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78-years-old and willing to serve time

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COLUMBUS, GA

As he has done for the past five years, Edwin Ross Lewinson is back in town for the annual School of the Americas Watch gathering to call for the closing of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.

Lewinson is a celebrity among the so-called "prisoners of conscience," the name given to those who opt each year to trespass onto Army Post Ft. Benning. The 78-year old professor emeritus at Seton Hall University, is totally blind. Despite "crossing the line" for three years in a row, Lewinson couldn't get his charges to stick. A local magistrate kept dismissing Lewinson's case. On his fourth try, Lewinson got his wish -- to be treated like everybody else. At his trial in January, he told Magistrate Mallon Faircloth: "If a blind person were a drug dealer, he would be sent to jail."

So, Lewinson received 90 days in federal prison.

"I'd do it again because I think people should have a commitment," Lewinson said Friday night. "If we want change we have to have a commitment."

Lewinson spent most of his time (April 3-June 30) in the Federal Correctional Institution in Elkton, Ohio locked down 23 hours a day.

Lewinson was able to receive reading material in Braille, and his cellmates would read him the piles of letters from well-wishers he received each day. They also helped him write back.

"I got a lot of mail," he said. Among the magazines Lewinson received in Braille: Playboy, sans pictures of course.

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