

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

November 3, 2015

Pettiness In Prison

If I was not in prison experiencing these conditions myself, I would not believe it's possible for them to exist. The current Wisconsin prison system is the product of the policy of promoting the most paranoid, delusional people available to positions of higher authority. Over the previous decades, it has created the worst case of group think I have ever encountered (group think: "the tendency of a decision-making group to strive for consensus and to avoid critical examination of alternatives" - Random House Webster's College Dictionary, p. 581).

No rational person could create the myriad of rules and policies prisoners in Stanley are required to follow. Here are a few examples:

The prison issues shoes with a hard rubber/plastic sole to every prisoner except for prisoners who cannot wear them for medical reasons. These shoes are required to be worn when leaving the institution for any reason, while on job assignment or on a visit. The shoes are uncomfortable and many prisoners experience pain from wearing them. The new Stanley handbook now requires these shoes to be worn to Health Services and to go to the gym (once at the gym, a prisoner may switch to personal shoes or other shoes provided at the gym).

Most prisoners have personal shoes they wear all the time except when required to put on the state shoes. Putting on state shoes to go to the restricted areas is tedious at best. More to the point, it's pointless. There is absolutely no legitimate reason to require a prisoner to put on state shoes to receive health care or to exercise. There is no reason to prohibit the wearing of personal shoes at any time. It would save the state tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars. Yet, a prison administrator is being paid \$60-80 thousand per year to think up and enforce these pointless, petty rules.

The worst aspect of this is that ALL of the people appointed to higher position within the DOC are on the same page. They ALL march in lock-step on the creation and enforcement of inane rules. It doesn't have to be like this, and it wasn't until the last 20 years.

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

November 1, 2015

The Worst Legislature Ever In Wisconsin

The Republicans in Wisconsin have total control over the state government and are using their power to remake this state into a haven for the wealthy and a nightmare for the poor.

First, they engaged in such widespread gerrymandering that it is now impossible for the Democrats to ever regain control of the state assembly. Former representative Spencer Black said on public radio recently that cumulatively the Democratic candidates for state assembly received 200,000 more votes than Republican candidates but resulted in only 39 elected Democrats and 60 elected republicans. This was caused by the Tea party backlash of 2010. The white Republican racists were so outraged that a black man was elected president, they swept the Democrats in Wisconsin out of power. This was just in time to redraw the state legislative districts to guarantee themselves control of state government from now on.

The backlash was more than Tea Party outrage. Democratic governor Jim Doyle focused his 8 years in office on pandering to minorities (he has two adopted black children - adults now). In a state that consists of an overwhelming majority of White citizens, it is foolish to ignore the interests of the people who elected you in favor of minorities. Wisconsin citizens can thank Jim Doyle for Scott Walker.

Now that the Republicans are firmly in control, they have dismantled much of what set Wisconsin apart as a progressive state.

The first big target with the public employees unions - Scott Walker's get-even legislation for all the troubles he had with unions when he was Milwaukee County executive.

Next came the Department of Natural Resources. The budget was cut, staff positions were eliminated to gut the power and the expertise of the DNR to protect the environment. The DNR is now controlled by a political appointee who will not allow its staff to interfere with business interests. Mining laws were rewritten to allow a major campaign contributor to mine iron ore in a sensitive area, destruction of wetlands is now permitted and high capacity wells are draining the aquifers and causing lakes to disappear.

The legislature is currently in the process of dismantling the Government Accountability Board (GAB), the nonpartisan entity which oversees Wisconsin elections and the political process. It is currently controlled by retired judges and has the power to conduct investigations and order recall elections. The new system will have 6 political appointees - 3 Democrat and 3 Republican - a system designed to create gridlock. A majority is required for the board to act and it will be impossible to ever attain a majority because none of the political appointees will ever vote to sanction their own party.

Campaign finance laws are also being rewritten to allow wealthy donors to control the political process while remaining anonymous.

The state now spends more on its prisons than it does on higher education. Thousands of old men and women who were locked up during the anti-crime hysteria of the 1980s and 1990s remain needlessly warehoused long beyond the point where their release would pose any risk to the public.

What else can I say? This is only a partial list of all the damage Republicans have done. If you are rich, unethical and have no concern for other people or the environment, Wisconsin is the place for you. If not, you are better off living in Minnesota.



H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

November 2, 2015

Bereavement In Prison

Recently, the guy in the cell next to me received news that his grandmother was admitted to the hospital and was not expected to live. He was very upset and powerless to do anything. He could not visit her one last time, help his family share the trauma of losing their matriarch or be a part of the grieving process. I got a sympathy card from the chapel, took it around the unit and had a bunch of guys sign it, and gave it to him. It wasn't much, but it's all he's going to get in prison.

I don't know what his crime was or how long his sentence is. But I do know he is a fellow human being and has feelings. He can suffer just as much as a free person. But unlike a free person, he gets no compassion or empathy from anyone. We are considered as little better than animals. I suppose this is how slaves were treated back in the slave days. We are a valuable commodity so we must be kept healthy and alive, but how we feel is irrelevant.

It is this callous disregard for us as human beings that does the damage. People need to be loved and cared for but the prison system is set up to make that virtually impossible. We are isolated from our friends and family, phone calls are expensive, there is no email, postage is 40% higher for prisoners and visiting is difficult because prisons are located in remote areas.

I lost both my parents since I came to prison 31 years ago. I was not there to help them when they needed me most. The only concern prison officials had was whether I was going to act up due to the grief and have to be placed in segregation.

Future generations will look back on this era as the dark ages of our country. They will shake their heads in puzzlement over why our elected officials believed dehumanizing prisoners was in anybody's best interests.