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**Murder victim's mom furious with Quinn: 'Is he a coward? Did he not want to face us' before making death penalty decision?**

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD - Cindy McNamara had called Gov. Quinn's office five times since January, desperately seeking to talk to him before he decided whether to end the death penalty and clear Death Row.

The best the Rolling Meadows woman got was a call from an aide.

And now, McNamara, whose only daughter, Shannon, was murdered by the first killer put on Death Row since George Ryan left office, has nothing but harsh words for Quinn, whom she angrily derides as "a weasel."

"He totally dismissed me and the other families like we didn't count. Our say was not worth the time and the respect that he could give us to sit down and talk to us," she said. "He's the governor. He's the head of the state. I'm just a little person. But I still pay my taxes, and he just took Shannon's death like it was a stub on the toe."

Earlier this month, citing a litany of errors that put 20 men on Death Row by mistake, Quinn signed historic legislation ending executions in Illinois and commuted the death sentences of 15 condemned killers, including Shannon McNamara's murderer, Anthony Mertz.

Mertz was convicted of the June 2001 murder of Shannon McNamara, a 21-year-old Eastern Illinois University student a semester away from graduating.

A jury determined that Mertz, an ex-Marine and apparent admirer of Adolf Hitler and Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, broke into her apartment while she was asleep and raped, beat, strangled and stabbed her.

With his action on the death penalty, Quinn justified reducing the sentences of Mertz and other condemned killers to life in prison without parole, saying that once he had decided to abolish the death penalty, it should be done for all.

Quinn told reporters that he talked to advocates on either end of the death penalty spectrum while weighing the issue, but he specifically acknowledged he did not speak to any family members whose loved ones were killed by the 15 on Death Row.

"I think I listened to many, many people on both sides of this issue. I think it is probably impossible for me to talk to everyone," Quinn said.

After Quinn made that statement a week and a half ago, on Friday, his office clarified his assertion that he had not met with any family members who had loved ones murdered by someone on Death Row.

In a late February meeting with anti-abolitionists, the governor met with prosecutors, the family of slain Chicago cop Thomas Wortham, and Roger Schnorr, whose sister, Donna, was raped and murdered by Death Row inmate Brian Dugan, Quinn spokeswoman Annie Thompson said.

Before Quinn's action on March 9, Cindy McNamara left with her husband on a trip to Cancun to celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary. She thought she still stood a chance to speak with Quinn when she returned based on his aide's assurances.

But two days into their Mexican getaway, a friend called and informed her of Quinn's decision.

"She said, 'Cindy, he signed it.' I said, 'You know what, Sharon? I pretty much thought he would.' But I was praying and hoping it wouldn't go further than that, that he'd give us, the victims' families, a chance before he commuted all those guys. Then the next sentence I heard was, 'He commuted the death sentences,' and my heart just dropped."

The news, McNamara said, was "pretty close" to as jolting as first getting word her daughter was dead. "Is he a coward? Did he not want to face us?" she said of Quinn, who as a candidate last fall expressed support for the death penalty though he vowed to keep the moratorium on executions.

The early March phone call McNamara wound up getting from the Quinn aide came after McNamara sought help from state Sen. Matt Murphy (R-Palatine) in reaching the governor. McNamara said she turned to Murphy, after five previous phone messages to Quinn's office had not been answered after she wrote a letter to him in early January.

"There are 15 murderers on Death Row. If you're gonna do this, calling on the families of their victims isn't that onerous of a task," Murphy said. "She deserved a call back at a minimum from the chief of staff and preferably the governor himself to hear her out."

But McNamara's strong feelings reached the governor's office and Quinn himself, Thompson said.

"The governor did read Cindy McNamara's letter, and she spoke at length with a top legislative aide in the governor's office," Thompson said. "During his deliberation on this historic legislation, Gov. Quinn carefully considered such letters, conversations and all those who reached out to his office as he made a decision that was ultimately based on a system that is flawed and that we cannot rely on when lives are at stake."