

## Crist to uphold death penalty

### He expects steady pace of executions

The Associated Press

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JACKSONVILLE · Gov.-elect Charlie Crist expects to continue signing death warrants at a similar pace to Gov. Jeb Bush, who signed the black-bordered documents resulting in 20 executions, the most of any governor since the state resumed capital punishment in 1979.

"I support the death penalty," said Crist, who earned the nickname "Chain Gang Charlie" for his support of inmate chain gangs while in the Florida Legislature. "It's a solemn task, but I believe in it, so I will sign them and review that process as the transition moves forward."

Crist said he will be as deliberative as his predecessor.

"It all depends on the cases that come up," he said. "I'll carry out the law, but it is a very solemn task."

In his eight years in office, Bush averaged 2.5 executions per year and saw the state move from the electric chair, beset by constitutional challenges, to lethal injection, now under judicial scrutiny for the chemicals used in the process and their dosages.

Three inmates have been executed this fall while challenging lethal injection. Another, Angel Diaz, is scheduled to die by injection Wednesday for the 1979 slaying of Joseph Nagy, a topless bar manager in Miami. It would be the 21st execution since Bush became governor in 1999.

In his four years as Florida's attorney general, Crist's office was responsible for representing the state in the last-minute appeals of Death Row inmates. In November 2005, Crist urged the Legislature not to follow a recommendation of the Florida Supreme Court. The high court wanted the state to require a unanimous sentencing recommendation from a jury before an inmate could receive a death sentence.

Currently, prosecutors only have to persuade a majority of jurors for death penalty recommendations.

Crist noted at the time that serial killers Ted Bundy and Aileen Wuornos would have escaped death sentences because of 10-2 penalty phase verdicts.

"I believe the current system is not only constitutional but appropriate to punish those who murder as well as deter potential future murders," Crist said. The Legislature did not change the law.

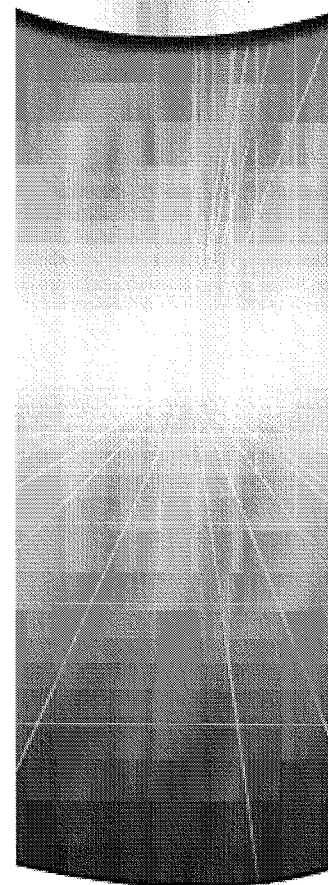
The most notorious inmates executed in Bush's years in office were Wuornos, who murdered at least six men between 1989 and 1990; abortion doctor killer Paul Hill; and Danny Rolling, the confessed slayer of five college students in Gainesville in 1990.

Bush viewed signing death warrants as part of the job.

"I have a duty to do this. It does not give me great joy, does not fill my heart with joy. I don't look at this as any

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easy part of my job," Bush said in October.

Since Florida resumed executions after a 15-year hiatus from 1964 to 1979, Gov. Lawton Chiles was second to Bush with 18 executions and Gov. Bob Graham was third with 16. Nine inmates were executed during the four years when Gov. Bob Martinez was in office, including serial killer Ted Bundy in 1989.

Bush signed his first death warrant six months after taking office in 1999 for the execution of Allen Lee "Tiny" Davis, 54, for the 1982 slayings of a pregnant Jacksonville woman and her two young daughters. It would be the first use of a new electric chair designed to handle Davis' 350-pound frame and the last time Florida would put an inmate to death in it.

Witnesses saw blood appear on Davis' chest and spread to about the size of a dinner plate, even seeping through the buckle holes on the leather strap.

It was a nosebleed, but the chair was on the way out. After the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to decide whether Florida's electric chair was unconstitutional, a special legislative session gave Death Row inmates the lethal injection option.

Mark Elliott, with the anti-death penalty group, Floridians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, hopes as governor that Crist will not be as active as Bush when signing warrants in light of a recent critical American Bar Association report and controversy over the chemicals used in Florida's lethal injections.

"I don't know what the future is going to hold. I would like to see more courage in the governor's office," Elliott said.

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