

April 2019

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Recommended Citation

"Detainees heading to court this afternoon" (2019). *Postville Project Documents*. 153.
https://scholarworks.uni.edu/postville_documents/153

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COURIER 05/13/2008

Detainees heading to court this afternoon

By JOSH NELSON, Courier Staff Writer

WATERLOO - Court proceedings against approximately 390 people detained in the largest immigration raid of its type are scheduled to begin this afternoon.

Agents from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement descended on the Agriprocessors plant in Postville Monday morning.

The 390 people arrested, most of whom were Guatemalan immigrants, were transported to a processing area at the National Cattle Congress fairgrounds in Waterloo.

Fifty-six people were released on humanitarian grounds, either from health conditions or because children would be left without parents. Most of those were women.

"Very few women remain in custody," said Claude Arnold, a special agent in charge of the ICE office of investigations in Bloomington, Minn.

Seventy-six women were arrested in all.

Three hundred and fourteen men are being held at Estel Hall on the fairgrounds.

Three temporary court rooms were set up at the fair by the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of Iowa, where the defendants who face criminal charges will make their initial appearance, said U.S. Attorney Matt M. Dummermuth.

The hearings are expected to begin at 4 p.m., according to court documents. Attorney Steve Swift has been appointed to represent the first 10 defendants.

After that appearance, the defendants will be remanded to the custody of the U.S. Marshals.

Those not criminally charged will stay in the custody of ICE while they undergo deportation proceedings, officials said.

The defendants may face a range of charges, including aggravated identity theft and fraudulent use of a social security number.

Officials said the raid was the largest single-site raid in the nation, and the largest in Iowa's history.

At a press conference earlier in the day, ICE officials showed a video of the processing area, which included enough space for nearly 700 people. The area included showers, sleeping arrangements and entertainment.

"You can see this was not just a small operation," said Bob Teig, an assistant U.S. attorney.

An intake processing area was set up in McElroy Auditorium.

Most of the administrative arrests in the immigration raid at Agriprocessors in Postville were Guatemalans but included four different nationalities, officials with the U.S. Attorney's office in Cedar Rapids said this morning.

Of the 390 detainees, 290 were Guatemalans and 93 were Mexicans, as well as a handful of Israelis and Ukrainians, officials said.

Twelve juveniles who were found working at the plant were also arrested, Arnold said. Six of those juveniles were released to family members or other responsible adults.

An immigration attorney gained was allowed access to the National Cattle Congress grounds late this morning.

Meanwhile Efforts to bring families currently staying in a Catholic church in Postville closer to detained family members and legal aid was underway this morning at El Centro Latinoamericano.

The Guatemalan consulate in Chicago said this morning it is sending two representatives to the center this evening. The Latino resource center is coordinating with area churches and St. Bridget's Catholic Church in Postville to transport people down to shelters in Waterloo.

Also a prayer vigil has been scheduled 6:30 p.m. tonight at Queen of Peace Catholic Church , 320 Mulberry St.

A bank account, called Postville Support Fund, has been set up at Veridian Credit Union benefit detainees and their families.

Read Wednesday's Courier and online updates for more details.