

U.S. prisons swelled by nearly 900 inmates per week in 2004

By SIOBHAN McDONOUGH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Growing at a rate of about 900 inmates each week between mid-2003 and mid-2004, the nation's prisons and jails held 2.1 million people, or one in every 138 U.S. residents, the government reported Sunday.

By last June 30, there were 48,000 more inmates, or 2.3 percent, more than the year before, according to the latest figures from the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

The total inmate population has hovered around 2 million for the past few years, reaching 2.1 million on June 30, 2002, and just below that mark a year later.

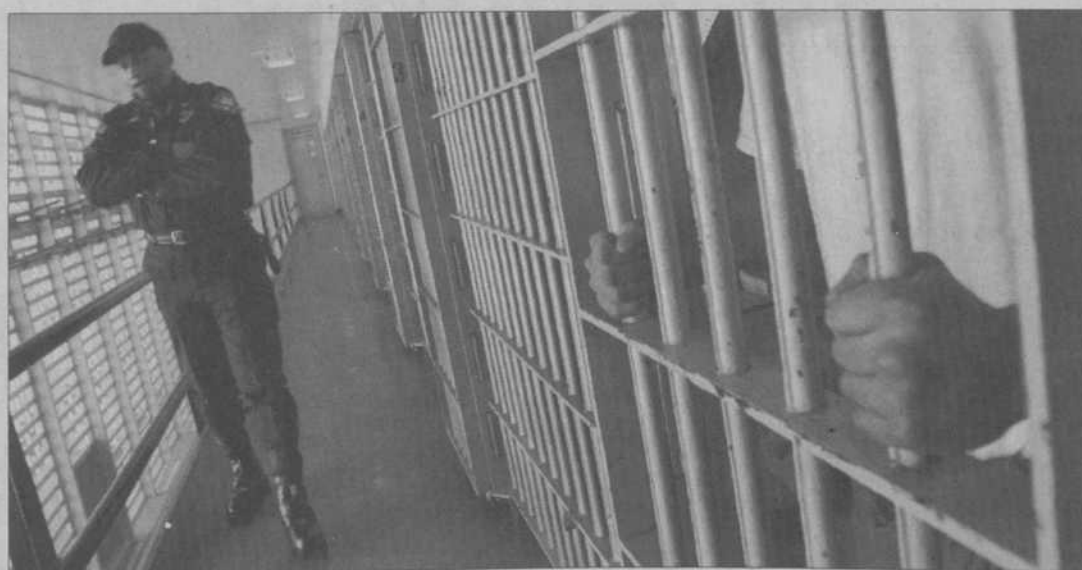
While the crime rate has fallen over the past decade, the number of people in prison and jail is outpacing the number of inmates released, said the report's co-author, Paige Harrison. For example, the number of admissions to federal prisons in 2004 exceeded releases by

more than 8,000, the study found. Harrison said the increase can be attributed largely to get-tough policies enacted in the 1980s and 1990s. Among them are mandatory drug sentences, "three-strikes-and-you're-out" laws for repeat offenders, and "truth-in-sentencing" laws that restrict early releases.

"As a whole most of these policies remain in place," she said. "These policies were a reaction to the rise in crime in the '80s and early 90s."

Added Malcolm Young, executive director of the Sentencing Project, which promotes alternatives to prison: "We're working under the burden of laws and practices that have developed over 30 years that have focused on punishment and prison as our primary response to crime."

He said many of those incarcerated are not serious or violent offenders, but are low-level drug offenders. Young said one way to help lower the number is to introduce drug treatment programs



Washington state prisons Lt. Clan Jacobs walks through a cellblock at the Washington Corrections Center. Prisons added nearly 900 inmates a week last year, according to a Bureau of Justice Statistics report.

that offer effective ways of changing behavior and to provide appropriate assistance for the mentally ill.

According to the Justice Policy

Institute, which advocates a more lenient system of punishment, the United States has a higher rate of incarceration than any other

country, followed by Britain, China, France, Japan and Nigeria.

There were 726 inmates for every 100,000 U.S. residents by June 30,

2004, compared with 716 a year earlier, according to the report by the Justice Department agency. In 2004, one in every 138 U.S. residents was in prison or jail; the previous year it was one in every 140.

In 2004, 61 percent of prison and jail inmates were of racial or ethnic minorities, the government said. An estimated 12.6 percent of all black men in their late 20s were in jails or prisons, as were 3.6 percent of Hispanic men and 1.7 percent of white men in that age group, the report said.

Other findings include:

— State prisons held about 2,500 youths under 18 in 2004. That compares with a peak, in 1995, of about 5,300. Local jails held about 7,000 youths, down from 7,800 in 1995.

— In the year ending last June 30, 13 states reported an increase of at least 5 percent in the federal system, led by Minnesota, at about 13 percent; Montana at 10.5 percent; Arkansas at 9 percent.

Verizon likely to increase MCI bid

By BRUCE MEYERSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Verizon is widely expected to boost its bid for MCI Inc. again now that the long-distance phone company has embraced a rival \$9.75 billion bid from Qwest, though it remains unlikely Verizon will need to pay that much to win MCI back.

Analysts say MCI's board had little choice but to declare Qwest's latest offer superior by Saturday's deadline, given its dubious legal grounds for sticking with a Verizon deal worth just \$7.5 billion.

But that means, to Qwest's dismay, that its "best and final" offer will amount to just another bargaining chip for MCI's board unless Verizon unexpectedly surrenders after a three-month bidding war.

Starting Monday, Verizon has five days to respond with an improved offer for MCI or walk away with a \$240 million breakup fee. It also has the right to ignore

that deadline and force MCI investors to vote on its existing deal, hopeful that enough fear Qwest's shaky finances and strategic outlook.

MCI's board has repeatedly expressed concern about Qwest's \$17 billion debt load and the long-term value of the Qwest shares MCI investors would receive as partial payment. The MCI board also has questioned whether Qwest can meet its forecast of nearly \$3 billion a year in cost savings from the proposed merger.

MCI's board has twice accepted lower-priced deals with Verizon, so Verizon could win with a lower bid.

The board can't officially swing its recommendation from Verizon Communications Inc. to Qwest Communications International Inc. until the five days elapse.

Regardless of who wins, analysts are questioning whether the bidders are at risk of overpaying for MCI's struggling business.

Qwest's \$30 offer values MCI about 50 percent higher than when the bidding began.

And on the basis of profit forecasts, it values MCI's prospective earnings as much as 50 percent higher than AT&T Corp., whose \$16 billion deal to be acquired by SBC Communications Inc. set off the scramble for MCI.

"We don't believe the risks associated with acquiring and integrating MCI are worth the prices being offered by either Qwest or Verizon," said Ben Silverman, an industry analyst for the investment newsletter FindProfit.com. "Thus, the only winners in this equation stand to be short-term MCI shareholders."

New York-based Verizon is one of the nation's two biggest local and wireless phone companies. Denver-based Qwest is the local service provider in 14 mostly Western states.

MCI, based in Ashburn, Va., has been hit hard by competition and a bankruptcy brought on by the WorldCom scandal, but still possesses a valuable customer base and national fiber-optic network.

Summer Membership at the Wellness & Fitness Center

USC-Columbia students who were enrolled in the 2005 spring semester and pre-enrolled in the 2005 fall semester, but are not taking summer classes, may purchase a summer membership per the following fee schedule:

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Summer II	July 2-August 12, 2005	\$34
All Summer	May 9-August 12, 2005	\$80

Membership fees may be paid at the Strom Thurmond Wellness & Fitness Center's Business Office during regular office hours, 8:30a - 5:00p. Cash and checks made payable to USC are accepted.

Students taking Summer classes will have access to the facility during the term in which they are enrolled.

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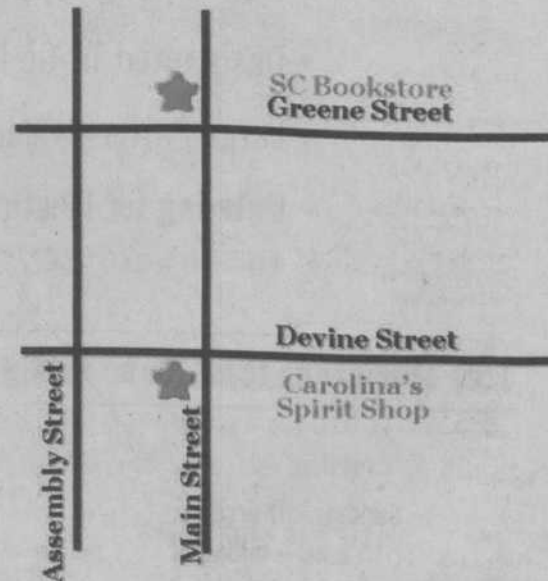
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