

Republican Perspective

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by John Littig

Feds Cut Pork!

Well that sounds encouraging. Oh, wait a sec. It's not the wasteful spending kind of pork---it's the kind of pork we eat.

Last October the Federal Bureau of Prisons eliminated pork from the menu at all of its 122 facilities housing 200 thousand inmates nationwide. Bureau spokesman Edmond Ross said the change is because the prisoners just don't like pork. He also said the prisoners "are more health conscious these days" and that "some choose to be vegetarian or vegan."

Dave Warner, spokesman for the National Pork Producers Council said he finds it "hard to believe that a survey would have found a majority of any population saying 'no thanks, I don't want any bacon.'"

On the other hand, Ibrahim Hooper, spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said "we welcome the change because it's facilitating the accommodation of Muslim inmates." (He did not explain how withholding pork from non-Muslims accommodates Muslims.) He predicted that others would claim that the federal government was acting under pressure from Muslims. "It will stoke the fires of Islamophobia based on the usual conspiracy theories."

Well, it turns out that the Ohio prison system had already dropped pork from its menu "to eliminate the possibility of pork coming into contact with other food during preparation." The catalyst for this decision was a lawsuit filed by Muslim death row inmate Abdul Awkal.

So the more likely explanation for the Bureau of Prisons' decision to eliminate pork from the menu is that they wanted to avoid a lawsuit by Muslim inmates, as had happened in Ohio. At least that makes a lot more sense than the absurd assertion that the majority of the prison population just don't like bacon or baby back ribs. (Although it's also possible that someone in or above the Bureau of Prisons chain of command directed this change out of feelings of solidarity with the Muslim inmates.)

But why not admit that the real reason was to avoid confrontation or a lawsuit by Muslim inmates rather than making up an obvious whopper? Concealing the real reason only seems to make Hooper's prediction all the more likely: that it will "stoke the fires of Islamophobia based on the usual conspiracy theories."

What is more disturbing is Hooper's statement that "we welcome the change because it's facilitating the accommodation of Muslim inmates." Really? Non-pork meals were already provided. How does withholding pork from non-Muslims accommodate Muslims? Are they accommodated by letting them control what *they* eat, or by letting them control what *everyone* eats?

Hooper says this elimination of pork will lead to conspiracy theories, so

here's one. If the prison systems can be pressured, why not the military? Why not the public schools? And once we accept that, then why not restaurants and supermarkets?

The National Pork Producers Council is right to be concerned. And maybe pork isn't the end of it.