

## AN OPPOSING VIEW TO SENATOR NOZZOLIO RE PRISON CLOSINGS

Gaye Chapman, Wayne County Democratic Chair 315-589-9649

Wayne County property taxes are among the highest in the United States, when measured against home values, and high property taxes are said to be a reason some New Yorkers are leaving for less taxed southern and western states.

Our Governor, David A. Paterson warned last summer that the State budget was facing a deficit and costs had to be reduced if we were to avoid raising those taxes. One of his proposals to cut the difference between revenue and expenses is to close some prisons.

Why Prisons? Let's look at some facts:

In 2000 the inmate population was 71,400; the inmate population today is 60,000, a reduction of 16%.

There are 7,000 vacant beds in all New York State prisons. The minimum security population has dropped by more than 50% over the last nine years. The Butler minimum security annex, with 141 inmates is included in the Governor's closure proposal effective October 1st; the balance of the Butler prison complex will remain open.

I am unhappy about the possibility of some Wayne County correction officers losing their jobs, as I am unhappy about anyone in private industry losing his job. When any business, Kodak, for instance, is unable to produce, through service or manufacturing, what it is that the public wants a reduction or change in business is necessitated.

The boom in the construction of new prisons in New York State occurred in the 1980's. This area of New York State was reluctant, even adamant against the location of those prisons here. The maximum prisons were built in other areas, in the North Country, Franklin County, for example. Had those prisons been built in the Wayne County area, Correction Officers now would not be faced with layoffs or moving to another locality.

The reductions in prison population have been occurring over the past decade. Senator Nozzolio as Chair of the Committee on Crime and Prisons should have noticed that inmate population decreasing. Has there been a hearing in either chamber as to the fate of prisons as the inmate population decreased? Has there been any consideration by him as to the fate of the careers of the Correction Officers during that time? Does he expect taxpayers to continue to pay for services that are not needed?

Senator Nozzolio rants against our new Governor's attempts to solve budget gaps, but here is another fact: New York State's budget during the 12 years of the Republican Pataki administration, started at \$58 billion, ended at \$104 billion, or almost DOUBLED.

Does Senator Nozzolio have a budget solution? Does he have a solution for Correction Officers? Does he have a proposal for the use of former prison buildings?

My answer, which I have already proposed to Gov. Paterson:

Consider converting these buildings to facilities where career skills can be learned. Not all young people choose college after high school; not all young people choose military life; why not train them in the building trades, carpentry, masonry, electrical, plumbing, HVAC? Why not retrain those citizens losing jobs to factory closures and layoffs? Then they would be able to earn good wages, which will afford them the ability to pay property taxes.

For those Correction Officers who will not be able to be transferred to another prison facility, our new Congressman Dan Maffei recently announced the reinstatement of funding for COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services), which had been eliminated in fiscal years 2006 and 2007 under the Republican-led Congress. Congressman Maffei's district will see an additional 116 law enforcement officials, possibly including Correction Officers displaced by Butler closing?