

N.C. Sen. Ellie Kinnaird speaks

Monday night to UNC's Young Democrats about pushing a death penalty moratorium in the Senate.

Senator pitches halt to deaths

Kinnaird speaks on death penalty

BY KAVITA PILLAI

N.C. Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-

N.C. Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Orange, spoke to UNC's Young Democrats on Monday night about her work to pass a moratorium on the death penalty earlier this year. The bill, which passed in the Senate on April 30, failed in the House. The moratorium would have halted all executions for two years, although juries could still hand out the death penalty as a

punishment.

The moratorium passed the

Senate only after a fierce debate.
"(Opponents) said this was just a smoke screen for abolishing the death penalty. In my mind, this is true," Kinnaird said.

Kinnaird's speech outlined three main factors that affect whether a conviction will result in the death penalty. These factors — race, income level and geography — can bias a jury, Kinnaird said, citing a study commissioned by the Senate during her second term.

"When a black person kills another black person, the likeli-hood of the death penalty is not very high," she said. "A white person killing a white person is more likely. But we know that when a black person kills a white person, the likelihood of the death penal-

Poor people also are sentenced to death disproportionately, Kinnaird said. They often cannot afford experienced legal counsel, which is especially important dur-ing the sentencing phase of the

ing the sentencing phase of the trial.

The third factor, geography, is not as obvious. The size of the victim's town can affect the jury pool.

"A lot of people know the victim in a small town. You're really disadvantaged if you live in a rural area" she said.

Part of the purpose of the mora-

Part of the purpose of the mora-torium would be to examine the fairness of executing the mentallyretarded.

Supporters of the death penalty cite the appeals process as proof that capital punishment is fair. But appeals courts do not rectify all problems in the judicial process, Kinnaird said. Kinnaird said.

"One of the things people don't realize is that appeals courts don't retry the facts. They only look for errors in the trial," she said.

Kinnaird hopes to get the mora torium passed in the House in the next session this May but concedes that she might not be able to get the full two years as she had

hoped.

The senator also cited other countries' efforts to abolish capital punishment. Both Canada and Great Britain have abolished the death penalty and the European Union does not allow member countries to have capital punish-

ment. Kinnaird's speech was sponsored by the Young Democrats in conjunction with the Campaign to End the Death Penalty. "There are very few issues that liberals on the UNC campus care about more than the death penalty," said Young Democrats treasurer Tom Jensen.

Although a moratorium would not end capital punishment in North Carolina, it would hopefully slow it down, Kinnaird said. But her problem is still with allowing the death penalty altogether. "I don't want them killing peo-

ple in my name," she said.

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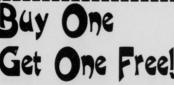
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