

# Report: ICE detainees not allowed phone calls

LOS ANGELES—Private psychiatric hospitals holding mentally ill immigration detainees for the federal government may have violated California law by not allowing the patients to make phone calls or other contacts, a legal newspaper reported Thursday, March 26.

The detainees were placed in a network of private psychiatric hospitals beyond the reach of their families and lawyers, the *Daily Journal* said.

California law requires private psychiatric facilities to allow all patients to make telephone calls, receive visitors and notify relatives of their hospitalization, according to Los Angeles County health officials.

But Omar Solis, a green card holder, told the *Journal* he was committed against his will and held incommunicado at College Hospital Cerritos and College Hospital Costa Mesa for five weeks in 2007. Solis has bipolar disorder and was facing deportation charges for a probation violation on a conviction for burglary and assault with a deadly weapon.

Those hospitals stopped the

practice a year ago, according to a letter that College Hospitals Vice President Richard Louis III wrote to the county, the *Journal* reported.

Solis said he was told to sign blank documents that were later filled in to indicate that he didn't want a relative notified of his location.

"I never told anyone that," Solis told the *Journal*. "I was very outspoken in voicing my desire to talk to my family. I was constantly telling people I wanted to call my family."

Solis' mother, Berta, said she spent weeks searching for her son, but was told by immigration officials that they couldn't provide information about his whereabouts.

Solis said he was able to contact his mother with the help of another hospital patient who was not in immigration custody.

When she showed up at the hospital "supervisors came out and said, 'We can't give you information. It's impossible for you to see him,'" Berta Solis said.

Solis said he was never told of the visit.

Another facility, BHC Alham-

bra Hospital in Rosemead, received notice from the county Department of Mental Health's patients rights director, Ellen Satkin, warning the hospital was in violation of legally mandated rights.

Last July the hospital received a memo from Ruben Vela, assistant field office director for the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office.

The memo obtained by the *Journal* instructed hospital staff that "individuals in ICE custody may not use the phone or have conversations with members of the public without prior approval."

In a letter dated Feb. 26, Satkin wrote that Vela "did not cite any legal authority that would override state regulation and statutes," which allow mental health patients to see visitors daily and to have reasonable access to telephones.

The hospital informed the Department of Mental Health that it stopped admitting patients referred by ICE and is no longer considered in violation, department spokesman Ken Kondo told

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# Audit: LAUSD spends \$77M on consultants

LOS ANGELES—An audit shows the nation's second-largest school district could have saved \$77 million if its own employees were used instead of consultants on the district's \$27 billion construction project.

Inspector General Jerry Thornton's audit, released Monday, March 31, says Los Angeles Unified School District officials should rein in the power of consultants before there's a loss of

government control.

The audit examined the 2006-07 school year, noting \$77 million may have been saved that year if district employees were used. It recommends removing consultants from senior-level positions and replacing them with district employees.

The district has built 76 new schools in the past seven years. Thirty-three are now being built, and another 22 are scheduled to open by 2013. (AP)

# FDA says to avoid pistachios amid salmonella scare

FRESNO, CA—Federal food officials are warning people not to eat any food containing pistachios because of possible contamination by salmonella, in another food scare sure to rattle consumers already upset by the contamination of peanuts with the same bacteria.

The Food and Drug Administration said central California-based Setton Pistachio of Terra Bella Inc., the nation's second-largest pistachio processor, was voluntarily recalling more than 2 million pounds of its roasted nuts shipped since last fall.

"Our advice to consumers is that they avoid eating pistachio products, and that they hold onto those products," said Dr. David Acheson, assistant commissioner for food safety. "The number of products that are going to be recalled over the coming days will grow, simply because these pistachio nuts have then been repackaged into consumer-level containers."

Two people called the FDA complaining of gastrointestinal illness that could be associated with the nuts, but the link hasn't been confirmed, Acheson said. Still, the plant decided to shut down late last week, officials said.

The recalled nuts are a small fraction of the 55 million pounds of pistachios that the company's plant processed last year and an even smaller portion of the 278 million pounds produced in the state in the 2008 season, according to the Fresno-based Administrative Committee for Pistachios.

California is the second-larg-

est producer of pistachios in the world.

According to the company's Web site, Setton Pistachio is in the corporate family of Commack, NY-based Setton International Foods Inc. The company sells nuts, dried fruit, edible seeds, chocolate and yogurt-coated candies.

The FDA learned about the problem last Tuesday, when Kraft Foods Inc. notified the agency that routine product testing had detected salmonella in roasted pistachios. Kraft and the Georgia Nut Co. recalled their Back to Nature Nantucket Blend trail mix the next day.

The FDA contacted Setton Pistachio and California health officials shortly afterward, in what Acheson called a "proactive move."

By Friday, March 27, Cincinnati-based grocery operator Kroger Co. recalled one of its lines of bagged pistachios because of possible salmonella contamination, saying the California plant also supplied its nuts. Those nuts were sold in 31 states.

Fabia D'Arienzo, a spokeswoman for Tulare County-based Setton Pistachio, said the company was only recalling certain bulk roasted in-shell and roasted shelled pistachios that were shipped on or after September 1.

Because Setton Pistachio shipped bags of nuts weighing up to 2,000 pounds to 36 wholesalers across the country, it will take weeks to figure out how many products could be affected, said Jeff Farrar, chief of the Food and Drug Branch of the California Department of Public Health.

"It will be safe to assume based

on the volume that this will be an ingredient in a lot of different products, and that may possibly include things like ice cream and cake mixes," Farrar said. "The firm is already turning around trucks in transit to bring those back to the facility."

Salmonella, the most common cause of food-borne illness, causes diarrhea, fever and cramping. Most people recover, but the infection can be life-threatening for children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.

Roasting is supposed to kill the bacteria in nuts. But problems can occur if the roasting is not done correctly or if roasted nuts are re-contaminated. That can happen if mice, rats or birds get into the facility.

The national peanut salmonella outbreak was blamed on a Georgia company under federal investigation for flouting safety procedures and knowingly shipping contaminated peanuts.

That outbreak is still ongoing. More than 690 people in 46 states have gotten sick. Nearly 3,900 products made with peanut ingredients from Peanut Corp. of America have been recalled.

California public health authorities have taken hundreds of samples at Setton's processing facility, but lab results have not yet determined whether salmonella was found at the plant, Farrar said. The food companies' own tests of the contaminated products isolated four different types of salmonella, but none were the same strain as the one found in the peanuts, Acheson said. (AP)

# Nation needs transition president in 2010—NSA Gonzales

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"We need Charter change, but we will never get to doing it until we have a transition president who is willing to carry it out and call for a new election under a new political system afterwards," Gonzales explained.

Gonzales said the country's transition period may take two to three years.

If the transition president is still interested in the leadership of the country after the transition period, he or she can seek a new mandate from the people under the new political system, he added.

The Malacañang official challenged the country's so-called presidentiables to be this transition president. "Who among our present leaders who want to be president is willing to be this transition president?" he asked.

"I can see that beyond the traditional politicians, we have leaders who are presenting themselves as reform candidate or are being pushed to be so in 2010. Perhaps, Brother Mike Velarde can be this transition president. Even Mr. Estrada, if he really wants to seek

again the presidency, can consider becoming this transition president," Gonzales suggested.

He said his challenge is addressed to all those who want to be the next president of the country, but he cited Velarde and Estrada because "these two have said they are willing, if elected, to serve only half of the term for the president during which they intend to spearhead the country's needed reforms."

He said the present administration can also begin the transition mode for the country.

The national security adviser noted that the country's politicians, both from the administration and from the opposition, have set into electoral mode but are heading to a routine 2010 elections that will bring only change of leaders and nothing else.

"The way I see things, we will have more of the same in 2010. We will not have the societal change that we need to finally put an end to our recurring political crisis and to move our people on the path to a new Philippines," Gonzales said. (NSA/PIA XI)



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