



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George Winner

Winner Questions Rockefeller Drug Law Agreement

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Albany, N.Y., March 26—State Senator George Winner (R-C-I, Elmira) questioned today an agreement by Governor David Paterson and the state's Democratic legislative leaders to dramatically overhaul the state's 1970's-era Rockefeller drug laws.

The deal was reported in today's New York Times.

Winner is questioning how the state can afford the expansion of its drug courts and drug treatment programs called for under the agreement at a time when New York is facing an unprecedented deficit. It's being reported that the reform plan will initially cost New York at least \$50 million.

Winner also wonders if it's wise to ease anti-drug laws -- and potentially release thousands of drug offenders back into communities across the state -- when crime experts warn that crime could be on the rise at a time of high unemployment, high costs, and other economic stresses.

“Is it a wise move, fiscally and, especially, for community safety? Many law enforcement leaders and prosecutors believe that now is no time to turn back the clock on anti-drug laws,” said Winner.

Winner said that the dramatic action is being taken in the absence of any recent public hearings and likely as part of the 2009-10 state budget, a move that Winner has already criticized as a political maneuver to protect legislators who don’t want to be seen as soft on crime.

“If you believe Rockefeller drug law reform is the right thing to do, then let’s openly debate the issue on its own merits. Don’t hide it in a budget bill. That’s a bad practice. It’s exactly the type of political game that the public’s tired of. If you’re willing to put thousands of state prisoners back into communities across New York, you should be willing to stand up and defend that action and that action alone.”

The state Assembly has already approved a sweeping Rockefeller drug law reform measure in the face of strong opposition from Republican lawmakers, prosecutors and police officers, who argue that existing laws are important to fighting drug-related crime.