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Judge reaffirms 'demonic possession' decision

DANBURY, Conn. (UPI) — Judge Robert J. Callahan Thursday refused to reconsider his decision prohibiting the use of "demonic possession" as a defense in the murder trial of Arne Cheyenne Johnson.

"I'm not saying I don't believe in demonic possession," Callahan told defense attorney Martin J. Minnella. "I'm just saying I'm not allowing that defense, period. There's no such defense."

Johnson, 20, is charged with the Feb. 16 fatal stabbing of his friend and landlord, Alan Bono, 46, of Brookfield, during an argument over Johnson's girlfriend, Debbie Glatzel, 28.

Callahan also rejected Minnella's suggestion that he disqualify himself as presiding judge at the trial, then ordered the questioning of prospective jurors to resume.

Minnella and prosecuting attorney Walter Flanagan agreed on three people for the Johnson jury Thursday. Ten prospective jurors were dismissed.

The first three selected for the jury panel of 12 plus two alternates were Gerard Ryan of New Fairfield, an employee of Automated Systems in Brookfield; Emily H. Sankey of New Fairfield, a bank employee and the wife of a retired New York Police Department sergeant; and Sonia J. Wosil of Danbury, an employee of Unimation Inc.

None of the questions posed by Minnella and Flanagan dealt with demonic possession.

Minnella claims Johnson, who performed odd jobs, became possessed a year before the murder when he was living with the parents of his girlfriend, Debbie Glatzel, 26, and her 12-year-old brother.

When the boy began suffering from visions of a dark figure with cloven hoofs, Minnella says Johnson assumed it was the devil and challenged the apparition to "take me on." The lawyer claims the spirit obliged.

Before the start of Thursday's court session, Minnella told reporters he planned to argue for the use of a "demonic possession" defense in the absence of prospective jurors in order to have it entered into trial record for use in possible appeals.

Callahan's initial rejection of the demonic defense came Wednesday during Minnella's questioning of the first prospective juror at the start of the trial.

Callahan said if the defense were able to prove demonic possession, it would not affect the intent of the crime. He also said the reliability of testimony relating to demonic possession would not be scientific.

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