

DAN FAGAN SHOW
KFQD 750 AM
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Fagan:
What is the status of future contract negotiations?

Schmidt:
Ah, well, you know, we scheduled to start negotiating for next year's contract

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Schmidt:
I don't know XXXXXXXX yea, yea, that's just XXXXXXXX sure, sure.

Fagan:
Well, what tools can they do to try to stop? What tools do they have in the arsenal, other than trying to use the media to try to stop some of the reforms you've put in place?

Schmidt:
Well, you know what's interesting, like I said; we're not conducting any We're not conducting any disciplinary. I think, I think the course is set and I think the union, can get any

Schmidt:
The governor is going to be fair. I have no doubt in my mind she is supporting me and she's a good lady to work for, but I also know that if had some things a-skew, I would be accountable for them and I know that very well, and I don't have anything to be afraid of right now. I know that the issue of crowding um, I don't arrest anybody, right? And I'm not gonna find a bunch of crafty ways to let people out of jail, because the union's mad, right? Our job is to protect the public and we need to step up on our feet and we need to do that.

Fagan:
Yea!

Schmidt:
It's the other issue with the MRSA and it does

Fagan:
The MRSA is this a, skin disease?

Schmidt:

It's got staff infection, and it's a

Fagan:

The union says that it is wide spread and nothing has been done about it.

Schmidt:

Yea, but, and that's a tricky one, Dan, because in MRSA, when you talk to medical folks as I have, MRSA is everywhere. It's on your desk. It's in your nose. It's everywhere and when you're, when you're weakened is when it gets you. So, if someone is in the hospital, like for instance, the inmate that they, that they tried to say died from MRSA. MRSA is listed on as one of the causes, but he also had multiple organ failure and severe obesity, and all kinds of other things.

Fagan:

Yea.

Schmidt:

In addition, to MRSA. So, I, they, the union knows I'm not able to say there is no MRSA. I can't say that! Every time we have a school bus or a locker room or a prison or hospital, you're gonna have MRSA.

Fagan:

Wow! That's amazing!

Schmidt:

How do we manage it? You know, and I'm confident that we're managing it well. And the other thing is I don't want to cry "Wolf", if someday I need to go forward. Let's say this thing breaks out into something bad then we have a real out-break.

Fagan:

Right.

Schmidt:

And it worries me. And I decide to ring an alarm bell, it needs to be a "real alarm bell" and I'm not going to be out here crying "Wolf", when it's not!

Fagan:

Now, what about the union's claim, ah, we're talking to Commissioner of the Department of Corrections, Joe Schmidt. What about the union's claim that there aren't enough employees?

Schmidt:

We added to, and you know, in, in calendar year 06 Dan, we averaged 703 correction officers for the year. Calendar year 07' this administration added 34. We averaged 737, other than years when we opened a new facility, we have never gained staff like that. So their claim XXXXXX what's that?

Fagan:

That claim that they're making isn't backed up with the facts.

Schmidt:

No, we're adding more staff, and next year we're funded for forty more. We're scheduled to go over 780. Now we're gonna try to hire that many, now that the union has told the whole public and it's a "Powder Keg" and "It's a terrible place". We're gonna have trouble finding people now. We're gonna try to spend some more money on recruitment and combat that and keep our positions filled, regardless of what the union does and now there are some overtime positions that have been added that never had funding. These new officers that are coming in we're plugging into those positions, but we're also eliminating them as overtime, because I'm not running unfunded positions. I don't create a position with no money.

Fagan:

Do you have the, are these "at will" employees? Can you fire a correction employee or do they; are they protected by the civil service kind-of thing?

Schmidt:

No, there's a collective bargaining process. To be honest with you, I wouldn't really want to go around firing a whole bunch of them.

Fagan:

Yea!

Schmidt:

I'm a little frustrated with the numbers and some of their tactics and the way that they come forward with this. When I start hearing about it from the media, a little common respect and decency, would have gave me a call and said, "This is what we've done." "This is what it's over." So, I could, so you know, when all the media shows up and the cameras turn on I have something to talk about.

Fagan:

Joe, in the, in the, in the end here what's their play? What are they trying to do, the union?

Schmidt:

Well, you know, they haven't told me. I've heard ...

Fagan:

What do you think it is?

Schmidt:

I heard from one, well, one place said they want me removed or investigated. I said, "Well, I would certainly welcome an investigation; I wouldn't welcome being removed." You know.

Fagan:

So, why, why do you think, because, because you are bringing reform?

Schmidt:

Yea, yea, I mean, it's over the discipline. That's where the threats came from and that's the only thing tangible that they have, but they can't really talk much about it, because it would embarrass them. Frankly, if I went into detail on what we fire people for,

Fagan:

Yea.

Schmidt:

It would not help their cause at all.

Fagan:

Wow!

Schmidt:

So, what they're trying to push on the front is the MRSA and the crowding, but you know, like I said earlier, I don't a, I would like to have less prisoners too, but our job is public safety so.

Fagan:

Yea, it's not like you can control population!

Schmidt:

No, no whoever gets arrested, we deal with and you know, like the Anchorage Complex is crowded. Our system is running between 99 and 101% everyday since we did our bed count. The Anchorage Complex does get over that, but it's a booking house. I can't put Arizona with those people. They're going to court. You know, they are just stuck there. So...

Fagan:

Talking to Joe Schmidt, who is the Commissioner of The Department of Corrections. 522-0750 Dan? And your on with Commissioner Schmidt – alright, we lost Dan? Well, Commissioner, I appreciate you giving us some of your time.

Schmidt:

Oh, sure Dan. (Joe Schmidt)

Fagan:
And hang in there man.

Schmidt:
Hey, I will.

Fagan:
It's tough going against "status quo".

Schmidt:
Yea.

Fagan:
But it sounds to me like you're doing the right thing and you've got the Governor's support, which is very important and I'm proud of her for standing up to the union and congratulations on putting yourself in the battle. It's a "Badge of honor."

Schmidt:
Thank you Dan, I appreciate it. Talk to you later.

Fagan:
Alright, that was Mr. Joe Schmidt, Commissioner of Corrections. We'll be right back.