



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Senator Ritchie Returns to Visit North Country Prisons

PATTY RITCHIE July 22, 2011

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Thanks Staff for Efforts that Helped Keep Facilities Open

State Senator Patty Ritchie returned to three state prisons in Ogdensburg and Gouverneur today to thank the officers, staff and administrators for their efforts to help keep the North Country facilities open, and to celebrate the news that every prison in St. Lawrence and Jefferson Counties had been spared the budget ax.

“Back in January, I visited each of the prisons in Jefferson and St. Lawrence County, and gathered information from staff and officers about just how efficient and cost-effective these facilities are, representing a better deal for state taxpayers,” Senator Ritchie said.

“Today, I returned to three of the facilities, Ogdensburg, Riverview and Gouverneur, to share with the dedicated workforce there that our strategy worked, and that Albany has recognized the good work they do, as do I,” Senator Ritchie said.

Senator Ritchie plans to visit the remaining two prisons she represents, in Cape Vincent and Watertown, in coming days.

Senator Ritchie worked closely with local prison representatives to help make the case for saving the North Country prisons. As part of her efforts, Senator Ritchie sent a letter to

Senate leaders that spelled out the advantages to taxpayers of keeping the prisons here open:

1. COST EFFECTIVE - The five Northern New York prisons rank among the most cost effective operations in the state. We should close inefficient, high operating cost prisons rather than facilities that provide the best return for taxpayers.
2. REAL ESTATE VALUE – Some downstate prisons sit on the most expensive real estate in the world. The state could make hundreds of millions of dollars from the sale of the land and actually improve the state's economy by increasing surrounding property values, bringing in new businesses and helping to create the kind of private sector growth and job creation that our state desperately needs.
3. COMMUNITY SUPPORT - Closing downstate prisons would not dislocate families because much of the staff lives elsewhere because they can't afford to live in those areas and, in some cases, communities have actually requested that prisons be closed.
4. REUSE - Closing prisons like Ogdensburg and Watertown offer no opportunity for reuse and no way to recoup taxpayers investment. Both sit next to acres and acres of vacant, deteriorating government buildings that have sat unused for decades.
5. UNNECESSARY BONUSES - DOCS is paying unnecessary bonuses of \$3,200 per staff member to get people to work at many of the New York City area prisons. That represents millions and millions of dollars in unnecessary bonus payments that could be cut by focusing operations in low cost areas.
6. PRISONER SAFETY – North Country prisons have among the lowest rates of prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff assaults and “unusual incidents,” which should be comforting to family members of staff and inmates, as well.

7. OVERTIME, ABSENTEE RATES, WORKMAN'S COMP RATES – North Country prisons have an exceptional record in all three areas, producing lower costs and more reliable service for taxpayers.

8. EMPLOYEES – Six out of every seven transfer requests in the Department of Corrections workforce involves staff asking to be located to prisons located north of the Thruway. Watertown Correctional, for example, has an 11 year waiting list to transfer to the prison. In the private sector, businesses locate where workers are available and want to live.

9. GREEN ENERGY – Potential exists for a major bio-fuels plant that can serve the Ogdensburg facility and nearby St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center, cutting energy costs and creating additional private sector jobs.

10. SHARING SERVICES – The prison in Ogdensburg is an excellent example of cooperation between state-run facilities. A state psychiatric center, sex abuse treatment center and substance abuse center all are located within a mile of two prisons.

11. ACCREDITATION – The five North Country prisons scored exceptionally well on the most recent accreditation and were ranked among the highest in the state.

12. LABOR GRIEVANCES – North Country prisons have among the lowest rates for employee grievances