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Assemblyman changes mind on capital punishment

By JOHN MARTINS Staff Writer, (856) 794-5114

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VINELAND — State Assemblyman Nelson T. Albano, D-Cumberland, Cape May, Atlantic, announced Friday at a forum against the death penalty that he has changed his mind and now opposes capital punishment.

Albano told an audience of about 50 people at Sacred Heart High School that his change of heart came after reading a book about Kirk Bloodworth, the first death-row inmate in the United States to be exonerated by DNA evidence. The book, he said, gave him compelling insight into why our capital-punishment system is flawed and should be put on hold.

“I think we owe it to the people in our prisons who are innocent to stop executing,” he said.

The forum, which was sponsored by New Jerseyans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, featured talks by two prominent speakers in the national campaign to abolish the death penalty.

Maryland resident Vicki Schieber, whose 22-year-old daughter was murdered by a serial rapist in Philadelphia in 1998, told those in attendance why she and her family opposed the death penalty for her daughter's killer.

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“That doesn't help me heal, and it creates another grieving family,” Schieber said. “That doesn't lessen my pain. That doesn't bring my daughter back.”

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Local	The other speaker, Juan Roberto Melendez, spent almost 18 years on Florida's death row before he was exonerated in 2002
Stock Market	after discovery of evidence prompted a judge to grant him a new trial.
National	
Technology	
Science & Nature	"I was not saved by the system," Melendez said. "I was saved in spite of the system. I was saved by the grace of God. I was saved by miracles."
ENTERTAINMENT	
Casinos	
Nightlife	The speakers' appearance in Vineland follows their testimony this week to New Jersey's Death Penalty Study Commission.
Beach & Boardwalk	
Dining Out	
Movies	The panel, which was set up early this year by the Legislature to assess the state's capital punishment system, consists of 13
LIFE	members from the state's law enforcement, legal and judicial segments as well as public representatives. The panel will hold a series of meetings, including one in Trenton on Sept. 27, before its final report is due in mid-November.
Health & Fitness	
Home & Garden	
Food & Wine	Albano said he has a strong personal connection to the ideas and feelings associated with capital punishment. His 19 year-old
Travel & Leisure	son was killed Dec. 20, 2001, he said, by a drunken driver who was a five-time repeat offender. He considers his son's killing
Outdoors	an act of murder.
Aging	
For Women	
Religion	"I know what it feels like to want revenge," he said. "Let the guilty truly suffer and live their lives without freedom."
Family	
PHOTO GALLERY	According to NJADP director Celeste Fitzgerald, the organization was founded in 1999 and has earned the support of more
Share Your Photos	than 10,000 members and 250 supporting organizations such as the League of Women Voters. The group, she added, began
Local Gallery	lobbying legislators to look at the state's capital punishment system in 2003.
Wire Galleries	
NIE	Fitzgerald said that 80 percent of the state's capital convictions are overturned at some point in what she described as a lengthy
WEB EXTRAS	and expensive appeals process.
Sudoku	
Daily Crossword	
SITE SERVICES	"The more you know about the death penalty, the less you like it," she said.
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