

# Lethal injection studied

HASTINGS (AP)—Several central Nebraska lawmakers indicate cautious support for the idea of allowing death row inmates to choose between lethal injection and the electric chair.

Sen. Doug Kristensen of Minden said he would only support a change if he could be certain it wouldn't create more avenues for appeal. Switching to lethal injection or allowing prisoners a choice could open the door for appeals for current death row inmates who were specifically sentenced to death by electrocution, he said.

"Once you start tinkering with the death penalty you're opening up a big can of worms," Kristensen said. "It isn't just a straight policy question."

Although a majority of legislators probably would support allowing the option of lethal injection, some senators would probably use procedural rules to block its advancement, said state Sen. George Coordsen of Hebron.

"Its chances of passage are less than

50 percent," he said.

Coordsen, unopposed in his re-election bid in District 32, said he would favor giving prisoners a choice or simply changing to lethal injection. Other legislators, including Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, probably would block the measure because of their opposition to the death penalty, he said.

Sen. Owen Elmer of Indianola, who introduced a bill in 1993 to make lethal injection an option, said death-penalty opponents in the Legislature would oppose the change because it would make efforts to repeal the law more difficult.

"Apparently people in the Legislature who are opposed to the death penalty think there would be less public sympathy for a person who is executed by lethal injection," he said. "I think in their minds that would make it more difficult to move people to push for an outright repeal of the law."

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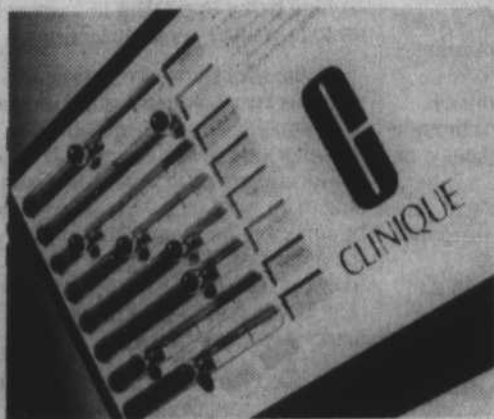
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