

## **WTE Column of Jan 3, 2014. Editor's Headline: "Cashing in on Immigrants"**

Sergio Garcia is an undocumented immigrant. Brought to this country as a child, he grew up in California, attended law school, passed the bar. When the state denied him the license to practice, he took his case to its Supreme Court, who a few days ago ruled that the license was unlawfully withheld.

Javier Garcia, too, was brought to this country as a child. He lives in Cheyenne, works in media and digital communication, and obtained an undergraduate degree from UW. He resides under a temporary DACA permit.

Regrettably, any such success story is set against dozens, hundreds, of tragedies. I've read heartrending accounts composed by children and spouses whose lives were shattered by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) searches within their homes that resulted in arrests. "It's been a month since they came for her," writes one husband. "They left us traumatized." He tells of children trembling and crying at night, calling for their mother. Another essay talks of an eight-year-old boy alone at home, waiting to go to school with his friend, when eight ICE agents barged in, demanding to see his parents (who were at work). Five agents searched and tore everything apart while three surrounded the boy, who was shaking with fear. Another first-person account tells of agents bursting in on a family, arresting one member who had a visa but whose work permit had expired, then tearing through the house. One agent threatened they'd be back in a few days and "if I see you here, I promise, I'll take all of you." The writer, holding a one-year-old child, was asked whether she was the mother and if the baby was born here. When she answered "Yes" on both counts, he told her she had three weeks. "They took my phone and about ten documents they found in the house. They did not return our visas," the writer states.

These brutalities happen right here in Cheyenne. Two mothers of children who are US citizens were detained last year in raids on their homes. Hauled to a for-profit prison in Scottsbluff, NE, were women house-cleaned for \$1 a day, when their loved ones visited, they could not see them or chat, not even through a glass divider, much less could the mothers hug or kiss their kids. They could talk only through a tiny television-type screen. Released on bail, both women now live under the threat of deportation while their children face a future of fractured family, horrific stress, and poverty. Typically, such conditions bring on physical and mental illnesses. Hunger and despair leads to substance abuse.

For-profit incarceration is a national disgrace, scorned in any other developed country. Its corporations work hand-in-glove with anti-immigration factions, fanning hatred and dictating dehumanizing action. They push through legislation that ruthlessly targets women and children. "People have no idea how close to Cheyenne these facilities are," says Carol Pasqual, who describes visitors being greeted by wardens in SWAT attire.

NPR's Laura Sullivan posted online an NPR inquiry into the "Prison Economics" that dove Arizona's brutal immigration law. NPR found huge, behind-the-scenes help in Sen. Russell Pearce's drafting of Bill 1070 by members of ALEC, a secretive group of state legislators and powerful corporations "such as the tobacco company Reynolds American Inc., Exxon

Mobil, and the National Rifle Association.” In Arizona’s case, the billion-dollar Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), “the largest private prison company in the country” was prominently present at the conference table of the Grand Hyatt in Washington, D.C.—under a banner reading “Let Freedom Reign”—where the senator laid out his plan. “Pearce and the Corrections Corporation of America have been coming to these meetings for years.” Two sources confirmed that the bill was drafted in that room.

Asked if private companies usually get to write “model bills” for the legislators, the meeting’s staff director answered, “Yeah, that’s the way it’s set up.” Pearce took his bill home to Arizona, where Gov. Jan Brewer signed it into law within four days. Brewer has her own connections to private prison companies, comments NPR: two of her top advisors, Paul Senseman and Chuck Coughlin, are former lobbyists for private prison companies.

At Arizona’s state capitol, campaign donations have appeared from prison lobbyists and prison companies. Already Georgia has followed suit with “Hate Bill 87”; other states are ramping up with ALEC. NPR reviewed reports from CCA executives who assert that immigration detention is “the next big market”; the execs aim to garner “a significant portion of our revenues” through ICE tactics.

NPR interviewed City Manager Glenn Nichols who was approached with pitches for a prison in his desert town, Benson, 60 miles from the Mexican border. “A prison for women and children who ware illegal immigrants,” reports NPR. “They talked like they didn’t have any doubt they could fill it,” said Nichols, who turned down the deal.

Between Christmas and New Year, a national movement, “Fast for Families,” included a good number of locals in Herschler Building’s Atrium. They brought laptops and sent messages to House Speaker Boehner and Wyoming’s congressional representatives, urging compassionate and speedy immigration reform. “No more profits off our pain,” was a young woman’s banner whose mother is a detainee.

“A system that breaks up families is itself broken,” said Reverend Rodger McDaniel, who organized the local fast. Reverend Audette Fulbright grieved over ICE’s “taking children from their parents, removing promising students from the only country they have ever known.”

It’s past time to enact intelligent immigration reform.