

THE HONORABLE ROBERT W. KASTENMEIER

STATEMENT ON THE FEDERAL PENITENTIARY IN MARION, ILLINOIS

May 4, 1990

As Chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property, and the Administration of Justice, I have responsibility to oversee the Federal Bureau of Prisons. In that capacity, I have worked and continue to work to assure that inmates in our nation's prisons are treated humanely.

I know that you are here today because of your concern about conditions of confinement at the Marion Federal Penitentiary, and in particular the "lockdown" policy and the Marion water supply. I commend you for your commitment to a humane prison system.

In 1983 and 1984 there were a series of violent incidents at the Marion Federal Penitentiary. As a result, all inmates at the prison were placed in "lockdown." What was initially a short term reaction to violent incidents has become a permanent "lockdown" policy. I have expressed my concern to the Bureau of Prisons about this policy on a number of occasions. Most recently at an oversight hearing on overcrowding in the federal prisons I noted that the policy of holding the majority of a prison's inmates in their cells for 23 hours a day "raises serious policy questions and will always be a target of those who are concerned about prisons."

In addition, I have inquired into the safety of the water at Marion both with the Bureau of Prisons and with the Environmental Protection Agency. This is a matter that I am continuing to explore.

I plan to visit the Marion Penitentiary later this month in order to assess the conditions of confinement first hand.