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NC's only private federal prison will close, more to follow after Biden ordered to end BOP contracts with private facilities

President Biden has directed the Department of Justice to end private federal prison contracts in an executive order, a promise he made during his campaign. "To decrease incarceration levels, we must reduce profit-based incentives to incarcerate by phasing out the Federal Government's reliance on privately operated criminal detention facilities," the executive order noted systemic racism in the mass incarceration and stated that decarcerating the prison population is a priority. There are 14,122 inmates — less than 10% of the federal prison population — in 12 contracted federal private prisons nationwide. The one in North Carolina, the 1,450-bed Rivers Correctional Institution, is a low-security, all-male facility in the Hertford County town of Winton, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons. But the DOJ already decided not to renew the contract with Rivers last year, according to Business Wire. The contract will expire March 31, 2021. The BOP website stated that the majority of BOP inmates in private prisons are criminal aliens who may be deported upon completion of their sentence. For Rivers, that's the majority of its prison population. The rest, around 160, were District of Columbia Code offenders, many of whom have mental health issues and are going through a reentry program. The owner of Rivers, The GEO Group, Inc., runs 9 of the 12 federal contract prisons. The facility will transfer the federal inmates and lay off 336 positions, according to the company. The GEO Group is a Florida-based company founded in 1984, according to its website. A 2016 DOJ Inspector General report cited a problem with contraband and violence at Rivers. The report also noted higher safety and security incidents per capita than at public prisons run by the BOP. The report led to a memo issued by former Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates to reduce contracts with private prisons, according to the GEO Group. But the Trump administration quickly reversed the decision and renewed the contracts. The ACLU released a statement supporting the move by the Biden administration, saying "Prison privatization increases the potential for mistreatment and abuse of incarcerated people, and this move by the Biden administration will start curtailing this insidious practice." But the civil-rights organization also called for more action against prison profiteering of other players, including for-profit prison health care companies and private prisons contracted with the Department of Homeland Security. A national advocacy group, the Detention Watch Network, reported widespread abuse, medical neglect, poor quality of food and sanitation, language access concerns, as well as lack of accountability in private prisons contracted with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement under the DHS. A GEO Group spokesperson released a statement, calling the executive order "a solution in search of a problem." The statement said that the BOP had already announced steps over the last four months not to renew expiring contracts with private companies, "President Biden's Executive Order merely represents a political statement, which could carry serious negative unintended consequences, including the loss of hundreds of jobs and negative economic impact for the communities where our facilities are located, which are already struggling economically due to the COVID pandemic." The GEO Group spent more than \$1.5 million in lobbying in 2019 and contributed over \$1.4 million in the 2020 election cycle, including \$11,010 to Sen. Thom Tillis, \$10,000 of which came from the company PAC, according to campaign finance research group the Center for Responsive Politics.