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Opinion

Foster prudent with clemency

Recently released statistics show a marked decline in pardons signed by Gov. Foster as compared with his predecessor. According to state records, Gov. Foster has, over the past 4½ years, signed a total of 111 acts of clemency that include pardons and commutations. His predecessor issued 583 pardons in only four years.

The granting of a pardon is a very serious matter. Criminals convicted of the most heinous crimes can request a pardon. One of the most powerful actions a governor can take is the commutation of an inmate's sentence. The governor, upon recommendation by the Pardon Board, can reduce the length or terms of a prison sentence imposed by a court and jury. This power must be used with proper judgment. Gov. Foster has used this power only twice since he was elected, according to state records. His predecessor used

this power 152 times, and that does not include his three previous terms.

The purpose of prison is to punish an individual and remove him from society. The criminal must actually be in jail for this to be meaningful. The Louisiana Department of Corrections statistics show that 55 percent of released inmates return to prison, usually for a more serious crime. Certainly, more commutations of sentences are not needed.

We, the citizens of Louisiana, should be thankful for Gov. Foster's prudent use of the power of his office and his selection of an excellent Pardon Board. Louisiana is a safe place to live, at least for now.

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