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**CERETTO TO CALL FOR DRUG TESTS FOR PUBLIC BENEFIT APPLICANTS:
SAYS IF SOLDIERS TESTED, WELFARE RECIPIENTS SHOULD BE TOO**

LOCKPORT—When Niagara County lawmakers meet Tuesday night, they will take up a resolution, introduced by Lewiston Republican John D. Ceretto, that calls on local state legislators to stop bottling up a bill that would require drug testing of welfare and Medicaid applicants.

Ceretto introduced the resolution, which calls on members of Niagara County's state delegation that sit in the majority in the state Legislature to take steps to force a floor vote on a bill, sponsored by Sen. George D. Maziarz, R-Newfane, that would require drug testing for applicants and recipients of various welfare benefits. The bill, S.7436, has been bottled up in the state Senate's Social Services Committee since April.

A companion bill, A.3602, has similarly been trapped in the Assembly's Social Services Committee. Neither Sen. Daniel L. Squadron, D-Brooklyn, nor Assemblyman Keith L.T. Wright, D-Harlem, have taken any steps to allow the bills to be discharged for a floor vote.

Ceretto said that Squadron and Wright were merely following orders from the leaders of their respective houses, and called on Niagara County's elected representatives who sit in the Democratic majority in both houses to use their influence to bring the bills to the floor for a vote.

"[Assemblywoman] Francine DelMonte [D-Niagara Falls] and [Sen.] Antoine Thompson [D-Buffalo] need to tell Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate President Malcolm Smith to let this bill come to the floor for a fair up or down vote," Ceretto demanded.

Ceretto pointed to the staggering totals from state and local spending on welfare entitlements, noting that in a typical month New York state is spending approximately \$975 million on food stamps, Supplemental Security Income, and Temporary Assistance—a figure that balloons to nearly \$4 billion per month when Medicaid spending is factored in. Those figures don't include administrative costs, such as social workers to run the welfare programs.

Ceretto also noted that as of 2009, Niagara County taxpayers were on the hook for \$42.1 million in Medicaid spending—a number likely to increase in 2010.

"When you add all of that up, that's a lot of money our hard-working families are being asked to give up for other people's social welfare," Ceretto said. "It's not right to ask Niagara County's working families to subsidize junkies and their lifestyles. All we want is a drug test when people apply and drug tests to keep their benefits."

The Maziarz bill would require those who fail such tests to enroll in drug rehabilitation programs or forfeit their benefits. Ceretto said that the costs of welfare programs have become so high and the state's willingness to take meaningful steps to police who receives the benefits so lax that such measures have become necessary.

"We can't keep spending \$1 billion a month and not knowing where it's going—what people are doing with it," Ceretto said.

Ceretto also noted that many employers, including trucking firms, police agencies, and many Fortune 500 companies administer drug tests to prospective and current employees, and that random drug tests are a fact of life in the military.

"Anyone who thinks we're asking a lot, just keep in mind that soldiers we ask to defend our country have to take surprise drug tests just for the privilege of protecting us," Ceretto said. "If the troops fighting and dying for America in places like Afghanistan and Iraq have to do it, why should people on welfare get a pass?"

Ceretto said he would open his bill to the full membership of Niagara County Legislature to join him as sponsors, a bipartisan move he said was aimed at demonstrating to Albany that people on both sides of the aisle are fed up with Albany's failures.

"I just hope all of my colleagues join me in asking Albany to be responsible for a change, and pass Sen. Maziarz's bill," Ceretto said. "That this is even an issue that we need to debate shows us how out-of-touch Albany really has become."

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