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FLOOR DEBATE

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looking at these issues, and particularly dealing with prisons and private contracting, is that a jail is different from a prison. You have people coming in and out for shorter periods of time. You probably have a lot more interaction with the community. In terms of our jail, we have religious groups that come in, people who work with prisoners on many issues that they may be facing in terms of treatment needs that they may have. We've had people come in and do projects with them on managing money, how to apply for a job, all those kinds of things. I think it's important that that tie directly and not be handed off to another private entity that's in there for profit, because all of those things that get done with the community take time. They take staff time to manage it. They take space to have them available for the prisoners. And I'm not convinced that this isn't a responsibility that a local governing board should take on and take an interest in and not try to find maybe the cheapest approach, but the best approach. And I think that's just a responsibility that we have, from living in a society, that we manage the prison population through...directly with our own employees. Now there is a way to save money by doing this because people who work for jails are often members of unions, and there's...they negotiate and they have benefits and they are good jobs in the community. I'm not sure we want to do this in order to take those jobs away from people, and also not to have the accountabilities that are there to the governing bodies that you have when those are your direct employees. So I've got reservations about this.

SENATOR CUDABACK: One minute.

SENATOR THOMPSON: I think that we should go slowly on any effort to allow counties to do...to not have the responsibility for their...directly for their jail and the employees of the jail. I think county jails are tricky things to manage for a lot of reasons, and I would have more confidence in the continuity of their management by their elected officials in the oversight of county boards to the extent that they fund them and they deal with the buildings. And so I'm going to listen some more to this debate, but I also know that, as public officials, it's an easy way to look at things to try to figure out how you can just relieve yourself of the burdens and the headaches of a