

A Happy Birthday Indeed

This past week union officials toured every area of the Jail (specialty areas included) to secure signatures for union cards. In the process we opted to take the opportunity to hear what concerns were circulating amongst the membership, and what if any changes that you would most like to see in this upcoming contract. You had much to say, and we intently listened.

It is apparent that A & F (Administration and Finance), for the 8th year in a row, is claiming that the state coffers are dry and virtually no money is available for upcoming contracts. It was with that knowledge that the general consensus from you was to mandate that we negotiate for significant changes in the language of our contract that, at the time, is terribly wanting.

Most notably, you have expressed 2 major areas within the parameters of language that you feel need to be addressed: bidding by seniority for specialty jobs and a real independent examination for promotions, one that is civil service in nature and not the "same old, same old", such as the recent pretentious test that the Sheriff unilaterally enacted without this Union's input.

It is clear that substantive change in both of these areas is desperately needed to ensure that specialty positions and promotions are finally removed from the political process, just as the Sheriff promised. One of the primary reasons why former Sheriff John M. Flynn lost the election to Sheriff Glodis in the spectacular fashion that he did was his inability to read the disdain the public had for his Administration's utter refusal to take the political patronage out of the process. Change was needed then and is demanded no less now.

Sheriff Glodis would do much to advance his reputation as a leader if he would finally say "no" to the power that corrupts from within. If not, the Sheriff will likely ram his ship along the very same crushing rocks that abruptly halted the Flynn Machine 4 years ago. The taxpayers will not be patient in their hope for this change forever, and neither shall we.

But it has been, and continues to be, the position of our Local to work with the Sheriff as much as humanly possible for the benefit of our membership. Yet the time for change draws nigh, and more than a band-aid cure is needed for this continuing conflict of interest that has been in place at the House of Correction for decades.

And this begs the question: how does one entice the Average Joe (this includes a fair number of W.C.S.O. employees) to attend a birthday party thrown in one's honor? Extra servings of cake? Super-sized balloons? Or could it possibly be the potential reward of better things with the unspoken understanding that one hand washes the other? If nothing else, I need to remember that at my next birthday party I should ask my "friends" for a "suggested donation"

of \$40, \$140, \$240 and what the hey... \$440! (What is, after all, \$440 between friends?) And here you were thinking the economy was performing badly. Never too badly to kick the Sheriff some cake for his party, I suppose.

This enormous appearance of impropriety is more than enough to raise cause for alarm. I believe the Sheriff sees this, understands this, and will consider doing the right thing if given the opportunity. And that opportunity is now here. Do the right thing, Sheriff, the very thing you promised the voters of the Commonwealth over 4 years ago. For once and for all, take the politics out of the process at the Jail and sign this necessary language into effect in this recent contract. If you do then I, for one, will promise to attend your next birthday party. Without a suggested donation in hand, of course.

Officer Warren Lohnes, Jr.

President, Local 550, W.C.C.O.