

Clarion call for hospital support

By ADAM PFEFFER

Congressman Guy V. Molinari said yesterday that unless Staten Islanders begin flooding the White House with letters and telegrams urging President Reagan to save the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital in Clifton, the facility will definitely be closed Oct. 31.

"The odds are not good, but the more responses we can get from local citizens, the better chance we have of being able to succeed," Molinari said. "If we all sit back and accept the situation as hopeless, then there is no question in my mind that the hospital would close."

Molinari said he was issuing the letter-writing appeal because "in my judgment, the best chance that we have of keeping the hospital would be by direct intervention by the president himself."

He said he wrote his own letter to the President Friday, which he had hand delivered. The letter, Molinari explained, reminded Reagan of a meeting Molinari attended in the Oval Office last April.

The meeting, Molinari said, included President Reagan, Vice President Bush, Robert Michel (R-IL), the House minority leader and Max Friederdorf, the President's chief liaison officer.

"We spent a half-hour discussing the critical problem that would exist if that hospital would close," the freshman Congressman said.

According to Molinari, the 168,000 outpatients that were treated at the Clifton facility

An editorial on the closing of the hospital appears on page E-2.

last year was more than all the other Staten Island hospitals combined.

"It will be virtually impossible to go to a hospital and receive prompt attention," Molinari warned.

"On the other hand," he added, "if we can have thousands of letters and telegrams and even telephone calls sent to President Reagan at the White House, that response, coupled with my own efforts, might be enough of a combination to prod the administration into doing the kinds of things that they should have done a long time ago."

Molinari blamed the Reagan administration for lending only tepid support in the waning days of the struggle to keep the hospital open.

"I don't think they initially wanted it to go down the drain," he said. "(David) Stockman (the administration's budget director), in particular, was very willing to invest the necessary dollars on a one shot basis, in return for closing down the PHS system."

St. Vincent's Medical Center had proposed a takeover plan, that was contingent upon federal funds.

"However, once the legislation passed providing for the elimination of the merchant seamen entitlement, and the budget for the conversion and takeover was cut severely, Mr. Stockman and the administration seemed to lose interest," Molinari said.

In addition, once the St. Vincent's plan was rejected and the PHS hospitals were cut from the budget, Molinari said that the administration tried to place the total blame on Congress.

"They're trying to point the finger at Congress," he explained. "I told the White House representative that was a cop out, in that we all know that if the president or a high-level cabinet member strongly recommended the funding levels, that kind of a bill undoubtedly would be approved in both houses."

Referring to the administration's expensive defense budget that is supposed to save Americans lives by offering a deterrent to warfare, Molinari commented, "We're also trying to save lives here by expenditure of a whole lot less money."

Meanwhile, Molinari said that he is trying to persuade both Mayor Koch and Governor Carey to also urge the president to publicly support the PHS hospitals.

He added that he was told yesterday that the governor had sent a letter to the president on Friday.

Both the city and state representatives in Washington are currently trying to push for the necessary federal funds, Molinari said, "which leads me to believe that they're sitting back hoping to secure the maximum federal funding so that if they are called on for financial assistance, it will be at a lower level."

When asked if he thought the city and state would fund the hospital regardless of the federal funding, Molinari sidestepped the issue.

"I'm not going to wait until the hospital closes, but I'm going to put the mayor and governor on alert as to the seriousness of the matter," he said.

"I would rather not have a confrontation (with the again Reagan administration)," Molinari said. "But I'll not shy away from one."

Molinari said that his confrontation may take the form of opposition to some of the president's tax cut plans.

"I can't win this fight alone," he said, "but I do believe if we get enough support from the thousands of people that care about this hospital, we can win the battle."

"I will continue to lead the charge," he added.