

15 SENATOR ROMERO: Good morning. I
16 apologize for having missed you yesterday but I had
17 legislative duties in Sacramento and I apologize for
18 arriving late this morning but that was pure
19 old-fashioned traffic in Los Angeles. But welcome to
20 California.

21 I'm very proud to serve as a member of this
22 commission, I'm excited that you are here in
23 California, my home state. I have, for those of you
24 who are participating with us today, I've had a real
25 opportunity to serve on this commission, to work with

1 these commissioners, and we have met throughout the
2 country exploring the conditions of the nation's
3 jails and prisons and much of what we heard has been
4 quite disturbing, certainly quite daunting and very
5 challenging, but we're in California.

6 I would like to give you quick snapshot as
7 we entertain and discuss what is occurring here.
8 California has one of the largest prison systems in
9 the world. We've got about 167,000 inmates, another
10 115,000 on parole. The prison budget itself has
11 skyrocketed. It is now over \$8 billion. In the last
12 two years alone the prison budget has gone up by \$2
13 billion. Right now in California, approximately one
14 out of every \$10 paid by taxpayers is going to
15 corrections. And yet as I look at the situation
16 lamentably, the prison system is in crisis. The
17 juvenile facilities I would declare to be an utter
18 failure. We have, of course, been taken over by a
19 federal judge into receivership, actually a move that
20 I supported and I applauded given the lack of
21 leadership to attend to the health care needs of
22 inmates. Even while incarcerated, inmates are
23 protected by the United States Constitution, and as
24 was discovered in this process, one inmate was dying
25 per week in the California state prison system,

1 preventable deaths. This was something that Judge
2 Henderson declared was simply a neglect of leadership
3 in the conditions of confinement of inmates.

4 There are so many issues. I did
5 participate with Governor Schwarzenegger this past
6 year, we did successfully bring about a
7 reorganization of the state prison system, but we all
8 know that reorganization is not the form but it can
9 provide a powerful template from which we can
10 emanate.

11 In that reorganization we also reintroduced
12 another part of corrections and we called the
13 department the California Department of Corrections
14 and Rehabilitation. I was very proud to have worked
15 with the governor to restore that arm into the state
16 prison system. It is about rehabilitation. The jury
17 is still out, but much of the evidence coming in this
18 year, however, shows a very dismal response to
19 reinserting the "R" into corrections. "R" is not
20 about rhetoric, it is about rehabilitation, and at
21 the end of the day when we look at the challenges we
22 face, whether it is violence or health care, reentry,
23 it is about population management and what we do.

24 Out of the 167,000 inmates in California,
25 there are approximately 38,000 who are assigned to

1 rehabilitation programming. 38,000 out of 170,000,
2 it is no surprise then that we end up with a failure
3 rate, a recidivism rate of over 70 percent, so we've
4 got many challenges.

5 I look forward to the testimony today. I'm
6 very excited in particular to hear from my friend,
7 Merrick Bobb, in terms of the conditions at the L.A.
8 County jails.

9 Certainly the landmark case that went to
10 the United States Supreme Court was filed by an
11 African-American inmate incarcerated at Corcoran who
12 challenged this administration on the practice of
13 housing inmates on the basis of race. Issues of
14 racial tension certainly are national issues, of
15 national importance and significance, but it was made
16 very clear, though, that we have opportunities to
17 house on the basis of gang membership but should not
18 be looking solely at skin color when an inmate walks
19 in the door, so these are continuing challenges.
20 Right now California is facing how to integrate its
21 prisons. This is 55 years after Brown versus Board
22 of Education, something that I was stunned about when
23 I first learned about the Johnson case in the Supreme
24 Court.

25 There are many other issues we can discuss

1 but I'm glad to be here, I thank you all for coming
2 out to look at the work we are doing on the
3 commission, we look forward to participating with you
4 as we endeavor to prepare reports that won't just sit
5 on the shelf but reports that can be utilized by
6 legislators, by oversight officials, by prison
7 authorities, by the community and by inmates and
8 families and victims themselves in order to truly
9 advance the safety of the public and the community as
10 we discuss incarceration. So thank you so very much,
11 it is a beautiful day, we planned it just for you.
12 You won't get this kind of weather in February
13 throughout the nation, only in California and in my
14 hometown of Los Angeles, so thank you so very much.