

# Lawmakers, guards push new 'super' prison

By Copley News Service

SPRINGFIELD — Backed by state prison guards with hands-on experience in dealing with violent inmates, a bipartisan group of lawmakers is rallying around a proposal to construct a \$60 million "super maximum" security prison.

Gov. Jim Edgar has backed off endorsing the proposed 500-inmate facility, which was suggested by his Task Force on Crime and Corrections. While not completely writing it off, he said Tuesday there isn't enough mon-

ey in the state's budget to support the plan.

In a Statehouse news conference, officers from maximum security prisons, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and four prison town legislators urged Edgar and lawmakers Tuesday to authorize building of the facility as soon as possible so it could be operating by 1996. Lawmakers said they will push the prison proposal in the Senate this week.

Under the task force plan, the facility would house prisoners who attack prison employees or

other inmates, and the prison gang leaders who influence the violence. The super-max prisoners would have little movement outside of their cells.

"We need some place to put these type of people," said Michael Bushue, an officer at Menard Correctional Center who was stabbed 17 times in the back by a prisoner during an attack in 1991. "If we go in there with the idea of super maximum security and we build this thing from the ground up, we should be able to control them."

James Atkins, an officer at

Stateville Correctional Center near Joliet for almost 18 years, said the means of dealing with troublesome inmates — in which they are moved to another facility and placed in an isolation unit known as "segregation" — is not working. An average of three prison employees are attacked every day.

"All we do is move them from one facility to the next," he said. "There is no deterrent there."

"All of my adult life I've dealt with these criminals," Atkins added. "They don't care about

you, myself or anybody else. It is important that these individuals be put away knowing that if they commit a crime behind the walls that they will be sent somewhere where they won't have the freedom to move on a day-to-day basis."

Attacks on prison officers often result in a "lockdown" where all prisoners are kept in their cells for most of the day — shutting down educational and jobs programs that reform inmates, said Henry Bayer, AFSCME Illinois Council 31 deputy director.

## SOUTHTOWN ECONOMIST, MARCH 26, 1993 Edgar holding off support for prison

SPRINGFIELD (AP) — Gov. Jim Edgar said Thursday that he was not prepared to propose construction of a \$60 million "super maximum" security prison, despite the recommendation of a task force he appointed.

In a statement generally urging the Legislature's adoption of Edgar indicated he wanted more study of lower-cost alternatives such as the conversion of a cell house at an existing prison.

The Illinois Task Force on Crime and Corrections, headed by former Chicago federal prosecutor Anton Valukas, earlier this month endorsed building a special prison for managing the state's most violent and aggressive inmates.

The report said the best way to reduce violence, protect the safety of staff and inmates, and

improve the functioning of the four antiquated maximum-security facilities was to remove violent inmates from the general population.

Edgar ordered the task force to find the best ways to deal with the state's overcrowded prison system, which now houses more than 32,000 inmates in more than 32,000 inmates in facilities designed for under 21,000.

Among the task force recommendations backed by Edgar: ■ Awarding inmates a one-half day earned time credit for each day spent in educational programs, drug treatment or prison industries assignments. ■ Making more offenders eligible for boot camp incarceration by raising the maximum allowable age to 35 from 39. ■ Expanding the use of electronic home incarceration near the end of inmates' sentences.

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