Corrections Secretary Richard Stelder named Dixon Corrections Institute Warden Burl Cain to head the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola on Thursday.
Cain, who will retain his civil service position as DCI warden, succeeds Warden John Whitley, who is leaving state civil service to oversee a privately operated prison in Florida.
Stelder said Corrections Undersecretary James LeBlanc will assume additional duties as acting warden of DCI.
LeBlanc’s assignment at the Jackson prison “reflects the importance of executive staff rotating to field executive positions, which will ensure that headquarters staff maintains a realistic perspective on the true nature of our operations,” Stelder said in a memo to state prison wardens.
Cain said he and LeBlanc met with key staff members at both prisons Thursday morning.
He said Angola’s deputy warden and assistant wardens “agreed to work with me. I left there feeling like we’ve got a good team.”
After 13 years at DCI, Cain said he is young enough for “one more challenge.”
“I’ve really got to find my way, with the inmates and employees, and look at the budget. As any good warden would do, I’ve got to do a lot of walking and looking,” Cain said.
In terms of land area, Angola is the largest prison in the United States. Approximately 4,600 maximum-security prisoners are housed in the Main Prison complex and five outcamps, or satellite prisons.
“I really believe it’s in good shape, and if it’s not broken, don’t fix it,” Cain added.
The state Civil Service Commission, of which Cain is an elected member, authorized a special $70,000 annual salary to persuade Whitley to leave the private sector in 1990 for Angola, then under a court-imposed “state of emergency.”
Civil Service Director Herb Sumrall and Cain said the question of how much Cain will be paid remains to be resolved.

“Obviously, I’m not going unless I’m adequately compensated,” Cain said.

Angola’s warden also presides over executions in the prison’s death chamber.

“It goes with the job, but it still makes you think. It may not bother you, but it’s still going to be on your mind,” Cain said.

“Angola is, in life, reality. But the opportunity is there to do good things for a lot of people, including a lot of inmates.”

Cain said he plans to promote education and self-help programs for inmates, saying the discontinuation of federal Pell grants for prisoners “is a shame.”

“Everyone has to have hope,” he said.

Pell grants have been used in the past by inmates to pay for college and vocational training.

LeBlanc said he will retain the undersecretary’s primary responsibilities for management and finance, but some duties as chief of staff may be delegated to other headquarters personnel.

He said he expects to spend 40 to 50 hours per week at DCI.

Burl Cain:
New warden at Angola

“Obviously, to manage a prison, you have to be at the prison,” he said.

LeBlanc has served 23 years with the department.

“This is an excellent opportunity for me show corrections and the people that I can manage a prison,” LeBlanc said.