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Halliburton's Immigrant Detention Centers

by Ruth Conniff

While thousands of people were celebrating the contribution America's undocumented immigrants make to our economy, and demanding justice and recognition for workers who are denied basic rights, the government was making plans for large-scale detention centers in case of an "emergency influx" of immigrants.

KBR, the Halliburton subsidiary recently reprimanded for gross overcharging in its military contracts in Iraq, won a \$385 million contract to build the centers. According to the Halliburton website--www.Halliburton.com--"the contract, which is effective immediately, provides for establishing temporary detention and processing capabilities to augment existing ICE Detention and Removal Operations Program facilities in the event of an emergency influx of immigrants into the U.S., or to support the rapid development of new programs."

What new programs might those be?

The web was abuzz with speculation after the contract was awarded on January 24. [Pacific News Service](#) gave the most detailed analysis.

It connected the new "immigration emergency" plans with older plans that involved imposing martial law.

Certainly the detention centers raise the specter of WW II Japanese internment camps.

The new facilities could be used for round-ups of Muslim Americans or other American citizens tagged as "enemy combatants."

The use of military personnel and military contractors in the event of a Katrina-like disaster, which the Halliburton contract provides for, brings us closer to martial law, whether it is officially declared or not.

It also means record profits for Halliburton, which declared 2005 "the best in our 86-year history." David Lesar, Halliburton's chairman, president and CEO, declares on the company website, "For the full year 2005 we set a record for revenue and achieved net income of \$2.4 billion with each of our six divisions posting record results."

Not bad for a company that has been repeatedly cited for inflating charges and wasting taxpayer money in Iraq.

The immigration detention centers ought to raise a red flag, not just about nepotism and waste among military contractors, but about what our government has in store for us.

Perhaps the same energy that propelled immigrant rights into the national headlines could be harnessed to demand an explanation for what, exactly, Halliburton is helping to prepare for with this latest big chunk of taxpayer largess.

Ruth Conniff covers national politics for The Progressive and is a voice of The Progressive on many TV and radio programs.

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