

# The Anniston Star

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## EDITORIALS

### Wise move in New Jersey

#### In Our Opinion

Lawmakers in New Jersey know a broken system when they see one.

After a special commission reported that the state's death penalty cost more than sending someone to prison for life — determining that it hasn't deterred murder and that an unacceptable risk of killing an innocent person still existed — the state Legislature did the reasonable thing. It abolished the practice.

Monday morning, Gov. Jon Corzine signed it into law.

It was the first time a state had outlawed the death penalty since Iowa and West Virginia did so in 1965.

There are only eight men on death row in New Jersey and there hasn't been an execution in the state since 1983. Clearly, New Jersey bears little resemblance to other states, where putting people to death has become a matter of routine. Since 1976, Texas has executed 405 people; Alabama has executed 38.

You can bet, though, that there are a lot of other similarities — starting with broken systems. If it's broken in New Jersey, you can bet the farm is broken just about everywhere else.

We'll let the Texas editorial pages get to the heart of the problem there. As for punishment in Alabama, it is not dished out fairly, especially when it comes to the death penalty.

The quicker we come to that realization — and admit that this is as much a political issue as it is an issue of justice — the better off all of us will be.

To understand that, you need look no further than Alabama Attorney General Troy King, an overzealous prosecutor who capitalizes on the issue, demagogues it, speaks nonsense in the face of common sense, argues with the high court and charges forward with death-penalty cases even when a de facto moratorium is in place.

We also have a governor who, Lord knows why, fears to appear weak on crime.

Following closely behind these two are scores of elected judges and state legislators who feel pressure from their electorate to dispense with accused murders even as a litany of questions about the quality of the system, the possibility of DNA evidence, sound legal representation and racial and class disparities linger in the background.

Corzine and other lawmakers in New Jersey are not soft on crime, nor are they bed-wetting liberals wishing to free monsters into the streets of Trenton or Newark. They simply wish to see their state become a more just place.

Alabama and other states that still allow the death penalty would be wise to follow New Jersey's lead.