

CUTTING EDGE WITH CC
4/23/2008

Page 1

CUTTING EDGE WITH CC
KUDO
APRIL 23, 2008

1 (Start of requested portion.)

2 CC: But first, let's go to this article in
3 the paper today. Workers' vote censures state prison
4 boss, Commissioner Joe Schmidt, who is hoping -- I
5 hope he's going to be joining us this hour. He is
6 wrapping up a couple of meetings right now, and
7 hopefully he'll be available for us.

8 We had the commissioner in the studio, oh, I
9 don't know how long ago now, several months ago. And
10 I really enjoyed our exchange.

11 And you know, if my internal radar was
12 working that day, my sense about him was he was a
13 pretty straight-up guy, unlike -- you know, I've had
14 people in the studio where you can kind of just sense
15 different things about them. And my sense of the
16 commissioner at that time was that he was a pretty
17 straight-up guy.

18 But you know, you read this article in the
19 paper today, and you've got to wonder really what's
20 going on.

21 And I don't think we're going to have time
22 just today to get into all of this. And I know
23 Aaron's going to cover this as well. Hopefully the
24 commissioner will be able to join us by phone today.
25 569-1080 is the number, though.

1 So what we have here is the corrections
2 officers, the workers, through their union, gave the
3 commissioner, quote, a "vote of no confidence." And
4 apparently, the vote was 514 to 19, apparently the
5 first ever of its kind.

6 Apparently members of the union, and they are
7 the Alaska Correctional Officers Association -- if any
8 of you are listening, you are welcome to call,
9 569-1080.

10 They allege that the commissioner has cut the
11 staff to dangerous levels in the prisons, and that he
12 has covered up medical issues in the jails, including
13 the spread of a contagious bacterial infection among
14 prisoners, and even the guards.

15 Now, after this news broke, the commissioner
16 himself held a press conference. And the medical
17 director of corrections, Dr. Henry Luban, said that
18 there is no problem. Or at least he says this, quote,
19 "We have it under control" -- so it sounds like there
20 is a problem and there was a problem, but they've got
21 it under control -- "and are treating it effectively,"
22 unquote. And he said this yesterday standing beside
23 the commissioner at the press conference.

24 Meanwhile, Sgt. Gary Damron at Hiland prison
25 said that the commissioner and the department refuse

1 to recognize that hundreds of inmates are suffering
2 from this MRSA, this infection, this bacterial staph
3 infection, and that two have actually died from it.

4 And apparently this has resisted them -- this
5 bacterial infection, this staph infection, is
6 resistant to first-line antibiotics, so that makes it
7 pretty serious. So they're claiming that in fact it's
8 not being dealt with, and that two inmates have
9 suffered to the point of death.

10 This Sgt. Damron goes on to say that a number
11 of incidents have been growing over the past year, and
12 the department needs to take measures to address it.

13 So clearly, what would be ideal is if we had
14 them both here in the studio, so that we could kind of
15 do the back and forth you have to do with these kinds
16 of stories. Because you've got, you know, one person
17 saying one thing and the other person countering it
18 saying something else.

19 So I am certainly not in a position today to
20 make any sort of judgment myself as to what it is
21 that's going on here. But clearly, a vote of 514 to
22 19 says that 514 of the commissioner's employees are
23 not feeling very good about him.

24 569-1080 is the number, if you want to join
25 in on the conversation. 569-1080.

1 On the commissioner's side, he says that in
2 his first year as commissioner -- by the way, Governor
3 Palin named Commissioner Schmidt to run the prison
4 department back in November of '06. She says that he
5 has, quote, "my full support as he and his team
6 continue to bring remarkable reforms to the Department
7 of Corrections," unquote.

8 So in his first year as commissioner, there
9 were 49 internal investigations of prison guards.
10 Half resulted in disciplinary action, four resulted in
11 termination, and another four people left their jobs
12 voluntarily. And of course, he would not give details
13 about the problems citing personnel rules.

14 So once again, we have the outside layer of
15 all this, but I don't really know what the inside
16 piece is. And Aaron Selbig has been working to get
17 the union reps on his show. I think that's going to
18 happen tomorrow.

19 My understanding from Aaron, and in talking
20 with him today, is that four of those terminations
21 actually were turned around. 569-1080 is our phone
22 number. 569-1080.

23 We'll go to Jason on line 1. Jason, welcome
24 to KUDO.

25 CALLER: Yeah. Hi. I just wanted to pass on

1 something I saw last week that I kind of -- seemed to
2 be something new for corrections here in the state.

3 When driving on the Glenn Highway out toward
4 the Valley, and there was a big sign saying: Caution
5 do not stop, prison work crew. And there was
6 basically a chain gang of prisoners. They weren't
7 actually chained up, but they were out picking up
8 garbage.

9 I know they do -- some people get the
10 community service to do that kind of thing, too. But
11 from the signing and everything here, it seemed to be
12 prisoners out actually doing some hard work beside the
13 road. And I had never encountered that in Alaska
14 before.

15 CC: And where was the sign? I mean, was it
16 an LED type sign on the side of the road?

17 CALLER: Like a construction zone, temporary
18 work sign. It was out there before the Knik River
19 bridge.

20 CC: That must be that community service
21 piece of someone's punishment.

22 CALLER: Well, from the signage and
23 everything, it looked like it was people that were
24 locked up, not simply people that had been sentenced
25 to exclusively community service, you know. The signs

1 said something to the effect of: Do not stop, prison
2 work crew in place.

3 CC: And onward we went.

4 Well, thanks for your call. Appreciate that.
5 569-1080. 569-1080.

6 I have to say, one of the things that is just
7 discouraging to me, when I go to the ADN Web site and
8 I follow the comments that are posted after each of
9 the articles that are listed, people get very -- you
10 know, just the attacking. The level of attacking the
11 person or the personality is -- to me, it's just a
12 waste of time, some of the things people say here.
13 But nonetheless, freedom of speech, my friend.
14 Freedom of speech.

15 So I'm just sharing with you what's in the
16 article. If the commissioner joins us today, we may
17 hopefully get more time with him so he can clear some
18 of this up from his perspective.

19 And we want to welcome anybody from the
20 union, the Alaska Correctional Officers Association,
21 to join the show as well. 569-1080.

22 So the commissioner says that in his first
23 year, which was last year, his first full year, '07,
24 49 internal investigations, half resulted in
25 disciplinary action, four resulted in terminations,

1 four people left their jobs voluntarily. No public
2 details available for you and I.

3 The commissioner also went on to say that the
4 200 people -- the 200 correctional officers who did
5 not respond to the ballot questioning his leadership
6 support him, and were likely some of the whistle
7 blowers who led to these investigations.

8 So one of the questions I am trying to -- I
9 have, because I am a little fuzzy about this, my sense
10 is that the correctional officer's association sent
11 out some sort of a ballot, some sort of a
12 questionnaire to their own people to gather up
13 information about where everybody was with regard to
14 their support and their level of confidence for the
15 commissioner, and came back as a result of that
16 information and had a vote of no confidence which
17 passed 514 to 19.

18 So Commissioner Joe Schmidt is saying that
19 200 or so correctional officers who did not respond
20 are likely some of the whistle blowers who led to
21 these 49 internal investigations that happened over
22 the course of the commissioners's first year.

23 Commissioner Joe Schmidt has not only
24 disciplined correctional officers, he has also changed
25 the department's mission. And he talked about that

1 extensively here on the show, that they are shifting
2 their focus on to reducing the high number of repeat
3 offenders, which is a good thing.

4 And he's putting more money into
5 rehabilitation programs, which I believe is also a
6 good thing, especially since, what's that number,
7 57 percent of funding that would go to support
8 substance abuse programs was cut from our elected
9 officials. So the very thing that's sending the most
10 people into jail needs all the funding it can get.

11 You know, of course, let's make sure we're
12 funding programs that are working and the funding has
13 the best paper trail it can have, so that we're
14 actually able to monitor and graph and chart all of
15 this.

16 But I know that was something the
17 commissioner said when he was here in the studio, that
18 he's very focused on substance abuse. 92 percent of
19 Alaska's prisoners have issues with substance abuse.
20 92 percent of Alaska's prisoners have issues with
21 substance abuse.

22 The department and the union agree the
23 prisons are overcrowded but disagree on how many
24 actual correctional officers there are. So here's one
25 of those he said/she said. The union says that the

1 commissioner has not filled open positions, but
2 Schmidt countered by saying he had increased the
3 number of guards.

4 So it's one of those moments where you're,
5 like, you know, somebody get in the studio and help us
6 figure out what's really going on here. I mean, 514
7 people. That's a lot of people to come together to
8 say that basically what the commissioner is saying is
9 not true.

10 Apparently 40 correctional officer positions
11 had been designated in the budget for the year that
12 starts July 1st of '08, bringing that number to 780
13 statewide. 780 statewide.

14 So we're hoping to hear from Commissioner Joe
15 Schmidt. I hope to hear from you as well. What
16 happens to you when you hear this kind of a story?

17 Maybe you yourself are a part of this union,
18 the Alaska Correctional Officers Association. If you
19 are, we welcome your calls. Give us your perspective
20 on it. Hey, you can use another name. I don't care.
21 569-1080 is the number.

22 And we'll be back after this.

23 (Commercial break.)

24 CC: Hi. Welcome back to the show. 25
25 minutes now after 2:00. This is Cutting Edge.

1 569-1080 is our phone number. 569-1080.

2 And I am glad to say that we do have on the
3 phone with us right now Commissioner Joe Schmidt.
4 Commissioner Joe Schmidt. Welcome to Cutting Edge.
5 Good to talk with you again.

6 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: How are you doing, CC?
7 Glad to talk to you.

8 CC: Well, I'm doing all right. Well, yes.
9 I would imagine today you are spending a lot of time
10 talking to the media about the article in the paper
11 today.

12 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Yes, ma'am.

13 CC: Before I get to my specific questions,
14 I'll just give you a chance to kind of generically
15 respond to what you've read and what's going on.

16 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Well, I think this is
17 an unfortunate event. I think it was propagated last
18 year through a slew of investigations we had to do.
19 And I'd like to say that as of right now, we are not
20 conducting any.

21 I think we made a big direction shift and I
22 think that's hard on the union and it's hard on
23 management. And it strained the relationship, of
24 course.

25 But our invitation has been there and it

1 stands. I'd rather move the department ahead at the
2 same table with these guys. But obviously, we have to
3 be professional and we have to work together.

4 CC: Well, obviously, you can understand that
5 when we look at this and we see that 514 of your
6 employees versus 19 raised their hand in the vote of
7 no confidence, I mean, 514, that's nearly all of them.

8 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Well, there's 740, so
9 there's 200 that didn't vote. And although the papers
10 won't usually let me, I like to focus on those.

11 Of course, those are the folks that did vote
12 with confidence that see where we're going and what
13 we're doing, and the 200 didn't get involved.

14 And what's significant is the union ran a
15 very aggressive, very nasty campaign for four months,
16 and I never responded. I never chose to -- I chose to
17 stay completely out of that, and all the mailings that
18 went out and all the allegations that were made.

19 We've got four different unions that we deal
20 with. And I believe that, you know, managing a big
21 group through a small group is by far the best way to
22 go.

23 And I can't lose sight of everything the
24 department's supposed to be doing because of one
25 group. So I decided to just stay the course and

1 stay -- and the other reason for the high road is I
2 want to be legitimate when I say that my offer to work
3 with that union stands. And if I get real nasty and
4 return fire and all that sort of thing, it's harder to
5 sit at a table with them later.

6 CC: Well, no doubt, the very little I know
7 about the life of a corrections officer, it sounds
8 like they really put their life on the line every day.

9 And so when I look at some of the claims
10 they're making, one of them being that there's just
11 not enough of them and it's an unsafe environment,
12 what can you say about how they can come to that
13 conclusion?

14 I mean, they're on the front lines. They're
15 doing this work. Why would they make something like
16 that up if it's just not true for them?

17 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Well, sure. That's
18 one of those things, I would like to say that the
19 business is completely safe. But no correctional
20 administrator who's going to tell the truth is going
21 to say that. The business can be dangerous. The
22 business is not dangerous every single day, but you
23 don't know when something's going to go bad.

24 And I can tell you that in 2006, the state
25 averaged 703 correction officers working on an average

1 for the year, calendar year end. In 2007, we raised
2 that to 737, so it went up by 34. And we're funded
3 for over 780 next year.

4 Now, at one point the union wrote a letter,
5 one of the letters where they were demanding 820
6 officers. And I have to agree, I would like 820
7 officers, but somebody has to pay for that.

8 And I will tell you, CC, that never in our
9 history have we grown at 34 a year unless we opened a
10 facility, and never in our history have we grown at 40
11 a year unless we opened a facility.

12 CC: So Commissioner Schmidt, what's the
13 story we don't have? I mean --

14 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: The story that's being
15 put to the back is the investigations and the
16 discipline last year, CC. We came on board and we
17 found some behavior in the work site that I cannot
18 tolerate.

19 Behavior -- we are a closed system. We are a
20 micro society, okay? And the public doesn't come in
21 and see us every day. We have to self-police and we
22 cannot be getting out of line with the way we treat
23 each other or the prisoners.

24 And we found some behaviors taking place that
25 were intolerable to us. And we did 49 internal

1 investigations in '07. 26 of them resulted in
2 disciplinary action and four resulted in termination.
3 Additionally, four quit during investigations.

4 CC: Now --

5 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Like I said, that's
6 hard. That's hard on everyone, but it's something
7 that had to be done.

8 CC: Did the union challenge those
9 terminations?

10 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Every one of them.

11 CC: And what was the outcome?

12 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: And as a matter of
13 fact, the business agent told me one day, we're going
14 to be at war if you go through with this one, the
15 third one.

16 And I said, you know, Brad, we can't do
17 business that way. That's a threat. That's not a
18 negotiation. That's not working together. That's
19 just -- he said, we have a nuclear media bomb and
20 we're going to drop it on you if you go through with
21 this.

22 CC: So what was the final outcome with
23 regard to those four terminations? Did they stand?

24 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Two of them did not.
25 Two of them went to arbitration and the arbitrator

1 ruled the other way.

2 And what we told the union early on is we
3 have an agreed-to process. We are not going to agree
4 on every decision we make. But we do agree and stand
5 by the agreement that we made that we will use the
6 collective bargaining agreement to settle our
7 differences. And it's a grievance and it's an
8 arbitration.

9 And if we lose an arbitration, we keep our
10 head up, we be professional, and we comply with the
11 arbitrator's ruling and we don't cry about it.

12 CC: It's their conclusion that out of those
13 four terminations, one was upheld and three didn't
14 stand, the two that you mentioned that were overturned
15 by arbitrators. But they are also claiming that one
16 was overturned by state officials, so --

17 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: I don't know which one
18 that would be. Only three have been arbitrated so
19 far.

20 CC: Okay.

21 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: So there is an
22 allegation of nepotism for hiring people in the
23 Valley, and that was a result of a grievance we
24 received. We hired an officer in the Valley and we
25 hired an officer in Anchorage. And the union grieved

1 that because what they want us to do is transfer
2 people from Seward before we hire anybody new
3 anywhere.

4 But the contract does allow us, with proper
5 notice, to hire wherever we need to hire to keep our
6 positions filled.

7 If you remember a year or so ago, they had
8 the "send my daddy home" campaign, where the young man
9 who was on the news last night saying it's a powder
10 keg was on the news with his wife and child, and they
11 were complaining that the state wasn't -- wasn't
12 filling positions and they were all being forced to
13 work overtime.

14 And so we came in -- that was before our
15 time. When we came in, in '07, we wanted to -- not so
16 much because of their ad, but because we wanted to go
17 to the legislature and ask for an increase. First you
18 have to fill what you already have, right?

19 CC: Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: So we filled
21 everything we had. We went to them this year with a
22 full docket. Like I said, 737 for a year-end average.
23 We are real proud of that, because that is the exact
24 number of positions we had to fill, which is 34 more
25 than the year before.

1 CC: But here's what's confusing for me,
2 Commissioner Schmidt. What is the union talking about
3 then when they say that minimums have decreased? In
4 other words, if there are more officers on the floor,
5 why would they say there aren't?

6 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: That's over time
7 they're talking about. Posts have been added over
8 time without funding, where management has, over the
9 last few years, decided to add someone somewhere and
10 never received funding for it.

11 So we're trying to reconcile the books. We
12 are adding officers to the overall statewide count,
13 but we are getting rid of these posts that have been
14 added without funding. And we're replacing many of
15 them, but we can't replace all of them, at least not
16 yet.

17 CC: So is that really just on paper that
18 you're getting rid of posts and replacing them? It
19 sounds like you're swapping one out for the other.

20 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Well, we're adding --
21 we're adding correctional officers, is what we're
22 doing. That's the bottom line. We have 34 more this
23 year and another 40 next year that we're adding.

24 Then the people that make the decisions on
25 where these people are posted are the site managers

1 and ACOA members of sergeants.

2 CC: Well, I think one of the things they are
3 complaining about or alleging is on any given day,
4 there are not more officers on the floor than when you
5 first took office. So you can say yes, you've brought
6 in 34 more, but the correctional officers themselves
7 are saying, yeah, but on any given day, they are not
8 on the floor, so --

9 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Well, we have to pay
10 for who we have.

11 We have done a posting study and we've looked
12 at how many posts we have and how many we need. And
13 we can't just add people that have no funding.
14 Because at the end of the day when we go to
15 legislature for resource, and we've just spent money
16 that we don't have, that doesn't bode well.

17 We didn't do that last year, and it worked
18 very well for us. The legislature seemed to trust us
19 and gave us another 40 positions.

20 CC: So when you say that you brought on 34
21 more officers, would they all be funded positions
22 or --

23 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Every one of them.
24 Everything we are doing is funded, CC. We are not
25 doing anything creating a PCN and then asking for

1 funding next year, or running it unfunded and doing it
2 supplemental.

3 You know, supplementals can get crazy. I
4 think the last one was \$17 million. And the
5 legislature and the public frown on that. That means
6 you are not managing your money.

7 When you fill all the positions you have and
8 you're being honest about what you're doing, that's
9 when you get the support, as we have this last budget
10 cycle. We are real happy with what we received.

11 CC: Commissioner Joe Schmidt is on the phone
12 with us taking your calls at 569-1080. We go to the
13 phones.

14 Barbara, thanks for waiting. You are on with
15 Commissioner Schmidt.

16 CALLER: Thanks very much.

17 As a matter of fact, I am a big fan of
18 Commissioner Schmidt. I knew the previous
19 commissioner, and under his reign, there were
20 virtually no programs offered.

21 And one of the things that is apparent in our
22 state constitution is that when we lock up people, we
23 have a duty as a state to rehabilitate these people.
24 And under the previous regime, that didn't happen, and
25 they didn't feel bad about it.

1 So I have spoken with this commissioner,
2 Commissioner Schmidt, and he is a wonderful man. And
3 I think he sees what's going on.

4 And one of the things that he will remember
5 that we last spoke about at a homeless get-together
6 and a community meeting here in Anchorage was the fact
7 that many of the people who are locked up in a penal
8 institution really need to be in a therapeutic mental
9 health community. They haven't -- these are the ones
10 that maybe have a drinking or drug problem, but
11 they're not out killing, murdering, or raping people.
12 They are doing, you know, maybe a rock through a
13 window.

14 CC: Well, Barbara, you say something
15 interesting here. You say anybody can see what's
16 going on.

17 So aside from the actual inmates and the work
18 that the commissioner is doing on their behalf, what
19 we're really talking about today are the -- are his
20 employees, 514 of them, who said we don't have any
21 confidence in our commissioner.

22 CALLER: And what I'm saying is perhaps there
23 are too many inmates. And perhaps some of these
24 inmates might -- well, would benefit some other place,
25 not in a penal institution.

1 So one of the complaints of the union is not
2 enough guards or whatever. Well, maybe if they have a
3 reduction in the number of people that are
4 incarcerated, and rather than being in a penal
5 institution, shipped off to someplace that will do
6 them some good, that will reduce numbers, and I hope
7 make the guards happy.

8 CC: You know, Barbara, I appreciate your
9 phone call, and that part of the topic which we have
10 talked a lot about on the show, including today, you
11 know, this idea of punishment versus reform.

12 And 92 percent of all people in jail in our
13 own state have substance abuse issues. So I know,
14 Commissioner, when you were on the show, you talked
15 about your desire to really fund substance abuse
16 support programs for these -- for this 92 percent of
17 these prisoners.

18 So -- but I -- so here's my question.

19 If you have a question for the commissioner,
20 569-1080.

21 But let me ask this question again, so --
22 because if I had the union guys here, we could have a
23 better back and forth, but I don't have that today.

24 If your -- if we have 514 of your employees
25 who are saying that they do not have confidence in

1 your work and your -- and you are taking each one of
2 their allegations and saying, well, that's not really
3 true, and that's not really true, and that's not
4 really true, what is true? Are you trying to say that
5 there's something underneath the allegations that is
6 more of the story that we're not getting from this
7 article?

8 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Well, no. I'm saying
9 the direct threats I received from the union were the
10 disciplinary actions last year.

11 CC: And why would they not be excited about
12 a commissioner who's going in and cleaning up house?

13 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Well, it's their own
14 members many times who bring the information to us.
15 They would say, boss something's going on here and you
16 need to look at this. And we come in, first thing we
17 protect that officer of course. We don't want them to
18 get any kind of attack. And we stand with the site
19 supervisor. We don't want to leave them by themselves
20 to this stuff because it's ugly and it's hard.

21 And that's our job, to run a clean, efficient
22 house. And because this -- you know, the staffing, we
23 are adding every -- facilities are getting positions
24 added to them. You would have to talk to Brian
25 Brandenburg or Garland Armstrong, the director, to

1 find out exactly which facilities received how many
2 staff.

3 But when you're adding 70 over a two-year
4 period, you're getting more PCNs to use every day.

5 CC: Well, let me ask you a question about
6 this bacterial infection that, again, you've got one
7 thought about it and they've got another thought about
8 it.

9 Sgt. Gary Damron over at Hiland is, you know,
10 basically saying that this is a problem and the
11 incidents have grown over the past year. Two people
12 died. And you are not taking this seriously enough.

13 You of course on the other hand are saying
14 that we are dealing with it. Your own medical
15 director, Dr. Henry Luban, said -- though I disagree
16 with him when he says there is no problem, because
17 there is. But he does go on to say, quote, "we have
18 it under control."

19 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Yeah. There is a -- I
20 saw a death certificate during the middle of an
21 interview yesterday, but a lot of the information was
22 blacked out. It was hard for me to respond to it
23 right on the spot.

24 But I did show it to Dr. Luban. And he
25 responded that MRSA is something that you are going to

1 find when you have a locker room or a prison or a
2 school bus or, you know, any time you have people
3 living in close proximity to each other, you can have
4 MRSA. And it seems to attack weakened -- people that
5 are weakened.

6 The death certificate that I saw was a Spring
7 Creek prisoner. He had multiple organ failure, he had
8 all kinds of things, and MRSA was one of the things
9 listed as one of his problems.

10 CC: So do you know how many cases overall in
11 the last three years involving MRSA?

12 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: No. I'd have to look
13 at what that is.

14 And I'm not denying that MRSA exists. I
15 mean, we know it exists. We know it's a staph
16 infection.

17 And we also take the guidance of our medical
18 staff on how to deal with it. And you know, you keep
19 things clean, you keep wounds covered, and you have
20 medical check when you need to.

21 And you know, if there is a crisis where I
22 need to go get resource, then I don't want to be
23 crying wolf all the time when there's not.

24 And my medical folks are looking at it and
25 saying we're dealing with it the way we should. And

1 we're not seeing an inordinate number of prisoners
2 going to the hospital or staff getting sick with it.
3 Then we're doing what we can do.

4 CC: So, Commissioner Schmidt, have you had a
5 chance to talk to anyone from the Alaska Correctional
6 Officers Association since this news broke?

7 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Yeah. They -- no.
8 They went to the deputy chief of staff for a meeting a
9 couple of weeks ago and said that the main issue was
10 they couldn't get a meeting with me.

11 So the next day, we offered a meeting, and --
12 which they responded in writing, no, we're not going
13 to talk with him, but we'll talk with the deputy chief
14 of staff. And so that's where that sits.

15 They wrote one since then that said, okay,
16 okay, after about a week. And I didn't hear anything.
17 They said, we'll meet with the commissioner, but it's
18 going to be all the board members. I want a full
19 investigation. There was all these conditions on the
20 meeting.

21 And frankly, we haven't had time to even mess
22 with that yet, so --

23 CC: And what is -- what's your sense -- what
24 is it that they want? What do they want from you?
25 What do they want you to do? Do they want you to step

1 aside? I mean, what is your sense about what it is
2 they want?

3 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Well, they haven't
4 said. I heard from one media out there that they
5 wanted me removed or investigated.

6 I heard from someone else that they wanted --
7 they wanted the discipline issue to be revised or
8 investigated. That'd be fine, too.

9 It's hard to tell. It's very unclear. You
10 know, when they talk about crowding our systems, we
11 counted all the beds we have, and we are running
12 between 99 and 101 percent every day.

13 Now, the booking facility that I am calling
14 you from right now can be over 101 percent. It can be
15 very overcrowded, because it's a booking facility and
16 their count fluctuates.

17 The trouble is, I can't go to Arizona with
18 these guys because they are going to court.

19 CC: And I think the last time you were here,
20 it was \$22 million you said that we are pumping into
21 Arizona's economy --

22 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: I think it's 23, yeah.

23 CC: -- sending our prisoners there?

24 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Yeah. Yeah. And so
25 to be -- you know, to be -- it was a little bit

1 surprising that a union would demand lower counts.

2 The only thing I could do is I could take,
3 for instance, Seward, where people are doing a fair
4 amount of time, and send more of them to the private
5 sector in Arizona.

6 But if I am sitting on a bunch of whole empty
7 beds in Seward, I can't justify the staff there. My
8 premise has been, so that's a backwards thing. I
9 never would have expected the union to demand
10 something like that.

11 What my premise is, CC, is that if we're
12 going to send 23 million bucks to Arizona, we need to
13 be at capacity first. Not 150 percent, but we need to
14 be close to 100 percent. Because that's fair to
15 Alaska.

16 Why would we be sitting on hundreds of empty
17 beds here? Because the correction officers are mad; I
18 understand that. But it isn't fair to the state to be
19 sitting on hundreds of empty beds when we're paying --
20 well, then we go up to 24, \$25 million a year in
21 Arizona.

22 CC: So, Commissioner Schmidt, when you say,
23 as you've done in this article today, quote, "they are
24 looking for a political or public solution to a
25 contract-type issue" --

1 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Yes. They are angry
2 about the way things are going.

3 And we agreed on a way to resolve these
4 issues. And I strongly support that way, the
5 collective bargaining. We talk about it. We have
6 meetings. The contract compels us to have meetings.
7 Whether the union wants to meet with me or not, the
8 contract says we will, and in the effort of good
9 faith.

10 That's why I took the high road and I never
11 engaged in all the nastiness that went on, because I
12 want to be able to sit at a table with these guys and
13 move the department ahead some day.

14 But they've got to stop throwing a fit first.
15 I can't -- we can't do anything when it's this hostile
16 towards me.

17 CC: Right. And I know you've got to get off
18 to another appointment here, but let me just get to
19 one caller who's waiting.

20 Will, you've got the last minute with
21 Commissioner Joe Schmidt.

22 CALLER: Commissioner Schmidt, please let me
23 disclose, I am kind of pro-union.

24 But before I am pro-union, I am pro-common
25 sense and openness, and fair and just things, okay?

1 Those things should transcend all organizations.

2 What I'm concerned about is this -- is this
3 is becoming nonsense. By the time you pay to have
4 these people -- penalize them to a room like an
5 animal, you'd be better off just offering them 40
6 grand to be a good citizen, and shoot them if they
7 don't.

8 I mean, so I think you need to restructure
9 the entire penal colony system. You need to move them
10 out the, that's outside the community so we can see --
11 it's like cleaning up a kid's room, where you see
12 something we've done.

13 Or else take permanent fund money and buy
14 some penal colony down in the Lower 48, run it like a
15 business and send them down there.

16 But I'd prefer you go outland with your --
17 with more of a compound, and actually give these men a
18 chance to learn something, like building a solar panel
19 or some new code generation energy, something so they
20 can get a sense of achievement in there.

21 Because right now, I see nothing but economic
22 blood-shed, just a plundering of the peoples' assets.
23 And if we did that, no one can ever be happy. They
24 have that right to mix with the community, with
25 domestic violence and things that occur, and those

1 things that go on. These are the unpretty things that
2 go on behind the scenes that no one wants to talk
3 about.

4 CC: Well, you know, Will, I've got to cut in
5 here, Will, because I'm running out of time, and I
6 know the commissioner's got to go. I promised I'd let
7 him off by 2:40.

8 But I hear what you're saying.

9 And, Commissioner Schmidt, we talked earlier
10 about this article in the paper today, that America
11 leads the world in inmates, 2.3 million criminals.

12 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Yeah.

13 CC: We've got a fifth of the population, but
14 a quarter of the world's prisoners. So that topic, in
15 and of itself, you know, always interesting, and
16 important to dialogue about.

17 Well, listen, I appreciate you giving us some
18 time today. Like I say, I think the people from the
19 union are going to be on Aaron's show tomorrow. So if
20 you want to continue the discussion here on KUDO, we
21 are happy to have you back.

22 COMMISSIONER SCHMIDT: Okay, CC. Thank you
23 much.

24 CC: Thank you so much.

25 Commissioner Joe Schmidt joining us this

1 afternoon, as he bops around from one place to the
2 other.

3 And we'll be right back after this.

4 (End of requested portion.)

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I, Jeanette Blalock, hereby certify that the foregoing pages numbered 1 through 32 are a true, accurate, and complete transcript of Cutting Edge with CC, KUDO, April 23, 2008, transcribed by me from a copy of the electronic sound recording, to the best of my knowledge and ability.

Date

Jeanette Blalock, Transcriber