

EXCLUSIVE

POLITICS NEWS

Former federal inmate pardoned by Trump tapped as Bureau of Prisons deputy director

Joshua J. Smith, a Tennessee businessman whom the president pardoned during his first term, now advocates for inmate rehabilitation.



— Entrepreneur and national prison reform advocate Josh Smith speaks at a ribbon cutting event for Men of Valor's Dogan-Gaither Flats in Knoxville, Tenn., in 2022.

Brianna Paciorka / The Knoxville News-Sentinel via USA Today Network file

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By Erik Ortiz and Michael Kosnar

A former federal inmate who was [pardoned by President Donald Trump](#) in his first term for drug trafficking crimes more than two decades ago has been tapped as deputy director of the federal

Bureau of Prisons, according to bureau spokesperson Kristie Breshears.

Joshua J. Smith, a Tennessee businessman who founded an inmate advocacy and rehabilitation nonprofit foundation, the [Fourth Purpose](#), will be second in command in the bureau.

The BOP has never had a formerly incarcerated inmate work as an employee at any level, according to a senior bureau official.

“Josh brings to this role something our agency has never had before at this level, a perspective shaped by lived experience, proven innovation and national impact,” Director William K. Marshall III said in a memo to staff Thursday.

“His firsthand understanding of our facilities – of the tension, the risk and the importance of trust – makes him uniquely positioned to advocate for the resources and reforms front-line staff need to do their jobs safely and effectively,” added Marshall, a former prison commissioner in West Virginia whom [Trump selected as BOP director](#) in April.

Smith declined to comment when reached by phone Thursday.

Trump granted a full pardon to Smith, who had been convicted of conspiracy to possess drugs with intent to distribute. Indictments were filed in 1997 for marijuana- and cocaine-related charges, and the court docket shows he pleaded guilty. The court recommended he go to the Federal Correctional Institution Manchester in Kentucky and boot camp for a 60-month sentence. He was also set to have five years supervised release, substance abuse treatment and a \$12,500 fine.

The bureau, in recent years, has been roiled by accusations of cronyism and corruption, widespread [staffing shortages](#), and [violence and misconduct](#) in prisons. Its leadership must manage a massive \$8 billion-plus budget, more than 143,000 federal inmates across 122 prisons, and a workforce of more than 35,000 as the Justice Department’s largest employer.

In deciding to pardon Smith, the [White House said in 2021](#) that, after his release from prison in 2003, he “dedicated his life to his faith and to his community,” founded Fourth Purpose and “mentored incarcerated individuals and taught business classes to those in prison – including at the prison where he was incarcerated.”

Smith’s pardon request was supported by Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican.

According to his [online biography](#), Smith said he was raised by a single mother in government housing, was convicted of 10 felonies by the time he was 16 and entered prison at 21. While in

prison, he said, he learned about Christianity and God and was mentored by white-collar criminals.

He [said he started](#) a multimillion-dollar company that hired ex-offenders before becoming more active in prison reform.

“Today is a day of redemption that I attribute to God’s grace,” [Smith said](#) after he was pardoned, adding that “there are a lot of Josh Smiths in prisons across our country, and I am going to help as many as possible find a new purpose.”

Smith’s pardon was one of 74 that Trump granted on his last day in office during his first term, when he also pardoned former chief strategist and longtime ally [Steve Bannon, who was indicted](#) on wire fraud and money laundering conspiracy charges, and hip-hop star Lil Wayne, [who pleaded guilty to weapons charges](#).



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