

SIDC closing dubbed 'historic'

By DAN JANISON
ADVANCE ALBANY BUREAU

ALBANY — The state's chief of services for the mentally retarded spoke exuberantly yesterday of an "historic moment" when the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) is phased out next year.

Arthur Webb, who heads the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), said it will be "some kind of irony" when the site of nearly 300 acres hosts a merged College of Staten Island campus.

Webb said the sprawling campus's old stone buildings conjure up a kind of "Ivy League atmosphere."

"What was once a symbol of neglect will now be a symbol of excellence," he added.

"It will be an historic moment, April 1, 1987, or thereabouts," he said, referring to the targeted closing date for SIDC. Besides the CSI campus, the plans for the site include more space for the Institute for Basic Research and small residences for current SIDC clients.

Every employee losing a job in the move should have available alternatives, and the state has held job fairs toward that goal, Webb said.

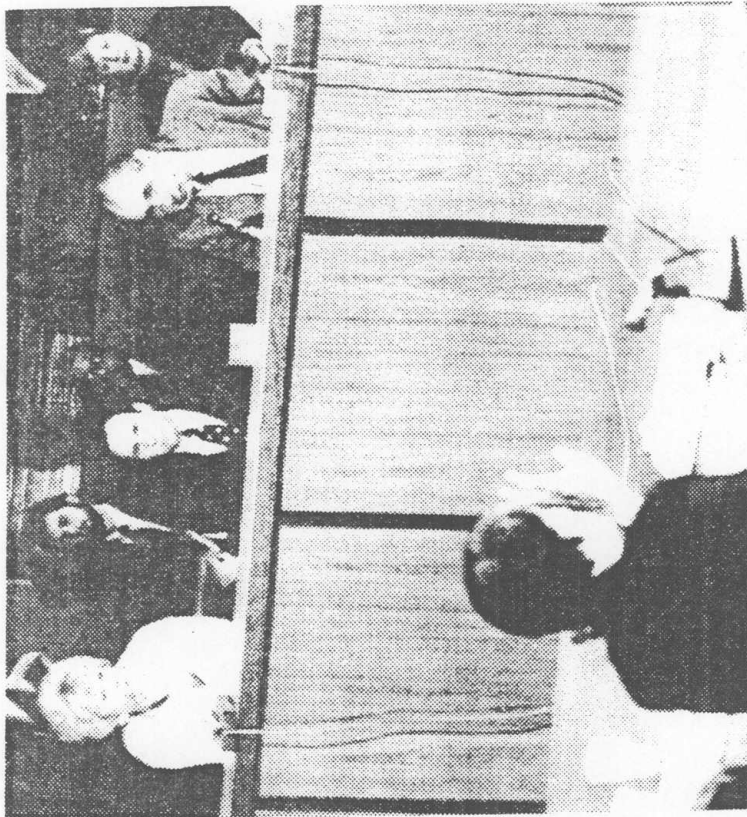
Under questioning from a joint legislative committee on the state budget, Webb added he is "optimistic but realistic" about the future of governmentally funded programs in light of national legislation forcing federal cutbacks.

"Even in the face of federal cuts, in the long term we can abide by the long-range goals of this department," Webb said. "But — and this is a big but" he added, the state needs more flexibility from certain federal regulation in how programs for the retarded are carried out, Webb said.

Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly, D-West Brighton, sought and seemed to receive assurances from Webb that the number of SIDC acres earlier pledged for mental retardation services will not be reduced.

A final environmental impact statement is due from state officials as early as the next few days, according to Webb. The document is key to an environmental dispute over woodlands adjoining the campus, and two sources said yesterday it has undergone some revision in recent weeks.

Much of Webb's testimony focused on the state's program of taking state clients out of larger institutions and placing them



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Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, left, and Sen. John J. Marchi listen to the OMRDD hearing in Albany.