

Bill Kleiber, my Ministry Assistant is in the videos below. He is featured in the second video. Both are worth watching.

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Mentally ill prisoners, homeless the focus of media report but not national healthcare debate

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By Scott Henson
Grits for Breakfast

Josh Rushing from *Al Jazeera's* English-language news has produced a quite well done, two-part video report on the mentally ill in US prisons, focusing particularly on Texas prisons and the Harris County jail (which is the largest mental institution in Texas, according to the report). See:

- [Part One](http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/faultlines/2009/09/2009917132219605302.html)
- [Part Two](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_dv-S0M9tak&feature=channel)

The two pieces run around 20 minutes all told and are well worth watching. Part one in particular contains some good interviews with staff and inmates at the Harris County Jail and hones on the relationship between homelessness and the criminalization of the mentally ill. Part two focuses more on the politics and history of how we reached this sorry state and also contains some interesting interviews with volunteers from our friends at Restorative Justice Ministries as they greeted prisoners fresh out of lockup in Huntsville.

An excellent point raised by Rushing is the near-complete lack of discussion about providing mental health services in the ongoing national healthcare debate. I'd also noticed that nobody in D.C. is talking about mental health and have wondered how the "individual mandate" for people to buy insurance will work with people who are homeless and mentally ill.

Kudos to the Harris County Sheriff for letting Rushing in the jail for interviews with inmates, medical staff, and front-line jail personnel. The state prison system refused, which I thought was bad form. Everybody knows we have a serious problem with warehousing the mentally ill in prisons and jails; there's no need to be close-lipped with the media about what's happening inside public institutions.

<http://gritsforbreakfast.blogspot.com/2009/09/mentally-ill-prisoners-homeless-focus.html>