

# Reed: Corrections Making Progress

Secretary of Corrections Amos Reed discussed the state's prison system in an interview with the Chronicle news staff on September 14. Following are excerpts from his remarks.

**Q-What are some of the problem areas your department is working on and what progress is being made?**

**A-** That's about as all-inclusive question as you can ask, because that covers the waterfront. I was asked to come up to North Carolina by Gov. Hunt to help with the multiple problems and the many year backlog of problems in the Department of Corrections -- not with any idea that we could create miracles or reverse all these negative issues in a short time frame.

There were several problems, many of them related to the major issue of overcrowding and over use, if you please, of the State Department of Corrections.

It just seemed like everything related to the fact that we weren't able to address the numbers of people.

But, nevertheless, we shared with the legislature our needs and they responded very beautifully. I suppose they gave as much as any legislature has ever given in response to a call for need.

For example, they approved 1100 new positions. I've never heard of that anywhere else. Of course, to bring 1100 new employees on the job is a massive undertaking, in and of itself.

The legislature has also provided many millions of dollars for new facilities and maintenance.

**Q-What is the exact dimension of the overcrowding?**

**A-** We are pushing 14,000. At times we have gone over 14,000. There shouldn't be more than 10,000 in this system. It would be less than that if we had our druthers. 13,937 was the figure as of the 12th. In addition to that, we have over 36,000 on probation and over 6,000 on parole.

Central Prison, over here, has 1517 right now and it shouldn't hold more than 950 to a 1,000. The old prison should come down. When you see me hesitate about what should be in there, I don't think anyone should be in there.

The place has dormitories in it; it's crowded; it's deteriorated; it's an ancient facility.

Out in our field units, I don't like these dorms. Because you can't protect the inmates, they don't have the privacy, particularly our medium and minimum custody prisoners.

Bear in mind that North Carolina has the highest rate of commitment of any state in the Union, per 100,000 population.

**Why is that?**

**A-** There are multiple reasons. There minimal resource in the county, city and private sectors for addressing the problems. The tendency has been to over-use the state system. There has not been enough diversion of people.

How foolish we are to assume that fining an alcoholic is going to solve his problem? How foolish can we be to assume that we can

put a person in a jail or prison and cure his problem of alcoholism. How foolish can we be?

**Q- A man by the name of Harold Ellison was on work release and started an anti-crime project for our local anti-poverty agency, and he got in trouble over making an unauthorized purchase and got put on a road gang. Since then, he's been paroled on a detainer to Virginia for a couple of bad checks...**

**A- You mean he was recommended to the institution...**

**Q- Well, he was on work release.**

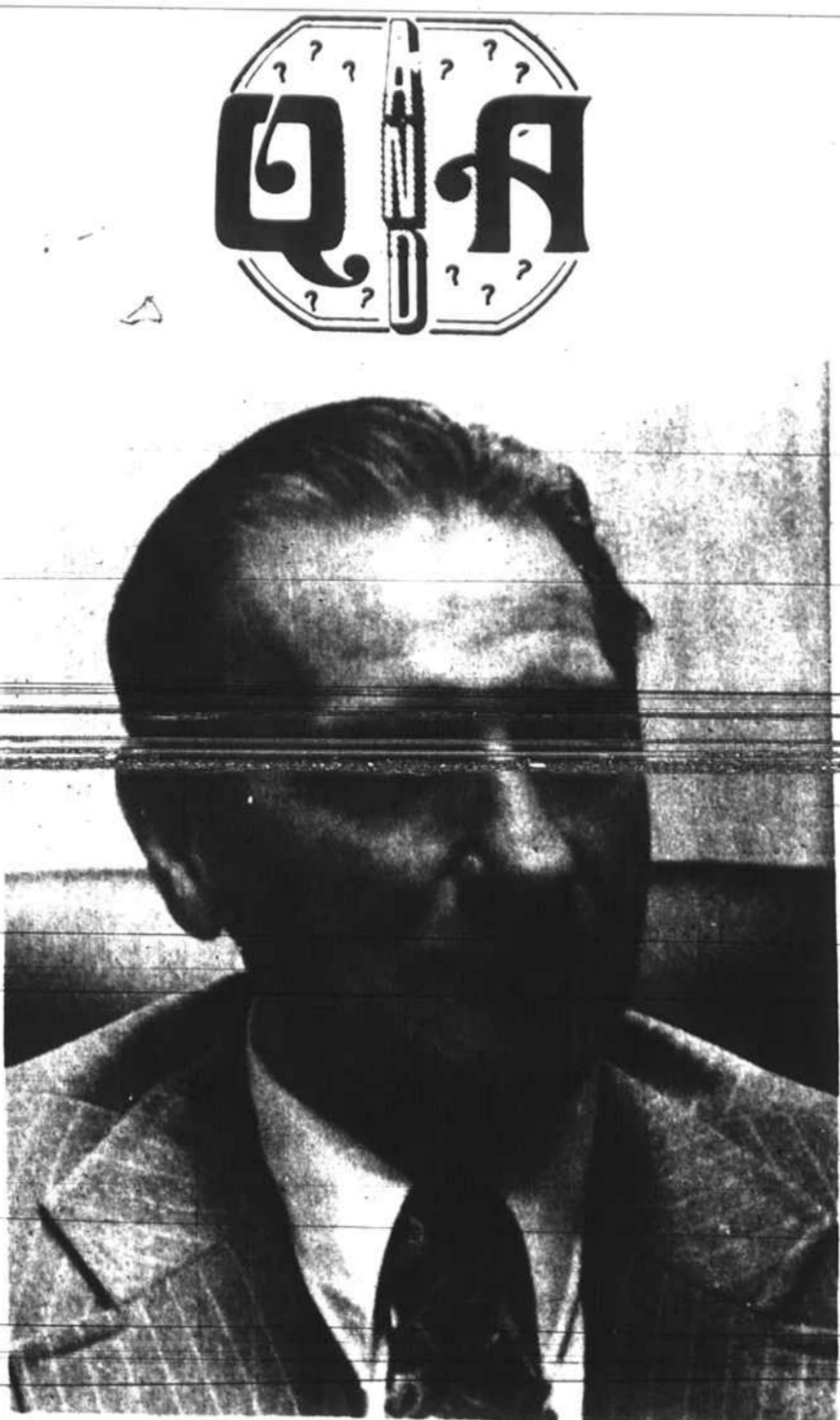
**A-** You have the advantage on me. I don't know the particulars. You have to remember I'm dealing with 60,000 offenders and we get another 10,000 every year. So in a year's time, I'm dealing with 70 to 75,000 prisoners and 6,000 employees.

But from what you've said here, no matter who it is, whether its an inmate on work release or an employee on a full time job, they don't have a license to break the law or the rules. They're going to be held accountable.

Lack of accountability is one reason staff get into trouble and why inmates get into trouble. If he has a detainer from another state, we must honor that detainer.

If he made an illegal purchase, then he planted the poison tree and the fruit from that goes to the seed that he planted.

It's not uncommon for



Amos Reed

inmates to get involved in a helping program. In fact, many of the inmates are almost under a compulsion to do this. For various reasons, some times positive, some times not so positive. We try to encourage inmates to take positive actions. We're cautious when they get involved with other inmates. It is not uncommon for drugs to be passed or for crime issues to be negotiated or for the inmates and the general public to be exploited.

To the general public, it almost sounds like motherhood. Everything is sweet and beautiful. And sometimes it is.

For instance, some people might want to start a half-way house. And not frequently, it isn't long before many of them get involved in the drug traffic, burglary and so on. So we have to handle those things very carefully.

But just a moments thought on your part would tell you that I as secretary and the rest of our staff have a lot to lose by anybody coming back into this overcrowded system. We don't get our jollies from people coming back.

**Q- Do you think the Joan Little case was handled correctly?**

**A-** Absolutely. Joan Little broke the law when she escaped and did a variety of things. As a general practice, I don't discuss individual cases with anyone, including the news media. I've made two exceptions here, except to the extent I'm not familiar

with the gentleman you just mentioned. Joan is a little different.

We can't give anyone a license to escape from our prison, to burn a house down, to cut someone in the face, to rob our houses or to do any of these other things which our society has said through its laws should not be done without a discipline falling along with it. I don't make the laws.

Just like, you are, I'm just a citizen. I'm not a free agent. I am bound by a framework of laws and procedures and directions. If we want those laws changed that permit people to escape without being held responsible, or burn or rob or write checks without being held responsible, I suppose we could get that done through our legislature. But until that is done, we must continue to hold people accountable.

**Q- Was there any negligence involved when Ben Chavis' appendix ruptured?**

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**A-** That has been grossly overstated. In fact, I still get letters demanding that I let him out of Central's hospital over here. When I was getting telegrams demanding that we cease our inhumane treatment of Ben Chavis, he was walking around with a Band-Aid over his wound from his surgery.

You can't take any appendix out without cutting through the flesh. He had excellent treatment. This is not Ben Chavis making this issue. There are all kinds of people making all kinds of issues for all kinds of reasons. He had the best surgeons, the best physicians, the same ones that if you lived in Raleigh, that we would have had. These were fine surgeons and he got excellent treatment there.

Now there were some people who tried to ride in on the wave of notoriety and wanted to do their thing. Very frankly, I don't go along with that. I'm not responsive to it and I'm not responsive to somebody sending me a telegram from Denver, Colorado, demanding that we let Ben Chavis out of Central Prison hospital when he's already been out for a month and a half.

This is the kind of thing I deal with.

**Q- How many letters have you gotten?**

**A-** A number. Most of them were form letters. It was clear that somebody had distributed a lot of information... misinformation... around the country and they had stirred up people, some clearly of good conscience.

The same wording... Very frankly, if you ever want to do something to influence a legislator or somebody, don't send them a form letter. Probably, an illegible scrawl on a postcard would have a hundred times the impact of that a form letter would have.

I got letters from states that have the most serious kinds of problems in their prisons, problems that I know about. For them to presume to direct North

Carolina and try to command how it's going to direct its prisons is mischievous and nonsensical on the face of it.

**Q- What's the situation out at the Mocksville unit? We get a lot of complaints from the prisoners out there.**

**A-** Well, you would have to talk with the director of prisons on some of these detailed issues. I have already told you that we're dealing with facilities that were built in the thirties.

I would challenge you and I would challenge the citizens of North Carolina. I wasn't born here and I didn't grow up in North Carolina. But the citizens of North Carolina have a shared responsibility for the schools and the prison facilities and it is no secret that there are needs.

I didn't build these facilities and I haven't been responsible for maintaining them over all these years. But if you had a

home that was built in the 30s, it would be in a different configuration than one that you had built in the 50s or 60s or 70s.

I already said that the legislature has set aside \$4 million to address this problem and we have already, for example, put up sneeze rails in the kitchens, we've added tens of thousands of dollars worth of equipment.

One of our problems and we have it in our budget now is for additional kitchen staff. Some our units only have one cook. If you can get 24 hours a day coverage seven days a week out of one cook, well, you don't get it.

Part of our problem is staff, part of it is facilities, part of it is overcrowding. We're already worked on a number of our sewage disposal operators and maintenance people. One thing people don't understand is that even when you have a determined need, you still go through a budgetary process. We don't appropriate our own money.

## POINT OF CONTACT

By Naomi C. McLean  
Business Writer



It is well understood back of the electric switch which we snap on to flood a room with light lies all the intricate machinery of the modern power plant. The huge turbines, the giant cables, and the miles of wire spring into life when the switch is pressed.

We now have a picture of the teacher who provides the point of contact between the educational machinery on one hand and the student body on the other. School buildings,

teaching tools, and the varied phases of educational administration are not ends in themselves but simply means to an end. That end involves bringing the influences of education to bear on youth.

It is the classroom teacher who meets at first hand the primary and essential problems of education. Those problems are human problems. After all is said and done, education has but on valid purpose to enable the teacher to prac-

tice the Art of Teaching with more satisfaction to himself and with more enduring consequences in the lives and thought processes of his students.

Wise administrators are the first to recognize the fact that all progress in education makes itself felt finally through the efforts of the teacher in the classroom. Effective teaching is the basic factor in the success of every educational institution.

## Letter to the Chronicle

Dear Editor:

Mr. Miller, who spoke to the group of Winston-Salem businessmen, states that our Proposition 13 Tax Revolt should be aimed at Washington, where the grassroots are.

Meanwhile, the martini drinkers, pot smokers and cocaine sniffers are spending our tax dollars. It is no different in North Carolina state, Forsyth County and the City of Winston-Salem, where the Stop and Stabilize Tax movement is being organized headed by Dr. Nash, Mr. Conrad and many others. The fat must be trimmed from state, county, and city budgets, which directly affects all of us citizens.

Here are some questions we demand answers to from the elected public servants - the Mayor, City Manager, Chairman of the County Commissioners and Board of Alderman, the High Sheriff, the Chief of Police, and the city and county Fire Chief.

They are furnished with high powered vehicles, gas gusslers, at the taxpayer's expense. If they were monitored with a stop watch and it was made public how many hours a shift they really worked for the citizens, we'd see how much of their time was spent sitting at restaurants drinking coffee or sitting behind a billboard or pulled off in a hole where the motorists cannot see them.

This state spends thousands of our hard-earned tax dollars and the Forsyth County School Board does the same - they have been hollaring higher education for a number of years. If you call high school graduates that cannot read or give you back right change from a dollar higher education, I have some other names for it. Take for instance, sex clubs, venereal diseases, pot smokers, and dope pushers - I have heard that one teacher at Mineral Springs School was caught peddling dope to our young children?

Tell the city and county taxpayers if there is a city line running all the way around the Whitaker Park

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