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FROM: SEN. LONG

PHONE: 318.628.5799

UPDATE FROM 2011 FISCAL LEGISLATIVE SESSION

SENATOR LONG OPPOSES PLAN TO PRIVATIZE STATE PRISONS

District 31 Senator Gerald Long (R-Winnfield) opposes plans to sell state correctional facilities in order to fill budget shortfalls, instead supporting a measure by District 29 Senator Joe McPherson (D-Pineville) which would lease two state prisons to the private firms currently managing them. Governor Jindal's plan to trim state government in order to respond to the budget deficit included a plan to privatize some of the state's correctional facilities as well as to sell three prisons to private operators through a competitive bid. The proposal included the sale of Winn Correctional Center near Winnfield. Plans to sell these facilities, however, were set back Monday when a House committee rejected legislation by District 9 Representative Henry Burns (R-Haughton) backed by the administration.

Sen. Long supports Sen. McPherson's alternative to selling the correctional facilities. Sen. McPherson's proposal would streamline the process to lease two of the prisons, including Winn Correctional Center, to private companies for up to 20 years and would require the money to be put forward immediately. Proponents of the legislation argue that the state could gain up to \$66 million by leasing the prisons. Sen. Long said, "Plans to sell our state prisons do not seem to be fiscally responsible and might end up costing the state more than it would for the facilities to be operated by the Department of Corrections. I want to assure the residents of those communities affected by the proposals that I stand by our state workers and oppose plans to privatize our state prisons. The provision for a 20-year lease for these prisons will give a sense of permanency to these communities and will ultimately be in the best interests of both state corrections workers and state taxpayers."

In response to House-approved budget cuts across state agencies, the Department of Corrections issued a directive to the wardens of five state prisons to issue layoff notices to workers should the state need to cut positions or close facilities. If the increased cuts to the budget are left in tact, the Department will have to adjust its spending to account for the \$27.5 million decrease in spending approved by the House. In response to these actions, Sen. Long said, "As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, I will do my best to work with the Department of Corrections to ensure that the final outcome of these deliberations continues to protect the long-term goals of our state and guarantees a reliable future for state employees."