PRISON SENTENCES

Obama commutes terms of 111 inmates

He’s granted 325 this month, which sets a record.

By Mark Berman Washington Post

TEXANS ON THE LIST

› Corey Lyndell Blount, Houston
› Ronald Lee Blount, Jr., Houston
› Juan Benito Calbo-Gomez, Corpus Christi
› Warren Dean Cornett, Houston Henry Deleon, Corpus Christi
› Darryl Dewayne Edwards, Port Arthur
› Jason Gardner, Fort Worth
› Ricky Lamont Garrett, Waco
› David Gonzalez, Houston
› Jose Jasso, Jr., Progreso
› Samuel Latrell Johnson, Odessa
› Lue Gene Swarn, Dallas
› Gracie Walker, Granbury
› Henry Deleon, Corpus Chirstie
WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama on Tuesday commuted the sentences of 111 inmates, the latest in his push to ease harsh penalties given to nonviolent drug offenders.

Obama has been critical of what he has called the “devastating” effects of severe sentences handed down during the country’s war on drugs. He became the first sitting president to visit a federal prison, and spoke there about the importance of “second chances.”

While the pace of commutations he granted had worried activists earlier this year, Obama has made a push in August to give clemency to scores of additional inmates. Earlier this month, Obama commuted the sentences of 214 other inmates, setting a single-day record for his administration. The 325 commutations he has announced this month are the most from any president in one month, the White House says, and have nearly doubled the total number he has granted while in office.

“Entire communities have been ravaged where largely men, but some women, are taken out of those communities,” Obama said the day after he granted clemency to 214 inmates. “Kids are now growing up without parents. It perpetuates a cycle of poverty and disorder in their lives. It is disproportionately young men of color that are being arrested at higher rates, charged and convicted at higher rates, and imprisoned for longer sentences.”

Obama said that he hoped the bipartisan push for criminal justice reform could wind up weighing how to fight crime alongside “the need for proportionality in sentencing and the need to rehabilitate those who commit crimes.”

This latest round announced by the White House on Tuesday pushes the total number of commutations Obama has granted while in office to 673, nearly equal to the number of commutations issued by the previous 11 administrations combined (690).

While the number of commutations Obama has granted far exceeds those of his predecessors dating back to World War II, they still impact a fraction of the country’s massive population of incarcerated people.
At the end of 2014, there were more than 210,000 inmates in federal correctional facilities, along with another 1.3 million in state facilities, according to Justice Department statistics. That year, half of all men and more than half of women in federal prisons were serving time for drug offenses, according to the most recent numbers from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which released them last fall.

The number of inmates in federal prisons has declined to less than 195,000 earlier this month, according to a memo Yates wrote outlining the Justice Department’s plans to stop using private prisons.

With just months left in office, Obama faces a mountain of names seeking clemency. According to the Justice Department, there were more than 11,000 commutation petitions pending earlier this month, along with more than 1,400 pardon petitions.

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