

# Mayors group to hold rally in Springfield

**RALLY IN SPRINGFIELD —** Centralia Mayor Tom Ashby spoke Wednesday evening to the Southern Illinois Mayors' Association regarding an upcoming rally to be held in Springfield in support of keeping the Warren G. Murray Developmental Center open and running. The rally, which will be hosted by the Southern Illinois Coalition, is scheduled to begin at 11 a.m. Wednesday in front of the Governor's office in Springfield.



Sentinel Photo/REANN PALMER

**BY REANNE PALMER**  
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

**WEST FRANKFORT —** Centralia Mayor Tom Ashby met with the Southern Illinois Mayors Association Wednesday evening to discuss some future plans for a rally to help save the Warren G. Murray Developmental Center in Centralia.

The rally will be composed of the Southern Illinois Coalition (Mayors Association) members, local legislators, community members and students of Centralia High School. There will also be guest speakers from each group assigned to speak.

"The theme of this rally is about the Southern Illinois Coalition and our collective efforts to stop this closure," said Ashby.

A Charter bus is scheduled to leave the former high school, at the corner of East Second Street and South Perrine Avenue in Cen-

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tralia, to travel to Springfield at 8 a.m. Wednesday.

Ashby said that there will be speaking points for the speakers and to help answer questions.

"We're trying to put a correlation of how the impact would effect the Springfield area," Ashby said.

He used the example that there are 575 people working at Murray Center, which is 3.17 percent of the workforce. If Springfield were to lose 3.17 percent of their workforce, that would equal 3,662 jobs and would increase their unemployment rate from 8.4 percent to 11.6 percent.

"We have 276 citizens. We call them our citizens because that's what they are. They've lived in Centralia for years — some as many as 42 years — and we want to keep them here," Ashby added.

Buttons and signs will also be handed out at the rally to help unify the support for the center.

Ashby expects that any-

where from 150 to 200 students from Centralia High School will also be in attendance. He will be speaking to the students at a school assembly on Tuesday to increase interest.

"We're trying to get away from the economics of the whole thing. It's about the citizens and what's right for them," he said. "We need a personal approach and I think the students will help with that."

The Murray Center Parents Association, Murray Center employees and other local facilities are also expected to attend to show their support of the center.

"We're trying to cover this in all the ways we can," he said.

President of the Mayors Association and Mayor Joe Bisch added, "We've got mayors from all over southeastern Illinois and we need to be heard. That's what [the Mayor's Association] is for."

Showing his continued support for the center, Bisch said that community support and numbers will be the best thing locals can do to help.

"People are not taking part and people need to start taking part. Southern Illinois will get flushed out if we don't do

something," he said. "This is not about the economics; it's all political, and that's a shame."

Ashby told the Association members that they need to continue to let their voices be heard to help those who cannot help themselves.

"We're talking about the citizens of Centralia here. [Of the 276], about 110 can be placed in the community setting, but the others cannot. The other 166 have high levels of medical or physical issues," he said. "[The state] doesn't have a plan on how to move these people, they just say to do it."

After the rally, the bus will depart from Springfield at approximately 1:30 p.m. and will return to Centralia by 4 p.m.

Individuals interested in attending the rally should call 533-7623 to register.

[rpalmer@morningsentinel.com](mailto:rpalmer@morningsentinel.com)