

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1316

May 24, 2010

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I appreciate your recent assurance to me that your administration will move forward with purchasing and opening the Thomson Correctional Facility in Illinois as a federal prison regardless of any plans to move the Guantanamo Bay terrorist detention center to the Thomson site. From day one, I have supported opening Thomson as a stand alone federal prison without the terrorists, and I have always been concerned the linking of the two could doom the opening of Thomson as a federal prison and the accompanying jobs and local economic development.

Last week, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) passed the Fiscal Year 2011 Defense Authorization bill (H.R. 5136), which contains a provision that would severely curtail any plans to move the GITMO terrorist detainees to any place in the United States. According to a summary from HASC, “[t]he committee firmly believes that the construction or modification of any facility in the U.S. to detain or imprison individuals currently being held at Guantanamo must be accompanied by a thorough and comprehensive plan that outlines the merits, costs and risks associated with utilizing such a facility. No such plan has been presented to date.” H.R. 5136 subsequently passed HASC by a unanimous vote of 59 to 0 and is expected on the House floor later this week. As a result of this legislative action, even Illinois Governor Pat Quinn acknowledged to the Chicago Tribune on Friday it is less likely the GITMO terrorist detainees will come to Illinois.

In light of this strong indication that Congress does not support relocating GITMO to the United States, I strongly encourage you to separate the GITMO portion of the Thomson plan and proceed with the full utilization of the Thomson Correctional Facility as a stand alone federal prison.

Your current plan for Thomson calls for housing 1,800 maximum security federal prisoners in five pods (each pod contains 200 cells) and reserving three pods for the Defense Department to house the GITMO terrorist detainees. Another 750 maximum security federal prisoners could be housed in the Thomson Correctional Facility if the Bureau of Prisons were given access to those three pods currently reserved for the terrorist detainees.

Housing an extra 750 federal prisoners at Thomson would create more civilian job opportunities while further reducing the current 52 percent overcrowding in the federal prison system’s maximum security division. It is my understanding that the federal prison population is expected to grow by 10,000 to

14,000 inmates over the next two years. This has become a critical safety issue that reduces the guard to prisoner ratio, and jeopardizes the security of our federal personnel who work in these facilities.

Numerous members of Congress, including myself, have traveled to GITMO to personally examine the facility. We have discovered the cost to the taxpayers in converting the GITMO facility to house the terrorists already exceeds \$350 million. The expense to retrofit Thomson to mimic GITMO could cost \$150 to \$250 million dollars in addition to the purchase price of the prison. In addition to these staggering retrofitting costs, Congress is greatly concerned about transferring the risks associated with GITMO to Thomson, Illinois, or any other state. The risks are not with terrorist detainees escaping the prison, but with making the area around Thomson and that part of the State of Illinois a magnet for terrorists and protestors, much in the same manner that former Governor Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas, now Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, expressed when there was an earlier plan to move the GITMO terrorists to Fort Leavenworth.

The Thomson Correctional Facility is ideally suited to help the U.S. Department of Justice and the Bureau of Prisons meet growing demands for more federal prison capacity. Because the Thomson Correctional Facility is already built as a "turn-key" facility for maximum security prisoners, purchasing the prison represents the best value for the taxpayer without the need or delay of construction. With some of the highest unemployment rates in the nation, the northwest Illinois region would also greatly benefit economically from the full utilization of the Thomson facility as a federal prison.

Thus, Mr. President, I respectfully request that you proceed with a plan for the Bureau of Prisons to purchase and operate the Thomas Correctional Facility and allow full access to all eight pods so it can utilize the entire maximum security prison space to help ease the tremendous federal prison overcrowding.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,



Donald A. Manzullo
Member of Congress