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## Senator says lawmakers will monitor lethal injection reforms

BY BILL KACZOR  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

The Legislature will be looking over the shoulders of prison officials to see if they fix problems with Florida's lethal injection procedure after a botched execution, a key lawmaker said Wednesday.

Sen. Victor Crist, R-Tampa, said he has instructed Senate staffers to work with their House counterparts to monitor the response to recommendations from a commission that investigated why it took 34 minutes - twice as long as usual - for condemned killer Angel Diaz, 55, to die Dec. 13.

"If I feel as if they didn't do a good enough job of addressing the commission's recommendations then I have the ability and the right to come forward with legislation to ensure it," Crist said.

Crist, who chairs the Senate Civil and Criminal Justice Appropriations Committee, also announced he has allocated \$175,000 in his chamber's proposed state budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1 to cover costs of implementing the recommendations including equipment and training.

Corrections Secretary James McDonough has offered assurances the recommendations would be taken seriously and not put on a shelf, Crist said during a meeting of the Commission on Capital Cases, which he also chairs.

The panel of judges and lawmakers oversees state-paid lawyers who represent death row inmates on appeal.

Crist also was among 11 members appointed by then-Gov. Jeb Bush to the Gov.'s Commission on Administration of Lethal Injection, which investigated the Diaz execution.

It concluded needles used to administer a three-chemical cocktail were improperly positioned in Diaz's arms, but it was unable to determine why that happened or whether he suffered pain as a result.

The recommendations included better training and communication, a clear chain of command as to who is in charge of each execution and additional staffing.

The most contentious suggestion, though, was for prison officials to explore the use of newer chemicals and evaluate whether a paralytic drug should be administered at all. The commission settled on that recommendation as a compromise between members who believed the paralytic chemical should be eliminated and those who maintained it should stay.

The chemicals are injected in a sequence, first sodium pentothal to deaden pain, then the muscle paralyzer, pancuronium bromide, and finally the fatal drug, potassium chloride.

The pancuronium bromide prevents body contortions that otherwise would result from the potassium chloride, Crist said.

"The reason why the second drug is administered is to prevent those muscle contortions, which would not be very pleasant to look at if you were a witness," Crist told the Commission on Capital Cases. "There were mixed feelings regarding that."

That's because the paralyzing agent also makes it impossible for a condemned inmate to show any indication of pain.

"Every muscle you have is frozen," said Bill Jennings, who heads one of two state offices that represent death row inmates and a member of the governor's commission. "They can't blink their eyelids."

Crist and Jennings reported on the investigation and recommendations as a matter of information, and the commission took no action.

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