

## Corrections officers use radio, TV to fight prison closings

By Andrew Beam

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In response to the governor's Executive Budget proposal to close four prisons in New York state, the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association announced an advertising campaign that is now appearing on television, radio, the Internet, and in voters mailboxes.

The state Department of Correctional Services budget proposes closing Lyon Mountain minimum security prison in Clinton County and Butler minimum security prison in Wayne County in January 2011. Additionally, the Moriah shock facility in Essex County and Ogdensburg medium security prison in St. Lawrence County would close in April 2011.

The proposed closings are estimated to save the state \$7 million in the 2010-2011 fiscal year and \$52 million in the 2011-2012 fiscal year. The proposed budget would reduce the number of positions to 572. Those employed at the closing prisons will be offered jobs where there are vacancies in other facilities.

The television ads produced by NYSCOPBA criticize DOCS for closing prisons and not making administrative cuts, calling it a "dangerous



New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association President Donn Rowe, at podium, joined by corrections officers, is asking for the state Department of Correctional Services to cut administrative positions rather than close four prisons. *Photo by Karla Cruz, The Legislative Gazette.*

choice" and "a difference between life and death."

"We are here to highlight that DOCS has yet again ignored our idea to make cuts to their own bloated administrative bureaucracy," said **NYSOCPBA President Donn Rowe**, who also complained that prisons are already overcrowded, forcing many inmates to live in double-bunked cells designed for a single inmate. The jails, Rowe said, are currently running at a 102 percent capacity, while maximum security prisons are at 122 percent capacity.

Dept. of Corrections Public Information Director Erik Kriss said the numbers provided by NYSCOPBA are "bogus."

"They are using a two-decade-old federally mandated reporting requirement," he said. The number, he said, does not include beds created for medical and mental health needs or segregation cells created for prisoners who violate the rules.

Kriss also said the reporting does not take into account the number of 2,300 general confinement beds. They are currently labeled as temporary, but are being reclassified as permanent.

"There are close to 5,000 vacant cells," systemwide, Kris emphasized.

Regarding the double bunked cells, Kriss said it is a practice that has been authorized by the state's Standard Correctional Practice. "We've converted some of those cells to two-man cells," Kriss said. "Double bunking is not a problem."

**NYSCOPBA Executive Vice President Chris Hickey** also criticized DOCS for not cutting administrative positions and said there is serious concern that cutting lower level staff would put the inmates, and the public, at risk. "They have decided to balance the budget on the backs of those who serve as our front line of protection for both our inmates and the public," he said. "It leads to an escalated level of potential danger for correctional officers and sergeants, and the inmates, but cutting from the administrative bureaucracy won't heighten any risk for front line staff."

**NYSCOPBA Western Region Vice President Al Mothershed** said

he is confident the advertising campaign will be effective. "We can only hope that [Commissioner Brian Fischer] and the Legislature come to their senses and realize that closing prisons is a bad decision for New York," he said.