

Prison in Hinton to lose all its inmates

by: BARBARA HOBEROCK World Capitol Bureau
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OKLAHOMA CITY - Arizona is pulling more than 1,700 of its inmates from the Great Plains Correctional Facility in Hinton.

Arizona has recently added 4,000 beds to its existing prisons to increase capacity, Arizona Department of Corrections spokesman Barrett Marson said Tuesday. In addition, the state's contract for space at Great Plains is nearing an end, he said.

The Great Plains private prison is owned by the Hinton Economic Development Authority and operated by Houston-based Cornell Cos.

Cornell Cos. was previously in the process of merging with GEO, based in Boca Raton, Fla. GEO operates the Lawton Correctional Facility.

The Arizona inmates are expected to be removed in the coming months, said Charles Seigel, Cornell Cos. spokesman. The company has known for several months that Arizona was considering the move, he said.

The Great Plains Correctional Facility has 272 employees with an annual payroll of \$9.1 million.

"We are going to be without inmates for the moment," Seigel said. "We are working to try to find another customer to use it."

Until then, employees will be laid off, he said.

Hinton has a population of just under 3,000, said Dave Flezickey, a Hinton Economic Development Authority spokesman. The prison is one of the town's largest employers.

Cornell and Corrections Corporation of America have told the Federal Bureau of Prisons that they are interested in housing criminal illegal aliens at Great Plains and three other private prisons in the state. The inmates would be low-security males who are predominantly Mexican citizens with one year or less left to serve.

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections does not have the funds to contract to house state inmates at the two Oklahoma private prisons from which Arizona has removed inmates, said DOC Director Justin Jones.

Arizona also removed inmates from Diamondback Correctional Facility in Watonga this spring.

"Obviously, I would not rule it out, but that decision will have to be made through the legislative process," Jones said.

He said the private prison industry is a speculative market.

"It is not immune to recession and trends in sentencing and crime," Jones said. "A lot of states have gone back and applied research to their sentencing practices, which results in sentences that are more evidence-based, and that obviously affects a market that relies upon incarceration."

Private prisons in Oklahoma

- Cimarron Correctional Facility, Cushing. Capacity is 1,692 inmates. Houses 653 Oklahoma inmates. Operated by Corrections Corporation of America.
- Davis Correctional Facility, Holdenville. Capacity is 1,670 inmates. Houses 1,600 Oklahoma inmates.

Operated by Corrections Corporation of America.

- North Fork Correctional Facility, Sayre. Capacity is 2,500 inmates. Houses 2,324 California inmates. Operated by Corrections Corporation of America.
- Great Plains Correctional Facility, Hinton. Capacity is 2,000 inmates. Houses 1,720 Arizona inmates, who are being transferred back to Arizona. Operated by Cornell Cos. Inc.
- Lawton Correctional Facility, Lawton. Capacity is 2,526 inmates. Houses 2,477 Oklahoma inmates. Operated by GEO Group Inc.
- Diamondback Correctional Facility, Watonga. Capacity is 2,160 inmates. Closed in the spring. Held Arizona inmates. Operated by Corrections Corporation of America, which is still actively marketing the facility.


Source: Oklahoma Department of Corrections

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