

News

Mayor wants terror trial in Newburgh

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By Mid-Hudson News Network
with staff and wire reports

NEWBURGH – Citing a potential boon in name recognition and tourism for his city, as well as a possible benefits package from the federal government, Mayor Nicholas Valentine has invited the U.S. Justice Department to hold the controversial 9/11 terrorist trials in Newburgh.

There has been a growing uproar about the plan to hold the trials in federal district court in lower Manhattan, as well as a local backlash to talk of possibly relocating the trials to Orange or Westchester counties.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has reversed his previous support and now opposes holding the trials in his city. On Thursday, President Barack Obama asked the U.S. Justice Department to consider other locations where the trials could be held.

Among the Orange County sites that have been floated are the Air National Guard Base at Stewart Airport in New Windsor, West Point and the Otisville federal prison.

Valentine said the newly renovated city courthouse would be an ideal location.

He said Newburgh would benefit from the international attention, as well as the hordes of lawyers and reporters attending the trial. The part-time mayor, who also owns a tailor shop across from the courthouse, said the trial also could attract tourists.

“For a city like Newburgh, it could not only put us on the map, but it could benefit us for many, many years to come,” he told the Associated Press. “Maybe we’ll truly be looked at as the sixth borough of New York.”

The renovation of the courthouse, formerly a Broadway school, cost \$22 million, and Valentine wants the federal government to pay the cost to hold the trials there. Valentine said he has spoken with Police Chief Eric Paolilli and concluded the city could handle the trials with federal assistance.

“I want officers the federal government would supply us with over a 10-year period (who) we don’t have to pay for to help us out in making this city safer for everybody, and also a community package to help out my Recreation Department and various other departments,” he said.

Valentine said the trial is going to go somewhere in the United States and he wants Newburgh to be in the mix.

The National Guard Base at Stewart International Airport is in the town of Newburgh. Deputy Town Supervisor George Woolsey said Valentine is “foolish” to make the offer, and that the Town Board has not discussed the subject of the terrorist trial at all.

Orange County Executive Edward Diana has said he doesn’t want the trial anywhere in his county.

“Forty-four residents of Orange County lost their lives on the most horrific day and to bring these monsters and terrorists to Orange County is an insult to our residents,” Diana said Thursday.

But Valentine said Diana “doesn’t deal with the same financial problems that we deal with and the financial end of this could be such a benefit to us in the city in name recognition.”

State Sen. Vincent Leibell, R-Carmel, says he will introduce legislation to oppose the federal decision to conduct the 9/11 terror trials in a federal

civilian court in New York City.

Leibell, whose district includes the Northern Dutchess towns of Milan, Pine Plains and North East, is the ranking member on the Senate Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs.

Leibell said holding the trials there will “unnecessarily put New Yorkers at risk and have a staggering economic impact on business, disrupt city residents, and cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.”

As for the possibility of moving them to an Orange County venue, County Executive Edward Diana says no way.

State Assemblyman Marcus J. Molinaro, R-Red Hook, quickly denounced Valentine’s proposal. “This civilian trial will be nothing more than a spectacle and an insult where the terrorists spout their hatred and try to inspire others to commit heinous crimes,” Molinaro said in a statement. “Worst of all, it will make our community a symbolic terror target.

“I’m absolutely stunned that we would actually have elected officials welcoming terrorists to the Hudson Valley because they view it as a chance for good publicity and potential profit,” said Molinaro. “It is insulting to cite economic gain out of the loss of thousands of lives and the loss of a global economic symbol. I would like to think that these elected officials can be a little more creative and less disrespectful in their economic development proposals.”

Newburgh already made terror-related headlines in May, when the FBI arrested four men in what authorities called a plot to detonate a bomb outside a Jewish temple and to shoot military planes with guided missiles at Stewart Airport.

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