issue to Nelson. He has performed numerous marriages and is concerned about rules that now prohibit inmates from having family visits with common-law partners and pre-

vent marriage after incarceration. People in prison are more successful upon release, he says, when they maintain family ties.

Some of the worst anti-inmate sanctions are financial, put in place by the state legislature's passage of House Bill 2010 in 1996. H.B. 2010 cut education programs and imposed expensive fees for health care. Such "mean-spirited legislation," says Nelson, is largely a result of the get-tough-on-crime mood of the 1990s. Slowly, he says, things are changing.

"I think there are signs that we may be forced to a new attitude," he says. "Part of it is economics. It's now costing more to imprison our young people than it is to educate them. That's a really frightening and sickening reality." ■

The Concerned Lifers "have said, 'This bitterness is not going to get me anywhere.'"

Life Matters

Jon Nelson and the Concerned Lifers Organization (CLO) have outlined five particular issues they're concerned with in a briefing book for legislators and the press.

Continuing education: The CLO calls for a full range of continuing and secondary education so that inmates may re-enter society as productive, law-abiding individuals. The state legislature passed House Bill 2010 in 1996, which reduced vocational and secondary education programs in state prisons. Now, Monroe's only secondary education opportunity is a GED program.

Self help: A list of programs that are now either discontinued, severely underfunded, or non-existent includes Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, dispute mediation, and volunteer tutors for inmates with special educational needs.

Following the money: The prison receives \$800,000 a year in the form of fees on inmates and their families for phone calls, as well as profits derived from Inmate Store sales. There is little accountability as to how that money is spent. According to Wright, the DOC receives over \$10 million in kickbacks from telephone service contracts alone.

Inmate savings accounts: In May 1999, the governor signed a bill that called for the payment of interest on inmate savings accounts, and gave the DOC until December 1999 to devise a plan to begin the payments. In 2001, the state Supreme Court mandated interest payments. As of this spring, the DOC still does not pay interest.

Sentencing reform: Nelson and other activists around the state have been advocating for the Robbery II conviction — non-violent attempted robbery — to be excluded from the three strikes laws. Forty percent of those who have "struck out" have done so because of a robbery conviction. Because of the three-strikes rules, murderers and armed robbers are released from prison before a prisoner with his third conviction of Robbery II.

Employment: Concerned lifers would like to see more employment in the private sector jobs instead of in poverty-wage state contracting. Currently, a state job in janitorial services pays as little as \$50 a month.

The People Speak

Street Talk asked pedestrians at Westlake and Third and Fourth Avenue one question: Should ex-felons have the right to vote?

Interviews and photos by Matt Nucci



"If they are going to pay taxes, they should be able to vote."
—Rex McAlee, financial planner



"Of course they should be able to vote. It might give them a thought process of what's right and what's wrong."
—Pamela Clayton, sales associate



"I can't judge people for what they did in the past. If they are American citizens, they deserve to vote."
—Greg Fontaine, machinist



"Once you've done your time, you should be able to rejoin society to the fullest extent — to work, to vote, to contribute once more."
—J. Prevratil, secondary school teacher



"I think the judge should take into consideration seven or 10 good years and wipe their record clean and give them a second chance to be an upstanding citizen."
—Manuel Gonzales, disabled

"I think that if you commit a felony you should have serious consequences — and voting should be one of them. An awful lot of crimes today don't have serious enough consequences."
—Connie Johnson, homemaker

"I think they should vote. Regardless, you are still a citizen of the U.S. — there's no exception on that."
—Fletcher Stitt, retired

"If a person has committed a crime and served their due diligence, they should be given the right to vote. Provided that they aren't repeat offenders."
—K. Iverson, insurance representative

"They should be given a chance to vote because people are subject to mistakes. I'm not saying the mistakes are justified, but they deserve their chance."
—Zedrick Whitters, temporary laborer



Late April Notables

Thursday 4/15

King County Office of Civil Rights presents a brown bag seminar on **Civil Rights** for nonprofit organizations. This knowledge is critical to prevent complaints and is good business practice. Each attendee will receive a resource packet including enforcement agencies pertaining to fair employment, fair housing, and public accommodations. \$10 registration by credit card payment through Acteva's online merchant account www.acteva.com. Noon-1:30 p.m., at Antioch University, 2326 6th Ave. Info 296-7592.

Friday 4/16

Author Larry Everest will discuss his new book **Oil, Power and Empire: Iraq and the US Global Agenda**. This meticulously documented history of U.S. intervention in Iraq demolishes the official pretext of weapons of mass destruction and liberating Iraq. 6:30 p.m., at Third Place Books, Towne Centre, 17171 Bothell Way NE, Lake Forest Park. Info 366-3333.

Saturday 4/17

Volunteer to increase registration and turnout of low-income voters. Join the **Statewide Poverty Action Network** as they register voters door-to-door in Auburn. Transportation from Seattle provided. 10:45 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., every Saturday through Oct. 2. Carpool from the Fremont Public Association, 1501 N. 45th, at 10:15 a.m. Info Anne Yen 206-694-6794 ext. 4 or vote@povertyaction.org.

Colombian Human Rights Leaders speak out against **Militarism and Attacks on Civil Liberties**, featuring two distinguished activists, Floro Tunubala and Ludivia Giraldo Diaz. Sponsored by Seattle Colombia Committee, UW Amnesty International, and Radical Women, free, everyone welcome. 4-6 p.m., at the 2100 Building, 2100 24th Ave. S., 3rd Floor, east of Rainier and south of I-90 interchange. Info Helen Gilbert 206-985-4621.

Sunday 4/18

Interfaith Vigil for Peace in the Middle East, on the 18th of each month, at St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, 1245 10th Ave. E., 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. in McCaw Chapel, 8 p.m. - 8 a.m. in Thomsen Chapel. Info 206-270-9170.

Seattle Chapter **Fellowship of Reconciliation** presents Stephen Bezrukhka, M.D., speaking on "Is Our Society Making You Sick?" Potluck 5 p.m., program 6:30 p.m., at Woodland Park Presbyterian Church, 225 N. 70th. Info 206-789-5565.

Thursday 4/22

Many Voices, One Song, a **Musical Celebration of Diversity**, this concert captures the artistry of performers of diverse backgrounds. Proceeds benefit Multifaith Works, a non-profit organization serving people with AIDS and other life-threatening diseases. Tickets \$20 at the door, \$15 in advance. 7 p.m., at Seattle First Baptist Church, 1111 Harvard Ave. Tickets and info Multifaith Works 206-324-1520 ext. 303 or info@multifaith.org.

Friday 4/23

Doubleexposure 2004, a fine art photography auction benefiting Youth in Focus. 6 p.m., at Consolidated Works, 500 Boren Ave. N., Seattle. Info Doug Roche 206-723-1479 or www.youthinfocus.org.

25th Annual Women in Trades Fair, "Empowering **Women in Non-Traditional Careers**," followed by Anniversary Celebration and Roundtable. The Fair offers hands-on demonstrations, activities, and exhibits. Free and open to the public. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m., at Fisher Pavilion, Seattle Center. Info 206-903-9508 or www.wawomenintrades.com.

Saturday 4/24

Community Coalition for Environmental Justice presents the 3rd Annual Community-based Solutions for **Environmental Health and Justice** Conference. Skill-building workshops are of-

ferred to equip participants with organizing tools and strategies. Issues discussed include farmworker and urban environmental justice. Keynote speaker is Chrystos, the noted activist, author, and poet. Sat. April 24 & Sun. April 25, at the UW Ethnic Cultural Center, 3931 Brooklyn Ave. NE. Info 206-720-0285.

Sunday 4/25

Non-Violent Resistance: Acting with Hope, a discussion with panelists John Oliviera, a former Navy Lieutenant and Navy spokesman Judith Kolokoff a life-long peace and justice activist, and Ibrahim al-Husseini, an Arab American activist living in Seattle. Sponsored by West Seattle Neighbors for Peace and Justice. The public is invited to this free event, donations accepted. 2:30 - 4:30 p.m., at Delridge Community Center, 4501 Delridge Way SW. Info 206-783-1088.

Tuesday 4/27

Women Under Occupation: From Palestine to Iraq, sponsored by Pursue the Peace. Bay Area activist Kate Raphael will speak about her work in Palestine and the women's delegation to Iraq. 7 p.m., at University Heights Center, 5031 University Way NE.

Wednesday 4/28

Ninth Annual First Place School Benefit Breakfast. First Place School is a

service agency devoted to **helping children and families who are in transition** due to crises that impact family stability. The breakfast is free; your donations go directly to support the school's programs. Reservations 425-562-0708. 7:30 - 9:30 a.m., at Seattle Sheraton Hotel, 1400 6th Ave.

Thursday 4/29

Free Workshop on Discrimination, Fair Employment, Fair Housing, and Public Accommodation. These workshops are for everyone, training sponsored by King County Office of Civil Rights. 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., at White Center Library, 11220 16th Ave. SW. Info 296-7592 or Civil-Rights.OCR@metrokc.gov.

Friday 4/30

Gimme Shelter, a Battle of the Bands to benefit the **Downtown Emergency Service Center**. The DESC works to eliminate homelessness step by step. Scheduled bands are Muckner, The Plains, The Psychotropics, and the Setbacks. Suggested donation \$6-\$20. 8 p.m., at About The Music, 6010 Airport Way S. in Georgetown. Info 206-762-5518 or www.desc.org.

Calendar compiled from Jean Buskin's *Peace and Justice Events Calendar*, available in full at www.scn.org/activism/calendar. Email calendar submissions to calendar@real-changenews.org.

Alaskan Way Viaduct & Seawall Replacement Project

Draft Environmental Impact Statement



Be part of a 100-year decision!

Public Hearing and Comment Opportunity

View info from the Draft EIS • Offer written comments • Provide oral comments to a court reporter

DOWNTOWN

Tuesday, April 27th
4:00-7:00 p.m.
Dome Room, Arctic Bldg
3rd Floor, 700 Third Avenue
Bus Routes: Served by over
50 Metro Bus Routes

WEST SEATTLE

Wednesday, April 28th
5:00-8:00 p.m.
Lafayette Elementary School
2645 California Avenue S.W.
Metro Bus Routes: 126, 51, 55,
58, 56, 57

BALLARD

Thursday, April 29th
5:00-8:00 p.m.
Leif Erickson Hall
2245 N.W. 57th Street
Metro Bus Routes: 15, 18, 44,
46, 75, 81

For More Project Information:

Project Hotline: (206) 269-4421
www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/viaduct



Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Individuals requiring reasonable accommodation of any type may contact Sarah Ferguson at (206) 382-5287/fergusa@wsdot.wa.gov. Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing may call WA State Telecommunications Relay Service (TTY) at 711. **Title VI:** WSDOT assures full compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, national origin and sex in the provision of benefits and services. For language interpretation services please contact WSDOT at (206) 382-5287. It is necessary to speak limited English so that your request can be appropriately responded to. For information on WSDOT's Title VI Program, please contact the Title VI Coordinator at (360) 705-7098.

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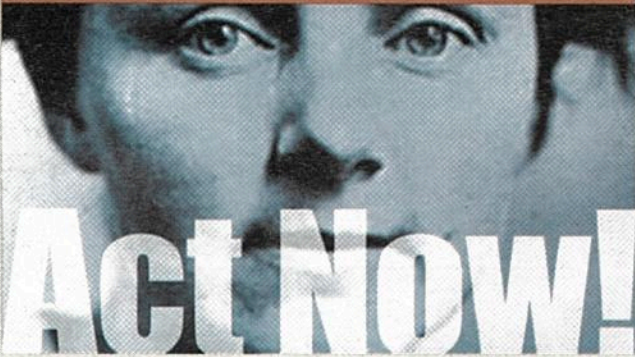
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citizens participation project



Help restore voting rights to felons

Issue: Over 150,000 Washington felons cannot vote because of their inability to pay legal fines. Tell your legislator that it's time to stop taking away people's civil rights.

Background: Eleven state legislators have sponsored House Bill 2054, which allows persons convicted of a felony to have their civil right to the elective franchise restored if they have completed all the requirements of all of their sentences *except for* their legal financial obligations (LFOs). The bill does not prevent the enforcement of LFOs or change the offender's obligation to comply with any other legal order.

In this year's legislative session, House Bill 2054 was literally dead on arrival. It never even got a committee reading.

Disenfranchisement laws in the U.S. are a vestige of medieval times, when offenders were banished from the community and suffered "civil death." Brought from Europe to the colonies, they gained new political salience at the end of the nineteenth century when disgruntled Whites in a number of Southern states adopted them and other ostensibly race-neutral voting restrictions in an effort to exclude Blacks from the vote. In the twenty-first century, the laws have no discernible legitimate purpose. Deprivation of the right to vote is not an inherent or necessary aspect of criminal punishment nor does it promote the reintegration of offenders into lawful society. No other democratic country in the world denies as many people — in absolute or proportional terms — the right to vote because of felony convictions.

The racial impact of disenfranchisement laws is particularly egregious. Thirteen percent of African American men — 1.4 million — are disenfranchised, representing just over one-third (36 percent) of the total disenfranchised population. In two states, data compiled by The Sentencing Project and Human Rights Watch shows that almost one in three Black men is disenfranchised. In eight states, one in four Black men is disenfranchised.

Restrictions on the franchise in the United States seem to be singularly unreasonable as well as racially discriminatory. No one has ever made a compelling argument as to why felons who have done their time should be denied this right. Indeed, defenders of these laws most frequently cite the patently inadequate goal of protecting against voter fraud or the anachronistic and politically untenable objective of preserving the "purity of the ballot box" by excluding voters lacking in virtue.

Action: Call or email the following legislators and thank them for sponsoring House Bill 2054 in the 2004 legislative session. Request that they re-introduce it next year and get their colleagues to support it. In addition, contact the legislators who represent you who aren't listed below and tell them to co-sponsor the bill in 2005.

Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos (Democrat - Southeast Seattle) 206-587-5549

Rep. Eric Pettigrew (D - Southeast Seattle) 206-587-5543

Rep. Jeannie Darneille (D - Tacoma) 253-756-0976

Rep. Al O'Brien (D - Bothell/Mountlake Terrace) 425-771-2141

Rep. Jeanne Edwards (D - Bothell/Mountlake Terrace) 360-786-7900

Rep. Dave Upthegrove (D - Kent/Seatac/Des Moines) 360-786-7868

Rep. Maralyn Chase (D - Shoreline/Lake Forest Park) 206-366-2604

Rep. Dennis Flanagan (D - Tacoma) 360-786-7930

Rep. Alex Wood (D - Spokane) 360-786-7888

Rep. Zack Hudgins (D - South Seattle / Tukwila / Renton) 360-786-7956

Rep. Brian Sullivan (D - Mukilteo) 425-640-3533

For a complete list of elected officials and their contact information, call The League of Women Voters of Seattle and request a copy of the pamphlet "They Represent You: a citizen's guide to elected officials." The league's number is 206-329-4848.

**Real Change Homeless
Empowerment Project**
2129 2nd Ave.
Seattle, WA 98121

Seattle Public Library, Serials Unit
800 Pike St.
Seattle, WA 98101

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**We want
to hear
from
you!**

Bring story ideas, comments, suggestions, and questions to the second monthly open meeting of the **Real Change Editorial Committee**. Wednesday April 28, 4:30 p.m., at the Real Change office. Everyone welcome. For additional information about the meeting, please call Adam Holdorf, editor, at 206-441-3247, extension 207, or email editor@realchangenews.org.

