

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
United States Congress

July 27, 2012

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We have learned that the Obama administration, through the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Prisons, has revived its plan to purchase the Thomson Correctional Facility in Thomson, Illinois. In 2009, we vigorously opposed President Obama's plan to purchase the Thomson facility in anticipation of closing the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and ship nearly 200 terrorist detainees to Illinois. We believed then, and believe now, that bringing hardened terrorists into the U.S. mainland would needlessly put Americans at risk.

We believe that if Congress clears the way for the Thomson purchase the President will invoke executive authority, defy the wishes of the American people, and close Guantanamo Bay detention center without notice despite bi-partisan opposition from Congress. Indeed, while signing a 2011 Defense Authorization bill which included a provision barring the use of funds to transfer Gitmo detainees to the U.S. for any reason, the President signaled his views in a signing statement, calling the prohibition "an extreme and risky encroachment on the authority of the executive branch."

In an April 4, 2011 letter to the Illinois delegation denying its intention to use the Thomson facility for Guantanamo detainees, the Obama administration nevertheless repeated its position that it considers Thomson sufficiently secure to house detainees and opposes Congressional restrictions on funding it.

Attorney General Eric Holder's recent testimony before the U.S. Senate, stating that the administration will not seek to move detainees to Thomson, has not reassured us. The President is in no way bound by the Attorney General's sworn statement. The administration's practice of using executive authority to nullify Congressional legislation, coupled with its continued insistence that Thomson is a perfectly appropriate place to relocate more than 100 known terrorists, has compelled us to speak out.

We call on Congress to restrain the President in the only way it can under the circumstances--through its appropriations authority. We urge members of Congress to join Representative Frank Wolf, Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, to stop President Obama from using this ploy to avoid being held accountable to the American people for bringing terrorists to the U.S. In poll after poll, the public has adamantly rejected the plan to close Guantanamo and bring terrorists to the homeland. In December 2009, a Gallup poll found that 68% opposed closing Gitmo and moving terrorists to the U.S. In December 2010, a Rasmussen poll found that 84% of voters worried that closing Gitmo would set dangerous terrorists free.

The Detainee Review Task Force found in its final report that 95% of the entire detainee population as of January 2009 had a connection to Al Qaeda. We have learned from JTF-GTMO officials that the current final group of 168 detainees consists of the most radical leaders, trained operatives, and ideologically dedicated Islamists of the entire original Guantanamo population.

Moving these dangerous individuals to Thomson under the transparently specious pretense of creating a speculative "federal jobs program" while our troops continue to take casualties and sacrifice their lives on the very battlefield where these terrorists were captured is an outrageous insult to the troops and their families.

We reject the extravagant claims that spending hundreds of millions of federal dollars to purchase, refit and operate the facility will rescue the economy of this small, rural community. In fact, studies show that prison enterprises aimed at injecting dollars into failing communities repeatedly fail to live up to expectations.

(See, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Business/2010/0315/Can-a-terror-prison-spark-a-boom>) Rural communities like Thomson are sometimes worse off, in part because local economies are displaced, volume suppliers are large companies from far away, and residents don't have the skills or qualifications to work as prison guards or administrative staff. This would certainly be the case if Thomson were converted to a maximum security facility operated by the U.S. military and unionized federal employees.

The detention facility at Guantanamo Bay is the most secure facility in the world. Located on a remote island, protected by land mines, and guarded by military personnel with state-of-the-art equipment and weapons, no one can come within miles of this secure facility unless the U.S. military wants them to. The U.S. government has spent more than \$ 500 million for this facility, which includes a state of the art courtroom for those detainees who are being tried in military commissions.

In light of the above facts, the case for closing Guantanamo, indisputably a superbly-run detention center, can only be reduced to one factor: politics.

As Americans whose loved ones were murdered by the very individuals who are now securely detained at Guantanamo, and as citizens who have watched more than 7,000 of our valiant armed forces sacrifice their lives in battle since that dark Tuesday morning almost eleven years ago, we regard the politics behind the effort to close Gitmo as nothing more than a cynical maneuver aimed at fulfilling a 2008 campaign promise.

Mr. Speaker, we urge you and your colleagues on both sides of the aisle to stand firm with the American people, and prevent this lawless and irresponsible plan from going forward.

Respectfully submitted,

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