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Blogging From the Five Boroughs

Former Assemblyman Seminerio Dies in Prison

By **David M. Halbfinger and William K. Rashbaum** January 6, 2011 2:51 pm

Former Assemblyman **Anthony S. Seminerio**, a onetime correction officer who served 30 years as a state lawmaker from southwest Queens before pleading guilty in 2009 to influence peddling, died Thursday at a federal prison hospital, less than a year into his six-year sentence. He was 75.

Edmond Ross, a spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Prisons in Washington, said Mr. Seminerio died in the medical center at the Butner Federal Correctional Complex in Butner, N.C., near Raleigh. The cause of death was not immediately available.

First elected to the Assembly in 1978, Mr. Seminerio built a persona as a streetwise, tough-on-crime, conservative Democrat, opposing abortion rights, favoring the death penalty, and making high-profile endorsements of Republicans like George E. Pataki and Rudolph W. Giuliani.

But federal prosecutors said he secretly abused his office for more than a decade, soliciting a stream of payments that exceeded \$1 million, exerting his influence to benefit clients and sometimes threatening those who resisted his demands.

He resigned in June 2009 and pleaded guilty to a single fraud count, admitting that in 2008 he “promoted the interests” of Jamaica Hospital Medical Center in connection with state business.

Prosecutors said he did not divulge receiving payments from the hospital of more than \$300,000, for which he helped the hospital get state financing and lobbied state officials on behalf of its effort to take over other hospitals.

He was also accused of using his status to extort payments from the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce, and of accepting \$233,000 to persuade hospitals to hire a company operated a convicted racketeer.

At sentencing last year, Mr. Seminerio's lawyers asked for leniency, citing his years of service and health problems, including artery disease and hypertension.

Wiretaps captured the profane Mr. Seminerio saying that he saw himself as a "godfather."

During a meeting in 2007 that was secretly recorded by Brian M. McLaughlin, a former assemblyman and union official who pleaded guilty to racketeering charges, Mr. Seminerio explained that he had tired of helping people without charge. He added, "From now on, you know, I'm a consultant."

Comments are no longer being accepted.