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Los Alamos scientist Lee released under plea deal

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Wen Ho Lee celebrated at home with family and friends after he was set free with an apology from a judge who said the former Los Alamos scientist had been “terribly wronged” by the government.

Lee’s release under a plea deal Wednesday came nine months after he was put in solitary confinement and branded a threat to national security.

“The last nine months were pretty tough for me, but I survived,” Lee said.

In his tongue-lashing of government officials, U.S. District Judge James Parker said he was angered over having been misled into believing the 60-year-old nuclear scientist was a danger to national security if released on bail.

“I sincerely apologize to you, Dr. Lee, for the unfair manner in which you were held in custody by the executive branch,” said Parker, who singled out the Energy and Justice departments.

“They have embarrassed our entire nation and each of us who is a citizen of it,” he said.

In a rare public rebuke of the Energy and Justice departments, President Clinton said he was “quite troubled” by their handling of the case and expressed his regrets.

“The last nine months were pretty tough for me, but I survived.”

— Wen Ho Lee
former Los Alamos scientist

“I don’t think you can justify in retrospect keeping a person in jail without bail when you’re prepared to make that kind of agreement,” the president said of the plea deal

Thursday. “It just can’t be justified. ... So I too am quite troubled by it.”

His comments came just a few hours after Attorney General Janet Reno refused to accept blame, saying Lee was at fault for not providing the government with information sooner.

“I think Dr. Lee, from the beginning, had the opportunity to answer this and I think now he needs to look to himself,” rather than expect an apology from the U.S. government, she said at her weekly news conference.

In Washington, the Energy Department issued a one-paragraph statement Wednesday: “Dr. Lee pleaded guilty to a felony admitting that he mishandled sensitive classified information. That speaks for itself.”

The judge’s stinging criticism came even as he signed off on the agreement that freed Lee, who pleaded guilty to one count of mishandling nuclear secrets as the government all but abandoned its crumbling case.

Nile virus scares Israel, Jordan

(AP) — Anxiety in Israel was growing Thursday after the West Nile virus killed an eighth victim this summer, and hospital emergency rooms were crowded with people who feared they had contracted the mosquito-borne disease.

In two dozen towns in Israel’s hardest hit coastal plain, residents closed their windows this week as machines belched forth clouds of insecticide mixed with diesel oil to wipe out the mosquitoes.

In southern Israel, 3,300 geese were destroyed at a farm after some of the birds died of

the disease. There were minor outbreaks among geese at other farms but no wholesale slaughter.

Most flocks have been vaccinated against the virus, said Dr. Oded Nir, chief veterinarian at the Ministry of Agriculture. “This is not like last year’s outbreak of the virus in New York where they had crows falling out of the sky,” Nir said.

There was little chance the outbreaks in New York and Israel were connected, officials said. The virus was probably brought to Israel by wild birds migrating from Europe to Africa, said Dr. Alex Leventhal, the

Health Ministry’s director of public health.

Concerned by the cases in Israel, neighboring Jordan asked hospitals and clinics throughout the kingdom to notify the Health Ministry if any cases were detected.

Eight people in Israel have died this summer, and 120 more have contracted the disease. The latest victim was Nurit Gurwitz, 54, from Rishon Lezion, south of Tel Aviv, who was hospitalized two weeks ago and died Wednesday.

Gurwitz’ family was only informed a few hours before her death that she

had contracted the illness, said her husband, Shlomo, suggesting that his wife did not receive the proper treatment from the start. The hospital denied the allegations.

In a sign of growing anxiety, hospital emergency rooms were crowded with people with mild influenza who thought they had the West Nile virus, which can be deadly for patients with a weak immune system.

“We calm them down and send them home, but more keep coming,” said Dr. Motte Ravid, director of internal medicine at a hospital in Kfar Sava.

Prison programs allow fathers to interact with their children

DURHAM, N.C. (AP) — At Missouri’s toughest prison, inmates run a 4-H Club program for their children. Imprisoned dads in Florida, some barely literate, send home recordings of themselves reading storybooks.

Though many wardens and legislators remain wary, fatherhood programs run by volunteers and non-profit groups are teaching parenting skills and family values to more and more of the nearly 700,000 fathers held in state and federal prisons.

Some states avoid such programs; others have one or two modest pilot projects. Pennsylvania has expanded a program called Long Distance Dads throughout its prison system, and several Southern states are preparing comparable initiatives.

The trend has contributed to an upbeat mood at one of the first major conferences on the topic, the North American Conference on Fathers Behind Bars and on the Streets.

The three-day meeting, which ends Friday, has drawn researchers, social workers and corrections officials from across the country.

“Maybe we’re coming to the point where the invisible families are starting to become visible to people in policy positions,” said James Mustin, executive director of the Family and Corrections Network, a co-sponsor of the conference.

Nearly 1.5 million American children have a parent in prison, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Many states already have special programs for mothers behind bars. But 93 percent of the imprisoned parents are men, and their role as fathers has traditionally been neglected by corrections officials.

“Most wardens see their job as, ‘Nobody gets out, nobody gets hurt,’” Mustin said. “If they can do that, they’ve had a good day.”

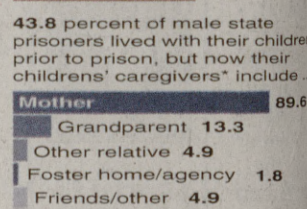
Over the past four years, Pennsylvania has worked with fatherhood groups to develop Long Distance Dads and now offers the 12-week program to imprisoned fathers throughout the state. With a curriculum created in part by inmates, and using inmates as group leaders, the program encourages fathers to assume responsibility for their children while in prison and after they get out.

Penn State University is scheduled to complete an evaluation of the program next June.

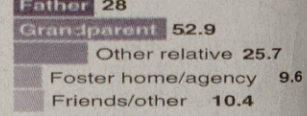
Parents in prison

In 1999, an estimated 721,500 men and women in prison were parents to 1.5 million children under 18. Here is a look at prison parenthood, based on a 1997 survey.

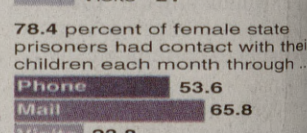
Percent of prisoners who were parents



64.3 percent of female state prisoners lived with their children prior to prison, but now their children’s caregivers’ include...



62.4 percent of male state prisoners had contact with their children each month through...



78.4 percent of female state prisoners had contact with their children each month through...



*Some prisoners had children in different homes.
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

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