



Republicans want death penalty to stay for terrorists

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TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — Months after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks took the lives of 693 New Jerseyans, state lawmakers unanimously voted to make murder committed through terrorism punishable by death.

Now, a day after a special commission recommended abolishing the death penalty in the Garden State, GOP lawmakers are calling on Democratic legislative leaders who voted for the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2002 to stand by their decision to execute terrorists.

To do otherwise would be going soft on terror, Republicans say.

The Democrats who voted overwhelmingly in favor of the anti-terrorism act "should summon the same resolve they showed five years ago, when they joined with Republicans to take a strong stand against terrorists who would attack this country," said Sen. Gerald Cardinale, R-Bergen. "By virtue of our proximity to New York City and our extensive network of transportation and chemical facilities, New Jersey stands at the front lines in the war against terror."

The Legislature's Democratic leaders, Senate President Richard J. Codey and Assembly Speaker Joseph Roberts Jr., both voted for the Anti-Terrorism Act.

On Tuesday, both men said they support the commission's recommendation to abolish the death penalty, and Codey said he expected legislation to be considered in the Senate by July.

Codey said Wednesday that he doubted that the legislation would include a terrorism exemption, but said the issue would be discussed.

"I would think it would not," Codey said. "Obviously, (the Anti-Terrorism Act) was only six months after 9/11. That doesn't mean some of those emotions don't carry over."

Cardinale and other Republicans say law enforcement would be hamstrung if the threat of capital punishment is taken off the table.

"I think we've invited disaster if we have this fuzzy thinking that we'll keep the terrorist in jail for life," he said.

Codey wasn't so sure.

"Aren't we better off having terrorists in jail?" Codey asked. "The longer they're in jail, maybe they'll open up" and divulge information about other terrorists or planned future attacks, he said.

Roberts did not immediately return a call seeking comment on Wednesday.

Gov. Jon S. Corzine, a Democrat, has also said he would work to enact the commission's recommendation to abolish the death penalty. However, when he was a U.S. senator, Corzine voted to allow the death penalty for terrorists.

The governor's spokesman, Anthony Coley, said the governor would not comment on future legislation.

New Jersey would be the first state to abolish the death penalty legislatively since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment in 1976.

In 1982 Codey supported reinstating the death penalty, but now says the law has proven ineffective. While serving as governor in January 2005, Codey approved a moratorium on the death penalty until the commission made its recommendations on whether the death penalty laws should be revised or abolished.

Cardinale agreed that the death penalty isn't working as a deterrent, but blamed the prolonged appeals process. He suggested that New Jersey look to Iraq for ideas on how to revise it.

"I was very impressed with the death penalty in Iraq being implemented in a very short time after it was imposed," Cardinale said, referring to the swift hanging of Saddam Hussein less than a week after his appeals were denied.

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