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Statement

by

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Commissioner

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections

before the

House Judiciary Committee

Investigating the October 25, 26 and 27, 1989, Riot

at the

State Correctional Institution at Camp Hill

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GOOD MORNING CHAIRMAN CALTAGIRONE AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE. I AM PLEASED TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO APPEAR BEFORE YOU TODAY TO DISCUSS THE OCTOBER RIOT AT THE STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION AT CAMP HILL. YOU HAVE MY THANKS FOR ALLOWING US TIME TO COLLECT OUR INFORMATION BEFORE SCHEDULING US TO APPEAR BEFORE YOU. YOUR PATIENCE HAS PERMITTED ME AND THE ENTIRE DEPARTMENT TO ADDRESS THE MOST URGENT NEEDS FIRST -- THE SECURITY OF THE INSTITUTION.

BEFORE I BEGIN, I WANT TO THANK THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO HELPED BRING THE INCIDENT TO A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION. I AM PROUD OF THE STAFF AT CAMP HILL AND THE OTHER INSTITUTIONS WHO PLAYED A ROLE IN QUELLING THE DISTURBANCE. THEY CONDUCTED THEMSELVES IN A PROFESSIONAL AND COURAGEOUS MANNER. THE STATE POLICE PLAYED AN ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL ROLE DURING THE ENTIRE ORDEAL. THEY CONTINUE TO THIS DAY TO MAINTAIN A PRESENCE AT THE INSTITUTION.

THE AMBULANCE, EMERGENCY AND FIRE UNITS, AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES FROM THIS REGION WERE OF GREAT ASSISTANCE.

THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE WHO DESERVE THANKS FROM THIS COMMONWEALTH AND THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO RECOGNIZE THEM ALL HERE TODAY, BUT REST ASSURED WE KNOW THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS AND THEY ARE DEEPLY APPRECIATED.

LET ME TELL YOU WHERE WE ARE TODAY. WE HAVE RELOCATED APPROXIMATELY 800 INMATES, ON A TEMPORARY BASIS, TO FACILITIES IN THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS. ON BEHALF OF GOVERNOR CASEY I WOULD LIKE TO THANK U.S. SENATORS JOHN HEINZ AND ARLEN SPECTER FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE.

THE INITIAL CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION IS STILL IN PROGRESS. AS YOU ARE NO DOUBT AWARE, THE INCIDENT BEGAN AROUND 3 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 25TH, AND IT ENDED APPROXIMATELY SEVEN HOURS LATER. THE INCIDENT FLARED UP AGAIN

AT APPROXIMATELY 7 P.M. THE NEXT DAY AND WAS BROUGHT TO A CONCLUSION BY THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE AND THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS PERSONNEL SOME 15 HOURS LATER. THE TOTAL TIME OF THE TWO CONFRONTATIONS WAS ROUGHLY 22 HOURS.

IN THE PUBLIC ARENA, EMPHASIS HAS BEEN FOCUSED LARGELY ON THE NEGATIVES. PERHAPS IT WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO THE DISCUSSION TO ADDRESS WHAT WENT RIGHT. WE HAD SEVERAL OBJECTIVES DURING THE DISTURBANCE. LET'S LOOK AT THEM:

THE FIRST OBJECTIVE WAS TO PROTECT THE CITIZENS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA THEREBY ASSURING THE SAFETY OF OUR COMMUNITY. I AM PLEASED TO REPORT TO YOU THIS MORNING: THAT OBJECTIVE WAS MET IN SPLENDID FASHION. AT NO TIME DURING THE THREE DAYS WAS THE COMMUNITY IN JEOPARDY.

SECOND OBJECTIVE: TO BRING THE INCIDENT TO A CONCLUSION WITHOUT LOSS OF LIFE. THERE WAS NO LOSS OF HUMAN LIFE DURING THIS INCIDENT.

THIRD OBJECTIVE: TO MINIMIZE THE DEGREE OF INJURY TO BOTH STAFF AND INMATES. DURING THE FIRST DAY OF THE INCIDENT, THERE WERE INJURIES TO 36 STAFF, SEVEN INMATES, ONE FIREMAN AND ONE POLICEMAN. ON THE SECOND DAY, THERE WERE 34 CORRECTIONAL STAFF AND 32 INMATES INJURED, PLUS 10 OTHERS INCLUDING FIRE FIGHTERS AND STATE POLICE. I CAN REPORT TO YOU NOW THAT, OF THOSE INJURED, NO ONE IS STILL HOSPITALIZED.

FOURTH OBJECTIVE: TO PROSECUTE THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO CAUSED THE RIOT. THE INVESTIGATION IS ON-GOING. IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT MORE ARRESTS ARE FORTHCOMING.

WHILE DEADLY FORCE WAS USED AND SHOTS WERE FIRED, THAT FORCE WAS REASONABLE, MANAGED AND MEASURED UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. WE WILL CONTINUE TO INVESTIGATE AND REVIEW ALL ASPECTS OF THE DISTURBANCE AND THE OPERATION OF THE INSTITUTION -- NOT ONLY TO LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE, BUT ALSO TO BECOME A STRONGER AND BETTER DEPARTMENT.

AS MAJOR DISTURBANCES GO, THIS INCIDENT WAS BROUGHT TO A RATHER QUICK CONCLUSION. I HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF DISTURBANCES LASTING FOR SIX TO SEVEN DAYS. THIS QUICK CONCLUSION WAS POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF THE EXCELLENT COOPERATION AND EFFORTS OF ALL OF THOSE AGENCIES INVOLVED AND BY THEIR RAPID RESPONSE. DESTRUCTION TO THE PHYSICAL PLANT WAS QUITE EXTENSIVE, BUT GIVEN THE ENORMITY OF THE CRISIS, IT COULD HAVE BEEN A LOT WORSE.

THERE HAS BEEN CRITICISM OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S HANDLING OF THE DISTURBANCE. WHILE WE CONTINUE TO EXAMINE THOSE ALLEGATIONS, I MUST SAY TO YOU IN ALL SINCERITY, I AM NOT AWARE OF ANY PRISON RIOT THAT HAS GONE COMPLETELY "BY THE NUMBERS." NEITHER DID THIS DISTURBANCE GO BY THE NUMBERS. I WOULD ASK YOU TO LOOK AT THE OUTCOME AS WELL AS THE PROCESS.

MAY I NOW TURN TO THE ROLE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF CORRECTIONS IN SUCH A DISTURBANCE. DURING A DISTURBANCE AT AN INSTITUTION, THE COMMISSIONER OF CORRECTIONS, ACCORDING TO OUR GUIDELINES AND ACCORDING TO NATIONAL STANDARDS, SHOULD BE ON DUTY IN THE COMMAND CENTER AT THE DEPARTMENTAL HEADQUARTERS TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO THE SUPERINTENDENT, AND TO MONITOR THE OVERALL OPERATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS -- TO BE PREPARED TO RESPOND SHOULD THERE BE ANOTHER INCIDENT AT A SECOND OR THIRD INSTITUTION. PLEASE REMEMBER, THE DEPARTMENT HAD EXPERIENCED A DISTURBANCE AT THE STATE CORRECTIONAL

INSTITUTION AT HUNTINGDON JUST TWO DAYS BEFORE THE CAMP HILL INCIDENT, AND INDEED THERE WERE RUMORS THAT WE WOULD HAVE TROUBLE AT TWO OTHER INSTITUTIONS.

THROUGHOUT THE INCIDENT, I WAS AT THE COMMAND CENTER WITHIN DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS COORDINATING AND DIRECTING THE DEPARTMENT'S EFFORTS. SOME HAVE INDICATED THAT DURING THE INCIDENT I HAD A "HANDS-OFF APPROACH." THIS COULD NOT BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. I WAS IN CONSTANT COMMUNICATION WITH SUPERINTENDENT FREEMAN AS WELL AS OTHER STAFF THROUGHOUT THE DEPARTMENT. WHENEVER ASSISTANCE WAS NEEDED AT THE INSTITUTION, THIS DEPARTMENT DID ALL IT POSSIBLY COULD TO PROVIDE IT.

PERHAPS IT WOULD BE APPROPRIATE FOR ME TO INTERJECT AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AT THIS POINT. THIS AGENCY WAS CREATED IN 1953 AS A BUREAU UNDER THE STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL IN THE AFTERMATH OF RIOTS THAT BEGAN IN THE STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION AT PITTSBURGH AND WHICH SPREAD VERY QUICKLY TO THE STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION AT ROCKVIEW. RIOTS AND DISTURBANCES CAN QUICKLY MOVE FROM INSTITUTION TO INSTITUTION. THAT IS WHY IT IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL THAT THE COMMISSIONER OF CORRECTIONS TAKE A DEPARTMENTAL APPROACH TO HANDLING A MAJOR DISTURBANCE, RATHER THAN DIRECTING ALL OF HIS ENERGIES TO ONE INSTITUTION IN A MANNER THAT WOULD LEAVE THE REST OF THE CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM VULNERABLE.

MR. CHAIRMAN -- REPRESENTATIVES -- I DID NOT TAKE A HANDS-OFF APPROACH. THAT IS NEITHER MY MANAGEMENT STYLE NOR MY PHILOSOPHICAL POINT OF VIEW. I AM AN INVOLVED MANAGER. BUT THE QUESTION BECOMES THE DEGREE OF INVOLVEMENT. MY ACTIONS WERE TOTALLY CONSISTENT WITH DEPARTMENTAL AND NATIONAL STANDARDS.

WHILE NO CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATOR CAN EVER GUARANTEE YOU THAT A RIOT OR MAJOR DISTURBANCE WILL NOT OCCUR, THERE ARE CERTAIN FACTORS THAT HAVE HISTORICALLY LED TO MAJOR DISTURBANCES AND RIOTS.

OVERCROWDING IS ONE OF THE LEADING FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A MAJOR DISTURBANCE. CAMP HILL WAS SIGNIFICANTLY OVERCROWDED PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT -- OPERATING AT NEARLY 50 PERCENT OVER ITS DESIGN CAPACITY. IN ADDITION, WE ARE EXPERIENCING IN THIS DEPARTMENT AN INFLUX OF A DIFFERENT KIND OF INMATE THAN WE HAVE RECEIVED HISTORICALLY. THIS INDIVIDUAL IS YOUNGER, MORE VIOLENT, MORE PRONE TO BE ADDICTED TO DRUGS, AND MORE GANG OR GROUP ORIENTED. OUR INVESTIGATIONS HAVE REVEALED THAT THESE CHARACTERISTICS DESCRIBE THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE INMATES HOUSED AT CAMP HILL. THESE INDIVIDUALS SIMPLY BRING TO US A DIFFERENT CHALLENGE, AND THEY PRESENT MORE SERIOUS PROBLEMS THAN THEIR PREDECESSORS, PARTICULARLY WHEN HOUSED IN OVERCROWDED CONDITIONS.

WE HAVE NOT IGNORED THE OVERCROWDING DILEMMA. WE HAVE COMMITTED RESOURCES TO ADDRESS THIS PROBLEM. MAY I VERY BRIEFLY TALK ABOUT THAT.

OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS, CAMP HILL'S BUDGET HAS INCREASED BY \$5.2 MILLION. WE HAVE ADDED 50 POSITIONS AND, EXCLUDING REPAIRS TO RIOT DAMAGES, WE HAVE ALLOCATED MORE THAN \$11 MILLION TO MAKE PHYSICAL PLANT IMPROVEMENTS.

HOWEVER, OUR POPULATION IN THE DEPARTMENT HAS INCREASED FASTER THAN ANYONE'S EXPECTATION, AND IT CONTINUES TO GROW. WHILE WE LOST OVER 1,000 CELLS IN THIS DEPARTMENT DUE TO THIS DISTURBANCE, WE STILL FACE THE REALITY THAT EACH MONTH BRINGS AN INCREASE OF MORE THAN 200 INMATES TO THE CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM.

THE SITUATION AT CAMP HILL HAS FURTHER EXACERBATED OUR CROWDING PROBLEM IN THE STATE. PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WOULD LIKE TO RETURN THE PRISONERS THAT WE SENT TO THEM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

SINCE ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITIES AS COMMISSIONER OF CORRECTIONS, I HAVE BEEN CONSISTENTLY SAYING THAT WE MUST ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS IN CORRECTIONS. I PROPOSED THAT WE BUILD INSTITUTIONS, BUT CLEARLY SAID WE CANNOT BUILD OUR WAY OUT OF THIS PROBLEM. WE MUST PUT IN PLACE VIABLE ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE NEED YOUR HELP. WE NEED TO CONTINUE THE AGGRESSIVE BUILDING PROGRAM RECOMMENDED BY THE GOVERNOR. BUT WE MUST BE JUST AS AGGRESSIVE IN PUTTING WORKABLE ALTERNATIVES TO TRADITIONAL INCARCERATION INTO PLACE.

THESE ALTERNATIVES SHOULD HAVE THE SAME GOALS AS THE INSTITUTIONS HAVE. THE FIRST IS THE PROTECTION OF THE CITIZENS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA. THE SECOND IS TO BRING ABOUT A CHANGE IN THE BEHAVIOR OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAM. AGAIN, LET ME EMPHASIZE, I AM NOT SPEAKING ABOUT PLACING DANGEROUS OR VIOLENT INDIVIDUALS IN THESE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS. I AM SPEAKING ABOUT NON-VIOLENT INDIVIDUALS WHO CAN BE SAFELY KEPT IN A LESS RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT.

I VIGOROUSLY URGE YOU TO PASS AN EARNED TIME BILL. I VIGOROUSLY URGE YOU TO EXPLORE DRUG AND ALCOHOL TREATMENT CENTERS. AND I VIGOROUSLY ASK THAT WE EXPLORE OTHER PROGRAMS THAT WOULD TREAT OFFENDERS AS WELL AS PUNISH THEM FOR THEIR CRIMES.

IF WE DO THESE THINGS, IF WE AGGRESSIVELY ATTACK OVERCROWDING, IF WE PROVIDE A MEASURE OF HOPE AND REWARDS TO THOSE INMATES WHO EARN IT, IF WE TAKE STEPS TO ASSURE THE SAFETY OF PRISON STAFF, WE WILL AGGRESSIVELY REDUCE THE MAJOR CAUSES OF PRISON DISTURBANCES.

BUT IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, WE MUST GO BEYOND THE EMOTIONS OF THE MOMENT AND MOVE QUICKLY INTO SOLVING THE PROBLEMS THAT TYPICALLY LEAD TO RIOTS: OVERCROWDING, WEAKNESSES IN SECURITY, SHORTAGES OF PROGRAMS AND COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEMS. ALL OF THESE CAN LEAD TO A PERCEPTION ON THE PART OF STAFF AND INMATES THAT CONDITIONS ARE UNJUST AND INTOLERABLE.

IF I DO NOTHING ELSE HERE THIS MORNING, I HOPE TO IMPRESS UPON YOU THE URGENCY OF OUR JOINING HANDS AND WORKING TOGETHER TO MAKE SURE THAT WE DO NOT HAVE ANOTHER CAMP HILL.

THANK YOU.