



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Stephen M. Saland

Senator Steve Saland And Assemblyman Marc Molinaro Comment On The Proposed Closure Of The Hudson Correctional Facility

STEPHEN M. SALAND

The Governor Doesn't Have to Slap Columbia County in the Face

Imagine this – you've worked at a job you love for 20 years and you make a decent salary. Your spouse has a good job too. You have a house that you've turned into a real home for your family with sweat equity. Your children go to the local public school, have lots of friends and play on the school teams. You've had the same doctor for years, you've shopped at the same stores for years, you trust your local mechanic to fix your car and your aging parents live two blocks away so it's easy to check on them. It's a good life.

Imagine then that you hear on the radio, not by a formal notification from your boss, that your job will disappear in a year. You may be offered a similar job halfway across the state, if someone there quits or retires and if you have enough seniority to have your choice of placement.

There are 277 hardworking people in Columbia County and surrounding counties that don't have to imagine what that's like – they're living it.

The Governor has decided to close four correctional facilities in the State, including the Hudson Correctional Facility -- a medium security facility operating at or near capacity and

in which the state has invested millions of dollars in improvements over the past five years. There is much we do not know about this proposed closure and the Governor has been less than forthcoming with the details. What we do know is that this will have a devastating effect on the economy of the City of Hudson and Columbia County. Multiply those 277 jobs by immediate family members and it could be several times that number of people uprooted and forced to find other jobs and other places to live. Hudson and Columbia County simply cannot sustain that type of loss -- not only the loss of jobs, compounded by the ripple effect on the local economy, but the corresponding damage to the community's social fabric.

On one hand, the Governor indicated in his State of the State Address that he wants to invest a billion dollars in the upstate economy. Then with his other hand he smacks the people in Columbia County right in the face with a proposal that is completely at odds with his plans to revitalize upstate New York.

Corrections Law requires the Department of Correctional Services (DOCS) to develop strategies to minimize the impact of prison closures on the State workforce and the local and regional economies. We'll be very interested to see how they propose to do that. We are sure the employees at the Facility as well as the local merchants who depend on those employees to patronize their businesses will be interested too.

It's safe to assume this idea did not come to the Governor last week. Proposals like this do not come out of thin air -- it had to have been contemplated for quite a while. Why not work together with those who will be directly affected? Keeping the four unions representing the employees, state and local officials, as well as local business leaders in the loop from the beginning of the process could have worked to everyone's benefit, but of course, that did not happen. The proposal was formulated in secret and just dropped on everyone with no input.

Governor Spitzer -- we know that tough choices have to be made, as you said in your State of the State Address. "Tough" we can take -- but "unfair" we cannot. We cannot stand idly by

and let this closure happen. Let's work together to find a "fair" resolution.