

Colo. Senate votes against repealing death penalty

By COLLEEN SLEVIN
Associated Press Writer

DENVER — The Colorado Senate on Wednesday rejected a proposal to abolish the death penalty and fund cold case investigations with the savings from ending capital punishment prosecutions.

Four Democrats sided with Republicans, voting 18-17 to narrowly defeat the bill on the last day of the current state Legislature's term. The House had passed a similar proposal by one vote last month.

Before the vote, outgoing Senate President Peter Groff pleaded with legislators to pass the bill, asking them to put aside election fears and stand up for the sanctity of life.

He said the question of who lives and dies shouldn't be decided by prosecutors under political pressure or a "governor wracked by guilt."

Gov. Bill Ritter had not indicated whether he would have signed the bill if it made it to his desk. When he was Denver district attorney, he unsuccessfully sought the death penalty seven times.

State Sen. John Morse, one of the Democrats who voted against the bill, objected to tying abolishing the death penalty with the funding of cold cases because the Senate this week came up with new fees to pay for investigations of unsolved crimes. He said the death penalty portion of the bill should have been given its own vote.

Howard Morton, the executive director of Families of Homicide Victims and Missing Persons, said the decision to unite cold case advocates with death penalty foes has brought more attention to the issue.

"We're going to be back with this type of bill next year, and we're going to win," he said.

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