



U.S. Prison Company and Mexico Announce Agreement on Incarcerated Immigrants

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NASHVILLE, Tenn., June 27 /PRNewswire/ -- Corrections Corporation of America, the nation's largest prison management company, today announced a new agreement with Mexico aimed at reducing the number of incarcerated undocumented immigrants in the United States.

"American taxpayer dollars pay for more than 50,000 undocumented immigrants, many of them repeat offenders, sitting in prison cells," said John D. Ferguson, President and CEO of Corrections Corporation of America. "Today, we begin to address that growing problem with the introduction of S.O.A.R., Serving Offenders to Affect Repatriation."

SOAR is a program already underway in CCA's California City Correctional Center in California and Cibola County Correctional Center in New Mexico; and is scheduled to begin at the McRae Correctional Facility in Georgia, which currently is scheduled to open in December 2002. CCA manages offender populations at these prisons on behalf of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Currently, 95% of the more than 3,600 inmates at the California City and Cibola prisons are undocumented Mexican nationals, and all will be deported to their country of origin upon completion of their sentence.

"SOAR addresses the root problem of repeat border violators -- lack of meaningful work opportunities at home, close to their families and their communities," said Ferguson. "Without prospects of work where they live, many of these offenders sit in their cells waiting for the clock to tick down; we release them back to their country, and they come right back to the United States, often within a matter of days."

The SOAR project includes bilingual academic classroom instruction where inmates can earn a diploma based on the Mexican education curriculum; rehabilitation assistance to help curb drug dependency, the primary reason many of the inmates are incarcerated; and vocational job training to teach them skills vital for obtaining employment upon their return to Mexico.

"We welcome the opportunity to work with CCA to deal with this social and economic phenomenon of human migration," said Dr. Juan Hernandez, special advisor to Mexico President Vicente Fox and Coordinator, Office of the President for Mexicans Living Abroad.

"Today marks another important step in increasing awareness that these people risk their lives to cross rivers, deserts and mountains and are not unlike millions of other immigrants who have done so for hundreds of years in search of fulfilling their dreams for themselves and their families.

"However, SOAR now offers thousands of Mexicans in prisons a way to acquire a basic education validated in Mexico; get help for any drug problem they may have developed; and learn a trade. That way, they can return and stay home where most would prefer to be if they had the hope that life held promise for them," added Dr. Hernandez.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons has an undocumented Mexican immigrant population in excess of 18,000, and California has more than 20,000 inmates, followed by Texas, Arizona and other states along the U.S. -- Mexico border. Despite increased border security implemented as part of the Federal Homeland Security Act, illegal border crossings since September 11th decreased only temporarily and are on the upswing again.

"SOAR students enroll in classes that are offered in both English and Spanish and learn language, writing and math skills," says Percy Pitzer, warden, California City Correctional Center, a CCA facility. "That, coupled with the drug rehabilitation and vocational training, enables inmates to learn, some for the first time, life and job skills that they desperately need."

"Once graduated, with Mexican diplomas in hand, SOAR alumni will have the assistance to perhaps open their own shop or work in someone else's company through a new partnership we have with the U.S.-Mexico Hispanic Chamber of Commerce," said Pitzer. "It's a win-win all the way around."

The U.S.- Mexico Chamber of Commerce entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with CCA for the SOAR project. The aim is to enlist the involvement of its Mexican entrepreneurial members who have jobs that need to be filled by qualified SOAR applicants.

"There's no doubt that this can work if we make the right matches," says Albert Zapanta, president and chief executive officer of U.S.- Mexico Chamber of Commerce. "Doing so will require coordination with our business members, identifying the job openings and CCA's assistance in sending applicants to us interested in employment."

The SOAR program helped the San Diego Community College earn a Rockefeller Foundation grant to conduct further research on future market trends in Mexico. The data will be used to determine where employment opportunities are projected to occur so that SOAR curriculum and vocational training can be adapted to meet future demand.

"We do not expect a 100% success rate. However, any success means a reduction in the cost to American taxpayers and the potential saving of lives of people so desperate for a better future, they're willing to risk it all," said Ferguson.

The Company houses and cares for more than 53,000 inmates for federal, state and local governments. Following the previously announced termination of the Company's Guayama, Puerto Rico contract, the Company will operate 61 facilities throughout 21 states and the District of Columbia.

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