

## Senator may resign corrections job over conflict of interest

By Michael Dillin  
Big Horn County News

As the Hardin Detention Center controversy has progressed, some backers have pointed a finger of blame at a key lawmaker in the process – State Senator Steve Gallus (D-Butte).

Now Gallus may resign his outside job with the prison industry as a result.

Gallus, who serves on the Senate Corrections and Public Safety Committee, has been a vocal critic of the project from the beginning, in part because a private company would run it, and because Hardin did not get contracts to house inmates in advance.

The Big Horn County News has learned that over the past few weeks, Montana's top state auditor has been looking into Gallus' relationship with a competing private company that also runs correctional facilities – Community Counseling and Correctional Services Inc. (CCCS).

“We’re compiling information at the request of another legislator,” said Angie Groves, a performance auditor with the Legislative Auditor’s Office in Helena. “It’s not an investigation, it’s not really an audit, but we are gathering information.”

The legislative auditor’s report should be finished in a matter of days.

It will show that in November of 2007, Gallus was hired as an employee by CCCS. It will also show that CCCS has numerous contracts with the state to operate or provide treatment for a variety of facilities within the state Department of Corrections.

Among those operations is the NEXUS methamphetamine (meth) treatment center in Lewiston. DOC records obtained by

the News shows the state pays CCCS \$117.86 per inmate per day for its services. The state signed a 20-year contract with CCCS to operate the Lewiston facility in August of 2006.

In an interview with the News, Gallus said he is prepared to resign his job with CCCS if it is perceived to somehow be improper, or if it adversely affects his legislative duties in the field of corrections.

“I’m involved with this process because I care about it and I know a lot about it,” Gallus told us this week. “I’m disheartened that some people in Hardin are attacking me because they don’t like my position.

“They’re making accusations against me because their project (the Hardin Detention Center) did not go as they had planned.”



photo courtesy  
Mont. Legislative services  
State Senator Steve Gallus

Gallus says his job with CCCS pays only \$28,000 per year.

“I’ve tried to explain that most members of the legislature have outside employment unless they are retired,” he said. “And sometimes employment crosses over to decisions they have to make in the legislature.

“In Montana, there really are no real conflict of interest laws.”

State Representative Bill Glaser (D-Huntley) is a member of the legislative audit committee, and was the legislator who asked that auditors review the state’s relationship with CCCS.

“Some of the folks in Hardin said they were concerned about Gallus, so I asked the auditors to look at it,” Glaser said. “The auditor will provide us with a list of facts on what’s going on, and we’ll know more shortly.”

Glaser said he agrees with Gallus’ interpretation of the law.

“Apparently he (Gallus) is not breaking the law by going to work for the folks in Lewiston,” Glaser told the News. “The rules of the Senate require you to declare your conflict, and after you declare the conflict publicly, you can vote.”

Glaser said he expected the issue to be resolved one way or another very quickly.

“If there is an act to clean up,” Glaser said, “I’m sure it will be cleaned up.”

The News asked Gallus directly if he believes there is a conflict of interest with working for a company that is receiving state contracts, while at the same time participating in decisions pertaining to the corrections department budget.

“I’ll resign my position with CCCS before I’d ever stop being a (legislative) leader on this issue,” Gallus replied. “And that might be coming.

“I’m considering finding another job.”