



An Open-Ed Article from HRAC

Pardon Bonanza and Aftermaths

A True Leader Would be Willing to Shoulder the Burden

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Close to the end of his presidency before January 20, 2025, former President Biden issued many pardons and commutations, including the commutation of Leonard Petier, age 80. Leonard was convicted for murdering two FBI agents and had been in prison since 1975. HRAC had called for his release in the last ten years with many campaign videos, and went as far as enlisting Pope Francis for assistance. While one could dispute the validity of the conviction because it was based on mostly circumferential evidences, 50 years of imprisonment is enough as the punishment for the alleged crime, in our opinion. The commutation issued to Leonard allows him to return to his homeland and unite with his family, for likely just a few more years because of his poor health and advanced age. His son was 10 years old when he was incarnated and is now 60. Most of all, this clemency would go a long way to promote healing for the people of Oglala Lakota Nation in South Dakota.

Did President Biden do the right thing? Will he receive severe criticisms? Of course, but a true leader should be willing to shoulder the burden for exercising this pardon power granted by Article II of the US Constitution as long as the President believes that the positive of the clemency outweighs the negative.

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, President Trump, after his inauguration on January 20, 2025, pardoned and commuted over 1500 J6 prisoners. His action was widely criticized. It still takes tremendous courage to make this decision, knowing that perhaps up to 50% of the nation might disagree with his action.

The notion that you need a consensus to issue a pardon is preposterous.

Going back in history, the pardons by Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Jackson for ex-confederates most likely were the key to heal our nation after the civil war. Their decisions were just as unpopular to many but their courage and wisdom guided them to do what was the best for the nation.

Another major human rights mission HRAC had taken was related to the former President of Taiwan, Chen Shui-Bian, twice-elected from 2000 to 2008, representing Democratic Progress Party (DPP) of Taiwan. Within Six months after he stepped down from his presidency, he was placed in custody by the succeeding government of Chinese National Party (KMT) under likely

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bogus charges. Many of these charges are still not resolved. President Chen was imprisoned in a small and punishing cell, under surveillance light 24/7. His health rapidly declined and was hospitalized in 2013. HRAC sent a team to Taiwan to investigate his case and met President Chen in person in the hospital. HRAC has published over 40 articles on Huffington Post and Twitter, in addition to a youtube video, to call for his release. Along with the effort of many other activists, President Chen was finally released from prison on medical parole in 2015, after six years of imprisonment. However, he is still not a free man almost ten years later.

As candidates, both former President Tsai Ing-Wen (2016-2024) and current President William Lai (2024-date) called for pardoning President Chen. However, after being elected, with the power of pardon, both bogged, citing lack of national consensus on the pardoning issue and on-going trials. Both of them, in particular President Lai, should learn from the Presidents of the US to shoulder the burden. If you thought pardoning President Chen would help to heal the nation as a presidential candidate, why is it wrong after you have assumed the presidency? President Lai can also review other human rights cases, particularly those related to journalists, because free speech is the guardian of Taiwan's democracy. HRAC continues to monitor human rights issues of Taiwan, an important ally of the US in the Pacific.

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